



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

Religious Studies

RSS06

(Specification 2060)

Unit F Old Testament

Report on the Examination

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General Comments

The entry size for this unit was similar to that for June 2010 and there was again a wide range in performance. This year, however, this range was not due simply to differing levels of ability and maturity. The uneven performance of some candidates was linked to the challenge posed by Question 2. Although taken straight from the Specification, many attempted it without understanding what it required. Other candidates, realising that they could not answer that question, appear to have chosen another topic for which they were not fully prepared. Candidates should ensure that they have studied and revised in detail at least three and ideally four topics so that if one particular question does not appeal to them, they have a choice.

It was pleasing to see more effective use of text in this examination. There were fewer predominantly narrative responses to questions.

Question 1 *An introduction to the world of the Old Testament*

- 01** Most candidates were well prepared for this question, which related to the introduction of the monarchy in ancient Israel. Although most textual exemplification was limited to 1 Samuel 8, many responses contained a range of reasons that were developed with thoughtful comment. A number of candidates gave relevant consideration to the composite nature of 1 Samuel 8 – 10.
- 02** Almost all candidates attempted a two-sided response to this part of the question. Various approaches, all of them valid, were taken. Some restricted themselves to the 10th century BCE. Others ranged more widely, contrasting immediate with long term effects. These answers often made effective use of other topics studied in this unit. Again, there was some reference to the sources underlying the set texts. One candidate, considering long term effects, considered the impact on this issue of the bias of the Deuteronomistic Historian. Many picked up and discussed the appropriateness or otherwise of the adjective 'total' and tried to address the key focus of the question by noting the phrase 'from a religious point of view'.

Question 2 *Old Testament views of God's relationship with the people*

- 03** There were some excellent responses from those candidates who were well prepared for all areas of this topic as laid out in the Specification. Many of these answers examined in detail and applied to the Mosaic covenant Mendenhall's analysis of suzerainty treaties. Some candidates examined also Weinfeld's comparison of royal grant treaties with the Abrahamic covenant. Others made reference to scholars' views that the concept of covenant was a later concept and that the Abrahamic covenant was an exilic creation. In the January 2011 examiner report, it was pointed out that candidates should study not only the set texts, but also 20th century critical views. This was the area of the Specification that was being examined in this particular question, but it was clear that many candidates were not familiar with the Specification phrase '20th century critical views'. Some responses included the phrase 'suzerainty treaty' but then wrote about more popular criticisms of the requirement of circumcision or of the nature of God as implied by the need to test Abraham's fidelity to the covenant relationship. This suggests either that candidates had been taught to use the phrase in their responses without any explanation of what it entailed or that they had been taught in more depth but without realising that this was an aspect of 20th century criticism. Centres would be well advised to ensure in future that their candidates are thoroughly prepared for the whole of this topic area.
- 04** Those candidates who gave competent answers to the first part of this question had few problems with this second part. Many candidates, however, showed no real understanding of what was required.

Question 3 *The phenomenon of prophecy*

- 05** The responses of less able or less well prepared candidates were limited to the incident on Mount Carmel and a few answers were largely narrative. Others pointed to Elijah's role as defending Israel's religion, but gave little or no development. There were, however, some highly confident and competent responses that considered in depth not only Elijah's defence of Yahwism against Baalism, but also his concern for social justice, his political involvement, his use of prophetic symbolism and his nature as an ecstatic prophet. Some candidates commented on the personal nature of his relationship with God as anticipating later prophecy and much more effective use was made of 1 Kings 19 than has been the case in the past. Although this was not required, a number of candidates made good use of non-set texts in the Elijah cycle, though one or two confused Elijah with Micaiah.
- 06** This was answered well by most candidates, including those who had struggled with the first part of the question, and a number of answers revealed a wider knowledge of the Elijah cycle than had been shown in that part. Several candidates argued that the whole issue was clouded by the Deuteronomistic Historian's editing of the cycle.

Question 4 *8th century prophecy – Amos*

- 07** This was by far the most popular question, possibly attracting a number of candidates who found this preferable to Question 2, but who had not revised Amos thoroughly. As a result, there were some weak answers that showed very limited knowledge of Amos' oracles relating to Israel's religious beliefs and practices. A significant number concentrated on his criticisms of social practice, though a few attempted to make their answers relevant by pointing out that this was a breach of the covenant. Many candidates did focus on religious practices, but showed little understanding of the religious situation in Amos' day, referring to the temple at Bethel as a Canaanite shrine and to the worship carried out there as that of Jeroboam as opposed to Yahweh. Centres might wish to ensure that their candidates are aware of scholarly views contained in commentaries on Amos. There were also a number of candidates who failed to note the two-pronged nature of this question and whose answers were restricted to the prophet's criticisms of religious practices. However, it was a joy to read those responses that did fully and accurately address the question.
- 08** Those candidates who had answered the first part well produced some thoughtful responses to this part also. A few answers pointed to the fact that even if the restoration oracles in Amos 9 did originate with Amos, there was no clear reference to the restoration of the cult. Centres might wish to encourage their more able candidates also to consider the views put forward by some scholars that oracles denouncing the Bethel and Gilgal cults were later additions to the text, reflecting the centralisation of worship in Jerusalem. A significant number of candidates, however, floundered with this question. Instead of assessing whether Amos saw any point to Israel's religious practices, they considered instead whether he was more interested in the nation's social misdemeanours than their religious practices. As in the second part of Question 3, some candidates showed knowledge that might have been creditable in the first part, had it been included there.

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