



## **General Certificate of Education**

# **Religious Studies (2060)**

**RSS05**    **either**    The History of Christianity  
              **or**            Religion, Art and the Media

## **Report on the Examination**

*2010 examination - June series*

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## General Comments

There was a clear upturn in the standard of scripts this year. Again Church History proved the less popular option on this paper, a little more than 10% of candidates submitting answers to this part.

The majority of candidates were clearly well prepared for the new numbering system, but a few were not; candidates need to be reminded that each question is now broken down into two separately numbered parts e.g. question 1 has parts 01 and 02, question 5 parts 09 and 10, rather than parts (a) & (b) as has previously been the case. This is illustrated in published exemplification.

## Section A: History of Christianity

### Question 1 *The Celtic Church*

#### Part 01

There were very few answers to this question. Key points were covered in a rather general way. The organisational differences were addressed adequately, as was the importance of monasteries to the development of Celtic Christianity. However, such answers focused on the development of Celtic Christianity in Ireland and made little reference to mainland Britain. Further development about the relationship between Roman Church and Celtic Christianity in mainland Britain, up to and including the Synod of Whitby, would have been beneficial.

#### Part 02

Whilst answers made reference to the way in which Celtic Christianity evolved and some reference to the distinctiveness of Celtic spirituality, there was little evaluation of the concept of 'Church', or the way in which Celtic Christianity included adoption and adaption of druidic society, and how this influenced the organisational structure and thus contributed to the distinctive ethos of Celtic Christianity.

### Question 2 *The Protestant Reformation*

#### Part 03

It was evident that most candidates had a sound knowledge of the teachings and key theological ideas of Calvin though not all used this to good effect when responding to the question. At the lower end there were some very general answers which tended to focus on the differences between Calvin and Luther and much was made of theme of predestination, rather than specifically addressing the question set. The better answers focused on the question and on the practice and organisation of the church. In the main most of these candidates were able to provide some clear understanding of Calvin's organisation e.g. fourfold order of authority and the importance of the Consistory; and substantiated this with sound exemplification of his work in Geneva. Surprisingly few could provide Calvin's definition of the church, or his distinction between the church visible and the church invisible, and only the very best candidates were able to make clear reference to Calvin's writings in the Institutes and Ordinances.

## **Part 04**

This part of the question produced a very mixed set of responses. The better answers made clear reference to the effects of Calvin's reforms outside Geneva, particularly in Scotland and the Netherlands and contrasted this with way in which Geneva remained a focal point and several made reference to Knox's description of Geneva as 'The perfect city of Christ'. Such answers were in the minority and the majority resorted to a binary GCSE approach to evaluation with little analysis or evidence of reasoning.

### **Question 3 *The Catholic Reformation***

#### **Part 05**

Answers to this question tended to be either clear and focused, or else very general, with very little in between. Several candidates failed to note the word 'before', in the question and proceeded to write at length about reforms made by the Council of Trent. The better answers did focus on the development of new orders, the Oratory of Divine Love, the Theatines etc. and the attitudes of the individual popes themselves. One or two excellent answers traced the internal calls for reform from the turn of 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards and included in some detail and to good effect the ideas of Martin Luther before his excommunication.

#### **Part 06**

There were some promising evaluations here and several candidates commented on and analysed the effects of key individuals such as Ignatius Loyola, and Contarini and their continued influence of the reform of the church and how the internal calls for reform resulted in reforms proposed the Council of Trent, and contrasted this with the outside influences of the Protestant reformation. Weaker answers tended to focus almost exclusively on the outside factors rather than evaluating the effects of the early internal calls for reform.

### **Question 4 *The rise of Methodism***

#### **Part 07**

Few candidates attempted this question. Most were able to make reference to some of the key distinctive features of 18<sup>th</sup> century Methodism, and were able to provide clear exemplification of them. The structural distinctiveness of 18<sup>th</sup> century Methodism was clearly well known, and accurate reference was made to class and covenant membership, the arrangements of circuits and the educational and social opportunities for leadership. However, few were able to comment on the development of theological ideas or the distinctive relationship with the Church of England.

#### **Part 08**

Most answers were able to highlight the development of Methodism from the revivalist movements of 18<sup>th</sup> century and were able to comment effectively on the fact that Methodism appeared to meet the needs of the population which the established church appeared not to do. Counter arguments were often weak in comparison, and few commented upon the role and influence of Wesley as a significant factor in developing the distinctive features. Again there was little, if any, reference to theological ideas.

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## Section B Religion, Art and the Media

### Question 5 *The nature and purpose of religious art*

#### Part 09

This question produced a wide range in quality of responses. The question was very clearly steered towards ways in which art had been used as a means of education, and not towards general observations about the purpose of religious art. Many candidates began by quoting, or in several cases misquoting, the four purposes of religious art suggested by Graham Howes in 'The Art of the Sacred', and proceeded to examine all four purposes of religious art to which the educational aspect was often purely incidental. The weakest candidates failed to understand that didactic was synonymous with educational. Thus, at the lower end of the mark range, candidates' responses were often far too general, lacked focus and at worst contained little of direct relevance to the question set. Examiners felt that there was a considerable number of candidates writing a pre-prepared answer which they were determined to make fit the question rather than addressing the question which was actually set. There were some very weak exemplifications, ranging from classroom posters to children's religious picture books, whilst some credit was given where appropriate, answers which utilised these examples and little more failed to progress much beyond Level 2.

In contrast, at the top end of the spectrum there were answers which showed considerable depth, and which commented upon the diversity of religious art specifically used as a means of religious education. There were some excellent exemplifications of stained glass windows as a means of education, and clear references were also made to architecture and the liturgy itself as further examples of means of education. Some candidates made reference to medieval mystery plays and more modern dramatic art, others made legitimate use of religious music as an example of a didactic art form. The best candidates were those who could think widely and provide clear and accurate exemplification with both breadth and depth.

#### Part 10

Evaluations of the view presented in the question were again wide ranging. Here it was legitimate to bring in and analyse the various other purposes of religious art and provide some debate as to which, if any, was the most important purpose or whether importance could be fixed in a hierarchical way. There were some very promising answers which considered the inspirational power of art against the didactic and institutional elements. The better answers provided clear reasoning in their evaluation and a conclusion which was clearly drawn from that reasoning, rather than a weak conclusion agreeing with the statement tacked onto two brief and pedestrian paragraphs in the 'on the one hand, on the other hand' style.

### Question 6 *The nature and purpose of religious art*

#### Part 11

There were two common errors in response to this question which left some candidates struggling for marks. The first and most common error was the failure to note that the question asked for reference to **one** religion only, in several cases weaker candidates failed to observe this restriction and wrote about the significance of art in two or more religions. In these cases examiners operated, where possible, the principle of salvage and credited the best examples only, treating the rest as a rubric infringement. The second problem occurred only where candidates had written answers to the previous question and here there was a tendency again amongst weaker candidates to repeat much of the material already used in answering the previous question. Again examiners were instructed to exercise generosity where appropriate.

These problems notwithstanding, there were many good answers and some excellent ones. With very few exceptions, answers tended to be written from the perspective of Christianity. Many answers commented on how art was used to define religious space and how the liturgy contributed as an art form, to help to define the faith of the community. Most picked up on the use of art to define and illustrate religious truths and teachings. Clear reference was made to the importance of devotional art particularly in the Orthodox and Catholic traditions, and many explained and contrasted this with denominations which laid very little emphasis on devotional art. At the top end there were some excellent answers which focussed on the relevance of contemporary religious art as defining a wider sense of spirituality rather than just an historical or denominational perspective. Several good references were made to the contemporary artists Bill Viola and Mark Wallinger.

## **Part 12**

This was perhaps the best answered evaluation question on this section. Even weak candidates who had not progressed beyond the lower levels in the preceding part of the question were able to offer some clear evaluation and analysis. Many focused on the idea that religious art could be partially understood and appreciated if not fully understood by those without religious belief. Other answers focused on the differences between religions, and evaluated whether a Christian with religious belief would be able to fully understand Islamic art or Hindu art. There were very few really weak evaluations evident and it was pleasing to see many candidates thinking widely and developing some independent ideas to good effect.

## **Question 7 *Religion, art and popular culture***

### **Part 13**

This question proved to be a very popular choice and there were a wide range of responses to it. The single most important factor in determining how candidates performed in response to the question set was the choice of fiction they utilised. This year candidates from one centre attempted to use a work of non-fiction in response to this question, under the terms of the specification this was not acceptable. The specification does not specify which particular works of fiction are to be studied, and centres are allowed a free choice, but the specification is very clear that these should be works of fiction not biographies, autobiographies, nor memoirs.

Centres should be advised that the choice of fiction selected to cover this part of the specification has a significant effect on the way that candidates are able to answer the questions set. Care must be taken to ensure that there is sufficient religious material to allow the religious ideas and /or teachings to be carefully examined in some depth. Dan Brown's *Da Vinci Code* was a popular choice amongst many candidates, but few were able to examine how religious ideas and/or themes were used in any great depth, and many answers which used this work were superficial in the extreme. Likewise CS Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia* were a popular choice and though often better exegesis of religious themes was evident, many answers lacked depth and substance to get to higher levels. Several centres used the film *Bruce Almighty*, but only a few were able to offer significant depth to their answers. Those who used this film to good effect concentrated on the themes such as the doctrine of God, prayer, miracles and the ways in which biblical references were used explicitly and more subtly. The highest scoring answers moved away from the more popular works of fiction towards other significant works, *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood was an inspired choice by several centres and this, either as a novel or as the film version, gave candidates some serious material to work with, so too did the works of Isaac Bashevis Singer, and one centre used Dostoyevsky's works to good effect.

As a general piece of advice, centres should be encouraged to look beyond 'Harry Potter', 'The Da Vinci Code' etc. The use of TV programmes also needs to be exercised with caution. Whilst examiners were prepared to accept programmes such as 'The Vicar of Dibley' or 'Father Ted' – as the specification does state that TV programmes can be used – it was felt that programmes such as these did not allow candidates, especially weaker ones, to examine in depth the way religious themes are used and thus maximise the marks available. It was interesting to note that no centre used short stories as an accessible means of dealing with religious themes in fiction – perhaps this may be a way for some centres to move forward in the future.

#### Part 14

Like the first part of the question, this drew a variety of responses, ranging from those which were clearly hitting the top of Level 7 to those who struggled to get beyond Level 2 'a *superficial response with some attempt at reasoning*'. Top level answers typically analysed the way that fiction had been used to convey religious teachings in the past and in contemporary fiction. This was then contrasted with the way fiction can devalue religious truths and/or disseminate anti-religious propaganda or ridicule religious teachings – again there were some excellent examples referred to. At the lower end of the mark range candidates again took refuge in the 'on the one hand ... on the other .. in conclusion I think....' approach with very little evidence of reasoning or the fact that their conclusion – if one was offered – was born out of the ideas they had discussed.

### Question 8 *Cyber religion and TV religion*

#### Part 15

Virtual religion is the participation by individuals in religious practices which take place online. The biggest problem for many candidates was a misunderstanding of the term 'virtual religion'. The specification makes it clear that virtual religion falls into the section dealing with 'Religion and the Internet' and **not** 'Religion and television' – reference to TV religion was not relevant here. Candidates who spent most of their answer examining TV religion received little credit, often scoring Level 2 for 'an *informed answer which misses the point of the question*'- unless they were able to show and exemplify a clear and legitimate overlap with virtual religion.

Candidates who did engage correctly with the terminology proved to have been well prepared, and were able to examine and exemplify the various types of virtual religion available online. All made reference to the earliest attempts at online worship in the aftermath of the Challenger disaster in January 1986, and many proceeded to provide a detailed examination of how virtual religion has developed since that date across the main world religions. The top level answers were able to demonstrate that for some small religious communities (e.g. Neo-paganism) their existence and practice is solely online. Virtual churches such as St. Pixels, Oxford i Church were discussed from a Christian perspective, so too was Church of Second life. Other sites which offered virtual pilgrimages and those which addressed the devotional needs of other world religions were discussed to good effect.

Two good resources which may help centres in preparing their candidates for this section of the specification are:

Beckerlegge G, (ed), *From sacred text to internet*;  
Dawson L, and Cowen D, *Religion Online*.

## **Part 16**

There were some excellent evaluations from candidates who understood the term virtual religion. Good use was made of Smart's 'Dimensions of religion' to analyse the benefits or otherwise of religious practice in a virtual environment. Top level answers often examined the statement from the perspective of two or more world religions and there was some considerable discussion as to whether Christian understanding of 'church' and sacraments could be met by religious practice in a virtual environment. One centre examined some of the problems which virtual religion posed for strict Jewish communities and whether the use of computer mediated religion actually transgressed the strict observance of the Sabbath, or how in a virtual environment the number of the 'minyan' could be calculated and regulated. It was clear that candidates who had been well prepared for this topic wrote to the question, provided clear analysis and reasoning and thus were invariably able to access the top two levels of both AO1 and AO2.