



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
June 2012**

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; the most popular was question 3 and the least popular question was question 1.

Overall, 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. In general, the answers were more focused than previous years and as a consequence, more concise.

Less able students continue to narrate the text rather than make reference to it to support or illustrate a point. Examiners are aware that students have use of the Bible in the exam. Therefore, little credit is given for narrative or long quotes from the text. From just reading some answers, it would have been difficult to work out what the question was. The structure of the essay should be the focus, not the text.

Some students 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. Students need to be made aware of the level descriptors for AO2 to understand what is required. Often students confuse reasoned and justified argument with opinion and presenting two sides without any evaluating as to the strengths or weaknesses of the respective views.

Question 1 *The context of John's Gospel*

01 Although the least popular question, those students that attempted it had prepared the material well. This question produced some high scoring answers reflecting a good understanding of the context of John's Gospel. Good use was made of evidence from the text. Most students structured the answer by identifying the various situations and needs of the Early Church. Many students discussed developing Christology and inaugurated eschatology. There were also some good discussions about reaching out to new converts as well as an apologetic need.

02 In contrast to the first part of the question (01), this was less well answered. The strongest students produced reasoned arguments with critical analysis. However, less able students tended just to list the points for and the points against. They also tended to just argue either that knowledge of background was relevant or that it was irrelevant. The more able discussed the *degree* to which knowledge of background was 'irrelevant'.

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

03 This was a general question on purpose and so students could select from a variety of the discourses to illustrate. Many students seemed to have been well prepared for this topic. Though most included the teaching about the person of Jesus as a purpose of the discourses, a significant number did not discuss the "I am" reference and its possible link to Exodus 3:14. Some students worked through each of the discourses in turn and so drifted into a text commentary on each discourse. The more able had key purposes as the structure and illustrated across a range of the discourses.

04 This particular A02 question was well answered. Many discussed the differences from the synoptic gospels and the developed Christology. There were some good discussions about the possible early date of the Gospel and John the Apostle as reliable eye witness and author. More able students focused on the 'how far' aspect in their conclusion.

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

05 Questions that focus on a particular text always attract less able students into writing a commentary on the text. Almost by accident, the student will include in such a commentary material that is relevant to the focus (i.e. purpose of the signs). However, it will not be credited a high level of response. At the other extreme, some less able students made hardly any reference to the Crippled Man text and just wrote in general terms on the purpose of the signs. It was noticeable that a significant number of students focused on the Feeding of the Five Thousand as their example. It was as though they had assumed the question would be about the Feeding of the Five Thousand. Or else they had revised that as an example that could be used to answer on purpose of signs. Other signs were credited and expected but students were expected to focus on the Crippled Man in particular.

The question on signs continues to be the most popular but students do need to keep to the focus of the question. Surprisingly few students discussed the background idea of the word “sign” as a signpost.

06 There were some good evaluative answers given with most students clearly focussing on the claim. Some students discussed the alternative interpretations of who “people at the time” referred to – those at the time of Jesus or those at the time when the Gospel was written. A few students drifted into discussion about modern readers but this was not considered a valid understanding of the question unless it was clearly linked in some way to how John understood the signs.

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

07 Though not a popular question, there were some good answers. However, there were also some disappointing answers in that some students wrote about the passion rather than the resurrection, whilst others limited their answer to the actual day of resurrection rather than the whole of the resurrection narratives. It is worrying that students at this level can confuse the passion with the resurrection.

Clearly, those students who discussed the whole of the resurrection narratives moved on from just talking about Jesus as human and divine.

08 As in other AO2 answers, the less able student lists both sides of the debate but does not evaluate their relative strengths and weaknesses as arguments. This weighing up and assessing the relative strengths and weaknesses of the arguments is what is meant by critical analysis in the level descriptors. There needs to be an evaluation of the argument to assess the extent to which the argument is successful. Listing arguments without considering how convincing/successful they are, is more akin to A01 than A02.

However, many students did use some good examples from the text to support their arguments and concluded there was a balance between the two aspects. Some students made a good case out for there not being a balance between the two narratives.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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