

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Paper 0490/01

Paper 1

General comments

There were approximately 362 international candidates for the syllabus this year, many of whom demonstrated an impressive level of knowledge and understanding. Fewer candidates than last year seemed to run out of time, failing to complete the last question. Many candidates wrote very full answers to all the questions. A small number of candidates, once again, should not imagine that answering more than the required number of questions gives them any benefit, as only the marks for the number of questions satisfying the rubric can be counted. A significant number also need to be more careful about reading the instructions for **section A** where they answered 2 of the questions rather than the 3 they should have attempted.

Some weaker candidates continue to confuse details of the different religions, for instance having the Jewish feast of Purim as the end of Ramadan or having an Imam as a Jewish religious leader.

Answers for part **(b)** questions which are presented as disconnected sentences or 'bullet points' are, by their nature, less likely than those written in continuous prose to meet the Level 4 requirement to give 'clear explanations' or demonstrate a 'thorough understanding'.

Some candidates made marking the scripts difficult by attaching the pages in the wrong order creating a jigsaw puzzle for the Examiner.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

This question was usually well done. Candidates generally had a good idea of what is used for worship in a Christian Church. A significant number, however, confused a pulpit with a lectern and a small number with a baptismal font. A wide range of objects were offered as responses from the obvious alter, crucifix and lectern to smaller objects such as hymn books or rosaries depending on the kind of service being suggested.

Question 2

Most candidates were aware that Id al-Fitr, with a variety of spelling, is the feast celebrated at the end of Ramadan. This meant that they were able to give a good account of the practices surrounding the feast which also included, in some cases, more local customs. A few candidates described the practices during Ramadan rather than after which clearly gained them no credit. Most demonstrated a good understanding of the importance of Id al-Fitr both to individual Muslims and to Islam itself.

Question 3

For most candidates this was a very straightforward question allowing them to demonstrate a good knowledge and understanding of Judaism. A very few, confused in their knowledge of the different descriptions studied, gave Imam rather than Rabbi as the answer to part **(a)**. A good range of duties of a Jewish religious leader were given in answer to part **(b)** ranging from preparing young people for Bar/Bat Mitzvah, through counselling members of the religion to interpreting the Torah for his/her people.

Section B

Question 4

- (a) Candidates demonstrated a good grasp of the practices involved in a Christian burial service from a number of different denominational backgrounds. Some candidates also described local customs such as the family preparing the body at home. Most had a good understanding of the main religious practices such as blessing the coffin, using the bible to read appropriate texts and the kind of things said by the priest during the sermon/panegyric. Many candidates described both burials and cremations.
- (b) Beliefs about death which can be brought to mind by a funeral service were very well understood. Most talked about beliefs concerning the afterlife and the resurrection of the body. Many used the biblical texts which are often chosen for funeral rites to explain their understanding of eternal life and the extent to which this life is seen as a gift from God. Some explained their understanding of the sacred nature of human life by describing the incensing of the coffin.

Question 5

- (a) In this question most candidates demonstrated a very good knowledge of the main features of a Mosque. Many started with the facilities for washing and the separate areas within the Mosque for men and women to worship. The qiblah and minarets featured in a significant number of responses. Most made reference to the calligraphy and its importance. Most candidates went well beyond a list and gave good descriptions of the various features they considered to be important.
- (b) Candidates made good use of their knowledge of a Mosque to explain the many ways in which the features help them to understand the nature and beliefs of Islam. Some discussed the way the meeting of heaven and earth can be represented through these features. They also explained the way it is designed to help Muslims worship and not be distracted and how the separation of men and women's worship can help with an understanding of the different roles of men and women in Islam.

Question 6

- (a) There were many good answers to this question but unfortunately many candidates did not read the question properly. So instead of focusing their responses on what might happen in a Jewish home, a significant number described what might happen at a Synagogue on the Sabbath which attracted no marks as they did not answer the question. Those who did address the question described the preparation for the Sabbath and the way that no work could be done on that day. They also described the family meal and prayers and the opportunity to study the Torah. Some candidates were also aware of the way that different groups within Judaism might celebrate the Sabbath in different ways.
- (b) Many candidates made good attempts at addressing this question explaining the importance of remembering both God and Jewish history on this day. Most were able to explain the belief that God rested on the 7th day after he had completed creation. They were also able to explain the importance in Jewish life of spiritual and physical refreshment. The best answers were also able to explain the importance of the day in terms of forming a bond between Jews around the world.

Section C

Question 7

- (a) There were many very full answers to this question where candidates were able to give detailed descriptions of both Christian and Jewish marriages. Most used technical terms accurately and were able to describe with understanding the roles of the various people involved in the different services. For example they not only described the breaking of the glass at a Jewish marriage but were able to describe its significance. In the Christian service they were able to recognise the role of the priest as a witness on behalf of the Church and God, while the couple themselves are the ones who marry each other.

- (b) Again most candidates were able to give good explanations of why Christians and Jews feel it is important to begin their married lives by having a religious ceremony; both because of its spiritual and public nature. Many were also able to explain that within these religions marriage is important before couple have a sexual relationship which should lead to a family.

Question 8

- (a) This was a less popular question but those who answered it had a good understanding of its demands. They were able to describe the way that sacred texts are used to produce rules about ways of living and behaving; they may even include the preparation of food and laws surrounding fasting. Some candidates built on their answers to earlier questions. Others focused on the way sacred texts are used for spiritual reflection and as part of worshiping communities.
- (b) Most candidates began their responses by explaining that these books are believed by those who follow their teachings to be the revelation of their God and that therefore they must be considered as more important than any other book. It is through these books that their God keeps their communities together and guides them through their daily lives.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Paper 0490/02

Paper 2

General comments

There were over 370 international candidates for the syllabus this year, an increase of 120 from last year's entry. There was a welcome decrease in the number of candidates who knew nothing beyond Christianity, who made rubric errors or who had significant difficulties with expressing themselves in English. However, there were some fairly widespread misapprehensions about Judaism: no Jew has offered an animal in sacrifice for over 2000 years, and Reform Judaism has not accepted Jesus Christ as their Messiah.

When a part **(a)** question asks 'For **both** [religion A] **and** [religion B]' or a similar form of words, it is necessary to address each religion separately: in every syllabus topic there are sufficient significant differences between religions for a synthesised answer to be nearly always unsuccessful. Often such answers concentrated almost exclusively on the Christian aspects of the answer, or claimed that Islam or Judaism did much the same as Christianity, thus throwing away most of the 50% of marks reserved for the other religion. It is sometimes possible to answer part **(b)** holistically, and the marking scheme allows for this, but separating the responses for the two religions is a more reliable approach. This might also help candidates to avoid inappropriately adducing the example or teachings of Jesus to Islam or Judaism.

As observed last year, a number of candidates wrote bullet-point or numbered-section answers. It is still the case that this disjointed approach gives no evidence of development of thought through the course of an answer or, most crucially, the 'thorough understanding' required for the top level as described in the marking scheme for part **(b)**. It also leads to answers which are very light in content, as a list looks longer on the page than an identical answer in continuous prose. Presenting material in table form leads to a spurious 'comparative' appearance; this is never required and is generally unhelpful. Another approach to be avoided is the repetition of an opening phrase for every sentence: it adds nothing to an answer for the candidate to assert repeatedly 'It is important because... It is important because... It is important because...' It is sufficient for this 'departure point' for an answer to be made clear, once, at the beginning. Weaker answers were often characterised by general and diffuse 'worthy' assertions.

For this as for every CIE examination, Centres should ensure that candidates are enabled and encouraged to follow the general requirements: answer paper must have margins on both left- and right-hand sides of the sheet, that on the right-hand side being kept clear for Examiners' use; candidates should write on both sides of the paper, and leave a few lines between answers; the sheets should be numbered, fastened together loosely and in the correct order; and the subject number and paper number should be written on the first sheet.

2010 is the last year of the syllabus in this form; teachers should be aware of the significant changes in syllabus content and question-paper format from 2011.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Ramadan was well known, but some candidates thought that the ninth month of the Muslim lunar calendar always means September (as it happened to fall, mostly, in 2009). It was important for candidates to show that it is about much more than fasting. The details of Yom Kippur were less familiar, and a few candidates thought that scapegoating continued as though the Temple had never been destroyed.

Question 2

The **(a)** question was about the work of leaders in the local community, and their functions as leaders of worship are only part of this; an elaborate account of the Christian hierarchy, starting at the top with the Pope, was not appropriate. Too often, candidates thought that the imam did more or less the same sort of things as a Christian priest/minister/pastor, whereas his primary function is to lead prayer in the mosque and deliver the Friday sermons – in the community he will officiate at rites of passage and educate the young, but he has no formal pastoral role. Part **(b)** was not about the importance of leaders (many candidates seemed to have prepared an answer on this) but about believers' care for members of their community, in which the leaders do not necessarily play a large part. In Christianity, the importance is founded in biblical teaching; the key aspect of Muslim care for the community is *zakah*. This was a question where answers attempting to combine the two religions were not successful.

Question 3

Candidates were usually clear about what is said and done during Christian prayer, and most did not fall into the trap of imagining the question was only about formal public worship; how Jews pray was less well-known, and again it is not just a copy of what Christians do. There were some good and thoughtful answers about the importance of prayer to Christians and Jews.

Question 4

This was not a popular question, but some of the best candidates scored highly for detailed descriptions of the differences between Sunni and Shi'ite Islam. Candidates from some Centres shared common misapprehensions about the beliefs of some of the groups in Judaism – not even Liberal Jews believe that Jesus is their promised Messiah ('Jews for Jesus' is an extremely small and very recent minority fringe group based in California, and not representative of Liberal Judaism) even though they have suggested the transfer of the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday. Part **(b)** asked for *why*, not *how*, and some candidates gained few marks because they repeated or elaborated factual material from part **(a)**.

Question 5

'First communion' is explicitly listed in the syllabus, and separate from baptism and confirmation. Many candidates however did not know its distinctive role in Roman Catholic life, and wrote as though the question were asking about believers' baptism, confirmation, or the routine celebration of the Eucharist. It was difficult to award such answers many marks except where the first communion after confirmation was specifically mentioned. The celebration of Bar Mitzvah was much better known, though there was sometimes confusion with aspects of Muslim birth rites – no Jew has sacrificed an animal since the destruction of the Temple. The answers to part **(b)** often understated the importance to the community of such rites of passage marking the transition to religious responsibility – they are not only about what happens within the individual.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Paper 0490/04

Alternative to Coursework

General Comments

The overall performance on this paper was very good and there were some exceptional candidates. A good number of candidates could describe, explain and analyse the issues well, and they wrote with authority and accuracy. Many candidates gained a high level of achievement in **Questions 1 to 3**. Some of the answers to **Question 4** also produced commentary of commendable depth and detail on each of the sources, however, with this question there were candidates whose answer was largely copied or paraphrased from the four sources. There was pleasing evidence of independent thought on **Question 5** although some candidates wrote too briefly.

This year there appeared to be an improvement in the way the majority of candidates managed the time available. There was less of a tendency to manage time ineffectively. Most candidates spent an appropriate amount of time on **Questions 1 to 3** but also adequate time was allowed for answering **Questions 4 and 5**, which carried the higher marks.

Some candidates demonstrated a high level of skill in selection and explanation of the religious teachings and attitudes inspired by the sources.

It was noticeable that the majority of those who did not gain Level 4 in **Question 5** were unable to evaluate different points of view and even some of the best-written answers demonstrated only one point of view. Generally, there was a noticeable lack of balance in answers to **Question 5** and this would appear to be one of the skills on which Centres might continue to focus.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

This was well answered by the majority of candidates. The contrasting points of view in Source G, of one speaker advocating separate churches for black and white people versus the opinion that mixed churches are more appropriate for the Christian message, were understood and the reasoning given by each speaker was accurately portrayed. Only a few candidates copied words from the source without much evidence of understanding.

Question 2

The majority of candidates drew on all of the three named Sources A, B and C for this answer. In the best answers, the excerpts from the sacred texts were known and understood and the teachings accurately described. Most answers were a reasonable attempt to deal with the information but some lacked the detail across **all** the sources. Some candidates limited their achievement by relating the teaching only to inequalities between men and women instead of to all areas of prejudice and discrimination.

Question 3

Surprisingly, some candidates who had made very good attempts to answer **Questions 1 and 2** merely copied or paraphrased Sources D and E for this answer. However, there were also some clever and profound answers relating to the Jewish experience of prejudice and Biblical teaching (Source D) and showing a good understanding of the Muslim belief of people being judged according to deeds rather than factors of race or gender.

Question 4

Some excellent candidates showed considerable skill in selecting and organising information to explain the ideas shown in Sources F, H, I and J and the pictures.

The majority of candidates tackled the Sources systematically and with so much material to read and digest, this appeared to be the best approach. The majority of answers showed a good understanding of the work of Desmond Tutu, Source F and Martin Luther King Jnr., Source H and awareness of the effect and result of the policies of Apartheid in South Africa, Sources I and J.

The assessment target for this question is to understand and interpret the religious ideas and beliefs behind the lives/practices described and this year it would appear that more candidates than previously understood that this was the skill being tested.

The general level of achievement on this particular question was higher than in previous years. However, there were still some candidates who copied at length from the sources or merely paraphrased rather than interpreted the meaning of the information. This limited the performance on the paper for some candidates.

Question 5

Most candidates answered **Question 5** well, but also, there were some excellent answers. Some candidates did showed a weakness in evaluative technique.

The majority argued that religious duty, together with the social evils resulting from prejudice and discrimination, meant that believers had a duty to challenge prejudice and discrimination. In the best answers, the arguments in defence of this view were lucid and detailed, making good use of the texts and information used in the various sources.

On the other hand, only a tiny minority considered an alternative view, believing apparently that it was sufficient to defend one point of view. Centres need to address this issue.

Other comments

Some candidates did not answer all five questions but this appeared to be due to lack of knowledge rather than lack of time or misunderstanding of the rubric.

