

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Paper 0490/11
Paper 1

General comments

There were many instances of sound understanding and reflective material, however, there was also a tendency for some candidates to offer a few points on either side rather than develop an argument in **part (c)** of each section. Developing an individual point of view, based on evidence and consideration of others' ideas, is an important skill needed for a **part (c)** response.

Some candidates had markedly more exact understanding of one religion than another. Generally, those who opted to answer questions on Islam demonstrated good understanding throughout. Answers on Judaism were mixed, with occasional resort to generalisation. A minority of candidates conflated Christian, Islamic and Jewish beliefs, for example, by referring to the Talmud as being about the life of Jesus, and there was an occasional reference to reincarnation as animals for all three religions. Answers on Christianity were mixed in terms of accuracy, with and a few substituting evangelical exhortation for knowledge.

A minority of candidates seemed to lack practice in using time effectively, not using the number of marks available as an invaluable guide to the expected length of answers. 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 or producing cursory responses to **parts (b)** and **(c)**.

Comments on specific questions

Section A – Christianity

Question 1

- (a) (i) Most candidates gained full marks for succinct accounts, a few confused tongues of fire on the Apostles' heads with tongues on fire.
- (ii) Generally, this was not as well answered. Some candidates failed to understand that speaking in tongues did not mean that the apostles were incomprehensible, but that they could be understood by speakers of all languages present. A few confused Pentecost with Passover.
- (b) The best responses demonstrated an understanding of the significance of the Holy Spirit as the Third Person of the Trinity. Some seemed unaware of this aspect, treating the Spirit as some sort of angel or even as a synonym for conscience.
- (c) Answers were often very generalised as candidates failed to exemplify arguments, simply asserting that the Holy Spirit was or was not ignored. Better answers were specific in reference to liturgy and/or teaching. Consideration of specifics led to more nuanced reflections.

Question 2

- (a) (i) Most candidates were able to name two or three items, though a few wrote about beliefs rather than items. Crucifixes, bread and wine were popular responses.
- (ii) Responses were mixed. A significant number of candidates did not make reference to customs specific to Holy Thursday, talking generally about Easter. Better responses understood that it is commemorated Christ's last supper and described the way priests and ministers washed the feet of 12 members of their congregations.
- (b) Some good answers were offered. However, significant numbers were unaware that Easter as a feast focuses on Jesus' resurrection from the dead, writing only about the events of Good Friday.
- (c) Many answers consisted of unsubstantiated assertions about Easter bunnies, while others simply listed opposing points. Better answers were more specific in exemplification, leading to nuanced responses.

Section B – Islam

Question 3

- (a) (i) This was generally well answered.
- (ii) Most candidates were able to correctly identify and describe two different Pillars.
- (b) There were many good answers, especially from those candidates confident in their knowledge of the content of Shahadah. Most were aware of the references to Allah, but rather fewer mentioned the reference in Shahadah to Muhammad (pbuh).
- (c) Responses were very mixed in quality. More perceptive candidates made reference to specific ritual practices, before considering the ways in which the believer might move beyond simple performance of ritual to sincere faith.

Question 4

- (a) (i) This was generally very well-answered. Candidates seemed to be fully aware of rituals such as washing the body and burial facing Makkah.
- (ii) There were many good answers, especially from those candidates able to develop the points about the role of angels. A few confused Islamic and Christian beliefs.
- (b) There were many good answers, especially from those candidates able to develop points about the role of angels both historically and in relation to afterlife beliefs. Many made points about the role of Jibril on the Night of Power.
- (c) Better responses developed their argument by specific reference to features of Islamic thought and practice, but some answers were very generalised in their comments about the rich. Many recognised that submission to Allah was more important than being rich or poor. Both states were recognised as having their own challenges.

Section C – Judaism

Question 5

- (a) (i) This was generally well-answered by candidates, with many being able to name three different books.
- (ii) There were a number of good answers, with some pointing to important Jewish history in these books, including the significance of the Ten Commandments.
- (b) Again, many candidates resorted to generalisation, demonstrating limited specific knowledge of the content of the Torah. Nevertheless, there were also some very sound answers, particularly on the Covenant, 613 mitzvot and Sabbath practices.

- (c) Better responses dealt thoughtfully with the relationship between different elements of the Tenakh. Few made a case for the superiority of either Neviim or Ketuvim over the Torah, but the best answers took care to justify their choice rather than merely assert it.

Question 6

- (a) (i) Some confused Rosh Hashanah with Pesach, but most candidates had little difficulty with this question.
- (ii) Basic understanding was generally good, but elaboration beyond this was sometimes incomplete.
- (b) There were some very good answers, from those who understood Rosh Hashanah, but some wrote more generally about their knowledge of festivals.
- (c) Some answers showed uncertainty about the significance of different festivals, but there were many thoughtfully argued responses.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Paper 0490/12
Paper 1

General

There were many instances of good understanding and interesting reflective material, though some found it a challenge 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 and a consideration of the ideas of others is an important academic skill and is explicitly referenced in the **part c** questions.

Many candidates had better understanding of one religion than another. Some also conflated the teaching of different religions. Generally, those who opted to answer questions on Islam demonstrated reasonable understanding, while those on Christianity often demonstrated little knowledge of Christian teachings on the Trinity. Answers on Judaism were mixed, with much generalisation on the Covenant relationship.

Some candidates seemed to lack practice in using time effectively, not using the number of marks available as an invaluable guide to the expected length of answers. 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 individual questions

Section A – Christianity

Question 1

- (a) (i)** Most candidates gained full marks for succinct accounts which carefully identified the three elements of the Trinity.
- (ii)** Those familiar with the Apostles' Creed provided excellent answers but too many had little idea of what the Creed was, and less of its contents. Answers usually outlined the Apostles' Creed or the Trinity but with no link about beliefs between the two.
- (b)** The best responses demonstrated understanding of the mysterious nature of the Trinity, drawing out the different aspects of God revealed in the mystery. Some were unaware that the Son and Holy Spirit were wholly God, and not mere adjuncts, and a minority equated the Trinity with the use of the Sign of the Cross.
- (c)** Answers were often very generalised as candidates failed to exemplify arguments. Too many gave only one side of the issue, a few dismissing it as old-fashioned. Candidates often gave a *for/against* answer for this question with discussion often focusing on the difficulty of God being one but in three different persons/aspects. Sometimes answers were too brief, lacking detailed discussion and in other cases answers gave good detail but with no personal opinion.

Question 2

- (a) (i)** Most candidates managed to produce relevant answers in giving three types of leader.
- (ii)** Responses were varied, given the openness of the question. Examiners credited any reasonable answer.
- (b)** Given the enormous variety of the term 'bishop' across Christian denominations and groupings, very varied answers were given. Examiners credited any justified account.

- (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 and limitations of a variety of leaders. Some good answers were however held back from the top level because there was no personal opinion.

Section B – Islam

Question 3

- (a) (i) Many candidates were able to give one or two reasons for why Muhammad (pbuh) left Makkah. In some cases the question was not well understood and irrelevant examples were given.
- (ii) A few candidates gave an account of simultaneous events, but most wrote about the removal to Medinah and events en route. Examiners credited either account.
- (b) There were some good answers, especially from those candidates able to develop their answers in relation to specific events. Some produced admirable accounts of the resonance of these events in today's world. Some candidates found this question a challenge, for example, describing a hijab and in many cases hajj was discussed rather than the Hijrah.
- (c) Responses were very mixed in quality. More perceptive candidates made reference to specific examples of persecutions suffered by believers and their effects on the ummah while demonstrating how those weak in faith might fall away, but too many resorted to unsupported assertions. Some gave irrelevant answers that focused on prosecution rather than persecution.

Question 4

- (a) (i) Responses were mixed, with many struggling because of lack of specific knowledge. Some candidates understood the question and were able to give some relevant details about the Sunnah, however many answers clearly did not know what the Sunnah is.
- (ii) Due to the difficulties that many candidates had with **Question 4(a)(i)** with knowing what the Sunnah is, this question also caused a great deal of difficulty with many answers failing to show any understanding or relevant detail about how the Sunnah is used with the Qur'an.
- (b) Those who had performed well in the first two parts of the question were able to provide good answers, but those who lacked this knowledge resorted to generalisation and irrelevant responses.
- (c) This proved a test for those careless in reading the question. Too many thought the question was about *reading* the Qur'an. Those who spotted that the question was about *recitation* were able to develop thoughts about whether merely reciting without understanding or reflection really strengthened faith in any significant way.

Section C – Judaism

Question 5

- (a) (i) While most candidates understood the question, giving philosophical appropriate answers, rather fewer offered specifically Jewish beliefs. Many responses focused on God as one God, all powerful and all knowing.
- (ii) There were many good answers, with some tying practices to individual covenants. Circumcision, kosher food and worship were popular choices. A few candidates also discussed charity.
- (b) Better answers demonstrated awareness of the differences between Covenants, drawing out their implications for both faith and practice. Again, many candidates resorted to generalisation about binding the community of Jews without more specific reference to the meaning of Covenant.
- (c) The question was read in various ways. Better answers considered whether Judaism could be fully lived by withdrawal from the remainder of the world. Many failed to note the significance of 'only' in the question, not considering the possibility of other modes of relationship with the wider world.

Question 6

- (a) (i)** Most candidates found this a straightforward question. A minority did however bring in ideas which were not part of the Ten Commandments.
- (ii)** Given the wide variety of practices within Judaism on the display of the Commandments, examiners allowed latitude in the answers.
- (b)** Most candidates managed to produce satisfactory answers. The best were very specific about how individual commandments affected specific practices and beliefs.
- (c)** Some answers were general rather than specific to Judaism, but better answers mentioned specific objects and their use. A few candidates failed to note 'objects' in the question, writing instead about beliefs in general.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Paper 0490/13
Paper 1

General comments

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Comments on specific questions

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Question 1

- (a) (i) Most candidates gained full marks for succinct accounts, a few confused tongues of fire on the Apostles' heads with tongues on fire.
- (ii) Generally, this was not as well answered. Some candidates failed to understand that speaking in tongues did not mean that the apostles were incomprehensible, but that they could be understood by speakers of all languages present. A few confused Pentecost with Passover.
- (b) The best responses demonstrated an understanding of the significance of the Holy Spirit as the Third Person of the Trinity. Some seemed unaware of this aspect, treating the Spirit as some sort of angel or even as a synonym for conscience.
- (c) Answers were often very generalised as candidates failed to exemplify arguments, simply asserting that the Holy Spirit was or was not ignored. Better answers were specific in reference to liturgy and/or teaching. Consideration of specifics led to more nuanced reflections.

Question 2

- (a) (i) Most candidates were able to name two or three items, though a few wrote about beliefs rather than items. Crucifixes, bread and wine were popular responses.
- (ii) Responses were mixed. A significant number of candidates did not make reference to customs specific to Holy Thursday, talking generally about Easter. Better responses understood that it is commemorated Christ's last supper and described the way priests and ministers washed the feet of 12 members of their congregations.
- (b) Some good answers were offered. However, significant numbers were unaware that Easter as a feast focuses on Jesus' resurrection from the dead, writing only about the events of Good Friday.
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Section B – Islam

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- (c) Better responses developed their argument by specific reference to features of Islamic thought and practice, but some answers were very generalised in their comments about the rich. Many recognised that submission to Allah was more important than being rich or poor. Both states were recognised as having their own challenges.

Section C – Judaism

Question 5

- (a) (i) This was generally well-answered by candidates, with many being able to name three different books.
- (ii) There were a number of good answers, with some pointing to important Jewish history in these books, including the significance of the Ten Commandments.
- (b) Again, many candidates resorted to generalisation, demonstrating limited specific knowledge of the content of the Torah. Nevertheless, there were also some very sound answers, particularly on the Covenant, 613 mitzvot and Sabbath practices.

- (c) Better responses dealt thoughtfully with the relationship between different elements of the Tenakh. Few made a case for the superiority of either Neviim or Ketuvim over the Torah, but the best answers took care to justify their choice rather than merely assert it.

Question 6

- (a) (i) Some confused Rosh Hashanah with Pesach, but most candidates had little difficulty with this question.
- (ii) Basic understanding was generally good, but elaboration beyond this was sometimes incomplete.
- (b) There were some very good answers, from those who understood Rosh Hashanah, but some wrote more generally about their knowledge of festivals.
- (c) Some answers showed uncertainty about the significance of different festivals, but there were many thoughtfully argued responses.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Paper 0490/21
Paper 2

Key messages

For **part (a)** questions, most candidates were able to confidently select the correct areas of knowledge and a significant number achieved the higher levels of marks with coherent, detailed accounts.

In general, candidates did less well on **part (b)** questions. To enable candidates to achieve higher marks in **part (b)** there is a need to ensure that they understand the assessment objective for these questions. Responses in **part (b)** should demonstrate good understanding of religious teachings and clearly demonstrate the relationship between belief and practice.

The majority of candidates appeared to find the **part (c)** evaluation questions accessible and were able to engage with the topics, offering a variety of views. Personal viewpoints were often original and insightful.

General comments

Section A and Section B, Christianity and Islam were the most popular combination of questions. A number of candidates did select Section C, Judaism and combining it with either Christianity or Islam. Many of the candidates who selected Judaism did not answer all the parts of the questions they selected. Rubric errors were made by candidates who did a 'pick and mix' from the parts of all three questions in a section, this particularly applied to Section C, Judaism.

A minority performed better at **part (c)** questions than others and this perhaps showed lack of preparation on knowledge and understanding for the examination. Some candidates could have improved their performance by more careful reading of the questions.

Comments on specific questions

Section A Christianity

Question 1

- (a) The question asked for a description of Lenten practice and activities and many of the responses were detailed and accurate accounts. Candidates took advantage of the wealth of material that might be used. Many included activities from Ash Wednesday to Holy Week as well as fasting and Bible study. Other accounts were more limited in scope and candidates appeared to be writing from personal experience of 'giving up something' rather than showing that they had studied the many aspects of this period of preparation for Easter.
- (b) Candidates who had demonstrated good knowledge in (a) tended to do well on this question also.
- (c) There were some strong arguments in support of the statement that preparing for Easter is the most important thing a Christian can do and candidates were able to write in some depth about this. To balance the argument candidates needed to consider the relative importance of other Christian duties. However, the alternative views were less strong and so many answers were good attempts but one-sided.

Question 2

- (a) Generally, candidates confined their responses to the religious aspects of the way Christians celebrate Christmas. Answers were comprehensive and covered most aspects including Christmas day activities.
- (b) The selection of two other festivals gave candidates the opportunity to achieve high marks. Some answers were uneven and having initially selected two festivals, explained the importance of only one of them.
- (c) The majority of candidates engaged well with this topic and gave well-balanced answers. Personal viewpoints were perceptive and thoughtful and most were of the opinion that the universal message of love and peace at Christmas is all inclusive but that only Christians celebrate the true meaning of the birth of Jesus.

Question 3

- (a) Sunday observance appeared to be a well-known topic with many accounts containing a combination of facts about church and Sunday school attendances as well as appropriate activities for a day of rest. All the answers focused on Christians but some responses could have gained higher marks with more detailed development of areas such as church services.
- (b) Generally, in this question, the performance was similar to part (a) although some candidates did, in part, repeat descriptions from (a) instead of explaining the advantages of the practices and so did not gain the higher levels of marks.
- (c) Again, candidates engaged well with the topic and most answers offered arguments both for and against the statement (see the note above about the performance of some candidates on part (c) questions).

Section B Islam

Question 4

- (a) This was a question on how Lailat ul-Qadr is celebrated during Ramadan. There was a mixed response to the question. A number of candidates wrote about the whole of the whole month of the fast, spending very little time on the Night of Power, which occurs during the last ten days. This might be addressed when preparing candidates for the examination. Remembrance of Lailat ul-Qadr is celebrated in a number of ways both in the home and in the mosque, as a special attendance or as part of the retreat.
- (b) Most candidates were able to offer a number of reasons why the different rituals of Ramadan might strengthen faith. The best responses were comprehensive and showed good understanding of the benefits of Ramadan. The majority of candidates achieved level 3 marks, perhaps showing that, in general, more thought and time needs to be allocated to answering part (b) questions to gain level 4 marks (see the general comment above).
- (c) Most answers were good or satisfactory. Others were descriptive rather than evaluative with some candidates demonstrating good knowledge of a Muslim's religious duties but not assessing the ability of believers to perform them at all times.

Question 5

- (a) Most candidates had knowledge of three stages of Hajj, the majority selecting the tawaf around the Ka'ba, stoning the pillars at Mina and the sacrifice. Details of the stages were well known and overall the performance on this question was good.
- (b) Candidates who showed awareness of the pivotal importance of Arafat as a stage of Hajj were also able to explain the importance of 'the stand' (wuquf) as the most important day of the Hajj and why if the stand is missed the Hajj is not valid. A necessary part of the answer was also the connection to the forgiveness of sins and Judgement Day, as well as the importance of the plain of Arafat as a site connected to beliefs about Adam and Eve. A significant number of responses only

concentrated on explaining that Arafat had been the site of the Last Sermon of Muhammad (pbuh). These answers often focused on Muhammad (pbuh) rather than on Arafat.

- (c) Good responses to this question produced interesting and insightful personal opinions and the majority of candidates also explored different points of view. Many concluded that Hajj is beneficial and changes lives, if it is performed with the right intention.

Question 6

- (a) There were some good answers here on Id al-Fitr. Candidates who mistakenly described Id al-Adha (please see the general comment above about careful reading of the question) were still able to gain credit for some valid points common to both festivals.

- (b) Answers showed good understanding of the concept of the ummah in Islam.

Candidates at all levels of ability had something to say about the importance of the ummah to the universality of Islam.

- (c) Many good, evaluative comments were made in answers to this question about whether new clothes and presents should be considered a part of religious festivals. Most views were in support of the statement but some also argued that they had an importance in expressing enjoyment of the festival and love towards others.

Section C Judaism

Question 7

- (a) More knowledge about the site of the Western Wall in Jerusalem would have improved candidates' performance. Generally answers were brief and many candidates described what pilgrims did when visiting the Western Wall but did not describe the features of the site. All candidates gained some credit but only a few achieved the higher levels of marks for their response.

- (b) Some candidates had used material in the answer to (a) that would have been appropriate in this response but they did not make the connection. Again, there were many descriptions of what Jews might do at the Western Wall but less explanation of why some Jews might choose to visit this historic site to pray or hold Bar Mitzvahs. On the whole, this question was better answered than part (a).

- (c) This question was usually answered with enthusiasm, many candidates demonstrating their appreciation of the role of religious buildings in the lives of believers but some of the answers were a Christian interpretation of the importance of religious buildings rather than a Jewish one. Some candidates did not refer to Judaism in their answer and so limited their achievement.

Question 8

- (a) There was evidence that candidates chose this question because it was about Shabbat but without carefully reading the question. Many candidates would have improved their mark if they had confined their answer to describing how Shabbat is celebrated in the synagogue. There were many good descriptions of various Shabbat activities in the home and at leisure but these accounts were not answering the question. A number of candidates omitted this part of the question and answered only (b) and (c).

- (b) Answers tended to be very general and many candidates would have improved their answer if they had been able to explain the special nature of the Shabbat meal as more than just a gathering of the family and not working. Most answers needed more development to achieve better marks. They might have included the role of the mother and the meaning of her actions, the marking of the holiness of the Sabbath, the special nature of the father's blessings, his praise of his wife and the symbolism of the challot.

- (c) In contrast to parts (a) and (b), many candidates engaged well with this question and offered personal opinions and different views that focused on the issue of the importance of Jewish families and communities celebrating religious occasions together. Others made strong arguments in favour of the statement that this was the most important way of keeping families together but did not explore another view.

Question 9

- (a) There was a mixed response to this question. Good answers described the teachings about Tzedeka (righteous giving) and other teachings from the Torah about helping the destitute, such as farmers leaving the gleanings of the harvest and fallen fruits for the poor as well as teachings about the appropriate ways to give to others. Other candidates described the different ways in which Jews practise charity for the poor but did not mention the teachings about it.
- (b) This question asked candidates to explain the ways in which Jews might interpret and practise the teachings about helping the poor. Good answers explained the importance to Jews of teaching children to be charitable and using pushkes and the ways in which Gemilut Hasadim (kind actions) help the less fortunate. Some also explained the role of Jewish global organisations and gave examples. Other candidates, who gave only satisfactory answers, had mistakenly used material in part (a) that answered this question (instead of describing the teachings from the Torah) but they did not make the connection.
- (c) Many answers to this question were satisfactory. Some improvement might have been made by a more careful consideration of the significance in Judaism of the belief about being a chosen people: chosen by God to carry out certain commands and responsibilities. Some candidates made good points but did not refer to Judaism.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Paper 0490/22
Paper 2

Key messages

For **part (a)** questions, most candidates were able to confidently select the correct areas of knowledge and many achieved the higher levels of marks with coherent, detailed accounts.

In general, candidates did less well on **part (b)** questions. To enable candidates to achieve higher marks in **part (b)** there is a need to ensure that they understand the assessment objective for these questions. Responses in **part (b)** should demonstrate good understanding of religious teachings and clearly demonstrate the relationship between belief and practice.

The majority of candidates appeared to find the **part (c)** evaluation questions accessible and were able to engage well with the topics, offering a variety of views. Personal viewpoints were often original and insightful.

General comments

Overall there was a good performance. Candidates at all levels of ability understood the requirements of the paper and the need to employ several skills in answering the different parts to a question.

A diversity in the religions being studied by candidates is being maintained. **Section A** and **Section B** (Christianity and Islam) were the most popular combination of questions with still a significant number of candidates selecting **Section C**, Judaism and combining it with either Christianity or Islam.

The most common rubric error was that candidates answered all the questions in a Section instead of selecting two. However, instances of this were relatively few.

Comments on specific questions

Section A Christianity

Question 1

- (a) The majority of candidates identified the correct event which was the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples and some candidates gained full marks. Other responses were good but lacked sufficient detail to achieve level 4 marks.
- (b) Most candidates considered the active role of the Holy Spirit in the world and its place within the Trinity to be the core of its importance and developed their answer to include the concepts of comforter and guide and the spiritual gifts of the Spirit such as glossolia and healing. Less developed responses concentrated mainly on one or two of these aspects, the most popular being the presence of the Holy Spirit as comforter and guide. The majority of answers were in a range from satisfactory to good.
- (c) This question was well answered and the majority of candidates did not have any difficulty in evaluating different views. Most candidates were able to identify reasons why Easter might be considered the most important festival and also reasons why other festivals might also have some importance. Most responses made some attempt to conclude with a view on whether other festivals should or should not be abandoned in favour of Easter being the only festival.

Question 2

- (a) This was a popular question, which seemed to be universally misunderstood. Lourdes was, by far, the most popular place referred to but unfortunately many candidates described only the story of Bernadette's vision rather than describing details of the pilgrimage site today. This omission led to most answers achieving satisfactory rather than good marks. Some candidates wrote about any Christian pilgrimage site they could remember and attempted to give reasons for going there (usually connected with the life of Christ, rather than a vision or miracle).
- (b) Candidates did significantly better with this question than with **part (a)**. Most candidates were able to identify a range of spiritual, personal and communal benefits to pilgrimage. Common responses included learning about one's religion, strengthening faith, strengthening bonds with other Christians and the powerful experience of being present at a place where events had actually happened.
- (c) It was commendable that those who attempted this question made a good effort to get to grips with the question and examine more than one view. Most answers tended to disagree with the statement that pilgrimage gives people false hope. However, although candidates said they disagreed with the statement, the strongest arguments presented were usually in favour of it. Most recognised that whilst many pilgrims travelled to pilgrim sites in the hope of a miracle of some kind, only a few experienced one. The better answers balanced this by suggesting that faith is based upon more than physical healing and that spiritual healing and comfort can be hoped for when on pilgrimage.

Question 3

- (a) This was a well answered question, with most candidates able to provide an account of different forms of charitable effort. A large number of answers concentrated on financial help. Better answers expanded their description to include practical and spiritual help that could enhance the life of another. Some answers erred on the side of being too general in their descriptions and did not focus on Christians.
- (b) This was also a well answered question. Candidates mainly selected the Two Greatest Commandments and the Golden Rule to explain teachings about love and concern for others (although a significant number of candidates mistakenly identified the Golden Rule as one of the Ten Commandments). The best answers also referred to the example of Christ and his ministry and the teaching in parables such as the Good Samaritan. It was also pleasing to see that some responses gave detailed consideration to the different types of love, including agape.
- (c) This question challenged candidates to evaluate Christian motivation and priorities for helping others. Impressively, candidates rose well to the challenge. Most candidates engaged enthusiastically with views in opposition to the statement. Religious arguments against the statement that Christians should concentrate on helping those who deserve to be helped were strongly expressed. Most concluded that those who appear to not deserve help are often the most in need of it. On the other side of the argument some responses considered the emotional challenges presented to Christians and others of helping the ungrateful or those who are helped repeatedly but fail to benefit.

Section B Islam

Question 4

- (a) This was a question about the rituals concerning the Ka'ba during Hajj. Many candidates failed to read the question properly and gave descriptions, of varying accuracy, of all stages of Hajj instead of focusing on the Ka'ba.
- (b) Mostly, candidates failed to give enough detailed development in their answer to gain the higher level of marks. The importance of Madinah as the place of safety gained by Muhammad (pbuh) and the early Muslims during the Hijrah was well known. Better answers explained further that Muslims visit Madinah during the Hajj as it is the place where Muhammad (pbuh) was buried and because of the Mosque and the tombs of the early followers. There is a spiritual as well as historical importance in visiting the city. Some answers confused Madinah with a range of other places including Mina and Arafat.

- (c) Well balanced answers evaluated the benefits of Hajj as encouraging Muslims to live a more spiritual and fulfilling life but challenged the idea that completion of Hajj alone could make a believer a true Muslim. Most responses also considered the relative importance of the other four Pillars and the fact that Hajj was a Pillar for which exemptions were made unlike, for example, Salah. Some very perceptive answers challenged the definition 'a true Muslim'. For a number of candidates, **part (c)** was the best answer on this question.

Question 5

- (a) This was a question asking for an account of the event remembered on Lailat ul-Qadr. However, the majority of candidates misunderstood the question and described what might happen in the mosque and in the home on Lailat ul-Qadr. Only a few candidates described the first revelation to the Prophet (pbuh) in Cave Hira. Those who did usually gained high marks for accurate and detailed accounts.
- (b) The majority of answers gave a number of reasons for the importance of festivals. The ones that gained the highest marks were answers that had a clear and close focus on the Islamic festivals of Id al-Fitr and Id al-Adha, rather than festivals in general.
- (c) Generally well answered and, again, for some candidates, the best answered part of the question. After exploring a number of views, most responses concluded that right intention was more important than the place of prayer.

Question 6

- (a) **Question 6** was the least popular question in **Section B** and candidates who attempted it tended to give a generic list of charitable activities carried out by an international aid agency. The main criterion for a higher-level mark was that the answer should concentrate on the relief of poverty and not all responses did this. Some candidates listed charitable activities but did not identify an Islamic organisation that carried out this work.
- (b) There were some good answers to this question but many answers focused on general principles concerning love or caring for others with only a brief reference or one example of actual teachings. In better answers, candidates selected material for their answer from the example of the Prophet (pbuh), the importance of the ummah, the practice of Sawm and Zakah and quotations from Qur'an or Hadith, in order to show how these teachings inspired Muslims to love and care for each other.
- (c) Those candidates who had a clear understanding of the principle and practice of Zakah answered this question well. There were clear arguments for and against the statement with most candidates arriving at a conclusion that even if people cannot spare money for others and are exempt from the payment of Zakah they are not exempt from the requirement to be charitable in other ways. Candidates less knowledgeable were also less coherent in their arguments.

Section C Judaism

Question 7

- (a) This was one of the better answered questions in this section with the majority of candidates who attempted the question able to identify most of the items on the Seder Plate and what they symbolise. However, after making a good start on this question with **part (a)** most were less successful with **parts (b)** and **(c)**.
- (b) In answer to this question, candidates needed to structure their answer around the celebration of Pesach to give themselves the scope to write about aspects of the celebration that included the family. Many answers were brief and explained only one or two of these aspects. Some concentrated on the general importance of teaching children the history of their religion. Some candidates did mention the use of the Haggadah and explained the responsibility of the elders to teach children about the Exodus and to thank God for their freedom. Some suggested that the Israelites came out of Egypt in family groups and that survival as a people today depends upon family groups. More comprehensive accounts, including all these aspects, would have resulted in higher marks. Others offered a more limited response, explaining only that festivals bring families together to have a meal.

- (c) Responses here were very mixed there were some good answers that contained perceptive, personal opinions about the need to remember the past as well as the present and how it is the past that has shaped Judaism today. Consideration was given to the importance of tradition for Jewish identity. However, arguments about the importance for Jews to be engaged with the present and the future were not as strong. Some of the weakest answers contained unhelpful, misunderstandings concerning the difference between Orthodox and Reform Judaism.

Question 8

- (a) Confident answers. Most candidates understood that 'coming of age' referred to the Bar Mitzvah ceremony that takes place at the age of thirteen and demonstrated knowledge of the events of the day itself and the preparations for it. Other candidates knew some of the facts but their answers contained notable omissions and a few, mistakenly, wrote about Brit Milah.
- (b) The most common mistake made here was that a number of candidates described the events of a Bat Mitzvah or Bat Chayil instead of explaining the reasons why it might be celebrated. Correct answers referred to the need to celebrate maturity and the importance of the role of the woman in a Jewish home. Some explained how the increasing trend to celebrate Bat Mitzvah in Progressive Judaism reflects the changing role of the female. Some answers were more superficial and referred only to the girl taking on the responsibilities in the home to cook and clean and care for the family.
- (c) Some candidates engaged well with this question and wrote about the many distractions and instances of immorality that might be encountered in the contemporary world. Most showed understanding of the challenges faced by parents in Jewish households. Many suggested that practising religion in the home and having a Jewish education provided continuity and a strong framework that protected children from outside influences. There was also an appreciation of the intolerance shown in society in general for children who are different and the difficulties they face. Some candidates attempted to argue that because of the strength of outside influences it might be easier to bring up children in Reform rather than in Orthodox Judaism but the reasons they gave for this were usually simplistic and based on mistaken stereotypes.

Question 9

- (a) What was required here was a description of Yad Vashem in Jerusalem. Some candidates did give an accurate, detailed description of the memorial site and garden. Others had only limited knowledge of the site. Some completely misunderstood the question and briefly described the Holocaust and attempted to explain why it should be remembered.
- (b) This was better answered than **part (a)** but most responses were general observations about 'making a new start', 'a new year, a new beginning without sins'. Many missed the point of Rosh Hashanah being 'head' of the 'year' and birthday of the world, a celebration of God's kingship of the world, a time of judgement and repentance. Some responses were just a description of what happens on Rosh Hashanah rather than an explanation of why it is important.
- (c) Most candidates argued that kind actions are important for everyone, irrespective of religion and that human beings are kind to each other without any thought of religion or Judaism. Many answers were very general in scope but some candidates did consider the probability that kind actions were more important for religious people who have rules and commands to follow. Only a few candidates considered the special meaning attached to Gemilut hasadim in Judaism.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Paper 0490/23
Paper 2

Key messages

For **part (a)** questions, most candidates were able to confidently select the correct areas of knowledge and a significant number achieved the higher levels of marks with coherent, detailed accounts.

In general, candidates did less well on **part (b)** questions. To enable candidates to achieve higher marks in **part (b)** there is a need to ensure that they understand the assessment objective for these questions. Responses in **part (b)** should demonstrate good understanding of religious teachings and clearly demonstrate the relationship between belief and practice.

The majority of candidates appeared to find the **part (c)** evaluation questions accessible and were able to engage with the topics, offering a variety of views. Personal viewpoints were often original and insightful.

General comments

Section A and Section B, Christianity and Islam were the most popular combination of questions. A number of candidates did select Section C, Judaism and combining it with either Christianity or Islam. Many of the candidates who selected Judaism did not answer all the parts of the questions they selected. Rubric errors were made by candidates who did a 'pick and mix' from the parts of all three questions in a section, this particularly applied to Section C, Judaism.

A minority performed better at **part (c)** questions than others and this perhaps showed lack of preparation on knowledge and understanding for the examination. Some candidates could have improved their performance by more careful reading of the questions.

Comments on specific questions

Section A Christianity

Question 1

- (a) The question asked for a description of Lenten practice and activities and many of the responses were detailed and accurate accounts. Candidates took advantage of the wealth of material that might be used. Many included activities from Ash Wednesday to Holy Week as well as fasting and Bible study. Other accounts were more limited in scope and candidates appeared to be writing from personal experience of 'giving up something' rather than showing that they had studied the many aspects of this period of preparation for Easter.
- (b) Candidates who had demonstrated good knowledge in (a) tended to do well on this question also.
- (c) There were some strong arguments in support of the statement that preparing for Easter is the most important thing a Christian can do and candidates were able to write in some depth about this. To balance the argument candidates needed to consider the relative importance of other Christian duties. However, the alternative views were less strong and so many answers were good attempts but one-sided.

Question 2

- (a) Generally, candidates confined their responses to the religious aspects of the way Christians celebrate Christmas. Answers were comprehensive and covered most aspects including Christmas day activities.
- (b) The selection of two other festivals gave candidates the opportunity to achieve high marks. Some answers were uneven and having initially selected two festivals, explained the importance of only one of them.
- (c) The majority of candidates engaged well with this topic and gave well-balanced answers. Personal viewpoints were perceptive and thoughtful and most were of the opinion that the universal message of love and peace at Christmas is all inclusive but that only Christians celebrate the true meaning of the birth of Jesus.

Question 3

- (a) Sunday observance appeared to be a well-known topic with many accounts containing a combination of facts about church and Sunday school attendances as well as appropriate activities for a day of rest. All the answers focused on Christians but some responses could have gained higher marks with more detailed development of areas such as church services.
- (b) Generally, in this question, the performance was similar to part (a) although some candidates did, in part, repeat descriptions from (a) instead of explaining the advantages of the practices and so did not gain the higher levels of marks.
- (c) Again, candidates engaged well with the topic and most answers offered arguments both for and against the statement (see the note above about the performance of some candidates on part (c) questions).

Section B Islam

Question 4

- (a) This was a question on how Lailat ul-Qadr is celebrated during Ramadan. There was a mixed response to the question. A number of candidates wrote about the whole of the whole month of the fast, spending very little time on the Night of Power, which occurs during the last ten days. This might be addressed when preparing candidates for the examination. Remembrance of Lailat ul-Qadr is celebrated in a number of ways both in the home and in the mosque, as a special attendance or as part of the retreat.
- (b) Most candidates were able to offer a number of reasons why the different rituals of Ramadan might strengthen faith. The best responses were comprehensive and showed good understanding of the benefits of Ramadan. The majority of candidates achieved level 3 marks, perhaps showing that, in general, more thought and time needs to be allocated to answering part (b) questions to gain level 4 marks (see the general comment above).
- (c) Most answers were good or satisfactory. Others were descriptive rather than evaluative with some candidates demonstrating good knowledge of a Muslim's religious duties but not assessing the ability of believers to perform them at all times.

Question 5

- (a) Most candidates had knowledge of three stages of Hajj, the majority selecting the tawaf around the Ka'ba, stoning the pillars at Mina and the sacrifice. Details of the stages were well known and overall the performance on this question was good.
- (b) Candidates who showed awareness of the pivotal importance of Arafat as a stage of Hajj were also able to explain the importance of 'the stand' (wuquf) as the most important day of the Hajj and why if the stand is missed the Hajj is not valid. A necessary part of the answer was also the connection to the forgiveness of sins and Judgement Day, as well as the importance of the plain of Arafat as a site connected to beliefs about Adam and Eve. A significant number of responses only

concentrated on explaining that Arafat had been the site of the Last Sermon of Muhammad (pbuh). These answers often focused on Muhammad (pbuh) rather than on Arafat.

- (c) Good responses to this question produced interesting and insightful personal opinions and the majority of candidates also explored different points of view. Many concluded that Hajj is beneficial and changes lives, if it is performed with the right intention.

Question 6

- (a) There were some good answers here on Id al-Fitr. Candidates who mistakenly described Id al-Adha (please see the general comment above about careful reading of the question) were still able to gain credit for some valid points common to both festivals.

- (b) Answers showed good understanding of the concept of the ummah in Islam.

Candidates at all levels of ability had something to say about the importance of the ummah to the universality of Islam.

- (c) Many good, evaluative comments were made in answers to this question about whether new clothes and presents should be considered a part of religious festivals. Most views were in support of the statement but some also argued that they had an importance in expressing enjoyment of the festival and love towards others.

Section C Judaism

Question 7

- (a) More knowledge about the site of the Western Wall in Jerusalem would have improved candidates' performance. Generally answers were brief and many candidates described what pilgrims did when visiting the Western Wall but did not describe the features of the site. All candidates gained some credit but only a few achieved the higher levels of marks for their response.

- (b) Some candidates had used material in the answer to (a) that would have been appropriate in this response but they did not make the connection. Again, there were many descriptions of what Jews might do at the Western Wall but less explanation of why some Jews might choose to visit this historic site to pray or hold Bar Mitzvahs. On the whole, this question was better answered than part (a).

- (c) This question was usually answered with enthusiasm, many candidates demonstrating their appreciation of the role of religious buildings in the lives of believers but some of the answers were a Christian interpretation of the importance of religious buildings rather than a Jewish one. Some candidates did not refer to Judaism in their answer and so limited their achievement.

Question 8

- (a) There was evidence that candidates chose this question because it was about Shabbat but without carefully reading the question. Many candidates would have improved their mark if they had confined their answer to describing how Shabbat is celebrated in the synagogue. There were many good descriptions of various Shabbat activities in the home and at leisure but these accounts were not answering the question. A number of candidates omitted this part of the question and answered only (b) and (c).

- (b) Answers tended to be very general and many candidates would have improved their answer if they had been able to explain the special nature of the Shabbat meal as more than just a gathering of the family and not working. Most answers needed more development to achieve better marks. They might have included the role of the mother and the meaning of her actions, the marking of the holiness of the Sabbath, the special nature of the father's blessings, his praise of his wife and the symbolism of the challot.

- (c) In contrast to parts (a) and (b), many candidates engaged well with this question and offered personal opinions and different views that focused on the issue of the importance of Jewish families and communities celebrating religious occasions together. Others made strong arguments in favour of the statement that this was the most important way of keeping families together but did not explore another view.

Question 9

- (a) There was a mixed response to this question. Good answers described the teachings about Tzedeka (righteous giving) and other teachings from the Torah about helping the destitute, such as farmers leaving the gleanings of the harvest and fallen fruits for the poor as well as teachings about the appropriate ways to give to others. Other candidates described the different ways in which Jews practise charity for the poor but did not mention the teachings about it.
- (b) This question asked candidates to explain the ways in which Jews might interpret and practise the teachings about helping the poor. Good answers explained the importance to Jews of teaching children to be charitable and using pushkes and the ways in which Gemilut Hasadim (kind actions) help the less fortunate. Some also explained the role of Jewish global organisations and gave examples. Other candidates, who gave only satisfactory answers, had mistakenly used material in part (a) that answered this question (instead of describing the teachings from the Torah) but they did not make the connection.
- (c) Many answers to this question were satisfactory. Some improvement might have been made by a more careful consideration of the significance in Judaism of the belief about being a chosen people: chosen by God to carry out certain commands and responsibilities. Some candidates made good points but did not refer to Judaism.