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# **GCSE EXAMINERS' REPORTS**

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## **GCSE (NEW) RELIGIOUS STUDIES – CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM**

**SUMMER 2018**

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## RELIGIOUS STUDIES

### GCSE (NEW)

Summer 2018

### CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM

#### PART A – CORE BELIEFS TEACHINGS AND PRACTICES: CHRISTIANITY

**(a) What do Christians mean by ‘incarnation.’**

Most candidates either scored the full two marks, or scored no marks. Candidates who failed to score offered a wide range of answers that covered almost every area of Christian belief and practice. One popular answer, nearly as popular as the correct answer – was to confuse it with reincarnation; and not only for candidates studying Hinduism as their second religion.

Candidates getting half marks often appeared to know the concept well enough, but gave a cursory answer with no development or a simple example. Others tried too hard to explain it off the cuff and tied themselves in knots or strayed from the facts.

Key points here are for candidates to learn/be taught clear and simple definitions; especially important on difficult concepts like this one, where trying to freestyle an answer can lead to confusion.

**(b) Describe Jesus’ teachings on treasure and wealth.**

The full range of marks were earned on this question but too many answers did not appear to know the specific things Jesus taught on this subject. Two very clear passages (and visually memorable passages – moth and rust and thieves breaking in/Lazarus begging at the gate while dogs licked his sores and the rich man in the flames) are cited in the Specification and candidates who knew and used them invariably scored well.

Some made good use of the parable of Lazarus but too many simply gave a potted storyline that lacked application to the topic ... they were credited for it, but missed the opportunity to maximise their score.

Other aspects of Jesus’ teaching got a mention occasionally, such as not serving God and mammon, choosing the narrow path, the widows’ mite, the camel through the eye of a needle. The syllabus has a limited number of prescribed texts, (because schools do not all have the same allocation of curriculum time), but others can embellish an answer and there are some that are visual and memorable, which helps candidates to learn and recall them.

Candidates also brought in biblical passages that did not fit the remit of the question. Job’s losses and suffering was popular but is Old Testament and therefore not from Jesus’ teachings.

Candidates need to be reminded to stick to the wording of the question. Questions on Jesus' teaching / what the Bible says / what Christians might believe about / Christian attitudes to ... are not variants of the same question (though there will be overlaps). The current question received answers that fitted all of those variants (Old Testament examples, what Christians 'do' etc.), as well as the candidates own thoughts about what Jesus should have said, occasionally slapped in between a set of inverted commas in an attempt to validate it!

Key points here are: what, specifically, is the question asking ... know the given passages (they give clear, information and are often the main difference between a very general answer or full marks).

**(c) Explain Christian beliefs about the nature of humanity.**

Again, candidates either knew this one, or they really struggled. It is a very clear section in the Specification (with wording echoed in this question), a set of clear examples and biblical references anchoring it in the origins of humankind (i.e. Genesis 1-3). One could sense many candidates mentally rolling up their sleeves and thinking that here was something they could really get their teeth into – working through the list, developing a few of them – and scoring highly, limited only by how willing they were to write at length and do justice to the fact that they were trying to earn 8 marks.

Unfortunately, too many appeared not to know what was being asked for. Some thought in terms of being 'humane' and so spoke about sanctity of life and euthanasia (which could earn some credit within an answer that used it as a development of being made in God's image, therefore each life being special and sacred), or tried to work through how Christianity thinks people / humanity should behave, or gave a blow by blow account of the six days of Creation culminating in the creation of humans. They appeared not to recognise the concept posed by the question and tried to interpret the word humanity as best they could; or the word 'nature'.

Again, familiarity with the given Bible passages is crucial.

Questions will endeavour to pick up on the wording given in the Specification (as here, and in the reference to 'treasure' in (b) earlier), so candidates will benefit greatly if they are familiar with it.

**(d) 'Prayer is the most important activity for Christians.'**

The full range of marks were attained in this question. However, too many candidates seemed to score in Bands 1 and 2. A concerning number made no attempt at a question on which so many marks, plus the SPaG bonus were riding.

Good answers included simple definitions of prayer, consideration and analysis of different types of prayer, the importance of prayer, different reasons for praying and advice on how to pray including the Lord's Prayer – all of which was in the Specification and the given biblical references.

Others offered some analysis (as the marking Band descriptors ask for), suggesting benefits from prayer and also negatives, such as set prayers becoming mere rote, and the question of prayer vs. action. This was where the better answers began to consider alternative activities and for the best answers to also analyse their relative importance alongside that of prayer.

Many of those answers that were stuck in the lower marking Bands had failed to engage with alternative activities.

Some candidates appeared unable to separate prayer from the wider notions of worship and of attending church or chapel services; they were still able to earn some marks via these more general definitions or circumstances of prayer, but it lost them the opportunity to use these as some easy examples of other more or less important activities that they could have compared or contrasted to prayer.

The (d) question requires a consideration of alternative or different points of view. This can be done by referring to different approaches to the specific issue raised in the question (in this case, prayer). However, this new question is virtually twice the value of the old question (e) in the previous Specifications A and B. It would seem that, to be able to access the higher marks, candidates should be encouraged to look for clear alternatives to discuss, to extend their answer appropriately; especially where the question refers to an extreme, such as 'most important' or to a controversial viewpoint, i.e. what Christian activities might be equally or more important, and why.

Again, care should be taken to follow the wording of the question. This is not about prayer being the most important 'thing', but 'activity' and it is therefore other activities that candidates should consider for comparison; 'just believing in God is the most important thing' is not, in itself, an activity, nor are other 'beliefs' without adding the 'practices' they might lead to.

Other issues that emerged relate to the influence of practices carried over from the previous specifications, that do not match well with the requirements of this question:

- A number of 'helpful' acronyms, old and new, could be observed in use and in candidates' scribbled notes at the top of their page. FARM was in evidence, as were ADIDAS, RAP, SONIC and others. These do not necessarily reflect the requirements of the new marking Bands. Also, they might have been suited to a shorter answer, but for a much longer and more valuable answer such as this, they can be misleading and constraining. Some that used these strategies gave answers that were not well suited to the new question.
- For example, candidates using a FARM-like, four part structure, gave answers where much was not relevant. They did not seem to know that the consideration of Humanist and Atheist viewpoints are not requirements of Part A on this paper. There were a significant number of candidates who very carefully looked at the issue of Christian prayer very equitably from the perspective of a Humanist, then of an Atheist, then of a member of another world religion and finally, constituting just one quarter of their answer, from the viewpoint of a Christian. The question did not ask for this, was singularly Christian in its emphasis, and yet they clearly felt this was what they were required to do.

We all need to be sure that we know how the new Specification works and where it is different from the previous ones.

## SPaG

This question, 1(d), is of course the one question on the paper where spelling, punctuation and grammar are specifically assessed.

One would hope that candidates take full advantage of up to six bonus marks for spelling, punctuation and grammar. It is strategically attached to their first extended writing question, so that they can be assessed while they are still thinking straight, are not yet worn to a frazzle and aren't yet involved in a mad dash against the clock. For the same reason, if they vary the order in which they answer questions – as some candidates do – 1(d) should still be done early.

However, too many candidates showed little sign of being aware to target those extra six marks here. These avoidable errors were far too common:

- Capital letters (especially to start sentences) and full stops should be a minimum expectation for the vast majority.
- Examiners are bound to pick up on mis-spellings of key subject words such as religion / religious, believe/belief /believer, Christian / Christianity, priest, knowing when to use pray and when to use prayer (a very common error).
- Over-long sentences that lose meaning.
- Candidates whose handwriting tends to flat-line for the final 4 or 5 letters might be advised to pause on, or even print, key words
- Candidates should be encouraged to give 1(d) a quick check (capitals for sentence starter, full stops, proper nouns) before moving on.

A good SPaG score can rescue a mediocre answer.

## CORE BELIEFS TEACHINGS AND PRACTICES: ISLAM

The new specification offers centres and candidates the opportunity to engage with a detailed study of many aspects of the religion of Islam. In the first year of entry of the new specification there were a number of issues which have been raised by the first examination. Many candidates were not using the religious and specialist language of Islam in answers; too many responses lacked appropriate use of the religious terminology and there were few references to sources of authority and wisdom. As a result, a significant number of answers lacked depth. A significant number of answers to (a), (b) and (c) questions lacked detail in terms of knowledge and understanding of a key religious belief, practice or teaching.

- Q.2 (a)** The (a) question is designed to assess candidate knowledge of a key term and it was clear that many candidates had learnt a definition of the term shirk and gave a comprehensive response to the question. A substantial number of candidates gave no response, indicating they were unaware of the term. It is essential centres enable candidates to be able to give an adequate response to this type of question. The most comprehensive responses gave a sound definition of the term, including an example of 'shirk'.

- Q.2 (b)** It is essential that candidates respond to the demands of a question. A number of candidates ignored the rubric and appeared to attempt to write everything known on the topic of prayer. The demand of the question is clearly focused on preparation for prayer and marks were only awarded for responses which centred on preparation. Most candidates gave answers about preparing for prayer at a mosque; some candidates responded with knowledge about preparation for prayer at home as well. Although marking is always positive, it is important candidates make an attempt to use the correct spelling of words such as adhan, du'ah, wudu, mosque, niyyah, Ka'ba and Mecca. Candidates should always be encouraged to use specialist vocabulary throughout any answers.
- (c)** The Hadith are a key source of belief for Muslims and the best responses included a clear exposition of the importance of the Prophet Muhammad and how a record of his words are highly valued in Islam. It is quite appropriate to explain the importance of the Hadith in the context of other sources of authority, such as the Qur'an. A minority of candidates used quotations from the Hadith to support their detailed answers. Unfortunately it was clear some candidates did not appear to know the term at all. Some simply wrote about the importance of the Qur'an and made no reference to the Hadith. Very brief or general answers will not elicit marks from the higher bands.
- (d)** There are a substantial number of mark available for this question and it is essential candidates engage with the demands of this question in order to access the higher bands. The focus of this question is discussion, evaluation and a consideration of more than one viewpoint. The centre for this discussion is on the issue of all Muslims being required to fast. It is only appropriate to offer points of view from other religious traditions or non-religious points of view if such responses directly relate to the statement and such inclusions need to be part of a discussion. This part of the examination paper is based on the religion of Islam and it is important candidates focus on Islam in their responses. There are opportunities in this question to use religious and specialist language and few candidates took this opportunity. Generally there was a disappointing reference to sources of authority. Some candidates simply expressed one point of view and because of the nature of the marking bands, such responses will achieve low band marks. In order to achieve the higher bands candidates must engage in a **discussion** of the statement.

## PART B – RELIGIOUS RESPONSES TO PHILOSOPHICAL THEMES: LIFE AND DEATH / GOOD AND EVIL

- Q.3**
- (a) Responses to this question were very good with detailed exposition of the term supported by examples. A number of candidates misunderstood the term and gave answers about the sanctity of life.
  - (b) Candidates generally gave generic responses to this question. Where candidates were able to unpack Muslim attitudes expressed through the sense of being a khalifah and an understanding of fitra, such answers were sophisticated and achieved very high marks. Unfortunately a number of candidates misread the question and gave answers with material from Christianity **and** Islam. In these circumstances marks were awarded for only one religion which contained the best answer.
  - (c) It is important to note that most candidates gave responses correctly based on the **two** religious traditions. Often the strongest part of the answer was on the Christian tradition. To access the higher bands it is imperative candidates use a range of religious and specialist language, and where such language is different within these traditions, these terms should be used. A number of generic answers did not use correct specialist terms. Some candidates gave response based on ideas of re-incarnation; such responses are not creditworthy.
  - (d) This question provided the opportunity for candidates to consider non-religious beliefs, such as those held by atheists and humanists, and the vast majority of candidates did this. The more able candidates gave a detailed and wide-ranging discussion of the importance of creation stories for religious believers and how these are perceived to be challenged in modern times, ranging from issues of the Big Bang to an increasingly secular society.
- Q.4**
- (a) Most candidates gave a brief explanation of the term with an example. Some candidates misread the question and gave a definition for injustice.
  - (b) Where candidates understood the term, answers varied from a 'list' of duties to a full description of the varied work of prison chaplains. A number of candidates did not recognise the term; some did not attempt the question at all.
  - (c) There was a wide variety in the quality of responses to this question. Most candidates correctly used attitudes from the two religious traditions to unpack attitudes to taking part in conflict. The more sophisticated answers considered conflict in human relationships and conflict in the form of war. A number of candidates used sources of authority and wisdom and correctly used quotations to support their explanation. Candidates explored diverse examples of pacifism, conscientious objectors, conflict in personal relationships such as marriage, and the idea of jihad or holy war.
  - (d) A large number of candidates did not attempt this question. Even though this is the last question on the paper it is important candidates attempt all questions throughout the paper. There were a large number of generic style answers with little discussion. Where candidates did engage with the demands of the question there were sophisticated responses which focused on how religious believers might come to terms with suffering through believing life is a test and how prayer might sustain religious believers through a time of suffering. Some candidates made reference to the idea of a benevolent God and explored ideas of how God would allow human suffering.



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