



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

**Religious Studies**

**RST3F**

**(Specification 2060)**

**Unit 3F Religion and Contemporary Society**

***Report on the Examination***

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## **General comments**

There was a small entry for this unit, but there were some excellent scripts produced. It was good to see the ways in which students had engaged with relevant literature and with current events to illustrate their responses.

### **Question 1 *Religion responding to the challenges facing the world***

This was the most popular question on the paper.

**01** As this was a ‘summarise’ question, covering two areas, war and environmental issues, it had been anticipated that the challenge would lie in the appropriate selection of material across the two areas. In fact, the great majority of students did not read the question carefully enough, and wrote about the *attitudes* of the religion(s). Whilst a little credit was allowed for this, clearly they could not score well if they were not answering the question set. A few students who did look at actions came up with some simplistic responses. There is plenty of evidence of collective, national and local actions on these issues, with which students should have been familiar.

**02** There were some thoughtful and well reasoned responses here, arguing on both sides of the discussion. Some students made valid points about the immediacy of war, versus the longer term effects of environmental issues. Some discussed the fact that major wars are fought for resources, so that war and environmental issues are inextricably linked, and some were able to look at the millenarianist views of some religious groups who may see both war and environmental destruction in positive terms as ‘signs of the times’.

### **Question 2 *Challenges to religion in contemporary society***

**03** There were some outstanding answers here, showing depth and breadth of understanding, and the ability to exemplify their answers well. Some had obviously read Munby’s ‘The Idea of a Secular Society’ and had used this work very well. It should be emphasised, however, that it was perfectly possible to gain the highest marks without reference to this work. The ‘model’ of a ‘secular society’ is examined in many texts, and students were able to draw on a range of ways in which such a society operates, and to explore the separation of religion from public life and the implications of this within a secular society. Some students were able to draw on particular examples from the modern world to illustrate the concept of a secular society. Quite a number of students, however, saw the word ‘secular’ and proceeded to write about secularisation. Whilst a secular society may be seen to be the end product of the process of secularisation, the two are separate topics, so students who took this approach could only gain incidental credit.

**04** Where students had fully appreciated the nature of ‘a secular society’ in 03, they were able to address this part well. Some weaker answers merely approached this answer in terms of ‘decline’ and thus their responses were limited. The best were able to tease out issues such as the tensions between low levels of religious practice, and the fact that religion still plays an important part in public life in the UK today. Some were able to make useful comparisons with other societies which are deemed ‘secular’ to refute the idea of the UK society meeting this description.

### **Question 3 *New forms of spirituality both within and outside religions***

**05** There were a small number of answers to this question, but some of these were quite well informed, and were able to write in an informed way about the work of the unit. Several students penalised themselves by not giving exemplification. This is always necessary in order to access the higher levels of the mark scheme. Some students went into quite

lengthy comments on the work of William James. Whilst this was not totally irrelevant, it sometimes tended to detract from the main focus of the question.

**06** Answers to this question generally did not focus sufficiently on the question. There was a specific demand in the claim about interest in religious experience being a response to a highly materialistic, commercialised society. Several students were obviously producing their prepared answers to the idea of the interest in spirituality being a response to a decline in institutional religion. Whilst parts of such a discussion could be relevant, it was not the same question.

#### **Question 4 *Religion and national identity***

**07** Given the timing of the examination, just before the Jubilee weekend, there was much going on which students could use in answer to this question, and some made some good links. Some students made a good attempt to explore what is meant by ‘national identity’ in this context, looking at the sense of belonging, symbolism and rituals. However, some students did not really get much further than the concepts of identity which appear on the AS paper. Some wrote at length about aspects of civic religion. Some of this was relevant, but it often needed a sharper focus. Few were able to comment on the significance of the parish system, or on the different forms of linkage between religion and national identity in Scotland and in Wales.

**08** The answers to this question tended to be focused rather more on civic religion, or on, for example, the role of the monarch, or the position of bishops in the House of Lords than on the whole idea of a linkage between religion and national identity. Again, this emphasises the importance of students reading carefully the question set.

#### **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

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