



GCSE EXAMINERS' REPORTS

**GCSE (NEW)
RELIGIOUS STUDIES – CHRISTIANITY
AND JUDAISM**

SUMMER 2018

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RELIGIOUS STUDIES

GCSE (NEW)

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CHRISTIANITY AND JUDAISM

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 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: JUDAISM

Candidates are given the opportunity to study core beliefs, teachings and practices in Judaism, in this unit of the specification. There were a number of issues that have been raised during this examination series. There was evidence of candidates using religious language and sources of authority. However, many candidates did not follow the rubric of the evaluation question and as a result answers could not meet the demands of the higher band.

Question 2

- (a) This question requires candidates to define a key concept from the Judaism specification. Many candidates had learnt a definition of the term Shema and gave a comprehensive response to the question. Some candidates wrote one word answers and some wrote where the Shema is found, but did not link their answer to the question. It is important that centres prepare candidates to give a clear response to this type of question. The most comprehensive responses gave an explanation of the Shema and provided wording from the Shema.
- (b) There were some detailed responses to this question. Many candidates included religious language and were able to describe how this linked to a teaching about God. However, there were some responses where candidates wrote a list in their response and therefore they did not achieve the higher band. It is vital that centres share the bandings with pupils, so they learn to write coherently. Although marking is positive, it is important that candidates do not focus on just one teaching about God. Some candidates focused on creation and re-wrote the creation account, as found in Genesis.

- (c)** Candidates were required to write an excellent and detailed response about how Shabbat is celebrated in the home. However, some candidates wrote about how it is celebrated in the synagogue and therefore there was a lack of focus on the question. Many candidates focused their response on the preparations of Shabbat and unfortunately this did not allow candidates to achieve the higher banding. Where candidates wrote about how Shabbat is celebrated in the home, many included religious language and sources of authority.
- (d)** Candidates must engage in the rubric of this question, so they can access the higher bands. The focus of this question was a discussion on whether Jewish food laws are easy to follow. Responses to this question were disappointing. Many candidates described the food laws in detail, rather than evaluating whether they are easy to follow. As a result, many candidates did not gain credit for their response. In order to achieve the higher bands, candidates must engage in a discussion of the statement. Where candidates understood the focus of the question, they were able to provide a balanced discussion with religious language and sources of authority. Where candidates used connectives at the start of each sentence, it allowed the candidate to focus on the demands of the question.

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

Question 3

- (b)** This was answered well. Candidates gave a definition of 'quality of life' and most gave an example to back up their response. However, some candidates wrote about the sanctity of life and therefore were not credited for their response.
- (b)** Where candidates were able to unpack Jewish attitudes, they wrote about stewardship. Some candidates wrote about Tu B'Shevat. However, some candidates wrote about both Christianity and Judaism. As a result of this, marks were awarded for only one religion which contained the best answer.
- (c)** Most candidates gave responses correctly based on the two religious traditions. There were some detailed responses to Jewish views on life after death and some evidence of religious language.
- (e)** Candidates were required to consider non-religious beliefs in their answer. Some candidates did not focus on the demands of the statement and as a result, they wrote about the different views of creation, rather than evaluating whether they are still important.

Question 4

- (a)** Most candidates gave a brief explanation of the term with an example and gained both available marks.
- (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 candidates misunderstood what a prison chaplain is and wrote about it being a building.
- (c)** A number of candidates used sources of authority and correctly used quotations to support their explanation. Candidates explored diverse examples of pacifism. Some candidates wrote a detailed explanation of Jewish views of conflict, focusing on optional and defensive wars.
- (d)** A number of candidates wrote generic responses with little discussion. Some candidates focused on how could God allow suffering and gave examples to support their answer.



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