

Examine the importance of religion as an indicator of culture.

(80 marks)

Marking Scheme:

Number of aspects discussed:	3 @ 20 marks each	4 @ 15 marks each
<u>For each aspect:</u>		
Identifying aspect	4 marks	3 marks
Discussion	8 x SRPs	6 x SRPs

Overall Coherence 20 marks graded* 20 marks graded*

In this answer, I choose 3 aspects to discuss (1. Christianity, 2. Islam and, 3. Judaism). Overall coherence means how well your answer is structured (Introduction, main section, conclusion – well-structured and coherent) and do you keep to the point/ answer the question directly.

Religion plays a huge role in people's culture and therefore, is an important aspect of cultural identity. Religion often influences how people dress. Orthodox Jews also dress very distinctively giving them a shared identity. Men wear beards and dress in black. They wear a skullcap to cover their head in God's presence while women wear long dresses with long sleeves. Religion also influences people's diet. For example, both Buddhists and Hindus believe that it is wrong to kill animals. The Hindu belief that cows are sacred animals affects the diets of people in India. For this essay I will discuss the importance of Christianity, Islam and Judaism and their traditions which act as cultural indicators.

Christianity is the largest religious group in the world with over 2 billion followers, or 33% of the world's population, including Roman Catholics, Protestants and Christian Orthodox followers. Christians believe that Jesus Christ was the messiah prophesied in the Old Testament, and the missionary aspect of this monotheistic religion led to the Christian faith spreading to Latin America through Portuguese/Spanish colonisation while the British and French spreading Christianity to the USA and Australia. As a cultural indicator, Roman Catholicism is conservative with regard to birth control, marriage, homosexuality and priestly celibacy. In many Christian societies, cultural traditions are associated with religion. Christian feasts are official holidays, eg. Christmas and Easter, and religious events such as Communion and Confirmation are important celebrations in Christian countries. Important dates which reflect Catholic culture and traditions include Ash Wednesday at the beginning of Lent (March) as well as Easter (Apr 14, 2017). Good Friday is considered the most important global date in the Christian calendar as it represents the death and resurrection of Christ. The cultural landscape is also influenced through Christian churches, monasteries, round towers (eg. Glendalough) and religious shrines (eg. Croagh Patrick). Irish culture was heavily influenced through schooling, primary in particular, as it was run by Christian denominations where currently 90% of primary schools are under Catholic Patronage. Irish sport has also been influenced by religion as GAA clubs are usually divided by diocesan parish. Also on our national airwaves the angelus is at the start of RTE news (6 o'clock) and the 12 o'clock news on Radio 1. Constitutionally, Irish culture was heavily influenced through Church-State relations. This can be seen historically through the 20th Century, for example the Government Report of the Committee on Evil Literature (1927), based on a

Catholic perspective because the influence the church had on the government of the time, led to over 1,000 books to be prohibited based on their 'immoral' material. These influences looked to guide the social norms of the time and therefore culture. The customs and social behaviours of Irish society continued to be influenced by the likes of the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1935, which raised the age of consent to 17 but also banned the sale and importation of contraceptives. Thus Catholic perspective was also reflected throughout the Christian world as previously also mentioned in Brazil. More recently, 2015, the Thirty-fourth Amendment of the Constitution was enacted that permits marriage to be contracted by two persons without distinction as to their sex, creating the Marriage Equality Act 2015. We can see from this that in Ireland, the increasing influence of Atheism is beginning to influence how much sway the Catholic traditions have on our society

When examining Islam as my second religion, Christian success served as a model for this monotheistic religion which appeared in the Arabian peninsula, founded by the prophet Mohammed in the seventh century. Islam is now the world's fastest growing religion, with an estimated 1.7 billion followers. Mohammed was an Arab who was born in Mecca in about 570 AD. He preached that there was only one god, Allah and that Christ was a prophet of Islam. Islam is divided into the Sunni and Shia branches. Mecca, in Saudi Arabia is the birth place of the prophet Mohammed and Medina, also in Saudi Arabia is the burial place of the Islamic prophet Mohammed. These are by far the most important sacred shrines and are at the heart of Islam acting as cultural indicators and places of worship. Followers of Islam see Hajj as a demonstration of the solidarity of the Muslim people, and is considered a mandatory religious duty. This is therefore a vital part of their culture. During Hajj, pilgrims join processions of hundreds of thousands of people, who simultaneously converge on Mecca for the week of the Hajj, and perform a series of rituals: each person walks counter-clockwise seven times around the Kaaba (the cube-shaped building and the direction of prayer for the Muslims). Followers of Islam, called Muslims, are found throughout North Africa, the Middle East and South East Asia, while migration has pooled cultural groups in Britain and France. As a cultural indicator, customs and traditions are heavily influenced by the religion. In some Muslim states, the civil law is based on religious law (Sharia law) eg. Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Pakistan (which are predominantly Sunni). This legal system is defined as a *theocracy* – where the laws and government of the country are guided by their religion. Strict rules apply to diet (eg. Halal meat) and dress. The role of women is restricted in some states. They have limited access to education and may not have the right to vote, or travel abroad unless accompanied by a male guardian. In the Islamic religion, women are expected to cover their heads with scarves called the hijab. These traditions are the cultural indicators which set Islam apart from other world religions. Many festivals throughout the world are based on religious beliefs and therefore, also form an important aspect of cultural identity. Muslims fast for one month each year between dawn and dusk in a period known as Ramadan. Muslims celebrate the feast of Eid al-Fitr, which marks the end of the Ramadan fasting period. Muslims do not eat pork or pork products. Finally, the religious landscape of regions are an indicator of the populations cultural identity. When visitors enter a town or city, it is likely that they will observe places of religious worship, which form a crucial aspect of cultural identity. Muslim countries have landscape features such as mosques with towers called minarets from which Muslims are called to pray each day.

Judaism is a major world religion with over 18 million members in the world today. Judaism dates back 4000 years and they believe in one God called Yahweh whom they call

“lord”, this makes it the oldest world religion that believes in one god. Abraham was the founder of Judaism. One of the Jewish cultural traditions which acts as an important indicator is the *Passover*. Here Jewish people eat flat bread which is a symbol of when they had to leave Egypt in a rush without time to eat or for the bread to rise. It is a big meal celebrated by all the family. Jewish people believe that after the Exodus Moses received the Torah directly from god on Mount Sinai, which is the Jews sacred text, containing over 600 laws. Each day Jews say the Shema (morning and evening), while wearing Tefillin, small leather boxes containing the Shema at prayer time. They also touch the Mezuzah containing the Shema which is on their doorframe. Every week they celebrate the Sabbath, a day set aside for rest and prayer that begins at sunset on Friday evening and ends at Sunset on Saturday. These are religious ceremony's at home and in the Synagogue. The Havdalah is a ceremony marking the end of the Sabbath at sunset on the Saturday evening whereby the father says a blessing and lights a candle. Another cultural indicator is the Kiddush; is a meal on the Sabbath whereby the father blesses a cup of wine representing joy before the meal and passes it around to be drunk from and then blesses loaves of bread, sprinkles salt over them and passes them around to be eaten. This meal is Kosher, ie. prepared according to Jewish rules, and ends with a prayer. Jewish men and women also cover their heads in the Synagogue as a mark of respect to God. Women wear a hat or scarf and men wear boys over 13 wear a Kippah. All ceremony's are performed in Hebrew by the rabbi in each synagogue who teaches the Torah. Yom Kippur is the holiest day in the Jewish Calendar and is the Day of Atonement. Jews fast and pray for the full day. Symbolic actions are used to express Jewish beliefs about Gods presence in people's lives. Symbols such as Menorah are used, which is a special seven branched candlestick lamp that is lit. Bar-Mitzvah is a another cultural indicator which marks a rite of passage for boys who turn 13 in the Jewish Community. This is when he becomes a “Son of the laws” at a special ceremony in the Synagogue and can now read the Sefer Torah. Bat-Mitzvah is the equivalent for a girl. Jews do not try to convert people to their faith, as there are no missionaries trying to convert others. You become Jewish by being born of a Jewish mother.

Therefore, the varying traditions found within each of the three religions, whether it influence dress, diet, customs or feast days distinguishes each from the other.