



General Certificate of Education

Religious Studies (2060)

RST3F Religion and Contemporary Society

Report on the Examination

2010 examination - June series

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General Comments

There was a small entry for this unit, but this included some excellent scripts, from candidates who had been well prepared, and were able to write fluently and to display good knowledge and understanding. Some candidates displayed good synoptic skills, and showed that they were able to reflect on other areas of study in their discussion. As indicated below, there were some topics where candidates need a more specific focus in their study, if they are to succeed at this level.

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

This was the most popular question and was attempted by nearly all candidates.

Part 01

Nearly all answered this from the perspective of Christianity, and the best approached this very well. They were able to consider the range of attitudes within the religion, focussing on the beliefs of the early Church, and to relate these to the teaching of Jesus, as well as to look at changes over time. Such answers often cited episodes such as the Crusades, or more recently, the attitudes of the Churches during the world wars of the 20th century. They were also able to write about the development of modern pacifism, and many cited the Quaker position. Some gave good exemplification of the attitudes of the Churches to modern conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan. A few cited the role of military chaplains as an example of Christian attitudes. Weaker answers tended to use much the same material but were lacking in depth or breadth, or tended to assume that Christians only took one point of view on war.

Part 02

The question asked about religion being concerned with the 'issue of war'. Some candidates took this as 'being involved in wars'. Credit was given for such responses, but candidates who took this approach tended to penalise themselves by narrowing the focus. The best answers were those which had taken up the help offered in the initial quotation 'war is a political issue, not a religious one', and were able to tease out some of the complexities of religions speaking out on such matters. There were some very good answers, which showed the inter-relatedness of many religious and political concerns, or which used the ethics of the religion to show how they felt that it was incumbent on religious people to speak out on such matters. Some wrote about the role of religious leaders in the House of Lords, or the fact that members of the House of Commons bring a range of religious commitments to their work, so religion and politics cannot be separated. There was also some informed comment which used the examples of recent statements of Church leaders on current conflicts. Weaker answers tended to be one-sided or to make rather generalised claims.

Question 2 *Challenges to religion in contemporary society*

Part 03

There were some excellent responses here, where candidates were able to answer in depth or breadth about a range of divisions, including the Great Schism and the Reformation, as well as current issues such as gay priests and women bishops. Such answers showed excellent knowledge and were well informed. These answers were able to show clearly **how** religions are weakened. In too many cases however, candidates appeared not to understand the meaning of 'divisions within religion' which is a set topic within the specification. Such candidates' tended to present their prepared answer (often on secularisation) for this section of the paper. Credit was given wherever possible, but this was obviously limited.

Part 04

In this part of the question candidates could either focus on divisions or on other internal threats. Whichever approach was taken, candidates needed to present a balanced and reasoned response. The best did this well, but weaker answers tended to be one-sided, or to present some rather generalised comments on the decline of religion in contemporary society.

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

This topic involves new forms of spirituality both within and outside religions. Spirituality is an area of wide interest generally, as well as in Religious Studies, but it appears that quite a few candidates were taking this simply as New Religious Movements, or in some cases New Age Movements. Whilst of course, there is relevance here, the topic of spirituality is much broader than this.

Part 05

Within the limitations noted above, there were some reasonable answers here, but they often tended to be rather general. Whilst sociological and psychological reasons can overlap, some candidates made little or no attempt to distinguish between them. In order to achieve the higher levels, candidates needed, as on all questions, to be able to exemplify their claims.

Part 06

Since many candidates had not really made much distinction between different types of reasons on 05, it then became difficult for them to evaluate the impact of these reasons in this part. A few gave a well reasoned evaluation here.

Question 4 *Religion and national identity*

The focus of this question was on the 'established church'. There were a few who maintained this focus, but several of the small number who attempted this question, tended to write more generally about civic religion.

Part 07

Generally, answers showed insufficient knowledge of the Church of England as the 'established church'. A few were able to look at some of its distinctive roles in local and national society, and the role of the monarch, but generally, those candidates who answered this seemed ill-prepared for it. They needed to show some awareness of the historical basis, the role of the monarch, the place of Bishops in the House of Lords, the concept of 'parishes' as well as relevant aspects of the role of the church in civic religion.

Part 08

This could have been answered with specific reference to the church chosen in 07 or in a more general way. However, since there had been a lack of focus on 'established' church in the earlier part of the question, answers here tended to be about the place of the church in general in contemporary society. Such answers could only receive limited marks, as they were not addressing the question set.