

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Paper 0490/12
Paper 12

Key messages

- It is important that candidates focus on the question asked in order to respond to it fully.
- While generic material which is equally true of any religion can be both relevant and creditable, it is crucial that religion specific references are made in candidates' responses.
- Candidates need to be familiar with command words and what they ask for, as well as with the key terms used in questions.
- It is important to practice exam skills such as time management, which includes using the number of marks available for the question as an indicator for answer length and/or amount of time to spend on it.

General comments

There were few rubric errors, with the majority of candidates attempting all parts of the questions they had selected.

There was sometimes a disparity in performance between the first and second religions chosen. There was also significant use of Christian terminology and Christian religious concepts in responses to questions on other religious traditions.

Most candidates were able to identify relevant knowledge for the specific questions, but there were some who did not take the command word of the question into account when answering. This was most common with b-part responses which require explanation rather than description of knowledge. Some candidates also seemed to find it challenging to judge how much was required to adequately answer a question, giving extended answers to a (i) and (ii) at the expense of later questions. (i) and (ii)-questions are marked by the number of points made in the response – where three things are asked for, one point is given for each of three different things identified; where 'describe' or 'outline' is used, marks can be given for discrete points or specific points of development up to the maximum available.

With regard to the c-part evaluation questions, many candidates seemed to have difficulties in developing arguments rather than stating a few points on either side. The skill of thinking through to a considered conclusion, based on evidence and consideration of other ideas, was displayed unevenly, with some candidates able to demonstrate it on one question but not others, or in relation to one of the two religions studied rather than both.

Comments on specific questions

Section A – Christianity

Question 1

- (a) (i) This question was well answered, with most candidates demonstrating a range of knowledge about Mary's perceived character, role and/or importance. The most common responses included references to her purity or virginity, to her being chosen or blessed by God and to her relationship with Joseph.

A common error was to repeat the question as one of the beliefs offered in the answer, for example including a point about her being the mother of Jesus as part of the response.

- (ii) This question was also well answered. There was commonly some repetition of material from **a(i)**, such as Jesus being born to a virgin, but where such points were equally relevant to this question they were credited. Most responses focused on Jesus' role as the saviour of humanity and beliefs about his death and resurrection. Many responses went into far more depth than was necessary to attain all the available marks.

A number of responses demonstrated some confusion, with an attempt to focus on Nazareth and the things Jesus might have done there. These responses tended to contain less creditable material, either making vague points about Jesus growing up and going to school there or confusing it with other places in which Jesus did significant things. Some responses said Jesus was born in Nazareth, baptised in Nazareth, and/or executed and resurrected in Nazareth.

- (b) Most responses showed some knowledge about what the Old Testament contains, with references to creation, the Ten Commandments, the deliverance from Egypt, and prophets. Some responses developed this material in relation to theological themes relevant to salvation such as sin and how it is overcome, or the literal examples of God rescuing God's people from threats. The best responses wrote explicitly about the events and prophecies of the Old Testament preparing the way for Jesus. Very few responses assumed that Jesus was part of the Old Testament, describing his death and its role in salvation.
- (c) Most responses showed awareness of the existence of the Apostles' Creed and some awareness of its contents, although a large number of responses presented it as going into far greater depth about the nature and substance of the beliefs it affirms than it actually does. Most responses observed that these beliefs are central to the religion of Christianity and therefore, a text which supports them must be important; some then went on to contrast it with the significance of the Bible.

Question 2

- (a) (i) The majority of candidates achieved full marks for this question. They included details like the sharing of bread and wine, the prophecies of Jesus about Judas and Peter and the washing of the disciples feet. Most responses were far more extensive than was needed for this three-mark question; many seemed intent on giving a full description covering every possible detail.
- (ii) This question was less well answered than **a(i)**. Responses that identified the correct event were often short on detail, simply stating that Jesus ascended to Heaven. There were also a lot of responses that showed confusion between the Ascension, the Resurrection, Transfiguration and the events of Pentecost.
- (b) A variety of approaches to this question were noted with some candidates focusing on the involvement of the Holy Spirit in the lifetime of Jesus, some using the promise of Jesus to send the Holy Spirit as their starting point, and others beginning with the idea of the Trinity. All of these approaches identified creditable material. Some responses were more descriptive than explanatory, giving an account of the many different things the Holy Spirit might be present for and involved in. Another common approach was to give a detailed description of Pentecost, without further development in relation to the question asked.
- (c) Overall, this was a well-answered question, with candidates being able to offer clear views on both sides of the question. Most responses argued firstly that the Holy Spirit was always present because this is what Jesus promised his followers would be the case when they gathered in his name, and then countered that with the idea of corruption in churches, meaning that the Holy Spirit would not be present.

Section B – Islam

Question 3

- (a) (i) Responses to this question included those who understood the term 'jihad', but appeared to have confused which form is lesser and which greater, as well as those who seemed confused about the meaning of the term itself. Very few responses correctly ascribed physical fighting to lesser jihad. It was also noted that understanding of what the non-physical forms of jihad might include was less clear and confident, even where the concept of spiritual struggle was recognised.

- (ii) The question asks about the meaning of the term 'Articles of Faith' and, while most candidates were able to demonstrate awareness of the term, very few responses actually focused on what it means. Most responses gained some of the available marks by stating that it is the name for a specific list of beliefs and giving examples of what that list includes but required further development.

A number of candidates seemed to have confused the Articles of Faith with the Five Pillars and with the artefacts necessary for salah prayers.

- (b) Most responses demonstrated clear knowledge of what salah is and its importance within Islam. References to obedience to God and the desire to follow the example of the Prophet (pbuh) were common and most candidates were able to relate these to the idea of importance specified in the question.
- (c) The distinction between compulsory salah prayer and the choice to perform du'a was identified by most candidates. Responses identified the various rules for performing salah and contrasted it with the potential for greater flexibility in how du'a is performed. Most responses also included an alternative view in the form of pointing out that both are prayers, and therefore communication with God. Some responses offered a nuanced perspective, suggesting that it is not possible or appropriate to draw an absolute distinction.

Question 4

- (a) (i) This was a well-answered question with most responses gaining full marks.
- (ii) Most responses to this question were clearer regarding the use of the compass than of the prayer mat. The need to face Makkah and the role of the compass in achieving that were identified by most candidates, and some responses gave multiple examples of situations when a Muslim needs to do this. By contrast, reference to the prayer mat was sometimes limited to saying it is used while praying. Some responses developed this in relation to the need to ensure a clean place to pray. Only a few candidates connected it explicitly to salah prayer.
- (b) Knowledge about the Qur'an and its contents was clear in most responses; knowledge of the Sunnah was more variable. Descriptions of what each is were common and included relevant material, but applying this knowledge to an explicit addressing of the relationship between them was seen much less. Responses which did attempt to answer the question directly tended to use the example of salah to explain how the instruction to perform it is given in the Qur'an and the details necessary to do so form part of the Sunnah.
- (c) Where the term 'hijrah' was correctly identified, candidates were able to offer good responses, offering differing views on its significance to Muslim history. However, there were a significant number of responses which did not understand the term correctly, confusing it with the Hajj or not identifying what they thought it meant at all.

Section C – Judaism

Question 5

- (a) (i) This was a generally well answered question, with most candidates identifying the tallit, tefillin and kippah. Other, less well known items such as the gartel were included in some responses and credited. Where errors were made it was most commonly by giving Hebrew and English terms for the same item as if they were two distinct things.
- (ii) This proved a more challenging question. While most candidates were familiar with the idea of the Shema as a prayer there was less specific knowledge of its contents and responses were often very generic, saying that Jews must pray often and have to praise God. Some responses seemed to conflate the Shema with other Jewish scriptures, saying that it contains all 613 mitzvot.
- (b) This proved a challenging question for most candidates attempting it. Almost all responses confused the menorah with the ner tamid, going into some depth about the eternal light of God and associated symbolism. Some wrote more generic answers about the use of candles in worship. Only a very few responses included specific material about the menorah itself.

- (c) Most responses offered relevant but non-Judaism specific views, contrasting the priestly role of the rabbi with the non-specific duties of the chazan. A few responses presented the two titles as different names for the same person, or described the chazan as a kind of deputy rabbi.

Question 6

- (a) (i) Most candidates gained at least some of the available marks, although many did so by naming more than three books. Books from the New Testament were frequently included in these lists.
- (ii) Most responses correctly named the Torah and the Ketuvim and offered some expansion on each. This was commonly to list books found within each, but some responses described the nature of the content or the central concerns. Either approach was creditable.

A small number of responses expanded on the Nevi'im here, which suggests a misreading of the question.

- (b) Most responses demonstrated knowledge of what the Talmud is, distinguishing it from the Torah and usually recognising that it expands on the laws and how to follow them. Some were able to go into more depth regarding the origins and development of the text and the need to understand how to apply the mitzvot in a changing world. However, most responses demonstrated limited understanding of how the Talmud is used, describing Jews reading it daily like a prayer book or structured synagogue services around it. Another common misconception was to suggest it is a simplified or condensed Torah, intended to make the contents of the Torah more accessible to Jews who have less education.
- (c) This was a well answered question with most candidates showing clear understanding of what Shabbat involves and its significance in Jewish life. Not all responses were discursive, with some appearing to regard the stimulus statement as a truism, but most were able to move beyond this by identifying other foundational Jewish practices, such as circumcision.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Paper 0490/13
Paper 13

Key messages

- It is important that candidates focus on the question asked in order to respond to it fully.
- While generic material which is equally true of any religion can be both relevant and creditable, it is crucial that religion specific references are made in candidates' responses.
- Candidates need to be familiar with command words and what they ask for, as well as with the key terms used in questions.
- It is important to practice exam skills such as time management, which includes using the number of marks available for the question as an indicator for answer length and/or amount of time to spend on it.

General comments

There were few rubric errors, with the majority of candidates attempting all parts of the questions they had selected.

There was sometimes a disparity in performance between the first and second religions chosen. There was also significant use of Christian terminology and Christian religious concepts in responses to questions on other religious traditions.

Most candidates were able to identify relevant knowledge for the specific questions, but there were some who did not take the command word of the question into account when answering. This was most common with b-part responses which require explanation rather than description of knowledge. Some candidates also seemed to find it challenging to judge how much was required to adequately answer a question, giving extended answers to a (i) and (ii) at the expense of later questions. (i) and (ii)-questions are marked by the number of points made in the response – where three things are asked for, one point is given for each of three different things identified; where 'describe' or 'outline' is used, marks can be given for discrete points or specific points of development up to the maximum available.

With regard to the c-part evaluation questions, many candidates seemed to have difficulties in developing arguments rather than stating a few points on either side. The skill of thinking through to a considered conclusion, based on evidence and consideration of other ideas, was displayed unevenly, with some candidates able to demonstrate it on one question but not others, or in relation to one of the two religions studied rather than both.

Comments on specific questions

Section A – Christianity

Question 1

- (a) (i) Most responses identified three types of writing, commonly history, laws and stories/narratives. The most common error was to name books of the Bible.
- (ii) Most responses focused on reading the Bible, describing sermons and the priest sharing and explaining the text. Some candidates either included or focused wholly on private use of the Bible, which was not relevant to answering this question.

- (b) Responses to this question were primarily descriptive, with some focusing on specific aspects of the Bible in connection with the idea of authority such as the Ten Commandments, and others giving a more generalised description of the Bible as a whole. These responses usually contained some relevant material but it was not applied to the question. Only a small number of responses linked this descriptive material with ideas connected to revelation, the word of God or similar.
- (c) This was a well answered question, with most candidates able to demonstrate some understanding of the issue and different perspectives on it. Most responses argued, on the one hand, that while the Bible is an inspired text that helps Christians understand what is required of them and, on the other, that the church service may help believers to understand what is taught in the Bible.

Question 2

- (a) (i) This was a well answered question, with most candidates demonstrating clear knowledge of the contents of the Apostles' Creed.
- (ii) Most candidates were clearly familiar with the story of Jesus' birth. The most common issue here was including too much material, beginning with the annunciation and sometimes going as far as the flight of the holy family to Egypt.
- (b) There were many good responses to this question, including detailed accounts of important ideas such as the defeat of death, the guarantee of eternal life, and Jesus confirming his identity as Son of God. Some responses more descriptive responses gave clear descriptions of the resurrection and the events surrounding it, but were less clear on why any of this matters to Christians.
- (c) Most candidates could see some significance in the statement and were able to identify relevant material to explore it. The Ten Commandments were often contrasted with the gospels or the two greatest commandments, with some reflecting on whether these laws are in fact a summary of the ten commandments rather than alternatives. Some candidates contrasted the Ten Commandments with the Bible as a whole, suggesting some confusion about the topic.

Section B – Islam

Question 3

- (a) (i) Where candidates gave a response to this question, full marks were generally attained. However, it was sometimes left un-attempted, suggesting a lack of familiarity with the terms.
- (ii) This was generally a well-answered question. Most candidates focused on the importance of attending Jummah, the instructions of the Prophet (pbuh) on this, and the delivery of a sermon (Khutbah). Some responses identified differences in the practice of rak'ahs for Jummah prayer. Some candidates incorrectly suggested that wudu was only required at Jummah or that Jummah is the only time salah prayer is compulsory.
- (b) This question was also often left un-attempted, implying candidates choosing to answer the Islam questions were unfamiliar with the term 'muezzin'. Where a response was attempted there was often a degree of confusion between the muezzin and the imam or, sometimes, with the minaret. Candidates who did understand the term were able to answer well, focusing on the muezzin's role in bringing the ummah together and enabling Muslims to properly fulfil their duty with regard to performing salah.
- (c) Most candidates were able to offer distinct perspectives on this question, usually arguing that the Prophet (pbuh) was a human being, and so his example must be attainable to ordinary people, contrasted with the idea that he was especially close to God. Others argued that the challenges he faced are not necessarily wholly applicable to contemporary Muslims who are practicing an established religion rather than establishing a new one. Some developed this to distinguish the values and moral demonstrated through the Prophet's life and actions from the specific practical examples he set, arguing that the former can be applied by everyone while the latter depend on circumstance.

Question 4

- (a) (i) Most responses gained all available marks for this question. Food, drink and sexual activity were the most common responses.
- (ii) Most candidates demonstrated detailed knowledge of what the Hajj entails and its status as a pillar of Islam. Many responses went into far greater detail than was required to gain the available marks.
- (b) Responses to this question were often focused on the generic use of prayer beads as an aid to concentration without including any Islam-specific material. The generic material can be relevant, but if it is all that is included then the response cannot be fully credited in most cases. Some candidates expanded their response to reference the 99 names of God, but references to dhikr or other specific forms of prayer were uncommon.
- (c) Most responses argued that persecution is less common in much of the world now than it was historically, and that many Muslims live in Muslim communities or predominantly Muslim countries and so are safe from it. While this was a relevant argument it was not always related to a clear understanding of the persecution that led to the Prophet (pbuh) leaving Makkah. Those responses which did make clear reference to this, tended to argue that without these events Islam would be very different to how it is today, although this was not always clearly explained or justified.

Section C – Judaism

Question 5

- (a) (i) This question was answered well with most responses gaining three marks. Examples included rites of passage, teaching/education and celebrations.
- (ii) Beyond stating that the Sefer Torah is a scroll, which was given in the question, responses divided evenly into those describing the object (handwritten, kept in the Aron Hakodesh) and those describing its contents (books of Moses). Both approaches yielded creditable material. Where irrelevant material appeared, it was usually regarding the importance of the Sefer Torah or describing how it is used in worship.
- (b) This question was often not attempted by candidates choosing to answer the Judaism questions. Many of those who did attempt it seemed unclear on the concept of a minyan, although the English gloss given in the question seemed to help them produce some kind of response. This was usually along the lines of stating that it was important because without it worship could not happen, which is correct, but does not constitute a developed answer to the question. Responses able to go further than this were unusual.
- (c) Most candidates were able to give views on the question, although understanding of what the Talmud actually is was variable, with some conflating it with the Torah. The most common approach was to argue that ordinary Jews might find it interesting to read the Talmud, but that only rabbis absolutely needed to because they need to be able to teach other people.

Question 6

- (a) (i) Some responses suggested a degree of confusion about what the question was asking for, with a noticeable number of responses simply repeating their **5a(i)** response.
- (ii) Most candidates were able to identify several items of Jewish ritual dress with detail about the form of them. Many responses went into far greater detail than was needed to gain the available marks.
- (b) Most candidates attempting this question had a good range of generic knowledge. Judaism specific material was more uncommon but some responses referenced the Shema, relevant mitzvot and other scriptural materials for a more explicit focus on the question.
- (c) This question gave rise to good responses, with most candidates correctly identifying various features of the covenants with Abraham, Moses and Noah and contrasting them with one another. Explicit consideration of their relative importance was less common, with most responses taking the form of saying that each Covenant has an important aspect.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Paper 0490/22
Paper 22

Key messages

- Candidates need to be familiar with command words and what they ask for. For example, candidates are reminded that responses to 'explain'-questions need to include further development and/or application of knowledge.
- It is important that candidates demonstrate a good understanding of religious teachings and clearly demonstrate the relationship between belief and practice.
- It is important to practice exam skills such as time management, which includes using the number of marks available for the question as an indicator for answer length and/or amount of time to spend on it.
- It is important to include more than one viewpoint in **part (c)** questions.

General comments

The performance overall was good. Candidates were well prepared, and answers reflected the fact that candidates of all abilities were able to access the questions. A range of skills was displayed, which was evident across the part questions to a varying degree.

There was a considerable number of rubric infringements, which reduced the amount of time that candidates had for an answer that was credited. Candidates are reminded to focus on the question asked, rather than write everything they know about a topic.

Section A and Section B (Christianity and Islam) were the most popular combination of questions. **Section C** (Judaism) attracted slightly less candidates overall.

In **part (a)** questions, most candidates were able to select the correct areas of knowledge. Many achieved higher levels in these questions, some of whom wrote more extensively than was necessary. Other candidates would be able to produce more successful answers if they gave more than scant detail and made their responses less like a list. There were responses which were purely generic; this affected the levels that candidates were able to access.

In **part (b)** questions, the vast majority selected the correct and relevant body of knowledge from the syllabus. It is in the application of this knowledge that further development would allow candidates to access the higher levels. 'Explain' is generally the command word used in these questions and candidates need to tailor their responses accordingly. Weaker responses can become stronger responses when the candidate adds understanding to the knowledge that they provide.

Part (c) questions should be discussed from more than one perspective, and many were well versed in this technique. Stronger answers were not constrained by a formulaic response. An opinion ought to be substantive, rather than being purely the reiteration of material already included in the response. This opinion can be complemented by a number of different reasons.

Comments on specific questions

Section A Christianity

Question 1

- (a) Stronger responses identified celebrations from across denominations. These also went beyond the obvious and widely known practises such as a nativity play. Details included Midnight Mass and specific Bible readings that are often heard in churches at Christmas. Some candidates referred to celebrations that occur in their own locality. Weaker responses wrote about celebrations that are more fitting to a secular celebration of Christmas within the home. Generic responses were also prevalent, citing celebrations that could occur in any service.
- (b) Most responses were able to show that the connection of Christmas to the birth of Jesus made Christmas important. Weaker answers were confined to that. Stronger responses were able to use phrases such as 'The Word becoming flesh' and showed an understanding of what Christmas means to some Christians in terms of salvation. Some pertinent responses recognised that the symbolism attached to the visits from the Magi revealed another importance. That is what their visit meant with regard to the nature of Jesus.
- (c) The majority of responses made reference to Christmas and Easter, which can easily be used to good effect in this question. Responses that agreed with the statement reflected their cultural origin and mentioned presents. Others were able to suggest that in many areas the commercial aspect of festivals is not paramount. Stronger responses from whatever standpoint could also state that a festival having a commercial element does not necessarily mean that everyone loses the true meaning.

Question 2

- (a) There were many comprehensive responses to this question. Stronger responses methodically re-told the story in detail. Some went into unnecessary detail in the sense that they explained something, such as its lasting significance. Weaker responses gave scant detail, often in a haphazard sequence.
- (b) Stronger responses recognised that there are many reasons why Christians might go on pilgrimage. Some used Lourdes as one of their examples and referred to the hope of a cure or spiritual strength as a reason for going. More generic responses that did not mention a particular place of pilgrimage also scored well. Weaker answers provided their responses in a list fashion.
- (c) Some responses suggested that this sentence is completely true. Building on what they had written in the previous part of the question, they said that faith is shown unequivocally by going on pilgrimage. Stronger responses were able to suggest other things that show faith. Many commented that not everyone can afford to go on pilgrimage but said that their faith is still strong. They further said that what matters is a pure heart and that is what shows true faith.

Question 3

- (a) Stronger responses gave a detailed account of the work of missionaries including the separation of physical and spiritual support. Many other responses listed some of the things that missionaries might do, which is not description. Excellent responses could connect missionary activity to the ministry of Jesus. This allowed their response to cover many more acts of kindness, suggesting further links to The Good Samaritan.
- (b) Strong responses could link Christian beliefs and teachings to the idea that caring for others is a Christian duty. Weaker responses made bland references to the need to care for others and most of those were purely generic in nature. Stronger responses referred to Christian teachings on love. Perceptive responses were able to include the Ten Commandments to good effect.
- (c) Many responses built upon the previous part question. Because of that they stated that the love for others is paramount in Christianity. Many missed the word 'difficult' and treated the question more as one of an 'ought', therefore missing the nuance of the question which is whether having a

Christian belief makes the love for others a natural part of their dealings with others. Others omitted 'as much as you love yourself' and answered a different question. Some commented that many people do not love themselves or agreed with the mantra that one cannot love others unless one loves oneself first.

Section B Islam

Question 4

- (a) Stronger responses described a range of reasons as to why Madinah has historical significance to Islam. Most were able to state that the first Muslim community was established there. Perceptive responses could comment that had Madinah not been a safe place for Muhammad (pbuh), then the preaching about Islam would have been under threat. Some responses referred to the continuing revelations to Muhammad (pbuh) in Madinah as well as it being the place where his tomb lies today.
- (b) Weaker responses treated this as a question on what happens during the festival. Most responses that dealt with the explaining of the importance of the festival were able to say that the concept of 'sacrifice' is an important one in Islam. Also, most seemed to understand that the festival is one of the ways in which Muslims can try to emulate the behaviour and faith of Ibrahim. The aspect of the festival which thanks God was explained in a few responses.
- (c) Stronger responses were able to give a variety of perspectives in response to the stimulus with most emphasised points in agreement with the stimulus. They pointed out how family-orientated Islam is. A useful consideration is how birth rituals, performed with the family, perpetuate religious tradition. Fewer candidates were able to offer the alternative perspective. Ideas include the line of argument that the ummah ensures continuity within Islam as well as adherence to certain beliefs.

Question 5

- (a) There were many comprehensive responses which showed excellent knowledge of this topic. Most candidates knew what the ummah is and could give at least one benefit to belonging to it. Many focused on the feeling of solidarity which the ummah strengthens. Useful references were made by stronger responses to the benefit the ummah bestows upon those that are in need. The ummah's pivotal role in the distribution of aid and resources to those who need them was a useful inclusion.
- (b) Responses that were able to show knowledge and understanding of specifically Muslim reasons were successful here. Other responses were generic. Stronger answers were able to explain the role of the ummah which helped in this question. Muslims should care for others as all are part of the ummah and all deserve care. Excellent responses introduced zakah and said Muslims believe they should give zakah as wealth is ultimately not theirs. Obedience to God's command is also a useful inclusion in a response to this question.
- (c) Weaker responses made this into a question about rules in general and did not deal with the required specifically Muslim aspects. Effective responses referred to the words and rules of the Qur'an being unchanged and unchangeable. Stronger responses were also able to suggest that neither the Qur'an nor the Hadith can cover all issues that Muslims encounter. Therefore, some form of adaptation or analysis of a best-fit rule might be required.

Question 6

- (a) Many less effective responses merely suggested male dominance over women and could therefore not give a comprehensive account of the teachings on both sexes. Responses could refer to the beliefs that paradise lies at the feet of mothers and also that the dowry is for the benefit of women. Many responses did not go much further than stating that men go to work and women stay at home. References to prayer and modesty would have been helpful.
- (b) The key word here is 'explain.' Descriptions of the marriage ceremony were not credited. Most candidates were able to suggest that a reason for marrying is because sexual intercourse should be within the framework of marriage. Candidates could also refer to marriage as being decreed in the Qur'an and that it follows the Sunnah of Muhammad (pbuh).

- (c) 'Successful' could be interpreted in a number of ways, and any valid response could be credited. Most suggested that 'successful' was connected to the love within the marriage. In other words, they said that a successful marriage can only be one where love is involved. Stronger responses were able to offer the idea that success is built upon trust and respect, which they separated from the element of love.

Section C Judaism

Question 7

- (a) Stronger responses gave a comprehensive set of rituals performed during this New Year festival. Frequently included actions were the blowing of the shofar and the throwing of breadcrumbs into a river or stream. Most knew about the Book of Life. Less well detailed was that the festival, though a joyous one, also has a solemn aspect. It should be noted that reasons for the rituals performed were not required in this question. Some time was lost by candidates who treated this as an 'explain' question.
- (b) Some candidates answered from a general perspective whereas others referred to specific Jewish festivals. Both approaches were acceptable as was a mixture of approaches. Stronger responses explained specifically Jewish important aspects although it is understandable that some reasons for celebrating festivals goes across all three religions. Many explained the importance of keeping the Temple alive in Jewish memory as well as remembering the escape from slavery in Egypt. Less frequent explanations involved reference to Shabbat which is a constant reminder of God's creation of the world.
- (c) The majority of responses disagreed with the stimulus. Building upon material from the previous part-question, it was suggested that Jewish festivals retain their meaning. This is because they commemorate important events from Jewish history and that this is never forgotten. Other responses could see the alternative perspective. This includes that festivals have a historical context which cannot be replicated. Mention of specifically Jewish material would allow candidates to improve their answers.

Question 8

- (a) The majority of responses recognised that this was a question about circumcision. Some candidates were able to write comprehensive answers. Weaker responses could have included more significant details such as the existence of and role of the sandek as well as the presence of the chair of Elijah. Reference to the Covenant was expected but was often missing.
- (b) Many candidates were aware that such ceremonies are important in Judaism. Weaker responses were generic in nature and discussed the importance of becoming an adult only. Stronger responses referred to the obligation that is placed upon young Jewish adults, which these ceremonies mark. Perceptive response would refer to the Covenantal relationship which is furthered as a result of entry into adulthood in Judaism. The importance of being old enough to read the Torah publicly could also be mentioned.
- (c) Many responses mentioned that some people never undergo birth rites and that their lives seem to be the same as those that do. Stronger responses recognised that for many, it is the interior change that occurs as a result of the rite which is important. For example, symbolically, being part of the Covenant is profoundly important to Jews. Some noted that birth rites could impinge upon the baby's free will. Referring this specifically to circumcision would be more fitting than a generic comment.

Question 9

- (a) There were many responses which referred to the perceived role of men in general rather than looking specifically at the role of men in Judaism. Those that were able to incorporate Judaism in their answer usually mentioned the role of men outside the home, namely with regard to worship. More could be made of the divine command to marry as well as the role of Jewish men in giving religious education to children. Torah study could be further explored.
- (b) Weaker responses described what tzedaka and gemilut hasadim are. Stronger responses briefly said what they are and then explained how they influence how a Jew lives their life. Judaism as a

religion of social action needed to be emphasised. Examples could have included Jews ensuring that no one is left in need and that the offer of friendship should be extended to all. Collections of money in pushkes as well as reference to charities could have given responses a more in-depth source of material.

- (c) Successful answers to this question made reference to specifically Jewish material. Many responses noted that love is an important part of Judaism, but this is also the case for all other religions. Candidates could have mentioned that the love for God is the most important part of Judaism. However, there is the belief that one cannot love God, yet mistreat human beings. Perceptive responses could have introduced the Ten Commandments, suggesting that if one does not steal, for example, then one is showing love for others. This is a divine command. On the other side it could be mentioned that things such as festivals, worship and so on are more important.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Paper 0490/23
Paper 23

Key messages

- Candidates need to be familiar with command words and what they ask for. For example, candidates are reminded that responses to 'explain'-questions need to include further development and/or application of knowledge.
- It is important that candidates demonstrate a good understanding of religious teachings and clearly demonstrate the relationship between belief and practice.
- It is important to practice exam skills such as time management, which includes using the number of marks available for the question as an indicator for answer length and/or amount of time to spend on it.
- It is important to include more than one viewpoint in **part (c)** questions.

General comments

The performance overall was good. Candidates were well prepared, and answers reflected the fact that candidates of all abilities were able to access the questions. A range of skills was displayed, which was evident across the part questions to a varying degree.

There was a considerable number of rubric infringements, which reduced the amount of time that candidates had for an answer that was credited. Candidates are reminded to focus on the question asked, rather than write everything they know about a topic.

Section A and Section B (Christianity and Islam) were the most popular combination of questions. **Section C** (Judaism) attracted slightly less candidates overall.

In **part (a)** questions, most candidates were able to select the correct areas of knowledge. Many achieved higher levels in these questions, some of whom wrote more extensively than was necessary. Other candidates would be able to produce more successful answers if they gave more than scant detail and made their responses less like a list. There were responses which were purely generic; this affected the levels that candidates were able to access.

In **part (b)** questions, the vast majority selected the correct and relevant body of knowledge from the syllabus. It is in the application of this knowledge that further development would allow candidates to access the higher levels. 'Explain' is generally the command word used in these questions and candidates need to tailor their responses accordingly. Weaker responses can become stronger responses when the candidate adds understanding to the knowledge that they provide.

Part (c) questions should be discussed from more than one perspective, and many were well versed in this technique. Stronger answers were not constrained by a formulaic response. An opinion ought to be substantive, rather than being purely the reiteration of material already included in the response. This opinion can be complemented by a number of different reasons.

Comments on specific questions

Section A Christianity

Question 1

- (a) Stronger responses described a range of customs on Holy Thursday. Most common across the range of responses were references to the Eucharistic celebrations and foot-washing, and stronger

responses either gave depth or breadth to the customs that they mentioned. Some were able to make reference to denominational differences. Other candidates seemed to know little about special collections in churches or the custom of clearing adornments from churches at this time. Mention could be made of the removal of the Blessed Sacrament.

- (b) Stronger responses took note of the 'explain' in this question. This resulted in far more than a simple statement about the creation of the world. They were able to explain that Sunday is a special day as it is the commemoration of the creation and an illustration of obedience to God's command to rest on that day. Less well explained was the idea that it is important to have a day in which one can recharge physically and spiritually. Many Christians therefore believe that it is important to have such a day on a Sunday.
- (c) Many responses were comprehensive and there was a variety of ways in which this question was answered. Candidates generally were able to cite more than one argument. Some responses suggested that the Eucharist is only as important as the intention behind it. Weaker responses were not able to substantiate their claim. Stronger responses made reference to some Christians who do not celebrate the Eucharist, as well as suggested that celebrating it is an act of obedience to Jesus' command to remember him.

Question 2

- (a) Most responses described some of the differences between infant and believers' baptism. Others seemed to have found it difficult to focus on 'the differences', and instead gave separate descriptions of the two types of baptism. Most were able to refer to the differences in the ages of those getting baptised. Less well known was the idea that believers' baptism has more of a focus on dying and rising with Christ, whereas infant baptism is more focused on entering the Church.
- (b) Candidates generally knew one reason as to why marriage is important to Christians. Stronger responses knew more than one reason from a Christian perspective. These include marriage being the framework for a sexual relationship, as well as fulfilling the ideal of raising children in such a relationship. Development is possible by showing that the marital relationship is analogous to the relationship that Jesus has with the Church or that God has with humanity.
- (c) Many responses suggested that what is important is that these rituals are performed with 'a pure heart.' Some mentioned that religious rituals are not relevant because there are many people who have not had taken part in such rituals whose lives are exactly the same as those who have. Stronger responses also suggested that religious rituals are relevant and were able to say why. Reasons included that there is an important symbolism in rituals which spiritually aids the person who has participated in the ritual.

Question 3

- (a) Weaker responses merely gave a list of some roles of women. Most of these roles were either general roles, not connected to Christianity or were stereotypical responses. Responses could make reference to the differing views these days concerning the ordination of women. They could also refer to the fact that the traditional role of women of being at home has changed due to financial pressures.
- (b) Some responses dealt with the word 'equal' in a number of ways. Some referred to equality in terms of rich and poor. Others referred to equality across the sexes. Any such valid interpretation was credited. Other candidates wrote details about a pilgrimage without really answering the question. Stronger responses used details from specific pilgrimages but as a way to respond to the question. For example, the wearing of Ihram was mentioned as a means by which all Muslims feel equal on Hajj.
- (c) Most responses agreed that pilgrimage to Bethlehem for a Christian is very important. They were able to substantiate this claim too. Stronger responses suggested that while the birthplace of Jesus is important, so too is the place where Jesus died. Perceptive responses stated that pilgrimage in Christianity is not compulsory. They also argued that for many, pilgrimage is not a physical, but rather a spiritual journey which can be made on a daily basis.

Section B Islam

Question 4

- (a) Most responses were generic and showed little knowledge about the work of a specific Muslim aid organisation. Because of this, most answers could have been about any religion. To improve, responses could take into account the changing roles of these organisations which respond to whatever the aid need is at the time. This will allow responses to be relevant and specific.
- (b) Responses were generally familiar with the fact that Muslims endeavour to include the poor in all celebrations. Less well established were the ways in which this is done. Many responses did know that during certain rituals, meat is shared with the poor. Stronger responses knew other ways in which the poor are remembered. For example, mention was made of special collections in the mosque which are distributed to the poor. Only very few responses knew of the existence of the compulsory sadaqah al-fitr.
- (c) Most responses said that it is impossible to help everyone in need. The most common reason given is that there are so many people in need that help cannot be extended to all of them. The majority of responses dealt with the question from the perspective of limited finances. However, there were some excellent responses that suggested that help can take a variety of forms. Stronger responses made sure that the answer contained material specific to Islam. For example, there is the idea that all can be helped as that is an integral part of belonging to the ummah.

Question 5

- (a) Some responses looked at a wide variety of rituals that happen after the death of a Muslim. Most candidates knew that Muslims are generally buried within 24 hours after death. Some were aware of the ritual that involves the washing of the body and that the body is buried facing Makkah. The best responses included that other than for a martyr the body is washed three times and perfumed with scents. Responses could be given more detail by the addition of further rituals. This could include the fact that the body is carried to the cemetery by Muslim males, as a sign of respect, rather than being transported by a vehicle to the cemetery.
- (b) Many candidates made considerable use of the material that they had revised on beliefs about the afterlife, including judgement. They were able to explain that it is because of the importance of the belief in the life to come, and that this life is seen as a preparation for the afterlife. It's not that this life is unimportant; rather this life is a test in order to determine one's fate in the afterlife. Perceptive responses could include material from other areas of the syllabus in order to enhance their answer.
- (c) The majority of responses gave more than one perspective on this. Many argued that set rituals can actually help mourners as well as being a source of comfort to the person who is dying. Often the reason given is that it follows tradition and gives people the assurance that they will know what is going to happen after death. Stronger responses linked this to specifically Muslim rituals, such as the wrapping of the body in white cloth. The opposite view commonly given was that a person should be able to grieve and conduct funeral arrangements in their own way.

Question 6

- (a) Most candidates were aware of what zakah is. Many were able to give a good account of the fact that zakah is one of the Five Pillars of Islam, thus making the giving of zakah compulsory. Stronger responses knew that it is an act in accordance with a Sunnah of Muhammad (pbuh.) Fewer candidates knew how zakah can and cannot be used. An example of how it can be used is to help someone out of debt. An example of how it cannot be used is to help those who are considered to be heretics or apostates.
- (b) Weaker responses answered this question in a purely generic fashion. Whilst generic points regarding the importance of family life do exist across religions, specifically Muslim reasons were needed here as well. Stronger responses could explain that it is family life which can protect the family members and can also give a sound moral base to the younger generation. Candidates could include the material on care of the elderly and nurture of the young in order to give a more Islamic substance to their response.

- (c) The majority of the responses agreed with the statement. Stronger responses were able to give specific examples of how an action even with a beneficial outcome could be ‘tainted’ by an insincere intention. Prayer is a good example. Excellent responses could refer to Muslim washing rituals in order to illustrate that intention is key to those actions. Stronger responses argued that actions are also needed however, as without action, nothing changes. Perceptive responses could suggest that it is not an either/or and that both intention and actions are of equal importance.

Section C Judaism

Question 7

- (a) Most candidates described Jewish women as being the head of the home. Their traditional role, being the one that took care of the children, was emphasised. As a corollary of this candidates said that the traditional role of Jewish women was not to go to work. Stronger responses emphasised the significant role of women in celebrations, especially Shabbat. This allowed for a more realistic understanding of the role of women, as one that is equal, yet different. More could have been made of the role of women with regard to dietary laws in the household as well as the role of women pertaining to mikvah.
- (b) The majority of responses answered this question in a general fashion, referring to ‘Jewish teachings’ as a whole rather than referring to specific teachings. Weaker responses barely mentioned either Jewish family life or Jewish teachings. Stronger responses explained that Jewish teachings are at the heart of family life and that family life is influenced by the teachings. Perceptive responses could have shown an understanding of how Jewish family life is the backdrop to the teachings and that it is in family life that those teachings are borne out.
- (c) Many responses were comprehensive and offered a range of reasoning, often from more than one perspective. Most candidates were able to suggest reasons as to how a religious family life could be helpful to young people. Ideas such as being taught the virtues of kindness and respect, by citing some of the Ten Commandments, were excellent features found in some responses. Specifically Jewish inclusion enhanced responses. A religious family life which teaches young people about dietary laws, for example, was useful. Reference to tzedaka and gemilut hasadim as being practised in a religious family is another way in which the young can be helped.

Question 8

- (a) There were many excellent responses to this question. The majority of candidates knew in great detail which food items are present during the Pesach meal and why they are there. The less well-known items were the four cups of wine, the chair of Elijah, the cup of Elijah and the Pesach Haggadah.
- (b) Weaker responses described what happens at Yom Kippur. Many answers explained why certain things are done at Yom Kippur, but the question was wider than either of those two things. Stronger responses were able to deal adequately with explaining the importance of Yom Kippur for Jews. Reference to Rosh Hashanah was inevitable and understandable. Candidates needed to emphasise the importance of repentance, starting anew and forgiveness during Yom Kippur.
- (c) Some responses argued in agreement with the statement, saying that what is important is practical help for the poor rather than the lavish celebrations of festivals. Others suggested that celebrating festivals is very important in Judaism as they remember important events in Jewish history. In that sense festivals cannot be ignored in order to help the poor. Stronger responses suggested that the two things are not mutually exclusive. In other words, the poor can be included in celebrations and will benefit greatly from doing so.

Question 9

- (a) Many responses were very comprehensive in terms of food items that are allowed and are not allowed. Some responses omitted reference to 'and its preparation'. Reference to ritual slaughter, the draining of blood, separate sets of cutlery and sinks were all significant features worthy of credit. Stronger responses were able to put the laws in context and illustrate where they are found in the Torah. Most knew examples of birds and animals that are permitted or prohibited and were also able to cite the prohibition of consuming meat and dairy at the same time. Very few responses made reference to neutral or parev items.
- (b) The majority of responses were restricted to an explanation as to why Jews would want to visit the Western Wall. Weaker responses described this area rather than explaining its historical significance which explains why Jews might visit. Few candidates understood the significance of Jerusalem as a spiritual home for Jews. Reference could be made to the importance of Jerusalem during festival times in the past, with pilgrims 'going up' to Jerusalem irrespective of where they lived. Jerusalem was the pinnacle of spiritual importance. The Holy of Holies could have been included. Technically Yad Vashem is outside of Jerusalem but was credited in this question.
- (c) Some responses suggested that 'updating' religious teaching is the only way to ensure the survival of the religion. Others suggested that God's word is unchanging and binding and that teachings from the Torah should not be changed just because society has. However, many appreciated that there are 'new challenges' that Jews face in the modern world and that teachings from thousands of years ago might not accommodate these challenges. Stronger responses commented that Jews have always faced threats to their way of life and discrimination, and so in fact the challenges of today are the same as they were centuries ago.