

# RELIGIOUS STUDIES

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Paper 0490/01

Paper 1

## General comments

This examination session there were a number of candidates who demonstrated an impressive level of knowledge and understanding. The proportion of candidates who seemed uninformed by any academic study was considerably smaller than in previous sessions, though some still showed a lack of preparation for the requirements of the question paper.

Centres are advised to remind candidates of the necessity to adhere carefully to the rubric. There are still candidates who answer more questions than required. A candidate who has attempted a past paper as practice should not commit the error of attempting more questions than are permitted by the rubric. In addition, candidates 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 number of candidates seemed to run out of time, or perhaps energy, failing to complete the last question; but on the other hand many candidates wrote very full answers to all the questions.

Some weaker candidates continue to confuse details of the different religions, for instance having a Jewish wedding conducted by an Imam, or in a church, but in general this sort of error was less frequent than in past sessions.

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'.

## Comments on specific questions

### **Section A**

#### **Question 1**

This question was mostly well done. 'Egypt' was considered too vague to be acceptable as a destination of Christian pilgrimage.

#### **Question 2**

Part (b) was asking for points of information about the *origin* of the Qur'an, for instance, its dictation to and recitation by the Prophet (pbuh). The key point for part (c) is that the Qur'an is the foundation of Islamic Law and is believed by Muslims to provide complete guidance about all aspects of life.

#### **Question 3**

- (a) Almost always correctly answered.
- (b) Candidates often struggled with the spelling of some of the items, but any recognisable attempt was credited.
- (c) Candidates too often resorted to generalisations about 'showing respect to G-d'; not many knew about the injunctions in Scripture concerning the use of the Tallit and Tefillin.

## **Section B**

### **Question 4**

- (a) A wide range of features was offered, and most were acceptable though some stretched the definition of 'religious' to the limit (pews are just seats that happen to be in a church). Candidates would be well advised to limit themselves to the features mentioned in the syllabus. There was sometimes confusion between the functions of the lectern and the pulpit. The cross and the crucifix are too similar to allow both to receive full credit.
- (b) Understanding of the use of icons and the iconostasis was often lacking. A surprising number of candidates thought that the Christian altar is used for sacrifices of animals and incense, confusing it with usage in the Jewish Temple before its destruction. Sensible candidates chose features which had an obvious role in assisting Christian worship; it was difficult to be convincing about the helpfulness of pews or the vestry.

### **Question 5**

- (a) The syllabus mentions only adhan and 'iqamah, so full credit was available for answers dealing with just those, but almost all candidates went on to mention the aqiqah and many referred also to tahnik, animal sacrifice and khitan/circumcision. All the details were usually well known.
- (b) The central importance of these birth ceremonies is that they mark the child's entry into membership of the ummah, which was not always emphasised. Most candidates knew the importance of the naming aspect of aqiqah.

### **Question 6**

- (a) Accounts of the marriage ceremony were usually very full, though the aspect most often overlooked was the recital of the seven blessings before the stamping on the glass.
- (b) The question asked specifically about the importance of the ceremony (in its religious aspects, it should be understood) for the couple, rather than the general importance and significance of marriage. The best answers focused on the transition of the couple from being two individuals to being a family unit, following the requirements of Scripture and tradition, and the recognition of this by the community. The ceremony itself is not particularly relevant to procreation and the legitimacy of children.

## **Section C**

### **Question 7**

- (a) Some candidates failed to mention the second religion at all, and others offered extremely unbalanced answers. It should be realised that marks are apportioned equally to the two parts of the question, and answering half of the question means that a maximum of half marks can be awarded. Some candidates who chose Pesach/Passover for their Jewish festival gave an account of the historical background of the festival rather describing how it is celebrated; even those who did describe the festival were often weak on details of the Seder meal and celebration.
- (b) Good answers explained the general importance of festivals and/or fasts as religious remembrance or discipline, and it was not necessary to consider each religion separately.

### **Question 8**

- (a) The question was specifically about leaders of *local* communities, so for Christianity, bishops and the Pope were not really appropriate. Answers on Christianity often lacked a wider perspective of the varying emphases on the work of leaders (priests, ministers, pastors, lay leaders) in different denominations. Some of the answers about Judaism confused the work of the Rabbi with that of priests in the Temple before its destruction, and others overlooked the role of the hazan/cantor.

- (b)** Many candidates found it difficult to move beyond pious generalisations in responses to this question. Good answers explained how specific different activities of a religious and pastoral nature were of benefit to the believers. In this context it is not necessary to consider each religion separately.

# RELIGIOUS STUDIES

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Paper 0490/02

Paper 2

## General comments

The standard of work produced for this paper was considerably higher than in previous years. Candidates seemed to be far more knowledgeable about the subject matter, and, in particular, their knowledge of Judaism and Islam was better. There were fewer rubric errors and very few answers where a candidate did not feel that he or she could make at least an attempt at an answer.

In general, candidates reached higher levels in their answers to part **(a)** of each question, where they were asked for a demonstration of knowledge, than in part **(b)**, where they were asked for explanation of the importance of different religious practices. They often wrote more for part **(a)** than for part **(b)**, despite part **(b)** being worth more marks.

## Comments on Individual Questions

### Question 1

- (a)** This question was generally answered well, with many candidates able to give a considerable amount of detail about public worship in Christianity and Islam. Weaker answers tended to lack detail.
- (b)** For this question, better candidates gave clear explanations of the importance for believers of public worship. Nearly all chose not to take each religion in turn but to write about public worship in general, which was a sensible choice. High-scoring answers included ideas about believers being supported in faith, learning from the religious community leaders, sharing prayers and feeling a sense of unity. Weaker answers tended to add description of public worship rather than explaining its importance.

### Question 2

- (a)** Most candidates were able to give thorough and accurate accounts of birth ceremonies in Christianity and Judaism. The best candidates showed an impressive knowledge of Jewish terms and recognition of different customs in different branches of Christianity.
- (b)** This question was not generally answered quite as well as part **(a)**. Some candidates were able to explain the importance of welcoming a baby into the faith of the parents, giving the baby status as part of the religious community and praying for the future life of the child, but others found it difficult to find enough to say.

### Question 3

- (a)** This was a popular question, and was generally answered well with clear and accurate detail, although some candidates were less confident in their knowledge of Islam. Most candidates recognised the need to focus on the religious ceremony rather than on social customs surrounding marriage.
- (b)** This was probably the best-answered of all the part **(b)** questions. Candidates were able to give a good range of reasons why a religious marriage is important for believers, such as the recognition of the relationship by the rest of the community, the solemnity of the marriage before God encouraging a couple to stay together, the importance of a religious wedding for legitimizing sexual relationships and the birth of children, and obedience to the scriptures.

**Question 4**

- (a) This was a popular choice of question. Candidates were usually very knowledgeable about pilgrimage in Islam, and were able to give a great deal of detail about the Hajj and its requirements. They did not write as much about Judaism because there is less to say, but most were able to describe a pilgrimage to the Western Wall in Jerusalem.
- (b) This question was also answered well. Many recognised that pilgrimage is an obligation for Muslims but not for Jews until the Temple is rebuilt. They described how pilgrimage can provide a sense of focus and unity for believers, and how it can be used to revive personal faith. They wrote also about the feelings that can be evoked by being in the same place where an admired religious leader has been.

**Question 5**

- (a) This was a less popular choice, but those who answered it usually wrote well about the different kinds of literature in the Bible. Some were confused about the differences between scriptures for the two religions, but most were able to give accurate answers. Weaker responses tended to be in the form of a list rather than a more detailed description.
- (b) In their answers to this question, most candidates wrote about how respect is shown by following the teachings of the Bible and making an effort to study it. Some were also able to write about how copies of the Bible are treated with respect, but only a few included details about the Sefer Torah in the synagogue being kept in the Ark and covered with valuable cloths.

# RELIGIOUS STUDIES

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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 analyse the issues well, and wrote with authority and accuracy. Many candidates gained a high level of achievement in **Questions 1 to 3**. There was evidence of independent thought particularly on **Question 5**, and some answers to **Question 4** also produced commentary of commendable depth and detail on each of the sources.

In contrast, there was a tendency amongst some candidates to manage the time available ineffectively, so that too much time was spent on **Questions 1 to 3** and not sufficient time was allowed for answering **Questions 4 and 5**, which carried higher marks.

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

However, 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 focus in the future.

## Comments on specific questions

### **Question 1**

This was answered well by most candidates, most of whom picked up on the call to action. The majority achieved Level 3 or 4, and there was some emotive and powerful description of the true meaning of poverty.

### **Question 2**

On the whole, this question was extremely well answered and there were a good number of candidates who gained full marks.

Most candidates looked at Sources A, B and C, in turn. The most common error, where there was error, was for candidates to over-generalise their responses. For example, answers to Source A often said a lot about money, but not so much about Jesus' instruction to sell **all** possessions and give the proceeds to the poor.

Source B was dealt with mainly by paraphrase, although the best responses linked the passage to the demands of the Jewish Law generally, for example, justice, compassion, empathy, etc.

Most candidates understood that Source C was suggesting the idea of a reward, although quite a few did not explain what the reward would be, or else they simply repeated the wording of the source. The over-arching theme of the Sources was that of heavenly reward, although several candidates suggested an equally good link by saying that all of the passages were encouraging empathy.

### **Question 3**

Generally well answered, however, the response to the Gospel passage, Source D, was generally a lot stronger than Source E, the Qur'an. However, where candidates did understand this second passage, they easily gained good marks. Some candidates suggested that the difference between Allah's approval of public alms giving and his greater approval of private giving was the difference between open charity and inner spirituality.

A fair number of weaker candidates began copying from the Sources at this point, even some who had answered well on **Questions 1 and 2**.

#### **Question 4**

There were a good number of impressive and clever answers to this question, where candidates met the challenge to cover all six sources and demonstrated a good understanding of the relationship between belief and practice, to gain Level 4. The majority of candidates were able to demonstrate a mature enough level of understanding to gain Level 3.

Some candidates appeared to have reached their potential by this point in the exam and there were a large number of answers which were merely copied from Sources G, H and I and gave only a brief comment on the pictures J, K and L.

Source G called for a clear knowledge of Paul's instruction to the Galatian Churches and how this is put into practice in the Christian Church. The Jerusalem reference was not understood by candidates. A considerable number of candidates were aware of weekly contributions and tithes but most candidates thought that the 'I' referred to in this source was Jesus or God. The best responses showed the need for preparation and saving to respond to the needs of the poor, according to ability.

In discussing Source H, surprisingly, the vast majority of candidates copied this in its entirety, seeming unable to paraphrase or improve on it. Even candidates who performed extremely well elsewhere on the paper were guilty of this. Those who did attempt an individual response showed a perceptive appreciation of the Jewish attitude to tzedakah as well as the voluntary collections of pushke.

Source I was, again, often copied in its entirety. However, the majority of candidates were also able to explain and compare the obligation of zakah with the spontaneity of sadaqah jariah.

Source J was often linked to Source I in the best responses, and Muslim aid for refugees was seen as an important extension of the religious attitude that created the sadaqah jariah projects. Of the picture sources, Source J elicited the best responses from candidates.

Source K was the most misunderstood source and only a few candidates managed more than Level 2 comments on this source.

Source L was sometimes responded to in detail and with perception about training young people to be charitable. Often the average and weaker candidate only wrote out the caption accompanying the pictures of children.

For some weaker candidates, fatigue appeared to have set in at this point and some answers to **Question 4** were very general, without specific reference to any individual source.

#### **Question 5**

A number of candidates achieved Level 3 in their answers to **Question 5**, but comparatively few made it to Level 4, primarily because of a weakness in evaluative technique. The majority argued that religious duty, together with the inducement of a heavenly reward from God, meant that believers had to give more than non-believers, and the arguments in defence of this view were lucid and detailed, making good use of the texts used in the 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 only to achieve Level 4. Centres need to address this issue.

Relatively few candidates were able to offer arguments that respected the stance of non-believers or appreciated the motivation behind secular contributions to charity. Whilst there were some full mark answers to this question there was an identifiable flaw across all Centres in the preparation of candidates to offer a balanced view on this issue.