

Examiners' Report
June 2016

GCE Religious Studies 6RS04 1C

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June 2016

Publications Code 6RS04_1C_1606_ER

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Introduction

At Standardisation meetings examiners considered three important documents for assessment and marking. First, the General Marking Guidance document sets out the policy of positive marking. Secondly, The Generic Mark Scheme divides each level across both AO1 and AO2 into 3 sublevels and this is helpful to achieve precise marking. Finally, the Indicative Mark Scheme is not intended to be prescriptive but to indicate possible legitimate ways of answering a question. The teams of examiners, by adopting these policies, have a broad and detailed understanding of the assessment process.

There are two fundamental principles for examining this paper based on the assessment objectives:

- One is that in AO1 it is essential to examine the text, noting there are various ways of achieving this.
- Two is that in AO2 it is essential to answer the full demands of this evaluative objective. This includes: 'Do you agree with the idea(s); justify your point of view and discuss its implications for understanding religion and human experience'.

Most of the religions in this unit used Ninian Smart's source on the dimensions of religion, including the ritual dimension. This source in the unit 6RS04 anthologies provides a context to the study of religion and illustrates a method used within religious studies.

Question 1

Good practice regarding AO1:

- Candidates showed evidence of a systematic focus on the passage, noting that this may be achieved via a variety of methods.
- Candidates focused on meditation with the ultimate aim of achieving nirvana.
- It was important to show an understanding of terms such as yoga and mysticism.
- The better quality scripts highlighted the significance of the place of ritual in Smart's dimensional analysis of religion, and how this is illustrated within Buddhism.
- Some examined the distinction between pragmatic ritual compared to sacred ritual.
- Good practice displayed the role of ritual across a range of Buddhist traditions, including Pure Land and Zen.
- Candidates presented synoptic links to the source as a whole; to related anthologies and to links in other units such as 6RS03.

Good practice in AO2:

- The best answers in part (b) struck a balance between insightful personal engagement with a critical analysis of the implications for understanding religion and human experience.
- There were some excellent answers with sound arguments and thoughtful discussions on this example of a phenomenological approach to the study of religion.
- There were interesting discussions based on Smart's ideas about issues regarding definitions of religion.

Areas for improvement for AO1:

- A comparatively small number paid scant attention to the passage. An examination of the passage is essential, noting that there are various different methods of achieving this. However, to evade the passage is very poor practice.
- Some presented a mere comprehension of the passage with little analysis or comments on significant points.
- Some mentioned a few scholars but at this level there was limited understanding of their contributions.

Areas for improvements for AO2:

- Some answers did little more than express an opinion, making sweeping claims, without supporting justifications with the ideas of scholars.
- More attention could have been given to alternative views of a topic and this is one of the criteria of Level 4.
- There was a limited ability to comprehend the implications for religion and human experience.

The two scripts below illustrate some good practice with room for improvement:-

- the first had full marks. It was good in terms of understanding the significance of Smart and his multi-dimensional analysis of religion and the answer was linked to the text and to Buddhism, making effective use of scholarly debates;
- in the second example there was a good wide-ranging analysis of ritual from a Buddhist perspective, although there could have been a more explicit focus on the wording of the question.

1(a) A common question asked is: 'What is religion?' This question has attracted many scholarly debates over the years and religion itself has always been a concern of mankind. There are two main ways in which to define religion: functional and substantive. A functional definition defines religion according to its role and function in society, whereas a substantive definition of religion looks at the features of religion. A famous substantive definition of religion was the one given by E. B. Tyler who defined religion as the 'belief in supernatural beings', however does this mean that a religion which does not have a belief in supernatural beings is not a religion (e.g. Buddhism). Niliam Smart's approach to defining religion, first set out in his first publication of 'The Religious Experience of Mankind' in 1969 then later developed and re-published in 1977, is somewhat unique. Instead of giving a clear-cut black and white definition of religion, Smart set out six dimensions which are present in all religions and which can be used as a means to define religion. The six ~~dimensions~~ dimensions are: rituals, experience, ~~spiritual~~ mythological, doctrinal, ethical and sacred. All of these dimensions are present within Buddhism.

The above passage is taken from the ritual dimension. Smart explains that rituals vary from the very complex, and that the main importance of rituals is the link between the outer aspect and the inner intention. In rituals, Smart highlights that the outer aspect (e.g. closing eyes to meditate) should correspond with the inner intention (e.g. focusing on Amida Buddha, or meditating on the Buddha or the 8-fold path). Smart identifies

that the connection between the two is of the utmost importance. In Buddhism, there are a range of rituals which all aim, as Smart puts it, to the "attainment of higher states of consciousness." In Theravada Buddhism, rituals include meditation to help the individual on the advised path to enlightenment through the 8 fold path, which will subsequently result in the psychological moment of enlightenment as *Nirvana*. Other rituals in Theravada Buddhism include the alms round in the *Sangha*. This helps the practitioner in the attainment of higher states of consciousness as the key emphasis in the alms round is the emphasis of 'Dana' (giving). This emphasis helps the individual in the attainment of higher states of consciousness as it makes the individual Buddhist realise the interdependent (*anica*) relationship of all things in the world and that on the ultimate reality, nothing has its own essence as every thing is made up of constituent parts. However, ~~Nirvan Smart also makes clear in his passage~~ Nirvan Smart addresses that rituals are not just limited to the belief in gods and sacrifices as he writes that: "In Buddhism, where the rituals of a religion of worship and sacrifice are regarded as largely irrelevant to the pursuit of *Nirvana*". The ritual dimension is linked with the doctrinal dimension as rituals are usually laid out in doctrines. Rituals dimension is also heavily linked and influenced by the experiential dimension as rituals are an attempt to experience and connect to the *Nirvana* world.

The experiential dimension, as Mircea Eliade says, is the experience of the invisible world. Eliade outlines that each religion has a figure who identified with ~~the world~~ a perception of the truth and who tried to communicate that truth. This can be seen for example in Islam with the Qur'an having been revealed to Muhammad by the Angel Gabriel. In Buddhism, Siddhartha Gautama was the original Buddha who identified with the existing realities of the Dharma (true nature of reality) and who tried to communicate it, as seen in the Buddha's first sermon: The Deer Park Sermon. Buddhism itself is an experiential religion, it has to be experienced and lived. This is because Buddhism is founded on the ~~own~~ original Buddha's religious experience when he became enlightened as a result of meditating. The experiential dimension is closely linked with the ritual dimension because as outlined in the passage above, Eliade says: "He adept performs various physical and mental exercises through which he hopes to concentrate the mind on the invisible world." In Buddhism, meditation is the ritual used to concentrate the mind in order to attain enlightenment. In Zen Buddhism, the use of Mandala and Kuan or a form of ritual used to help the practitioner break the conventional reality and experience the ultimate reality.

The Mythological dimension is often misunderstood. Eliade highlights in his book "The Religious Experience of Mankind" that myths do not mean true or false, but they are rather a tool to communicate a moral or spiritual teaching as well as symbolism. In Buddhism, the Mythological dimension

is present. This can be seen with the story of the arjuna of the Buddha and the four signs he encountered which helped him realize the emptiness from of the throna. Another myth present in Buddhism is the story of Sujata which represents the Buddha's rejection of the caste system and his worldly held belief that enlightenment is open to all, not just those who are socially high up or wealthy. The mythological dimension is linked with the ritual dimension due to certain rituals being the by-product of myths and stories. This can be seen with the background of the Buddha and the four signs as the rituals of meditation is a result of the mythological story of the original Buddha's (Siddhartha Gautama's) realistic observation of the world around him, his rejection of the vedic tradition and his consequent enlightenment. ~~Mythological~~ The mythological dimension is also present in the ritual dimension of Buddhism as seen in the Mahayana use of the celestial Buddhas, such as Avalokiteshvara, which is used as a shield in mantras to understand the ~~deformation~~ self-discipline needed and to meditate on the worldly attachment of the cycle of Samsara. Action must support this by writing in the passage; "Thus the essence of such religion is contemplative or mystical."

The doctrinal dimension is often a product of the experiential and mythological dimension. This is because, as Stuart Altmeyer, doctrinal dictate the "intellectual world" of religion and are the place in which rituals,

Myths and experiences are to be found. The most important doctrine in Buddhism is the Upasadhā, which collects and assesses other Buddhist doctrines such as the Four Noble Truths, ~~and~~ Anicca, Anatta and the 8-fold path. In Buddhism, the doctrines are not set as they change over time in response to the changing attitude of the understanding of the Dharma as nothing has its own permanent essence, as all things are permanent (Anicca). In response to the passage above, the ritual dimension is linked with the doctrinal dimension because rituals are present within the Buddhist doctrines. For example this can be seen when Buddhists meditate on the impermanence of all things. They do not meditate on the doctrine of Anicca. This can also be seen in the Theravāda sutras where individuals use Anicca Buddha as a Sutta to meditate on as well as parables such as 'the parable of the Burning house' in order to gain a subjective grasp on the true nature of reality.

Both the ethical and social dimensions can be grouped together as they are closely interlinked. In Buddhism, ethics is of key concern. The main focus in Buddhism is for the individual to become an ethical person. The main focus is not to become enlightened as that causes desire and desire fuels the 3 fires. Enlightenment is instead a consequence of living the ethical life. Smart scholars in his book that religions are not just for the individual, but that they are institutions which play a large role in society. This can be seen in regards to Theravāda

Buddhism with the Sangha which represents the interconnectedness and oneness of the community and all things. This principle is shown in the Sangha by the requirement to shave hair off and to wear the same robes as to express loss of ego, attachment, desires and judgement. Zen Buddhism is also meant to reflect the social dimension in Buddhism as it is said to have soaked up many of the pre-existing Japanese traditions such as martial arts and the tea ceremony. Both the ethical and social dimensions have an interdependent relationship because the ethical dimension dictates the social attitudes of a community and the adoption of principles, and the social dimension dictates the practice of the ethical dimension. In relation to the passage, both the social and ethical dimensions are present in the ritual dimension because as stated in the passage by Smart, "the ultimate aim of such methods is the attainment of higher states of consciousness," rituals in Buddhism are practiced in concern for the individual to become an ethical individual and are practiced by the whole of a society and community for the well-being of those in the community to "attain higher states of consciousness".

(b) I think Smart's attempt at defining religion is somewhat unique, because as shown above with Buddhism, all the dimensions are interlinked and are all present in a religion such as Buddhism. The dimensions are not

Stated randomly and Smart has put some thought in identifying which dimensions are in fact present in all religions. In support of Smart's view; John Hick used Wittgenstein's concept of 'family resemblance.' First he took the notion of 'game'; there are no features that any game should possess ~~as the explicit~~, as not all games are the same (some solitary, some competitive), but what makes us apply the term 'game' to certain activities. John Hick extended this idea to family resemblance. Hick stated that there are no features that all family members should possess, however there are resemblances which distinguish certain families from another family. Hick stated this in support of Smart as he concluded the possibility that maybe religion can never be defined - only described. Richard Swinburne is also in support of this view as in his books "The Existence of God" and "Is There a God?" he identifies that religion is a wide term and can be applied to various beliefs and practices, not just those that adhere to a God or deity.

In disagreement with Nidhan Smart. It can be argued that his attempt in defining religion is not unique as he would have needed an ~~inherent~~ initial starting point in which to derive the six dimensions to form his criteria. Therefore, this asserts that the concept of religion is already an idea stuck in people's heads universally and that it is not possible to attempt to find a new way to define religion without reference to this

universally help criteria of what a religion is. In disagreement with Smart's views expressed Paul Tillich came up with the concept of 'Ultimate Concern.' With use of this, Tillich disagreed with Smart's views by suggesting that a religion does not have to be made up entirely of the 6 dimensions in order to be labeled a religion and that instead religions can be defined by a small collection of these dimensions. However, this therefore implies that Marxism could be a good candidate as being labeled a religion. Smart would disagree with Tillich on the grounds the religions must consist of all the dimensions and Smart would criticize the view that Marxism is a religion as it does not have an experience into the 'invisible world.'

Other issues arise also with Smart's attempt at defining religion through the use of the ritual dimension because many activities, not just religious ones, have ritualistic aspects about them and so therefore this creates holes in Smart's attempt at defining religion. For example, Football matches include the rituals of chanting and buying tickets yet we would not consider this a religious issue also arise with Smart's interpretation of myths as traditions. Such as the Abrahamic traditions would not question as to whether the myth is true or not as they are seen as absolutely true (e.g. The virgin Birth in Christianity). In conclusion, I think that Smart's attempt

at defining religion is unique as he provides a broad spectrum from which individuals ~~can discuss~~ and scholars can discuss and debate the ~~various~~ key activities which are attributed to a religion, and which systems of belief are to fall under the umbrella term for it. However, despite Smart's approach being better advanced in the year it was published, I fear that the six dimensions are too wide and varied ~~and~~ because we have to debate which beliefs and activities fall within it and which don't, rather than providing us with a clear answer. With regard to the ritual dimension in the passage, I agree with Smart and felt that he had the correct approach in outlining that rituals can vary from being to small scale, with regard to intention.

This particular passage can be found in Mircea Eliade's work: 'The Religious Experience of Mankind', and is an extract from the ritual dimension. The key point made in the ritual dimension, as Eliade highlights, is that rituals have an inner and outer aspect. The outer aspect of the ritual is the physical action, whilst the inner aspect is the feeling of being in contact with the divine or reaching a higher state of consciousness, which corresponds to the physical action. Eliade ~~highlights~~ explains largely how rituals can vary, from the simplicity of closing one's eyes during prayer to the complexity of orthodox mass. As the passage points out, there are some rituals which can be classified as pragmatic, where the aim is to the attainment of certain experiences, compared to other types of rituals which are directed towards a holy being. This type of

ritual would be more prevalent in the Abrahamic traditions.

There are many rituals in Buddhism because the ritual is so diverse. Mahayana Buddhism in particular covers a wide variety of schools of Buddhism, for example Pure Land and Zen. In Zen Buddhism Pure Land, the ritual of chanting the name of Amida Buddha is done regularly with the hope of gaining a place in the 'pure land', a place in which there are no distractions and therefore the attainment of Nirvana is more likely. ~~The problem with~~ In addition to this, in Tibetan Buddhism, the creation and destruction of sand mandalas takes place. The ~~center~~ mandala represents the mind & transforming from one of ill-khwa, which is the center of ~~the~~ the mandala, to one of contentment - Nirvana, this is represented by the outside of the mandala.

The destruction of the mandala highlights the key Buddhist truth of impermanence ~~to~~, which is anicca. Everything is in a constant state of change, including the self.

Moreover, in Buddhism the rituals are aimed to bring you to a higher state of consciousness in most cases, whilst in the Abrahamic traditions the aim ~~is~~ ~~to~~ is to enable contact with the divine.

Zen Buddhism is a very good example of putting the Buddha's last words of 'be diligent' into practice. The use of quans are used in an attempt to go beyond rational thinking. What Smart highlights is that there is a danger that rituals can lose their inner meaning and just become an 'empty shell', in order to avoid this the believer must constantly focus on why they are performing a certain ritual. ~~For example,~~ ~~the morning the so~~ Finally, the

passage also speaks of yoga and other such practices. Whilst, meditation can be seen to train the mind and extinguish the 3 fires: greed, ignorance and hatred, yoga can be seen to train the body.

The mythologized and narrative dimension is also identified by Smart. The term ~~is~~ myth means 'story', with a story we are simply retelling a sequence of events regardless of whether it is true or not. The same principle applies to religion. ~~Additionally, there are~~ 3 ~~p~~ Myths in religion provide something which the practitioner may be able to relate to, there are 3 different purposes that a myth can have: 1. The myth ~~is~~ narrative is not true, but has some other value, motivational for example. 2. Using a myth allows us to talk about the 'ineffable' things, which are beyond our

expression. ~~It~~ 3. The myth allows us to understand the underlying reality / truth of that religion. ~~It~~ ~~so~~ brings Rodolph Bultmann criticised the use of myth in the bible, events such as the resurrection and the Virgin Mary. To him ~~+~~ Bultmann said that the bible needed to be 'demythologised', and that in the scientific era we could not believe in

the spirits ~~and~~ etc that the bible talks of. John Hick was another individual who attacked the use of myth in Christianity. He said ~~+~~ that in the ancient world, the people understood ~~R~~ certain aspects of the bible to be ~~&~~ embellished with myth.

However, as time went on people began to take it as absolute fact and the myths turned into doctrines. ~~+~~ in his work 'The Myth of God Incarnate'

Furthermore, there are many myths within the Buddha's lifetime.

however they are only a use of skill in means, a way of communicating the dharma. For example, when the Buddha was born, it is said that he could ^{walk} ~~walk~~ instantly and lotus flowers grew where he trod. This is obviously myth, and ~~it~~ should not be taken literally. The purpose of myths like these ~~is to~~ was to show that the Buddha was a righteous person who would bring a cure to the suffering of mankind.

Similarly, ~~in~~ the book of Job in the Old Testament, is about keeping faith through hard times, this is rooted in myth and that should be understood.

Smart also identifies the experiential dimension of religion. ~~in his~~ work. All of the world religions had a founder who personally identified with a perception of the truth, which now dominates

The world view of that particular faith. Religious experiences vary hugely depending on the individual and the faith in practice, William James used the term 'ineffable' to describe religious experience, it is beyond words. For someone, simply being in a religious institution may trigger an experience, whilst for another the chanting of mantras or meditation may give you flashes of satori (known as enlightenment in Zen.) Nirvana is beyond the grasp of words as language itself is a construction. Therefore the only way to reach Nirvana (Buddhism) and to be in contrast with the divine (the Abrahamic tradition) is to extend your knowledge and practice of the faith in question.

Furthermore, the doctrinal dimension is another key dimension of religions discussed by Smart. Doctrines provide the foundation

for all faiths, something that can be referred to in times of need. Smart points out how the doctrinal dimension is linked with the ritual dimension.

For example, the ritual of the Eucharist is a direct participation in the doctrine of the Trinity. Similarly, in Buddhism the ritual of the Alms round reflects the ^{loss} ~~loss~~ of the 3 fires and the regeneration of a self. This is because the monks are dependent on the laity to provide resources for them, primarily food. It also reflects the aspect of the Buddha's life when the Buddha was given rice and milk by a girl.

~~The social~~ The social dimension is key to all of the world religions. In Buddhism the Sangha is made up of the laity and the monks. Whilst the monks

provide the spiritual guidance,
the laity provide the material
goods. The two are interlinked, one
not one is more important than
the other. What smart points
out in this section is that
it can be hard to distinguish
what is religious and what is
social. ~~Just as society can~~
Society ~~can~~ plays a huge part in
religion ~~with~~ ~~often~~ and this
should not be overlooked.

Lastly is the ethical dimension.
All religions have a code of
ethics which help the practitioners
to become a more rounded
individual. In the Abrahamic
traditions, for many live the
ethical life in the hope of
~~receiving~~ something positive in the afterlife.
This largely contrasts to Buddhism,
where ethics are the
basis of the faith. Through
following the 8 fold path, the
5 precepts and so forth, the

practitioners will liberate themselves from the cycle of samson and their false perceptions.

The motivation for Buddhist ethics is in no way divinely inspired, ~~therefore~~ orientated.

Problems can arise as Smart points out, ~~that~~ when religious moulds the ethical attitudes of society, and equally when society moulds religious ethical attitudes. For a long time, the law in the West was based on Christian ethics, this can also be seen in ~~the~~ Islam with ~~Islamic~~ Shariah law.

b) Overall, I feel that Smart gives a very good overview of the different dimensions of religion.

Through explaining ~~the~~ religion through the different dimensions, Smart makes the reading accessible to all.

Due to the increased migration

of workers from the Indian subcontinent, it became increasingly important to have a wider understanding of all of the world religions, as opposed to just Christianity. ~~In addition to this~~ With multiculturalism increasing, wider knowledge about people's faith was essential to have. In addition to this, I thoroughly agree with the importance of personal experience, which which Ninian Smart discusses in the Experiential dimension. Without personal experience, there would simply be a set of doctrines with no personal feeling to accompany it.

The examples that Smart provides are mainly from Buddhism and Christianity, it is very likely that this is the case as Smart's own faith was Christian Buddhist &c. This suggests a lack of knowledge

on Smart's behalf, an example the Indian tradition.

What Smart fails to do is accurately describe the mythological dimension.

Even in the 1979 update of this essay, this dimension is not addressed to the extent that it should have been. Smart underestimates the extent to which myth has divided religion throughout history. Some people have taken the immaculate conception of the Virgin Mary as complete proof, which has led to disagreements within Christianity. Moreover, Smart does also not consider the ~~extent~~ ~~to which~~ ~~Art~~ ~~that~~ ~~Art~~ profound impact that ~~it~~ ~~art~~ has within religion. Art serves as a physical representation of beliefs and is key to many people's faith. Take the image of Jesus on the cross for

example, it is an image which is at the core of Christianity.

To conclude, despite ~~using~~ examples not being adequately provided from all of the world religions, Smart certainly ~~gave~~ provides a very a good introduction into religion.

The use of simple ~~examples~~ ~~also~~ ~~help~~ but yet insightful examples are also very helpful for the reader.

Paper Summary

This paper was first examined in 2010. It has been a significant and worthwhile feature of the current Specification, enabling candidates to study, in detail, sources and to develop synoptic links.

In 2018 the new A level specification will be first examined (with AS in 2017). The new A level develops the opportunity to study sources. All A level components will have anthologies, normally with four sources and these will have a compulsory question on all A level papers. The new anthology includes Karen Armstrong on the enlightenment of the Buddha; texts on the Bodhisattva ideal and the interpretation and application of ahimsa.

It can be noted that the ideas in the current anthologies can continue to be used in various ways across the new Specification.

Grade Boundaries

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link:

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