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

Religious Studies   **RSS05**

(Specification 2060)

Unit E The History of Christianity

OR Religion, Art and the Media

Report on the Examination

General Comments

This year there was a slightly larger entry for this component compared to January 2010. Once again the majority of candidates continued a similar trend to previous years selecting questions from Section B Religion, Art and the Media. Only one centre offered answers to Section A The History of Christianity.

There was some considerable range in the standard of scripts seen this year and the range of marks awarded reflected this. There were fewer scripts in the sub 30/90 bracket; however there were also very few high scoring scripts.

There were few rubric infringements; however a considerable number of candidates failed to complete all four parts of the two questions offered, usually as a result of poor time management. Typically candidates wrote at some considerable length in one or two parts, leaving themselves short of time to complete all parts required.

It is heartening to see that issues 'flagged up' in earlier examiner's reports on this unit are being addressed by many centres and there were clearly fewer tangential answers in response to questions, and for the most part appropriate and clear exemplification of works of art, or works of fiction were deployed.

Section A Christianity

Only one centre offered answers to this section. The only questions attempted across the whole centre were question 2, The Protestant Reformation, and question 3 The Catholic Reformation. 33% of candidates from this centre either left a blank script or wrote little more than one sentence.

Question 1

There were no scripts offering answers to this question.

Question 2

03   There were very few answers of quality offered in response to this question. The majority of answers seen were at best narrative accounts of Calvin's work and at worst an attempt to write about Luther rather than Calvin. Only in very few examples did candidates actually engage with the thrust of the question asked and attempt to examine the core ideas of Calvin's theology. The question expected candidates to cover a range of the key ideas of Calvin's theology, namely: doctrine of God, predestination, the person and work of Jesus Christ, the authority of scripture, Calvin's reasoning on the sacraments and the role of the Church. The focus of the question asked was not the biographical details of Calvin's life nor a general review of the historical events in which Calvin worked, but upon his theological reasoning and how that was manifest in his teachings.

04   In light of candidates' responses to 03 it came as no surprise that answers to this question were often very weak indeed, even allowing for some degree of latitude in the response to the question asked. Few candidates, if any, were able to suggest or consider that Calvin's teachings had a lasting effect on later developments of Protestantism or Puritanism or provide some counter argument to this. If the effects were examined in any depth at all then answers were confined to the effects in and around Geneva and ignored much of the rest of Europe.

Question 3

05 This question was often satisfactorily answered, and there were a number of answers that met the criteria for Levels 4 or 5. However, few were able to provide sufficient level of understanding of the material required to progress beyond these levels. A considerable number of answers were able to accurately list the key teachings of the Council of Trent yet failed to provide sufficient examination of them by way of explaining either why they were needed or what they intended to uphold or reform. Had they been able to do so then these answers could have moved into the upper levels with ease. The mark scheme allowed for upper levels to be awarded if answers confined themselves to the key teachings about Catholic doctrine, rather than both doctrinal emphases and the key teachings aimed at reform of abuses.

06 A wide range of responses was evident in response to the evaluation question posed. Many confined themselves to an accurate but binary approach – 'on the one hand', 'on the other hand' – and were able to present at least a partially successful attempt to sustain an argument. Few were able to provide sufficient analysis or reasoning required for Levels 6 and 7. In several potentially good answers the effects were examined only in the short term and few if any made any reference to the variation in effects from region to region and the time it took for the reforms to permeate all levels of society, or the effectiveness of the reforms being dependent upon the will of the post Council papacy.

Question 4

There were no scripts offering answers to this question.

Section B Religion, Art and the Media

Question 5

09 This proved to be a very popular question with candidates. Most candidates answered the question from the perspective of Christianity; however, there were some very good answers from the perspective of Islam. A few candidates failed to note the restriction to one religion as highlighted in the question and expanded their answer with reference to two or in some cases more religions. Such answers were often very general.

Most answers were able to identify, list and exemplify the key ways in which art contributed to the worship of their chosen religion. The upper levels were awarded to candidates who could go on to examine in some detail precisely how this contribution is made. Several also legitimately included the negative view towards art within worship as part of this examination. Candidates had clearly prepared well for this type of question and most were able to substantiate their answers with clear and relevant examples. However, some caution should be exercised in the selection of examples to ensure relevance to the question set. There were, for example, several inaccurate references to Grunewald's Isenheim altarpiece as still being in the chapel for which it was created and how this still provides a focal point for the altar in worship, when in fact it is now in a museum. Several candidates moved their answers beyond the obvious areas of icons, architecture and devotional paintings and made clear reference to the use of other art forms e.g. music and the drama of the liturgy as a form of religious art, and how these make a contribution to worship or conveyed religious truths to worshippers.

10 Of all the evaluation questions in this section this was, broadly speaking, the one which attracted the best responses. There were some one-sided or basic binary style answers which did not attempt any real analysis or further reasoning; however, in the majority of cases this was the one evaluation question that seemed to attract more reasoning from the candidates who attempted it. The best candidates were able to draw on a variety of opinion within religions and there were some very good answers which highlighted the historical attitudes towards art and worship in the Christian religion and used these as basis for debate and evaluation with good reference to the ideas of scholarly opinion and argument.

Question 6

11 This question attracted a very wide range of responses. There were some very good answers which examined the term 'religious art' from a variety of perspectives. It was good to see a wide range of exemplification used to support answers, and that some of the high scoring answers examined the term 'religious art' from a philosophical perspective. It was clear that the majority of candidates who answered his question had been well prepared and had a good understanding of the term and the wide range of material to which it can be applied. At the lower end of the mark range weaker answers were typified by merely listing examples and offering little by way of examination as to why the examples used could be regarded as religious art.

12 There were some very good answers to this question and again, as in part 11, candidates took a variety of valid approaches to this question. Ideas were supported by reference to some good examples. Responses which gained the upper levels offered some exploration of the term 'meaningless' and there were some interesting examinations of the statement from philosophical and aesthetic perspectives being weighed against the didactic purpose of religious art. One centre in particular made use of more abstract examples of religious art by way of illustration that in some cases the meaning of religious art is often difficult to understand even by those who have religious belief.

Question 7

13 The target of this question was the examination of how religious ideas provide the theme for two works of fiction. The works of fiction chosen covered a wide range. However, despite reference in previous reports to what constitutes fiction in response to this type of question, several candidates attempted to use TV situation comedies as examples, and others used a biography. There was some leeway shown to such candidates but their responses were often very superficial and failed to provide a developed examination of how religious themes are used, e.g. themes such as prayer, miracles and the doctrine of God or interaction between religious perspectives were rarely examined. Choosing a work of fiction which is merely set against a religious backdrop or loosely religious in its content is unlikely to allow candidates to provide sufficient examination and development to reach the higher levels of response. C.S Lewis' 'Chronicles of Narnia' were a popular choice for one of the works of fiction and were used to good effect when there was a clear examination of how religious ideas, good versus evil, betrayal, temptation or atonement are used as a basis for the narratives. Conversely there were several answers which offered little more than a précis of the plot only.

Some candidates spent so long writing very descriptive answers on their first work of fiction that they failed to do more than suggest that their second work also contained religious ideas. I repeat the advice contained in earlier examiner's reports, centres need to be careful about the choice of fiction used in this section of the course. Fiction can legitimately refer to literature or film, however the key factor governing choice should be, can candidates gain sufficient material from the works chosen which allows them to examine, rather than narrate, how religious ideas are used. There could be a clear element of contrast between the works chosen, for example the novel 'The Handmaid's Tale' by Margaret Attwood, and the film 'Bruce Almighty'. Both are accessible and with detailed study can easily provide candidates with a very wide range of material about the use of religious ideas to facilitate answering questions from this section.

14 Responses to this question were often very pedestrian in their approach and few successfully engaged fully with the issue posed in the question. The majority of answers were of the simple binary form and lacked depth and development. Answers often covered simple basic arguments with little exemplification or further reasoning.

Question 8

15 This question attracted a considerable number of answers, and was one of the more popular choices of question on the paper. A few candidates failed to take careful note of the word 'positive' in the question and wrote at length about how the Internet could be seen as making a negative contribution, or how it made both positive and negative contributions. There was evidence of clear knowledge about the development of religious material on the Internet in most answers and the majority of the key areas were covered. The key to getting to the heart of this question was the need to understand and examine the difference between 'religion online' and 'online religion'. Again, lower level answers were typified by merely listing examples rather than examining the contribution they made to religion, e.g. either as aids to the study of religion, or to religious practice within a faith community.

16 The responses to this question ranged widely. Lower level answers were typified by a failure to understand the term 'virtual religion' clearly enough. There were few answers of real quality evident. Those which did make it to the upper levels offered some clear reasoning about the problems raised by 'virtual religion' as a substitute for real life practice, for example from a Christian perspective the problems caused by the idea of sacramental religion in a virtual environment was a clear issue tackled by some candidates. Others examined the idea of the need for religions to embrace the advances in technology as a means to furthering religious belief and practice. Good answers were those which showed clear understanding of the term virtual religion and then examined this in some depth in the light of the statement made in the question. Answers which merely listed two basic views without clear reasoning or development did not progress beyond Level 5.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the Results statistics page of the AQA Website.