

# Examiners' Report

Summer 2012

GCE Religious Studies (6RS04)  
Paper 1C Buddhism

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## Introduction

It is clear that very many candidates worked hard in their preparation for this paper, including evidence of wider reading around the topics. Many showed evidence of commendable study skills. This included the ability to focus explicitly on the demands of the question, structuring their answers in a clear coherent manner and marshalling arguments into a critical evaluation.

Very few candidates attempted to fuse parts (a) and (b) together whereas in previous years, this approach led some candidates to pay insufficient attention to the various demands of AO2 (Assessment Objective 2).

The main focus in all the levels for the mark scheme of AO1 (Assessment Objective 1) relates to an understanding of the passage. Candidates had different methods for examining part (a). For example, two popular methods were:

- (i) to work their way systematically through the extract and link it to other scholars, and
- (ii) to select relevant material from the Smart material as a whole and relate this to the passage.

These various methods have been credit worthy and have produced some very good answers. However, as with other methods, these could have potential problems:

- (i) sometimes a close analysis of the text became a simple and basic comprehension exercise rather than the means of placing the Smart material in any meaningful context or showing evidence of analysis, and
- (ii) occasionally some candidates, by summarising Smart as a whole, may pay scant attention to the selected passage.

It must be noted that there is no predictable pattern in the choice of selected texts however over the life time of the specification all the three texts will be used.

One of the purposes of this unit is to enable candidates to develop skills in textual analysis. There are important outcomes for candidates, including transferable skills across a range of enterprises, involving careful attention to detail, evidence and reason and also preparation for university work. In addition, this unit provides an opportunity for candidates to reflect upon and debate the implication of their studies of religion.

## Question 1

### AO1 features of good quality

- Evidence of excellent work with confident understanding. For example, some provided the theoretical basis for Smart's approach and sometimes this included reference to Wittgenstein's language games.
- Examination of the passage in breadth and detail.
- Specific ideas/points of view raised by Smart being addressed. For example, some candidates focused on key areas such as the interaction between the social, ethical, mythological and doctrinal dimensions.
- Creative use of material from their other Buddhists studies in the units 6RS01 and 6RS03 and where appropriate 6RS02 1D.
- Using the extract as a spring board to showcase their wider knowledge. For example, some candidates incorporated ideas of Ashoka's social policies and the relationship between the Sangha and the laity.
- Clarity in the conclusion that cohered with the rest of the answer.

### Examples of AO1 work that require improvement

- Generalised views on Buddhism without specific reference to the selected passage. For example, some focused on biographical details of Ashoka with little attempt to adapt these to the demands of the passage.
- Some examples of AO1 were shorter than the AO2 material although there are more marks available for AO1.
- Evidence of candidates using a generic response to Smart which provided only incidental information on the extract itself.

### AO2 features of good quality

- Good critical analysis reflecting an evident ability to think through the implications of the passage. Some discussed critical scholarship on Smart and his methods. For example, some questioned whether a definition of religion is possible or even useful.
- Some included scholarly debates about the significance of Ashoka and a discussion about whether or not Marxism is a 'religion'.
- In response to the question 'Do you agree with the ideas expressed?' the stronger responses presented their own opinions and located these within their wider areas of study. They referred to scholarly opinion, debating and constructing a valid and well justified argument. These showed a thoughtful understanding of alternative and challenging views and ideas.
- Ability to debate implications for understanding both religion and human experience.

### Examples of AO2 work that require improvement

- Some candidates answered AO2 in the same manner as AO1 with little evidence of evaluation. Some stated personal opinions and presented little evidence of justifying their ideas.
- Part (b) was sometimes too short and descriptive rather than evaluative.
- Some short answers omitted either implications for understanding religion or understanding human experience or both.
- Sometimes using paragraphs not linked together.

**Example 1**

This answer reflects good practice across both assessment objectives. In AO1 the candidate analysed Smart's dimensions in detail and applied them to Buddhism. AO2 was well structured and incorporated a good range of scholarship in the evaluation.

**Example 2**

The candidate put Smart into perspective about definitions of religion. The candidate analysed the six dimensions and related them to examples from Buddhism. The candidate gave special attention to the social dimension in line with the passage. AO2 contained a range of debating points tightly focused on the question.

## Example 1

2) How religion ~~ought~~ ought best be defined is a matter of much scholarly debate, in part owing to the diversity in world religions. Scholars such as E.B. Tylor have dubbed religion as 'the belief in spiritual beings', a definition considered by some as too exclusive as it neglects 'religions' which have no belief in an ultimate or creator God such as in Theravada Buddhism. On the other hand Yinger's definition of religion is considered to be too ~~exclusive~~ inclusive yet ~~the refer to those~~

There are two main categories of definition for defining religion: functional and substantive. A functional definition considers the role of religion within society and ~~the~~ whereas a substantive definition looks at features of a religion, for instance a belief in God. These two go some way in defining religion, yet they also pose problems: for instance neither fully explain what religion is, merely the role it plays ~~as~~ in its wider, societal context or what it possesses.

Smart's attempt to define religion is somewhat unique. As opposed to a conventional religion definition which attempts to briefly define, he opted for six dimensions. Each dimension outlines a key aspect of religion which, though in forms that differ (often greatly) can be found in each. Ritual, ethical, social, doctrinal, mythical and experiential.

The ritual dimension ~~in~~ incorporates all kinds

of worship, from the more elaborate ceremony such as marriage or the potlaxatomupol'a ceremony in Buddhism to more simple, everyday acts such as prayer or meditation.

Here, the outer ritual is made of two key components, and while the outward is more noticeable (the act of the ritual itself) the inner <sup>motivation</sup> intention is more important.

Smart states the 'action without intention is cold' referring to the fact that without a motivation, the act itself is pointless.

The ethical dimension considers the moral implication of religion. Often this is derived from the doctrinal dimension of religion and can be seen as governing moral behaviour. The upholding of teachings such as the 10 commandments in Christianity or the following of the 5 precepts in Buddhism <sup>would be</sup> ~~suggest~~ be key examples of this. Adherence to the ethical teachings of a religion is often key to leading a commendable life by religious standards.

The doctrinal and mythological aspects of religion are often considered as ~~being~~ <sup>being</sup> ~~great importance~~ <sup>being closely intertwined</sup>. The doctrinal dimension includes key teachings of the religion which are often used to live morally <sup>and are in many</sup> ~~or to uphold~~ cases given by an important figure from the religion. For example: the 10 commandments in Christianity and the 4 noble truths as taught by the Buddha in his first sermon in deer park. The mythological doctrine does not necessarily mean myth in the conventional sense. In this

circumstance it is merely the recitation of stories and may include legends of historical figures. It is often used to give context or explain doctrinal aspects ~~to~~ for instance parables such as that of the good Samaritan in Christianity or The Parable of the Burning House found in Buddhism in the Lotus Sutra.

The experiential dimension is considered by ~~many~~ <sup>Smart</sup> to be the most important of all. It is the experience of the ~~spirit~~ <sup>spiritual</sup> 'invisible world' which gives people a purpose for religion, it can write and is often where the mythological and doctrinal dimensions come from. For example the life of the historical figure Siddhartha Gautama is recorded in the Pali Canon, recounting his religious experiences. It also provides incentive for followers to adhere to the ethical dimension as they may ~~hope for~~ <sup>hope to</sup> then experience the invisible world personally.

The social dimension, as described in the extract given, ~~proves~~ <sup>highlights</sup> the importance of religion on a communitarian level and suggests that the role it plays within society is a defining feature of religion. This 'social significance' can be observed in many forms; religion can control how society itself is run, as sometimes countries ~~to~~ <sup>do</sup> rely on the doctrinal dimension of religion. For instance the use of Shariah law in many countries shows

institutionalized Islam which impacts on an official role. Furthermore, in more Western countries, religious ethics can be seen as having influence from religion as too, commandments such as 'thou shalt not kill' and 'thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife' may be considered in part influential as to why, though not illegal, affairs break commonly held, unspoken social guidelines.

In Buddhism, both the lay and monastic (Jongho) communities co exist in a constant state of codependance. The alms given to the monks allow their physical survival and, in return their in depth knowledge and understanding of the Dharma allows Buddhists doctrine and mythology to continue.

By institutionalizing the ethical dimension, the social dimension allows how religion can focus on a day to day basis and ultimately survive. The cited exception detailing the Japanese fishermen shows the evolution of religion which to necessity and see exceptions to the rule of Ahimsa (non violence to sentient beings) is allowed. It can also be seen in the Tibetan mountains where Buddhism is also practiced and Ahimsa is again generally upheld, however meat is

necessary for survival in such terrain and so meat is still eaten.

The social dimension indeed 'indicates the way in which these men's lives are in fact shaped by these claims [of an invisible world]' and an example of religious morality seeping into how one lives can be seen through another practice of conscientious objection. Their extreme pacifism meant they avoided involvement in land to land combat and adhered strictly to their ethical dimension.

③ whether or not religion can ever be fully explained however, and if James' dimensions really do the job remains subject to debate.

The extreme diversity of religion lead to Hill comparing religion to a game. What does a girl playing with a doll and the Olympics have in common? Well, despite a distinct look of similarity, they are both a game, even though they are very different.

Hill also cites Wittgenstein who suggests religion is similar to family resemblance. Whilst no one feature is held in common with each and every family member, some share qualities with others who, whilst they may not share any physical resemblance for the former in the game world, Hill could a different one. It is for

from clear cut and many are far from obvious, but nevertheless it is still there.

It is for the reason Tully stresses the importance of 'ultimate concern' or one main goal which is shared by all despite other differences. This is, the belief (according to Smart) of an invisible world. Again this differs in specifics according to religion: in Christianity and Islam there is heaven, hell and a creator God whereas Theravada Buddhism aims for Nirvana. But ultimately, this physical world we are in now is not all there is, this plays a key role in understanding religion.

The social dimension can mean to some that Marxism can be classified as a religion. It has doctrine which binds people together and it is adhered to en masse with fanaticism which is often comparable to religious extremism. So whilst the social dimension plays a key role in linking and institutionalising a religion and therefore ultimately giving it staying power it leads to other issues.

High context the classification of Marxism as a religion, merely a belief system. Smart also disagrees with Marxism as a religion due to it lacking the experiential dimension; there is no invisible world.

in Marxism which can be experienced. Arguably this suggests that the experiential dimension is the most important. It gives people incentive, it makes it real, it makes rituals purposeful as they can lead to experience, beliefs are gathered to in the hope of experience, doctrines and myths come from past experience. Experience allows social dimension to be connected with key emotions. It is the backbone of all other dimensions and arguably the most important as well as going some way to explain the implications of religion.

Whether or not religion may ever be truly defined however, arguably is a question which still remains. Smart, it seems, goes further with his dimensions than any other scholar, his ideas explain what religion is more accurately. Yet even his dimensions are not perfect, he later added a seventh - the material dimension which suggests there may be room for more to be added at a later date. Smart has also been criticised as only truly <sup>analysing</sup> ~~describing~~ religions he ~~found~~ knew about already in depth. As opposed to making a definition which could be applied to all, he was making use of what he already knew and reorganizing it.

In spite of such criticisms, Smart picks up where others have left off. His dimensions give

religion a better definition and maybe considered to explain why people continue to join religions and maintain religious practice.

## Example 2

(a) It can often be asked 'what is religion?', with many scholars attempting to answer this question. For example E.B. Tyler gave the definition of 'belief in spiritual beings', an example of a substantive definition, as it attempts to define religion by identifying its key features eg. spiritual beings or belief in a holy book. However there are problems with this definition, as does that mean a belief system without a god is not a religious one (eg. Buddhism)?

Additionally, Xinger gave the functional definition of 'a system of beliefs/practices by means of which a group of people struggle with the problems of human life'. This is functional as it explains religion in terms of the role it plays in society eg. uniting people together, explaining death. However, does this mean any institution that explains death is a religious one?

Furthermore, Ninian Smart attempted to overcome the problems of defining religion by applying six dimensions rather than a single definition; ritual, mythical, <sup>(later added the material dimension)</sup> doctrinal, ethical, experiential and social.

The ritual dimension involves both an inner and outer aspect, and although the outer often dominates, it's the inner that is

most significant - 'Ritual without feeling is void'. Rituals include ceremonies and practices eg. In Buddhism Buddhist monks take part in a shaving head ritual during the initiation ceremony. Furthermore, the ritual dimension can be extended to include things such as yoga and self training, which aim at achieving higher states of consciousness. (<sup>spiritual</sup> development)

The mythical dimension is often misunderstood, with Smart claiming that the term 'myth' does not mean the content is false, but instead it is reporting on what has already been said. ~~many~~ Many testimonies are preserved in oral traditions for generations before being written down, and Smart said we must rely on these. When applied to Buddhism, the mythical dimension can be seen through past lives of the Buddha - The Jataka Stories, although their historical accuracy is questionable. Also, myths can be interpreted differently, for example someone believing the literal truth of the Bible would read the Genesis creation story as a factual account of how the world began; whereas others may prefer the scientific version of events.

The doctrinal dimension can be seen

through important Buddhist principles such as the 4 Noble truths (4 Truths of the Noble ones) revealing important teachings on Dukkha and Tanha (craving). Doctrines within Buddhism are closely linked to experience, with doctrines being revealed through the Buddha's life - 'bedrock of the entire Buddhist religion' (Keown), with Smart saying that doctrinal colours experience, but experience shapes doctrine. \*

Additionally, the ethical dimension is concerned with the 'ethics of the individual and the community' (Smart). This shows how religion plays a role in shaping the ethical ideas of ~~the~~ society, although not everyone lives up to these codes of behaviour. For example in Buddhism, the Sigala Vada Sutta (Laymen's Code of Ethics and the 5 precepts eg. 'undertake to abstain from harming sentient beings' are ethical principles - Ahimsa (non-injury). Also, Smart recognised that some faiths have a strict set of laws eg. Shar'iah Law in Islam, whilst others have a value that is influenced eg. The Christian value of love.

The experiential dimension is said to be ~~the~~ 'centrally concerned' (Smart), often

referred to 'as the food on which the other dimensions feed'. In Buddhism experiences include achieving enlightenment, said to be the ultimate experience in Mahayana Buddhism - 'All of you shall become Buddhas' (Buddha). However, experiences can also take the form of blissful states in meditation, with meditation (Samadhi) being 3/8<sup>th</sup> of Magga (The Middle Path). Additionally, the Whirling Dervishes in Sufism experience a trance-like state.

The Social Dimension refers to the influence a religion has on people's everyday lives. For example, in Buddhism the Sangha is seen as the social nucleus of the religion; but Buddhism is not just a religion for monks, with the 'Fourfold Order' emphasizing inclusivity and interdependence. It can be argued that the social dimension is closely linked to the ethical dimension, with ethics being adapted to people's everyday social situation. For example, Japanese fishermen reconcile the Buddhist injunction against taking life (principle of Ahimsa) to their activity as fishermen.

In addition, a further link between the social and ethical dimensions can be seen through ~~the~~ the religion becoming ~~and~~ institutionalised; as through the institutions and teachings - the community in which it finds itself is affected. (Under about on the community).

Furthermore, the importance of the social dimension can be seen through an apparent link with the 'centrally concerned' experiential dimension; as similar experiences tend to unite and bring people together, whereas different experiences can in fact split social groups. Additionally, belief in similar doctrines and taking part in similar rituals can in fact unite social groups.

According to Smart, the doctrinal, mythological and ethical dimensions express a religion's claims about how men's lives ought to be shaped; but it is in fact the social dimension that indicates the way in which men's lives are shaped - showing the importance of the social dimension.

b). John Hick uses Wittgenstein's concept of 'Family Resemblance', applying ~~to~~ it to

religion in support of Smart, that perhaps religion cannot be defined - only described. First he took the idea of games, they have no common essence (some of solitary, some competitive), but what makes us apply the term 'game' to such a wide variety of activities? The answer is 'Some are similar in certain respects to the family, though not in all respects to any, or in any respects to all'.

This means, there are not any distinguishing features that every member of a family must have, but there are similar features and characteristics that are distributed (in varying degrees) that distinguish us from another family. When applied to religion, there aren't features that a religion must have, but there are similarities; suggesting that perhaps religion cannot be 'defined' at all.

However, Hick must have had a starting point in order to chart this range of phenomena; with the answer to this being Paul Tillich's ultimate concern. Worship of a higher unseen power is a common ~~the~~ feature amongst the religious family, however this is a concept that is absent

from Theravada Buddhism. It does however claim to teach the true nature and meaning of life. This suggests how religion can be described as a combination of the 6 dimensions, not needing features from all 6 of Smart's to be defined as 'religion'.

However, this implies that Marxism could be defined as a 'religion', featuring similarities to Smart's dimensions - Rituals, Symbols, Ethical Ideals (Capitalism). Despite Hick saying that Marxism could be seen as a distant cousin of Islam or Christianity; Smart says that it lacks the experience (experience into the invisible world).

Linking back to the social dimension, its significance to the other 5 of Smart's dimensions is apparent; however it can be seen as quite general. Many activities can unite social groups, such as supporting the same football team, attending the same school etc - however these activities would not be classified as 'religious'.

This leads on to the question, has Smart really achieved anything? It can be argued that Smart must have had an

idea of what religion is in order to try and define it, as he clearly needed a starting point. Additionally, Smart's dimensions of religion tend to describe what religion is, rather than attempting to define it, suggesting that he has not been successful. Furthermore, it can be said that each of Smart's dimensions are too general, manipulating them in order to define something as religious. Finally, Ninian Smart later added a seventh dimension (the material dimension), suggesting he was wrong the first time. If it was so simple to miss something out of his dimensions, how do we know he is right now?

\* The importance of the doctrinal dimension can be questioned, as 'mystical experience ~~is~~ was a surer path to liberation than the study of texts' (Keown).

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