



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
June 2011**

Religious Studies

RST3E

(Specification 2060)

Unit 3E New Testament

Report on the Examination

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General Comments

The marks awarded covered the full range. All questions seemed accessible, with Question 1 being the least popular and Question 3 being the most popular.

There were some very good answers that reflected a high level of knowledge and understanding of the course topics with good use made of scholarship and illustrations from the text of John's Gospel. It should be noted that no credit is given for just naming a scholar unless there is some discussion about their particular contribution to the issue in question.

A feature that was noticeable this year was the number of candidates who started every answer with a repeat of the question, then explained what it meant and then explained how they were going to answer it. Sometimes this took up half a page of writing. Such an approach only seems necessary if there is some doubt or perceived ambiguity about what the question is asking. Hopefully, there is no ambiguity in the question set. Certainly there was no indication in the marking of the scripts that there was a need for such an introduction.

Candidates should be aware that it is in the attention to addressing the focus of the question that differentiation in the application of the level descriptors occurs. For instance, Question 03 has the focus of John's portrayal of Jesus and his ministry, whilst Question 05 has nature of signs. Many candidates continue to ignore the focus and write a general commentary on the text. In such cases it is very difficult to discern what the question was from the answer given. In many cases it was clear that the candidate did have good knowledge of the material but did not select according to the focus. Skills of selection are an important aspect of the AO1 descriptors. The structure of the essay should be the focus, rather than the text.

Examiners are aware that candidates have use of the Bible in the exam. Therefore, little credit is given for narrative or long quotes from the text. What is required is allusions to the text as illustration or explanation. The text needs to be explained in terms of how it illustrates or explains the point being made.

Question 1 *The context of John's Gospel*

01 Although the least popular question with just 10% of candidates answering it, those candidates had prepared the material well, with answers reflecting a wide range of background material. Good use was made of evidence from the text. Most candidates made reference to the Dead Sea Scrolls and discussed the new light that they had shed on the subject.

02 Again, this was well answered and in fact achieved the highest mean of the AO2 questions. The strongest candidates focussed on the "essential" aspect of the quotation. There were a few candidates who gave lots of AO1 that should have been used in their answer to 01 rather than here. Candidates should note that there is no cross crediting between the AO1 and the AO2 answers.

Question 2 *The nature, role and purpose of the discourses in John's Gospel*

03 Questions that focus on a particular text always attract less able candidates into writing a commentary on the text. Almost by accident, the candidate will include in such a commentary material that is relevant to the focus (i.e. portrayal of Jesus and his ministry). However, such answers will generally be awarded a level 3. If the candidate reorganised the material to specifically address the focus, then a much higher level would be awarded.

Candidates seemed to struggle with the discourse "I am the True Vine" and often repeated what was in the text. The range of discussion was often limited to Jesus as portrayed as both human and divine. From just reading some answers, it would have been difficult to work out what question they were answering. As stated in the general comments, the structure of the essay should be the focus not the text.

- 04** Some candidates continue to struggle to present high level AO2 answers and fail to reason and critically analyse. In A2 the evaluative element is weighted more than that in AS, and therefore has a greater effect on the total mark and grade awarded. Candidates need to be made aware of the level descriptors for AO2 to understand what is required. Often candidates confuse reasoned and justified argument with opinion, and present two sides without any evaluating of the strengths and weaknesses of the respective views.

This particular AO2 question gained the lowest mean of the AO2 questions, yet the issue is taken directly from the Specification. It is important that the Specification is followed as a structure for teaching the material, since questions often use similar wording.

Question 3 *The nature, role and purpose of signs in John's Gospel*

- 05** The question on signs continues to be the most popular. However, there was some evidence that candidates struggle with the term "nature". The teachers' notes available on the AQA website explain this term and what is expected. In brief, it is about the characteristics of the material, i.e. what identifies that material as a sign.

Surprisingly few candidates discussed the background idea of the word "sign" as a signpost or referred to the common characteristic of symbolism. Some candidates ignored the reference to two signs and referred to a number of signs or just one.

- 06** There were some good evaluative answers given with most candidates focussing on the claim. Some candidates struggled to argue against the claim.

Question 4 *The nature, role and purpose of the passion and resurrection narratives*

- 07** There were some good answers covering material from both chapters (18-19). Some candidates clearly had prepared for a question about the resurrection and so strayed into that material in their answer.

Selection of particular features of John's passion account were well explained and illustrated, though only a few referred to glory/glorification.

The material on purpose was less focussed and tended to be briefer than that on nature. Candidates generally coped better with the concept of "nature" in this question than they did in Question 05. Why that should be so is not clear. It may be that the passion material is a block of two chapters where the emphasis and unique material is easier to identify, whereas the signs are a number of different narratives with some common features.

- 08** This is a debate that has been well rehearsed by candidates. Again, the weak answers list both sides of the debate but does not include evaluation of their relative strengths and weaknesses as arguments. This weighing up of an argument is what is meant by critical analysis in the level descriptors. There needs to be an evaluation of the argument to assess the extent the argument is successful. Listing arguments without considering how convincing/successful they are is more akin to AO1 than AO2.

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