
A-level

History

2C The Reformation in Europe, c1500-1564
Report on the Examination

7042/2C
June 2018

Version: 1.0

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General

In general, this paper proved to be accessible and students were able to answer all questions thoroughly and, for the most part, to a high standard. Unsurprisingly question 3 proved the most popular of the essay types but the second essay broke fairly evenly. There were a lot of L4 answers with very little at L2 or below.

Question 1

There was not a great deal in source A to cause students difficulties but the stronger responses were able to provide a context for some of these provisions: the reference to Rosary beads (anti-Catholicism) and the reference to drunkenness and gambling (the rather racy reputation Geneva possessed previously). Some students picked up and developed via own knowledge, the role that the Consistory played. Some saw this as part of the development towards a theocracy in the City and so were able to show conceptual awareness. The relationship between church and state was a factor that stronger answers honed in upon.

In source B Gruet makes a libertarian stand and many students were able to develop this point with reference to the activities of the Libertines in Geneva. Some good answers were able to identify the context of this source showing that Calvin was on his second stay in Geneva having previously been forced to flee and so he was not at the height of his influence and was therefore more vulnerable than the source might suggest; that nuance was lacking in a more simplistic reading of the source.

Source C, although superficially similar to B, has plenty to distinguish it as well. Weaker answers perceived that there was little difference and so repeated similar points. The date of 1553 was an important clue/focus with Calvin now a far more domineering influence and this linked directly to the claim within the source that Servetus' conditions were all down to Calvin. The source again allows for an exploration of church/state relations. A more superficial reading identified the cruelty of Servetus' situation and so portrayed Calvin as a sadistic dictator. More balanced answers pointed out that such conditions were hardly out of the ordinary and that Calvin tried to ensure that Servetus was beheaded, not burnt, which was a more humane fate.

Question 2

This was a superficially attractive question as 'the state of the church' is a well-worn topic that most students will have plenty to say about. Therein lay the problem, with weaker answers perceiving the question in this fashion and failing to focus in upon the secular emphasis within the wording. In general terms students were often able to say relevant things in passing about the worldly ambitions of the Renaissance Popes but too often weaker answers then drifted into a theological discussion and so ignored the focus of the question. Nuance was to be had from pointing out that despite some criticisms evident with regard to taxation or the personal behaviours of priests and popes, much of Catholic Europe nevertheless remained supportive of church practices with even the sale of indulgences a popular feature for those seeking to do their bit for their dead relatives. It was disappointing to see how limited references to the everyday work of the church either in education or welfare were. Therefore, what appeared to be an attractive question for students was not universally well-answered.

Question 3

This was the most popular essay and although it confined students to primarily focusing upon a four year period a lot happened in that time and so there was no shortage of material to work with. Some students were in fact too disciplined in just sticking to the timeframe and so failed to acknowledge the influences that had led to Luther perceiving the world as he did by 1517. This was allowable as relevant context as long as it was not overdone. Therefore if students were arguing that Luther's thoughts were already well formulated by 1517, then there would need to be some reference to how or why that was so. The best essays not only identified the key debates and written works that Luther engaged in at this time but were able to demonstrate how each of these exhibited a particular criticism of Church teaching and so was a developing strand of Lutheran thought. The question allowed for detailed responses and many students accomplished this with an impressive array of reference.

Question 4

At the higher levels students 'got' the idea that this question allowed for the exploration of a twin interpretation of the Council Of Trent, i.e. as part of a 'Catholic Reformation' that was happening anyway or as part of a 'Counter Reformation' that was a reaction to progress of the reforming movement. In fact, a sophisticated response might argue it was not a case of either/or but both. Given that there were three main Councils, each with a distinctive core element, there was plenty of material to use. That said, it was key to either perspective that an exploration of the immediate position prior to the first meeting in 1545 was evident, so the strength/weakness of the Protestant position by the 1540s, the broader political position of the great powers, and (in particular) the Holy Roman Emperor (the accession of a seemingly reforming Pope through that decade) were made clear.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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