



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

Religious Studies

RSS08

(Specification 2060)

Unit H Religion and Contemporary Society

Report on the Examination

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General Comments

There was an increased entry for this unit in this series, and whilst there were no really outstanding scripts, the great majority of answers were at least satisfactory. A noticeable feature of answers this time was the way in which many candidates seemed to be producing their prepared answer on the topic area. It should be noted that whilst the present format of the question paper has named topics for each question area, (Question 1, Question 2 etc) the specific questions (01, 02, 03, 04 etc) are on discrete areas arising from the specification, and candidates must be able to answer these specific questions, rather than assuming that answers on the general area will suffice.

A few candidates chose to devise new numbering systems for themselves, including reverting to the traditional 1a, 1b, etc. They should be aware that this may cause significant difficulties in the future, and get into the habit of using only the numbers (01, 02 etc) that appear on the question paper.

Question 1

- 01** This was an example of a question where many candidates approached the paper with their prepared answer for the first topic, and failed to pay sufficient attention to the specific demands of the question. Some therefore decided to write all they knew about decline, or to give current statistics on religious practice. Whilst *some* of this could have been relevant, it was not the main focus of the question. Better answers gave a range of changes to denominational structures, often focussing on the breakdown of traditional denominational patterns, in response to charismatic and Pentecostal Movements, and the rise of Black-led churches. Some also wrote in an informed way about the ecumenical movement, although there were a few misconceptions here. Some answers tended to focus more on ways on worshipping than denominational structures, but they often managed to gain some credit for their approach.
- 02** This could have been answered in several ways. Many attempted to argue about ‘traditional’ denominations, which they often saw as Roman Catholic and Anglican, as opposed to what they thought of as ‘newer’ denominations (amongst which many counted the Baptists), and made a good argument for their point of view. A smaller number answered in terms of denominational groupings having little meaning today, since religion is declining, and people’s life styles make ‘belonging’ harder.

Question 2

- 03** There were some good answers to this question, but far too many remained at the level of rather stereotypical description. At this level, some greater awareness is important, and a key word in the question was ‘various’. Many answers gave fairly basic stereotypical descriptions of places of worship in 3 or 4 religions. Better answers were able to address ‘various’ on a number of levels. They were able, for instance, to comment on denominational diversity within Christian places of worship, as well as looking at the diversity of traditions within other religions. They were also able to address ‘various’ through the differences found between old and new buildings, and purpose-built built places and those which have been adapted from other uses. A few were also able to make thoughtful comment on other sorts of places of worship such as those found in shopping centres, airports, hospitals, etc.
- 04** Many here took the idea of ‘set apart’ on a very literal level, some even talking about the distance from other buildings. The sort of discussion which followed was therefore limited. A few grasped the central idea, and gave a good assessment of the importance of the idea of the ‘otherness’ of the building, and whether it was important that it should be different.

Question 3

- 05** This was an example of a question where a number came in with their prepared answers, and seemed to pay limited attention to the question set. Such answers were nearly always about dress and diet, which are features of maintaining religious and cultural identity. Whilst these practices could be made relevant, many candidates did not attempt to do so, and thus gained limited credit. The focus of the question was on the ways in which religions attempt to maintain a sense of community within the religion, and there were some good responses, in which candidates wrote about ways in which religions encourage mutual support, encourage attendance at social gatherings as well as worship, undertake charity work locally and globally, etc. Some wrote with insight about the ways in which faith schools can contribute to community. There were some good answers based on Islam which explored the concept of *ummah* and the ways in which this is developed. Some answers based on Islam also made good comment on the ways in which Ramadan and Hajj develop the sense of community worldwide. Some candidates approached the question in terms of ways in which religions contribute to the sense of community within the wider society. This was a legitimate interpretation, and some made good points about the various ways in which religious groups offer support and help to the wider community.
- 06** Those who had only answered question 05 in terms of dress and diet naturally found some difficulties with this part. Others obviously had their prepared answer about the difficulties of practising religion when in a minority, or about aspects of assimilation. Such responses could only gain limited credit. Better answers were able to look at both the challenges of being a minority, and also the advantages, arguing, for example, that it may be easier to have a strong sense of community when in a minority.

Question 4

- 07** On the whole, this question was answered quite well. Candidates generally knew a range of sociological / social reasons why people might join New Religious Movements (NRMs), and they were able to discuss these quite well, talking about societal changes in the 1960s, economic crises today, the need for belonging in a fast paced fragmented society, and the role of charismatic leaders. Many also mentioned the role of celebrities. They were also able to mention the need for self fulfilment and a range of other factors. Most were able to talk reasonably accurately about the relative deprivation theory and how this relates to the development of NRMs. Some candidates wrote at some length about the classification of various types of NRMs, but this could gain little credit. The marks of some candidates were limited by their lack of exemplification. There were some answers which could easily have gained full marks had the points made been appropriately exemplified.
- 08** Generally, candidates were able to make a reasonable assessment of this claim. Some argued that NRMs have no relevance because all religions are dying out. Others argued that if the social needs are still there, then so are the NRMs. As counter arguments, they pointed to their limited numerical significance, and to the fact that society now is very different from that in the time when many of the NRMs arose.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.