

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Paper 0490/01

Paper 1

General comments

There was an increase in entries for the syllabus this year. A wide range of ability was evident with some very good, well-prepared candidates achieving a high standard. However, a significant number of candidates were not sufficiently knowledgeable about all three religions to perform consistently across the paper. The performance of the majority was generally erratic, with candidates achieving a satisfactory standard in only one religion, i.e. Christianity or Islam, and performing poorly on the other two.

Some of the weakest candidates were confused in their knowledge of the vocabulary and technical terms in the different religions and this affected their ability to demonstrate understanding of the three religions.

Again this year there were a substantial number of rubric errors where candidates answered all the questions in parts **B** and **C** and, for the most part, these answers were unfocused and insubstantial. Credit was given for the best answers and the extra ones were ignored, but candidates' efforts produced fewer marks than if their approach had been more disciplined.

Even amongst candidates who performed well in parts **A** and **B** there were a number who misunderstood what was required in part **C**. In **Question 7** or **8**, answers should have been restricted to description from only **two** religions in part **(a)** and explanations of the importance of the **two chosen** in part **(b)**.

A number of candidates seemed unaware that the different parts of questions represented different assessment objectives. The most common error was to answer part **(b)** with further description instead of taking notice of the trigger to the question in the phrase '**Explain** the importance of...'. Many part **(b)** answers were too brief and undeveloped.

Comments on specific questions.

Question 1

- (a)** Mostly accurate answers.
- (b)** Candidates who answered **(a)** accurately were also able to gain full marks for three things that happened at Pentecost.
- (c)** A number of answers offered a description of the celebration of the festival rather than its importance. However, a substantial number of candidates were aware of its importance as the birthday of the Church and of the influence of the Holy Spirit in the life of Christians.

Question 2

Generally, this was the best-answered question in this section. Many candidates scored full marks for **(a)** and **(b)**.

The commonest mistake was to confuse Ramadan with Lailat-ul-Qadr (The Night of Power) when the Qur'an was revealed to Muhammad. These candidates gained few marks for parts **(b)** and **(c)** of the question.

- (c)** Some very good answers. A weakness here, as elsewhere, was that many candidates did not write enough to gain 6 marks.

Question 3

- (a) Very well known.
- (b) Most candidates could describe two religious objects found in a synagogue but not three.
- (c) The majority of answers showed awareness of the variety of religious and secular uses of the synagogue. However, only the best candidates developed their answer to show how this united and strengthened the Jewish community.

Section B

Question 4

- (a) Most candidates achieved Level 3 for a description of the key features of Holy Communion (Eucharist), the partaking of bread and wine and the words of institution, etc. Some achieved Level 4 with the inclusion of one or more of the other aspects of the service e.g. Confession, Absolution, Ministry of the Word, etc.
- (b) The importance of this service for Christians was generally well known by those who made a good attempt at (a). Some weaker answers were a repetition of (a) and a number omitted to explain that the actions were commanded by Jesus at the Last Supper.

Question 5

- (a) Generally, the performance was poor on this question with many who answered it not achieving above Level 2. Some only wrote about cultural practices of arranged marriages or personal experience of weddings and failed to describe the religious practices that are common to all Islamic weddings, even though other elements might vary. Some weak candidates were confused and described a Christian wedding.
- (b) The majority of answers were too brief. Most were able to gain some marks by an explanation of marriage being a state Allah/Muhammad recommended for all people for sexual morality and the nurture of children. However, most answers did not develop the explanation any further. As mentioned previously, candidates appeared to lack the skill to write enough or develop their answer to gain Level 4.

Question 6

- (a) The quality of answers varied widely. There were some very good descriptions of the celebration of Passover in the home: the chamtez, the Seder foods, wine, prayers reclining, etc. A number concentrated on describing only the foods on the Seder plate, with varying degrees of accuracy. Some candidates erroneously described the Sabbath celebration.
- (b) On the whole, this was better answered than (a). An explanation of the symbolism of the foods on the Seder plate brought some answers to Level 3. With a coherent explanation of the Exodus from Egypt and an understanding of the importance of freedom/love of God for his people, a fair number of answers gained Level 3/4.

Section C

Questions 7 and 8 proved to be equally popular. These were the questions that discriminated between the good and average candidates. Surprisingly, only a few of the best candidates were sufficiently well prepared to gain the top level on either sacred writings or pilgrimage. Weak candidates made only a superficial attempt to answer the question set or show understanding of the rubric.

Question 7

- (a) The sacred writings of Christianity and Judaism were best known. The majority of candidates knew something about each of the scriptures chosen, however there were very few comprehensive answers, which reached Level 4. Many candidates included explanation of the importance of the sacred writings to believers in this part of the question and omitted relevant description.
- (b) There was again confusion here as to what was explanation and what description, especially with the Qur'an and Hadith. Few candidates developed their answer beyond the physical book/scroll, etc. to explain the importance of the **contents** of the sacred writings, and the way they inspired/guided believers, which would have been one of the best ways to answer this question.

Question 8

- (a) Candidates were asked to name a place of pilgrimage in two religions and describe what pilgrims do there. The majority of answers named several places for the two religions chosen but failed to mention anything that was done there. The best answers were on Makkah (for the Hajj).

This was the question with the most rubric errors.

- (b) Explanation of the importance of pilgrimage in the religions chosen was generally answered well on Islam and the Hajj but more weakly on Christianity and Judaism. Again, rubric error had a detrimental effect on the answers of a large number of candidates, with many weak, superficial answers on all three religions.

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Paper 2

General comments

As usual the standard of responses to this paper varied widely. The majority were good; candidates seemed well-prepared, were able to use specialist religious vocabulary, and divided their time carefully between their different answers.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

- (a) A sizeable minority of candidates confused Confirmation with Baptism, and Bar Mitzvah with Brit Milah. Better answers included considerable detail about the different ceremonies. Some of the descriptions of Bar Mitzvah ceremonies were particularly impressive, with competent use of key Jewish terms.
- (b) Some candidates answered about both ceremonies together, pointing out their importance as initiation into adult membership of the religion – this was a perfectly acceptable way of approaching the question. Others dealt with each in turn, with the better answers including the importance of the ceremony to the community as well as to the individual believer. Those candidates who had confused the identification of the ceremony in part (a) were often able to make comments worthy of credit in part (b).

Question 2

- (a) Despite the question referring to 'the work of', there were still some candidates who wrongly identified imams and rabbis as artefacts or pieces of text. However, most were able to write coherently about the roles of each of these leaders. Weaker answers were more vague and often introduced elements of Christianity inappropriately, for example, claiming that the rabbi taught about Jesus; better answers were able to give accurate accounts of these roles in worship and in the community. The best could explain differences between the role of the rabbi and the role of the imam.
- (b) This question brought a variety of interesting responses. Some argued for the importance of leadership in establishing a sense of unity and settling disputes, while others wrote about role models and the need for knowledgeable teachers. Most mentioned the roles of leaders in ceremonies and festivals.

Question 3

- (a) Many answered this question very well. Weaker answers did not identify specific occasions in each religion, but talked about fasting in general. Better answers usually chose Lent for Christianity and Yom Kippur for Judaism, and candidates could explain the reasons why these occasions are set aside for fasting. Some candidates wrote that people go without food for religious reasons when God sends no rain, which was an unexpected answer, but gained some credit.
- (b) This question was not always answered well. Better answers included ideas about unity with the poor, self-discipline, appreciation of food, remembrance of historical and religiously significant events, unity with other believers and obedience to religious rules. Weaker responses tended to repeat material from part (a).

Question 4

- (a) This question was misunderstood by a significant minority, who wrote about different groups such as the Mothers' Union, the choir, the youth group and so on. However, this was a reasonable interpretation of the wording, and therefore credit was given. Others wrote about the differences between Sunni and Shi'a Muslims, or between Orthodox and Progressive Jews, or between Protestant and Roman Catholic Christians, in a thorough and knowledgeable way. Many wrote their answers in the form of a chart, where continuous prose would have been preferable, to make it clear to the Examiner that the candidate knew what phrases such as 'Papal authority' meant.
- (b) This was not always answered well. Some produced good answers discussing the need for personal expression in a religion, often arguing their own point of view as well. However, others were confused and simply repeated material from part (a).

Question 5

- (a) This was a very popular question, which most answered well, although a significant number identified the synagogue as one of their places of worship despite the question referring only to Christianity and Islam. The better answers described objects of religious significance, including architectural features, whereas weaker candidates chose to write about items which could be found in any building whether it was a place of worship or not, or else wrongly attributed religious statues to Islam. There was some excellent understanding of key vocabulary.
- (b) This was answered well. Candidates wrote about the need for a clean place of prayer; a place that could be beautified for worship; a place away from the distractions of everyday life; and a community centre to create a sense of unity between believers. There were few weak answers – these tended to misunderstand what was being asked, and instead wrote again about particular features of the building.

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Paper 4

General comments

There was a wide range of achievement this session. There were a greater number of very good candidates than in previous sessions, but still a large number who struggled to understand the questions and, in turn, to make themselves understood.

Comments made in previous years continue to apply: for the weaker candidates, there was no real improvement in the standard attained. Many candidates either failed to understand the questions or did not attempt to answer them. Questions such as **Question 1** and **Question 2** require answers closely based on the set passages, and answers that do not address the sources cannot score high marks. Relevant supplementary material can contribute to the overall worth of an answer, but it must be supplementary, and not the main focus. It is important that candidates write about every source specified in the question, and do so in a way that answers the actual question set.

Writing in continuous prose is not a requirement of the syllabus, but answers which consisted of a list of bullet points were often incoherent and showed no development of ideas. Some candidates had significant difficulties in expressing themselves in English. Despite the Examiner's best efforts, where it was not clear what candidates were trying to say, their marks inevitably suffered.

Most of the sources used have an overtly religious aspect, but even when this is absent, candidates should bear in mind the overall topic of the paper, which is always 'The teaching and practice of the religions studied in relation to...'

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a political statement by the United Nations, and has no religious authority. A few candidates pointed out that the right to change your religion is not always supported in some countries.

Question 2

The question specifically asked for the teachings given in each Source, so attempts to put the passages in a wider context were not usually appropriate. Source C from the Qur'an would have been easier to interpret had candidates borne in mind the missionary theme of the paper.

Question 3

'*Explain the main points*' implies that some selection should be made – candidates are asked to show their knowledge by selecting which they think are the 'main' points. '*Explain*' does not ask for an opinion, which is the province of **Question 5**.

Question 4

Candidates should be aware that 40% of the paper's marks are allocated to this question, so they should make a proportionate effort and take sufficient time to write a full answer, considering and *explaining* every source specified in the question. It is equally acceptable to take each source in turn, or write an extended answer which covers every source in a coherent essay. However, in either approach the best answers make cross-reference and comparison between the sources in considering the overall topic of the question holistically – and in the religious context of the specified topic. Here candidates had the opportunity to fruitfully explore the contradictions between the two written sources G and H, and the best did; some weaker candidates seem to have been unnerved by the negative tone of Source G in its statements about missionary activity, and either ignored it or re-interpreted it. In this question there were four sources mentioned, and each needed to be addressed; some candidates wrote only about the first two or the last two.

Question 5

'Give reasons for your answer' requires evidence and argument for the candidate's views, which evidence can be taken entirely from the sources on the question paper or expanded with other relevant material. Answers should show that candidates are at least aware of different points of view. It is not appropriate for every source to be explained in turn. Many candidates asserted a naïve syncretism, that 'we all worship the same God'. That may be so, but most dedicated adherents of major religions do feel that differences of belief and practice are of fundamental importance, and that they have a duty to rescue the 'ignorant' or 'wrong' from their error and this underlies the drive to missionary activity.