

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Paper 0490/11
Paper 1

General comments

There were some very strong candidates this year and they often demonstrated a sound grasp of the material questioned. Evaluation was well focused and effective, showing that candidates had an excellent understanding of the demands of this paper.

A minority of candidates seemed to lack practice in using time effectively and some did not use the number of marks available as a guide to the expected length of an answer. Some penalised themselves by writing at unnecessary length on parts **(a)(i)** and **(a)(ii)**, only to run out of time without completing the required number of questions.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

- (a) (i)** Most candidates clearly understood what was meant by 'types of literature' and easily named three. A few confused literature with names of books and could not be credited.
- (ii)** The majority who gave good answers to **(i)** had no difficulty describing what the different kinds of literature are. The few who named books tended to ignore this question.
- (b)** Many candidates demonstrated a good understanding of why the Old Testament as part of the history of divine salvation is still important to Christians. Many also mentioned predictions of the Messiah throughout the Old Testament. A few weaker responses confused the Old and New Testament.
- (c)** Those candidates who knew the difference between the Old and New Testament submitted some excellent answers to this question. Many recognised the importance of the Old Testament in making sense of what is described in the new. For example, considering the predictions of the coming of the Messiah and the importance of the Ten Commandments to Christianity. Others suggested that the focus of Christianity should be on Jesus Christ and his birth, death and resurrection. Hence argued that the New Testament is in fact the only one relevant to Christianity.

Question 2

- (a) (i)** There were some excellent answers to this question, often offering more material than was needed for the marks available. Responses gave a good description of this incident both through what the Angel Gabriel said and how Mary responded.
- (ii)** Many were able to give an excellent account of the visit of the Magi from the point of view of the journey and the significance of their meeting with Herod and finally the three gifts which were given to Jesus.

- (b) There were many good answers here around the meaning and significance of the gifts the Magi brought to the manger. Fewer responses, though, pointed to the significance of them being gentiles and the consequent message that the incarnation was for all of the world and not just the chosen people. The star was occasionally mentioned as heralding a great event and the birth of a great man.
- (c) Most candidates recognised that there is no one answer to this question, there were indeed many good arguments put on both sides of this issue. Some expressed a preference for the idea that without the incarnation there could be no Christianity and therefore it is right that we should celebrate Christmas more. Some brought in the significance of the Magi to this event supporting arguments for Christmas. Others argued that the redemption brought by Christ's suffering, death and resurrection were much more important to Christianity. They proposed that Christ was sent specifically by his Father to fulfil this role and nothing could be as important as the fulfilment of this mission.

Question 3

- (a) (i) Responses demonstrated a very good knowledge of who should and should not practice Sawm and the issues which might mean that someone could be excused from fasting. Illness and pregnancy were the most popular.
- (ii) Responses covered a good range of material from when Sawm should be practiced both in terms of the month of Ramadan and the times of the day which are significant. A few candidates also showed an understanding of the importance of intent and that it is renewed each day before sunrise.
- (b) Many began their responses by recognising that Sawm is one of the Five Pillars of Islam so fundamental to their practice. They also pointed to the beliefs that empathy with others particularly poor people is encouraged by fasting. Many also said that in relation to God they were given the chance to seek redemption for past sins and recognise the importance of being grateful for all they have been given.
- (c) Responses often started by saying that all of the pillars of Islam are of equal importance as the religion would not survive without each of them. Others assessed the belief that Sawm may indeed be best at bringing about the kind of believer God required. While others suggested that the Hajj was the most important of the Five Pillars

Question 4

- (a) (i) Nearly all the candidates were able to name three prophets, so most achieved full marks on this question.
- (ii) As the prophets were so well known, responses were again very good for this question. Abraham and Moses were the most popular answers.
- (b) Many responses began by proposing that because prophets were both chosen by God and sent out as his messengers they were crucial both to the founding of Islam and to its development. The prophets interpreted God's messages and called the people to worship.
- (c) Most candidates recognised that there is no one answer to this question and there were indeed many good arguments put on both sides of this issue. Many responses suggested that both prophets and angels had missions from God and as such should be considered as of equal importance. This is supported by the belief that they are both articles of faith. Some suggested that as angels were unable to make decisions but were merely messengers then from that perspective prophets might be considered more important.

Question 5

- (a) (i) The majority of candidates were familiar with the Tenakh and its divisions into the Torah, Nevi'im and Ketuvim.
- (ii) Most candidates gave thorough answers describing the Torah and Nevi'im through the five books of the Pentateuch and the preaching and teaching of the three major prophets and twelve minor prophets.
- (b) Most candidates were able to explain that the Talmud is the earliest rabbinic interpretation of the Bible. Good explanations were given of the belief that to study the Talmud is to take part in the conversations and arguments that have for nearly two millennia been the form and substance of Jewish law.
- (c) As both the oral and written traditions are believed to be the revealed word of God many candidates proposed that they were of equal importance. Also many of the moral laws which come from both these teachings have the same intentions. However, others were of the opinion that in terms of passing and maintaining the integrity of this revealed word, then a written version was more reliable. However, some argued that since the oral tradition was the product of discussions, it had a better chance of being reliable than the writings of a few.

Question 6

- (a) (i) Most candidates were able to list the following:
- Tallit (prayer shawl)
 - Tefillin (phylacteries)
 - Kippah/yarmulke (skull cap).
- (ii) Some very clear descriptions were offered, including an oblong piece of cloth and a special box containing the Shema.
- (b) The majority of candidates demonstrated a good understanding that the ritual clothes did not just show the community Jews belonged to but also showed respect to their God and a continued reminder of their history. Many explained the importance of the tefillin as helping to keep the word of God close in their hearts and minds.
- (c) Some candidates suggested that while learning the rituals might lead to distractions in the early days, once learned and becoming habit, they are an important way to partake in worship with respect and to know where they fit into such worship. Ideally the rituals help them focus on God and resist distractions. However, others suggested that on some days such as Shabbat, there are so many rituals that they become distracting rather than supporting true worship.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Paper 0490/12
Paper 1

General comments

There were many instances of good understanding and interesting reflective material, though some struggled to develop an argument rather than to state a few points on either side or to make a simple assertion in part c of each section. Developing an individual point of view, based on evidence and consideration of others' ideas, is an important skill, both academically and for personal religious development. Many candidates had better understanding of one religion than another. Generally, those who opted to answer questions on Islam demonstrated good understanding. Answers on Judaism were mixed, with much generalisation on writings, especially the *ketuvim* and festivals. A minority of candidates conflated Christian, Islamic and Jewish beliefs, for example, by referring to Shavuot as a feast about Jesus' redemptive actions, or the Angel Gabriel announcing Jesus' birth in the cave at Hera. Answers on Christianity were mixed in quality, with some candidates very confused about Christian faith and practice.

It is important for candidates to use time effectively during the exam and use the number of marks available as an invaluable guide to the expected length of answer. Some penalised themselves by writing at enormous and unnecessary length on parts (a) (i) and (a) (ii), only to run out of time without completing the required number of questions.

Comments on specific questions

Section A – Christianity

Question 1

- (a) (i) Most candidates gained full marks for succinct accounts.
- (ii) Generally, this was well-answered. Candidates could cite four accurately, though sometimes 'love thy neighbour' was included among the four.
- (b) The best responses demonstrated understanding of the significance of the commandments, though some argued that adherence to these as the most basic and important part of Christianity. This reduction of faith to the ethical would diminish the significance and meaning of faith. There were some valuable insights about their educational value as well as their role in binding society together.
- (c) Answers were often very generalised as candidates failed to exemplify arguments, simply asserting the ethical rules were or were not old-fashioned. Exemplification would have encouraged deeper thought. If commandments and other rules are just dismissed as old-fashioned, then any conclusion is liable to be vague generalisation. If one considers, specifically, 'Do not murder' or 'Do not steal', it is at least arguable that these have some contemporary significance. Consideration of specifics leads to more nuance in reflection.

Question 2

- (a) (i) Relatively few candidates were aware that Jerusalem was the place of Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection, as well as his Presentation. More were aware of the Entry into Jerusalem, but many thought the city was Jesus' birthplace.
- (ii) Responses were mixed. Lourdes and Bethlehem were frequently mentioned, but accounts of their significance were often brief or inaccurate.
- (b) Some very good answers were offered. Some contented themselves with a sentence or two on building individual faith, but many delved more deeply into the implications for various types of healing, education and encouragement of harmony and identity.
- (c) Too many answers consisted of unsubstantiated assertion, while others simply listed opposing points. Better answers were more specific, pointing out instances of both the benefits to faith and society for both options.

Section B – Islam

Question 3

- (a) (i) Few ventured beyond saying the reason for being in the cave was prayer or meditation, and some confused this with other cave experiences.
- (ii) Most candidates made a reasonable response though relatively few mentioned the point that Muhammad (pbuh) would be the final prophet.
- (b) There were some good answers, especially from those candidates able to develop the distinction between Greater and Lesser Jihad.
- (c) Responses were very mixed in quality. More perceptive candidates made reference to specific teachings and practices, but too many resorted to unsupported assertions. Those who referred to the public aspects of Islam adopted in distinctive dress and behaviour or who considered issues of practice within different cultures generally produced excellent answers.

Question 4

- (a) (i) Responses were mixed, with many lacking specific knowledge. Most knew that sacrifice was important, while rather fewer made the direct link to Ibrahim.
- (ii) This was adequately answered by the majority of candidates.
- (b) Most responses demonstrated knowledge of festivals and good answers developed such points as their significance in uniting the ummah. Rather fewer seemed aware that the festivals were commanded.
- (c) Better responses developed their argument by specific reference to features of Islamic thought and practice, but some answers were very generalised or demonstrated gaps in understanding the teachings of the Qu'ran.

Section C – Judaism

Question 5

- (a) (i) While most candidates were aware of the significance, rather fewer demonstrated knowledge of its content, while many talked about how it was used rather than its nature – there was insufficient awareness of the distinction between use and what something is in itself.
- (ii) There were many good answers, though a few displayed more hope than knowledge, as God was variously described as 'nice' or 'organised'.

- (b) Again, many candidates resorted to generalisation about writings, though better responses were much more detailed on the content of the Ketuvim. Those who thought Ketuvim a ceremonial cloth or the language spoken in at the time of Moses were less convincing.
- (c) Better responses dealt thoughtfully with the relationship in Judaism between the believer and God, though not many thought about what it might mean to understand God *fully*. Having some knowledge through various teachings is not identical with complete understanding of God's intentions, especially given traditional Jewish teaching and the difficulties of determining God's mind during such events as the Babylonian exile, the Diaspora or the Holocaust.

Question 6

- (a) (i) Most candidates had basic knowledge, though elaboration to include pilgrim festivals or harvest was sometimes not specified.
 - (ii) Basic understanding was generally good, but elaboration beyond booths or tabernacles was sometimes incomplete.
- (b) There were some very good answers, developing the many ways that festivals are so central to faith and life in terms of identity, thanksgiving and relationships with God.
- (c) Some answers were general rather than specific to Judaism, but better answers, while acknowledging the value of travel, pointed out that giving to the poor is commanded and worthy while pilgrimage has never been a requirement of faith.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Paper 0490/13
Paper 1

General comments

There were some very strong candidates this year and they often demonstrated a sound grasp of the material questioned. Evaluation was well focused and effective, showing that candidates had an excellent understanding of the demands of this paper.

A minority of candidates seemed to lack practice in using time effectively and some did not use the number of marks available as a guide to the expected length of an answer. Some penalised themselves by writing at unnecessary length on parts **(a)(i)** and **(a)(ii)**, only to run out of time without completing the required number of questions.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

- (a) (i)** Most candidates clearly understood what was meant by 'types of literature' and easily named three. A few confused literature with names of books and could not be credited.
- (ii)** The majority who gave good answers to **(i)** had no difficulty describing what the different kinds of literature are. The few who named books tended to ignore this question.
- (b)** Many candidates demonstrated a good understanding of why the Old Testament as part of the history of divine salvation is still important to Christians. Many also mentioned predictions of the Messiah throughout the Old Testament. A few weaker responses confused the Old and New Testament.
- (c)** Those candidates who knew the difference between the Old and New Testament submitted some excellent answers to this question. Many recognised the importance of the Old Testament in making sense of what is described in the new. For example, considering the predictions of the coming of the Messiah and the importance of the Ten Commandments to Christianity. Others suggested that the focus of Christianity should be on Jesus Christ and his birth, death and resurrection. Hence argued that the New Testament is in fact the only one relevant to Christianity.

Question 2

- (a) (i)** There were some excellent answers to this question, often offering more material than was needed for the marks available. Responses gave a good description of this incident both through what the Angel Gabriel said and how Mary responded.
- (ii)** Many were able to give an excellent account of the visit of the Magi from the point of view of the journey and the significance of their meeting with Herod and finally the three gifts which were given to Jesus.

- (b) There were many good answers here around the meaning and significance of the gifts the Magi brought to the manger. Fewer responses, though, pointed to the significance of them being gentiles and the consequent message that the incarnation was for all of the world and not just the chosen people. The star was occasionally mentioned as heralding a great event and the birth of a great man.
- (c) Most candidates recognised that there is no one answer to this question, there were indeed many good arguments put on both sides of this issue. Some expressed a preference for the idea that without the incarnation there could be no Christianity and therefore it is right that we should celebrate Christmas more. Some brought in the significance of the Magi to this event supporting arguments for Christmas. Others argued that the redemption brought by Christ's suffering, death and resurrection were much more important to Christianity. They proposed that Christ was sent specifically by his Father to fulfil this role and nothing could be as important as the fulfilment of this mission.

Question 3

- (a) (i) Responses demonstrated a very good knowledge of who should and should not practice Sawm and the issues which might mean that someone could be excused from fasting. Illness and pregnancy were the most popular.
- (ii) Responses covered a good range of material from when Sawm should be practiced both in terms of the month of Ramadan and the times of the day which are significant. A few candidates also showed an understanding of the importance of intent and that it is renewed each day before sunrise.
- (b) Many began their responses by recognising that Sawm is one of the Five Pillars of Islam so fundamental to their practice. They also pointed to the beliefs that empathy with others particularly poor people is encouraged by fasting. Many also said that in relation to God they were given the chance to seek redemption for past sins and recognise the importance of being grateful for all they have been given.
- (c) Responses often started by saying that all of the pillars of Islam are of equal importance as the religion would not survive without each of them. Others assessed the belief that Sawm may indeed be best at bringing about the kind of believer God required. While others suggested that the Hajj was the most important of the Five Pillars

Question 4

- (a) (i) Nearly all the candidates were able to name three prophets, so most achieved full marks on this question.
- (ii) As the prophets were so well known, responses were again very good for this question. Abraham and Moses were the most popular answers.
- (b) Many responses began by proposing that because prophets were both chosen by God and sent out as his messengers they were crucial both to the founding of Islam and to its development. The prophets interpreted God's messages and called the people to worship.
- (c) Most candidates recognised that there is no one answer to this question and there were indeed many good arguments put on both sides of this issue. Many responses suggested that both prophets and angels had missions from God and as such should be considered as of equal importance. This is supported by the belief that they are both articles of faith. Some suggested that as angels were unable to make decisions but were merely messengers then from that perspective prophets might be considered more important.

Question 5

- (a) (i) The majority of candidates were familiar with the Tenakh and its divisions into the Torah, Nevi'im and Ketuvim.
- (ii) Most candidates gave thorough answers describing the Torah and Nevi'im through the five books of the Pentateuch and the preaching and teaching of the three major prophets and twelve minor prophets.
- (b) Most candidates were able to explain that the Talmud is the earliest rabbinic interpretation of the Bible. Good explanations were given of the belief that to study the Talmud is to take part in the conversations and arguments that have for nearly two millennia been the form and substance of Jewish law.
- (c) As both the oral and written traditions are believed to be the revealed word of God many candidates proposed that they were of equal importance. Also many of the moral laws which come from both these teachings have the same intentions. However, others were of the opinion that in terms of passing and maintaining the integrity of this revealed word, then a written version was more reliable. However, some argued that since the oral tradition was the product of discussions, it had a better chance of being reliable than the writings of a few.

Question 6

- (a) (i) Most candidates were able to list the following:
- Tallit (prayer shawl)
Tefillin (phylacteries)
Kippah/yarmulke (skull cap).
- (ii) Some very clear descriptions were offered, including an oblong piece of cloth and a special box containing the Shema.
- (b) The majority of candidates demonstrated a good understanding that the ritual clothes did not just show the community Jews belonged to but also showed respect to their God and a continued reminder of their history. Many explained the importance of the tefillin as helping to keep the word of God close in their hearts and minds.
- (c) Some candidates suggested that while learning the rituals might lead to distractions in the early days, once learned and becoming habit, they are an important way to partake in worship with respect and to know where they fit into such worship. Ideally the rituals help them focus on God and resist distractions. However, others suggested that on some days such as Shabbat, there are so many rituals that they become distracting rather than supporting true worship.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Paper 0490/21
Paper 2

General comments

Some candidates performed very well, demonstrating good preparation and selection of material for their answers. As in previous years, the best performance and strongest answers were in the Christianity section but it was also notable that some candidates performed well in Islam or Judaism.

All candidates appeared to find the questions accessible and were familiar with the different skills of knowledge, understanding and interpretation required for part (a) and (b) of questions. With regard to part (c) questions and evaluation, more could have been done in terms of drawing an answer to a conclusion. Only when this is done is the question truly answered.

Comments on specific questions

Section A – Christianity

Question 1

- (a) Descriptions of the duties of a Christian priest or minister were sometimes formulaic and often just a list of actions. The best answers showed in depth knowledge of the many ways in which a priest carries out duties both within the church and outside the confines of the building, in supporting and ministering to the community.
- (b) The majority of candidates gave good answers to this question and it was approached in a variety of ways which showed thoughtful and perceptive understanding of the ways Christian communities created a successful church. Responses included the sense of worship, being prayerful and demonstrating faith, caring for each other and for those in need as a ‘family in Christ’. Attention was also paid to the need to attract members to the church and various ways of doing this explored.
- (c) In this evaluation question, many candidates presented arguments both for and against the statement before arriving at a logical conclusion that a minister would not be able to carry out his duties without a flock to take care of and so attracting people to church services and encouraging them to attend is an important duty of a priest.

Question 2

- (a) Answers here tended to be unequal across the two elements of the question. The vows made by a bride and groom were well known but many candidates had incomplete knowledge of the promises made by godparents, often confusing the role of godparents with that of legal guardians.
- (b) The performance on part (b) was generally better than on part (a). Explanations of the Christian belief that marriage is the right relationship in which to raise children were thoughtful and well considered. Most candidates made a good attempt to illustrate the advantages of a stable family life as an essential foundation and the correct environment in which to raise children. The connection between Christian belief in the sanctity of marriage and the duty to set a loving and moral example to children was made clear.
- (c) Generally, a well-answered question with some good analysis of the dangers of making rash generalisations that Christian teaching is old fashioned and out of date. Mostly, candidates considered the way some people acted today to be incompatible with a lot of Christian teaching.

They concluded that some modern behaviour was immoral or caused harm to the family. Many good answers explored different views but failed to come to any conclusion.

Question 3

- (a) Most candidates showed knowledge of the scope and purpose of Christian missionary activities.
- (b) There was a mixed performance on this question. The best answers attempted to show how the teaching might inspire Christians to follow the Ten Commandments and why Jesus said it was all that was needed.
- (c) Candidates showed good understanding of the significance of the question and readily engaged with the issue of conflict between acquiring wealth and following religious principles. Weaker answers were a simple expression of two or more views. A number of candidates recognised the complexity of the issue and that the attitude to wealth rather than possession of it created problems. Some also analysed the different views and offered a conclusion.

Section B – Islam

Question 4

- (a) Answers were mostly just satisfactory. A number of descriptions of haram were only about not eating pork and halal was described only as that which is allowed, without any examples.
- (b) As with part (a), candidates failed to appreciate the scope of this question. It might have been approached in a number of ways. The importance of a number of different types of making sacrifice in Muslim life might have been explained. Some candidates did show understanding of the religious importance of the different sacrifice rituals involving animals, some showed appreciation of the sacrifice and self-discipline of fasting but only a few responses gave a comprehensive answer that included several of these examples.
- (c) A number of candidates gave thoughtful and discursive arguments on the importance of the strict observance of religious rules and the infallibility of the Qur'an and Hadith but also the value of embracing the ways in which original rules might be used as the basis for new decisions, to enable Muslims to cope with modern day issues and temptations. Many candidates only discussed one view in support of the statement and so limited their answer.

Question 5

- (a) Most candidates had some knowledge of the Nikah ceremony, however, many answers were brief and important elements such as the necessity of obtaining the consent of both bride and groom, the presence of witnesses and the signing of the contract were often omitted.
- (b) On this (b) question the overall performance was mostly satisfactory rather than good. Generally, responses showed a lack of understanding of the teachings about marriage in Islam. Most answers cited the dominance of the man as head of the family and the fact that Muslim men may have four wives who must be treated equally. Most answers lacked scope and understanding of the teachings.
- (c) This evaluation question on free choice in choosing a marriage partner was treated seriously. Many responses showed awareness that the choice should be a partner for life and carefully weighed up the advantages and disadvantages of making decisions on emotion only as opposed to considering religious and cultural compatibility. Some candidates gave very good generic arguments for and against the statement but did not refer to Islam, which is an important aspect of the question.

Question 6

- (a) Well-answered, most responses were knowledgeable and gave detailed accounts of the different ways Muslims carry out their duty to the poor.
- (b) Some candidates made a good attempt to show how all members of a family contributed to the care of one another within the family group. The best answers included the roles of all members of

an extended family. Some candidates made good points and gave examples but did not relate their answer to the Muslim family.

- (c) There was a good performance on this evaluation question. Most candidates discussed the statement in a thoughtful way and presented good arguments in support of both caring for the family and carrying out obligations to the poor.

Section C – Judaism

Question 7

- (a) Many of the accounts of the ways in which religion plays a part in the Jewish home were limited to a brief description of one festival such as Shabbat or Pesach, or, were very general comments that lacked any detail. Some good answers did describe a number of ways in which religion is observed in the home and included the use of artefacts such as the Mezuzah, the food laws and daily prayer as well as festivals.
- (b) Most responses demonstrated good understanding of how and why religious symbols are important in a Jewish home. Candidates identified a number of symbols such as a menorah, a mezuzah, the items on the Seder plate and explained their significance. There were some basic answers where candidates wrote inaccurately about reading the Torah in the home.
- (c) Some good, discursive answers. Candidates mostly evaluated the benefits and disadvantages of worshipping together as a family, which is a strong religious tradition in Judaism. Some responses compared worshipping with others with praying alone. Some candidates wrote well but their responses were generic and could be applied to all religious traditions so they limited their achievement by not referring to Judaism.

Question 8

- (a) Most responses contained only basic details of the rituals and customs of Shiva, the intense mourning period for seven days, immediately following a death. Most who answered this question gave an overview of **all** the stages of mourning during the first twelve months following a death but they made only a brief reference to what actually happens during Shiva.
- (b) Candidates were able to explain the benefits of allowing the bereaved to concentrate on mourning and expressing their grief for a specified period of time, to enable them to move on with their lives. Very few made any direct reference to Shiva but this did not affect the quality of the answers, which were mainly good.
- (c) There was a mixed response to this question. There were some good, well-balanced answers. In others, arguments were strongest in support of the statement that funerals should be private, opposing arguments or different views tended to be weaker. Many did not find a way to conclude their evaluation. Some did not make any reference to Judaism.

Question 9

- (a) The majority of responses showed good knowledge of the traditional teaching on the role of women in Judaism.
- (b) Answers showed good understanding of the importance of marriage in Judaism and the aspects of it that might strengthen the faith of the couple. Mostly this was interpreted as both faith (trust) in each other and in following their religion. There were some very insightful responses, which showed a good understanding of how personal relationships and religious faith might be strengthened by shared values and convictions.
- (c) Many candidates explored both sides of the argument, acknowledging the great value placed on marriage in Judaism and the seriousness of any kind of break up. However, many of the arguments acknowledged the sanctity of marriage but looked at the issue of a break up in more practical, general terms. Specific references to Judaism were not made. Very few candidates mentioned that divorce is allowed in Judaism.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Paper 0490/22
Paper 2

General comments

The overall performance and response to the questions was good. Some candidates performed very well, demonstrating good preparation and selection of material for their answers. All candidates seemed to find the questions accessible and were familiar with the different skills of knowledge, understanding and interpretation required for part (a) and (b) of questions. With regard to part (c) questions and evaluation, more could have been done in terms of drawing an answer to a conclusion. Only when this is done is the question truly answered.

As in previous years, the best performance and strongest answers were in the Christianity section but it was also notable that some candidates performed very well in Islam or Judaism. Some weaker performances in non-Christian religions showed a tendency to write about these religions in Christian terms, using Christian terminology.

Some candidates did demonstrate significant, unexpected weaknesses in understanding questions and there was some confusion with religious terminology and between religions. There were a number of rubric errors where candidates answered questions from all three religions or answered all nine questions. This was usually to the detriment of the quality of the answers.

Comments on specific questions

Section A – Christianity

Question 1

- (a) Information selected by candidates in answering this question was not always relevant to the question. Most understood the importance of the bread and the wine and the Bible but wrote about them in general terms when the focus of the question was a description of how they are used in worship. Very few candidates concentrated on the use in worship. There was often a lack of balance between the two elements of the question and there were some very general answers.
- (b) This question was well answered overall with candidates utilising both religious knowledge such as the presence and experience of the Holy Spirit and biblical references as well as more general observations about the importance of community and shared values. Some weaker answers were descriptive about what happens in services of worship without addressing the 'benefits' to worshippers.
- (c) This evaluation question was very well answered. Most candidates were able to give multiple perspectives with useful examples and could also relate religious beliefs and values to the issue. There were some perceptive and thoughtful arguments about faith shown through humility and also the belief of some Christians in the splendour of the House of God.

Question 2

- (a) The majority of candidates had some reasonable knowledge of the rituals involved in a Christian funeral. However, many candidates started writing about events long before the actual ritual of the funeral, which were not creditworthy. Responses tended to be generic – the use of coffins and the reception into a church followed by a burial or cremation was the general focus of answers. However, it was good to see some awareness of denominational differences in some answers.

Generally, the information in most answers was not irrelevant or incorrect but it lacked the detail to build a good, Christianity-focused response.

- (b) This was generally well answered, with candidates focussing on beliefs about life after death in heaven and/or the resurrection of Christ and the ways in which such beliefs would reassure or comfort a Christian. A notable minority misunderstood the question and answered in terms of what Christians should do to comfort other people who are mourning.
- (c) Some candidates wrote a great deal in response to this question but their understanding of the issue contained in the stimulus was often questionable. The best answers reflected on what the best life might be for a Christian and whether fulfilment of that potential is a duty to God. References to the biblical stories of talents and stewardship enhanced some answers. Many appreciated that for Christians making the most of life meant serving God and not breaking the tenets of faith.

Question 3

- (a) Most candidates gave lots of examples of the different activities church communities might use to raise money and were able to describe these in some detail. Other means of relieving of suffering were less commonly addressed and only a small minority of candidates considered whether suffering might extend beyond the issue of poverty. However, it was good to see that some understood that suffering could be relieved, for example, by a visit to one who was lonely.
- (b) This question was usually less well answered than part (a). References to Christian teaching often did not extend beyond a general reference to the teaching of Jesus and although the Ten Commandments were referred to in many answers they were rarely quoted accurately. The best answers, however, did have knowledge of examples from Jesus' teaching and ministry and quoted the Two Greatest Commandments to show how belief influences practice.
- (c) In this discussion about the motive behind good actions, most answers were balanced and evaluative. Candidates assessed different types of expectations and rewards and explored different points of view. The value of actions done with a good heart was mentioned and also that God rewards and so there is not actually a problem with Christians acting with this in mind.

Section B – Islam

Question 4

- (a) The answers here, on Jumma prayers were mostly just satisfactory. Many noted the obligation for men to attend the mosque wherever possible and the Imam delivering the khutbah. Other aspects such as the closing of businesses, the possible subject matter and interest of the khutbah, the discussion of community matters, the change to the sequence of rakahs were omitted. Some weak answers to this question gave a general description of Salah without making reference to the aspects of Jumma prayer that make it special. This was either through lack of knowledge or a failure to read the question carefully enough.
- (b) Most candidates experienced difficulty in answering this question. The ways in which they tackled the issue of equality and described Muslim attitudes to it tended to raise questions about their understanding of the whole concept of equality – most seemed to rest their response on the idea that men, as head of the family, allowed women certain privileges. The best responses identified that all human beings are equal before God and in Islam religious obligations are the same for both men and women and expanded from this into the idea of different but equally important roles and responsibilities in life and in the family.
- (c) In contrast to parts (a) and (b), this was generally well answered with candidates being aware of the difference between Du'a and Salah and utilising this knowledge to make a case in response to the stimulus. The best answers offered responses that developed the argument about the importance of Salah as a pillar of Islam and compared this with the amount of self-discipline and faith shown in performing Du'a, 'the essence of worship'.

Question 5

- (a) A relatively well answered question with most candidates able to give most of the relevant events involved in the birth rituals. Some of the descriptions of how the rituals are practised were brief and often candidates strayed into explanation of the meaning of the ritual (the answer to part (b)) without giving a clear description of the practice itself. This meant that some candidates who wrote at length wasted the opportunity to gain more marks.
- (b) On this (b) question the general performance was good. The majority of candidates were aware of the meaning of the rituals and the religious and cultural reasons for carrying them out at the birth of a child. In some cases, candidates explained the meaning of more rituals than they had described in part (a), for others, however, there was a direct correlation between the number described in (a) and the answer here.
- (c) Much of the discussion in response to this statement about the restrictions religion might impose on the freedom of young people was considered and thoughtful. There were perceptive and sympathetic views expressed both in agreement with and in opposition to the statement. Some concluded with the suggestion that a religious family life in Islam was not a restriction but rather a form of protection for young people against immorality.

Question 6

- (a) There was some confusion in answers to this question. Some candidates were unable to separate Sadaquah from Zakah with some even going as far as to say Sadaqah was another term for Zakah. Some very brief answers concentrated on how Sadaqah is used with not much explanation of how it is given. There was however competent selection of relevant information in some responses.
- (b) Some candidates dealt well with this question, combining both generic religious values about caring for others with specific Islamic material about the ummah and equality before Allah. Only a few responses also showed understanding of the right of the poor to be included in all celebrations.
- (c) There was a mixed performance on this question. Some candidates struggled to identify a reason why the stimulus statement might be considered true, pointing out that the purpose of charity (Zakah) was to give people what they needed. Most discussed the idea that if charity helps in any way at all then it has met its target. Arguments in support of the statement were sometimes simplistic and many said that charity may not help if it encourages laziness and apathy or that it might be unhelpful to give only clothes to hungry people. Some more reflective answers examined the role of meaningful work in supporting human dignity and also the need for larger charities to expand the scope of their work. Some candidates limited their achievement by not referring to Islam in their answer.

Section C – Judaism

Question 7

- (a) With this part (a), candidates for the most part knew what both named items are and were able to give a general account of their use in the sense that the ark stores the scrolls and the scrolls are read as part of worship. Few were able to go beyond this to show any depth of knowledge about their use in synagogue worship.
- (b) Many candidates could identify specific articles of ritual dress and were able to show some understanding of their significance and made a good attempt to answer the question. Weaker responses were often vague or confused about items of ritual dress or perhaps did not understand the term. Some candidates referred to 'ritual dress' in a general way without naming any items and this limited the scope of their answer.
- (c) Candidates were asked to discuss the statement that private prayer is the greatest sign of faith. The majority found the question straightforward and accessible and it was approached in a variety of ways. Some limited the discussion to a comparison between private and public prayer, better answers took this further and discussed other aspects within Judaism that show great faith.

Question 8

- (a) This was one of the better answered questions in this section, with candidates offering detailed knowledge on both the nature and usage of the Mezuzah and the scriptural reference to the obligation to put the words on the gatepost. A minority of candidates did have only minimal knowledge of the Mezuzah as a box or container. There was also confusion of the Mezuzah with the menorah and tefillin in some answers.
- (b) Responses to this question were very mixed. Candidates were asked to explain the responsibilities taken on by a boy who has reached the age of thirteen (the age at which he can be part of a minyan). However, some candidates spent too long on reiterating the question or explaining the Bar Mitzvah ceremony to give a meaningful response.
- (c) This question focused on one of the main tenets of Judaism and, in the main, candidates did well with it, drawing various connections and comparisons between action, religious commandment and faith/belief. A significant minority seemed confused as to what constitutes actions in the context of religion and interpreted them as solely 'good works' and argued, for example, that actions are not as important to Jews as observing rituals or prayer.

Question 9

- (a) In response to this question about Kashrut and clothing, very few candidates were confident that they knew the meaning of Kashrut and how it is applied to clothing. Some candidates did refer to the mixing of wool and linen and the need for modesty in dress but many wrote only about the food laws.
- (b) Overall, the answers to part (b) were better than part (a). Good understanding and interpretation of the ways in which Jewish values are preserved in family life was shown in many answers. Some responses tended to be very generic with reference to the roles and responsibilities of both parents and the teaching of morality within a family but the best answers made specific reference to the observance of festivals such as Shabbat and observing the commandments and laws of Judaism as an essential part of family life.
- (c) This was a well-answered question. Candidates appeared to find the subject matter thought provoking and engaged with the issue. Many showed awareness of the denominational differences within Judaism as well as making their own assessment as to the extent to which changes to Jewish traditions should be either embraced or avoided. The best answers showed appreciation of the reasons for different views within Judaism.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Paper 0490/23
Paper 2

General comments

Some candidates performed very well, demonstrating good preparation and selection of material for their answers. As in previous years, the best performance and strongest answers were in the Christianity section but it was also notable that some candidates performed well in Islam or Judaism.

All candidates appeared to find the questions accessible and were familiar with the different skills of knowledge, understanding and interpretation required for part (a) and (b) of questions. With regard to part (c) questions and evaluation, more could have been done in terms of drawing an answer to a conclusion. Only when this is done is the question truly answered.

Comments on specific questions

Section A – Christianity

Question 1

- (a) Descriptions of the duties of a Christian priest or minister were sometimes formulaic and often just a list of actions. The best answers showed in depth knowledge of the many ways in which a priest carries out duties both within the church and outside the confines of the building, in supporting and ministering to the community.
- (b) The majority of candidates gave good answers to this question and it was approached in a variety of ways which showed thoughtful and perceptive understanding of the ways Christian communities created a successful church. Responses included the sense of worship, being prayerful and demonstrating faith, caring for each other and for those in need as a 'family in Christ'. Attention was also paid to the need to attract members to the church and various ways of doing this explored.
- (c) In this evaluation question, many candidates presented arguments both for and against the statement before arriving at a logical conclusion that a minister would not be able to carry out his duties without a flock to take care of and so attracting people to church services and encouraging them to attend is an important duty of a priest.

Question 2

- (a) Answers here tended to be unequal across the two elements of the question. The vows made by a bride and groom were well known but many candidates had incomplete knowledge of the promises made by godparents, often confusing the role of godparents with that of legal guardians.
- (b) The performance on part (b) was generally better than on part (a). Explanations of the Christian belief that marriage is the right relationship in which to raise children were thoughtful and well considered. Most candidates made a good attempt to illustrate the advantages of a stable family life as an essential foundation and the correct environment in which to raise children. The connection between Christian belief in the sanctity of marriage and the duty to set a loving and moral example to children was made clear.
- (c) Generally, a well-answered question with some good analysis of the dangers of making rash generalisations that Christian teaching is old fashioned and out of date. Mostly, candidates considered the way some people acted today to be incompatible with a lot of Christian teaching.

They concluded that some modern behaviour was immoral or caused harm to the family. Many good answers explored different views but failed to come to any conclusion.

Question 3

- (a) Most candidates showed knowledge of the scope and purpose of Christian missionary activities.
- (b) There was a mixed performance on this question. The best answers attempted to show how the teaching might inspire Christians to follow the Ten Commandments and why Jesus said it was all that was needed.
- (c) Candidates showed good understanding of the significance of the question and readily engaged with the issue of conflict between acquiring wealth and following religious principles. Weaker answers were a simple expression of two or more views. A number of candidates recognised the complexity of the issue and that the attitude to wealth rather than possession of it created problems. Some also analysed the different views and offered a conclusion.

Section B – Islam

Question 4

- (a) Answers were mostly just satisfactory. A number of descriptions of haram were only about not eating pork and halal was described only as that which is allowed, without any examples.
- (b) As with part (a), candidates failed to appreciate the scope of this question. It might have been approached in a number of ways. The importance of a number of different types of making sacrifice in Muslim life might have been explained. Some candidates did show understanding of the religious importance of the different sacrifice rituals involving animals, some showed appreciation of the sacrifice and self-discipline of fasting but only a few responses gave a comprehensive answer that included several of these examples.
- (c) A number of candidates gave thoughtful and discursive arguments on the importance of the strict observance of religious rules and the infallibility of the Qur'an and Hadith but also the value of embracing the ways in which original rules might be used as the basis for new decisions, to enable Muslims to cope with modern day issues and temptations. Many candidates only discussed one view in support of the statement and so limited their answer.

Question 5

- (a) Most candidates had some knowledge of the Nikah ceremony, however, many answers were brief and important elements such as the necessity of obtaining the consent of both bride and groom, the presence of witnesses and the signing of the contract were often omitted.
- (b) On this (b) question the overall performance was mostly satisfactory rather than good. Generally, responses showed a lack of understanding of the teachings about marriage in Islam. Most answers cited the dominance of the man as head of the family and the fact that Muslim men may have four wives who must be treated equally. Most answers lacked scope and understanding of the teachings.
- (c) This evaluation question on free choice in choosing a marriage partner was treated seriously. Many responses showed awareness that the choice should be a partner for life and carefully weighed up the advantages and disadvantages of making decisions on emotion only as opposed to considering religious and cultural compatibility. Some candidates gave very good generic arguments for and against the statement but did not refer to Islam, which is an important aspect of the question.

Question 6

- (a) Well-answered, most responses were knowledgeable and gave detailed accounts of the different ways Muslims carry out their duty to the poor.
- (b) Some candidates made a good attempt to show how all members of a family contributed to the care of one another within the family group. The best answers included the roles of all members of

an extended family. Some candidates made good points and gave examples but did not relate their answer to the Muslim family.

- (c) There was a good performance on this evaluation question. Most candidates discussed the statement in a thoughtful way and presented good arguments in support of both caring for the family and carrying out obligations to the poor.

Section C – Judaism

Question 7

- (a) Many of the accounts of the ways in which religion plays a part in the Jewish home were limited to a brief description of one festival such as Shabbat or Pesach, or, were very general comments that lacked any detail. Some good answers did describe a number of ways in which religion is observed in the home and included the use of artefacts such as the Mezuzah, the food laws and daily prayer as well as festivals.
- (b) Most responses demonstrated good understanding of how and why religious symbols are important in a Jewish home. Candidates identified a number of symbols such as a menorah, a mezuzah, the items on the Seder plate and explained their significance. There were some basic answers where candidates wrote inaccurately about reading the Torah in the home.
- (c) Some good, discursive answers. Candidates mostly evaluated the benefits and disadvantages of worshipping together as a family, which is a strong religious tradition in Judaism. Some responses compared worshipping with others with praying alone. Some candidates wrote well but their responses were generic and could be applied to all religious traditions so they limited their achievement by not referring to Judaism.

Question 8

- (a) Most responses contained only basic details of the rituals and customs of Shiva, the intense mourning period for seven days, immediately following a death. Most who answered this question gave an overview of **all** the stages of mourning during the first twelve months following a death but they made only a brief reference to what actually happens during Shiva.
- (b) Candidates were able to explain the benefits of allowing the bereaved to concentrate on mourning and expressing their grief for a specified period of time, to enable them to move on with their lives. Very few made any direct reference to Shiva but this did not affect the quality of the answers, which were mainly good.
- (c) There was a mixed response to this question. There were some good, well-balanced answers. In others, arguments were strongest in support of the statement that funerals should be private, opposing arguments or different views tended to be weaker. Many did not find a way to conclude their evaluation. Some did not make any reference to Judaism.

Question 9

- (a) The majority of responses showed good knowledge of the traditional teaching on the role of women in Judaism.
- (b) Answers showed good understanding of the importance of marriage in Judaism and the aspects of it that might strengthen the faith of the couple. Mostly this was interpreted as both faith (trust) in each other and in following their religion. There were some very insightful responses, which showed a good understanding of how personal relationships and religious faith might be strengthened by shared values and convictions.
- (c) Many candidates explored both sides of the argument, acknowledging the great value placed on marriage in Judaism and the seriousness of any kind of break up. However, many of the arguments acknowledged the sanctity of marriage but looked at the issue of a break up in more practical, general terms. Specific references to Judaism were not made. Very few candidates mentioned that divorce is allowed in Judaism.