



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

Religious Studies

RSS07

(Specification 2060)

Unit G New Testament

Report on the Examination

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General Comments

Candidates writing lengthy narratives continue to be one of the main problems in this unit. Very little credit can be awarded given candidates have access to the Bible in the exam. What is required is allusion to the relevant text to illustrate or justify a point. The paragraphs should be centred on the focus of the question, not the narrative. For instance, in Question 03 the focus is the teaching found in the healing story. In Question 05 it is teaching about the person of Jesus.

As mentioned in previous examiner's reports, some candidates still seem unaware that the first parts of the question (01, 03, 05, 07) are AO1 (knowledge and understanding) and the second parts (02, 04, 06, 08) are AO2 (evaluation). For instance, some candidates gave material relevant to question 02 in question 01, discussing at length whether oral tradition was reliable and accurate.

There also seemed evidence that some candidates were writing prepared answers, possibly repeating summary notes from class on a topic, without regard to the particular focus of the question set. For instance, some candidates wrote at length about the differences between the gospel accounts of the healing of the Centurion's Slave, without any reference to the teaching. Key words/phrases in the question often did not appear anywhere in the answer.

Candidates continue to struggle to present high level AO2 answers and fail to reason and critically analyse. Far too often, answers drift into listing arguments for and against a view/claim with no attempt at weighing up how successful those arguments are. Opinions without some support/justification gain little credit.

However, there were also some very good answers that reflected a high level of knowledge and understanding of the unit topics. Each question had scripts where full marks were awarded.

Question 4 was the least popular question answered and Questions 1 and 2 were joint most popular.

Question 1 *How the synoptic gospels came into being*

01 A variety of approaches were credited, including those that discussed how circumstances led the oral tradition to develop into a written gospel. Surprisingly, few scripts made reference to actual evidence of oral tradition in Mark's Gospel. Also, scripts made little reference to form criticism. Some candidates seemed not to have prepared for this part of the topic and reproduced an essay on the four source theory with the emphasis on documents rather than oral tradition. Other weak answers discussed the characteristics of each gospel. Those candidates that focussed entirely on the historical issue covered material more appropriate to Question 02.

02 This was generally well answered, and most candidates seemed well prepared for this debate. There were good arguments given for each side but the particular focus of "to what extent" was not always addressed.

Question 2 *Aspects of Jesus' teaching and action, parables and healings*

03 The weaker answers tended to recount the miracle, with a brief commentary. Others just focussed on the person of Jesus in terms of his humanity and divinity. There were instances of some candidates who discussed, almost to the exclusion of anything else, what the miracle taught about society at that time, especially the slave/master relationship. However, the Specification makes clear that it is Jesus' teaching that should be studied in the healing stories. Such an approach limits the level attainable as directed by the level descriptors. Some candidates continue to refer to healings as parables. The higher level answers covered a wide range of teaching and alluded to the text to illustrate their points.

04 Where a claim is to be assessed in an AO2 question, the claim is usually controversial in some way, so that there is a clear focus to discuss and debate. In this question it was the sweeping claim that the **only** purpose was to show the need to have faith in Jesus. Very few candidates addressed that aspect.

However, there were some very good evaluative answers that analysed and assessed the extent to which the candidate agreed with the claim stated in the question.

Question 3 *The arrest, trial and death of Jesus*

- 05** Surprisingly, a significant number of candidates did not seem to understand what text they were meant to be considering, and so answered on the arrest of Jesus, whilst others included Jesus' resurrection. Some conflated the text from all four gospels. The question focussed only on the teaching about the person of Jesus in Matthew's accounts of Jesus' trial and death. Once again good candidates alluded to the text to support their answer. Some candidates drifted into a general commentary on the text but failed to focus on what they taught about the person of Jesus.
- 06** This was a little disappointing given the wide range of material available. There seemed some confusion about exactly what was being asked, even though the same wording appears in the specification. This does suggest that some centres are not teaching to the Specification. It was expected that candidates might discuss the nature of the claims (e.g. supernatural elements) and the authenticity of the claims (e.g. contradictory/unreliable) as well as the theological problems (e.g. God dying). This question produced the lowest mean of the AO2 questions.

Question 4 *The resurrection of Jesus*

- 07** This was the least popular question and it may be that the wording (i.e. scholars' views of the theological message) deterred candidates from answering this question. However, that same wording appears in the specification. Nevertheless, there were some good answers. It was not required that particular scholars should be identified. The emphasis was on the theological message.
- 08** The claim to be debated was one that has been well rehearsed in many books. In the light of this, it was surprising how many candidates struggled and showed limited knowledge of the debate and the arguments. There were only a few candidates who made reference to the manuscripts. Most answers just centred on different styles and the references to Mary Magdalene. Weaker candidates did not focus on the issue of authenticity.

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