

CARIBBEAN EXAMINATIONS COUNCIL

**REPORT ON CANDIDATES' WORK IN THE
SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION
MAY/JUNE 2007**

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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RELIGIOUS EDUCATION
GENERAL PROFICIENCY EXAMINATION
MAY/JUNE 2007

GENERAL COMMENTS

The examination in 2007 was the first under the recently revised syllabus for Religious Education. A significant objective of this syllabus is to “develop an understanding of the meaning and purpose of life as advanced by different religions practised in the Caribbean.” While four major religions and Caribbean Indigenous Religions are examined in Paper 01, to date only the Christianity Option is currently being examined in Paper 02. The examinations for 2007 were therefore set to enable candidates to explore various social issues through the lens of religious thinking. For the most part candidates displayed an ability to reflect and analyse life issues through the lens of religion and offered reasoned opinions on a variety of topics.

A significant feature of a large number of responses in Papers 02 and 03 showed up that the differences between the former syllabus and the present syllabus may not have been fully grasped by teachers. In far too many cases candidates were not familiar with the scriptures related to areas of the syllabus and were therefore unable to display knowledge in citing appropriate examples of scripture passages. The concern of previous years of candidates having not covered the syllabus effectively in time for the examinations continues into this year.

The techniques of taking examinations were deficient for a number of candidates. Many candidates were apparently unaware of the meaning of terms used in questions such as “explain”, “identify” or “relate”. Teachers should be reminded that a glossary of terms is printed on pages 60 – 61 of the syllabus and that candidates should be familiar with the nuances of each term in order to effectively take the examination.

Profile 2, Interpretation and Analysis, was not adequately demonstrated by candidates and was well below expectations. This was both surprising and a source of concern, but seemed to be a reflection of the way the syllabus is taught. Performance in Profile 3 - Application showed that this was a challenge for many of the candidates. In many cases candidates were unable to adequately apply their knowledge to the situations at hand. In too many cases candidates tended to be either vague or “preachy” in their responses.

Teachers who are thoroughly prepared for the teaching of the subject, committed to objectivity in their approach and the academic discipline required could make much difference in respect of the preparation and overall performance of those who enter as candidates for the examination.

DETAILED COMMENTS

Paper 01 – Multiple Choice

With the new syllabus, questions relating to Caribbean Indigenous Religions were included for the first time on the paper. Performance on this paper was quite satisfactory. Candidates demonstrated sound all-round knowledge and understanding of the content and objectives tested.

Paper 02 – Essay

Question 1 (Human Life Issues)

This question tested specific objectives 3 and 5 and content areas 1 and 3 of Section 1 of Option A.

This was the compulsory question. The question sought to address the social ills which affect the human family and ways in which these could be addressed.

Most candidates had a difficulty in part (a) of the question; many were either unable to identify the scripture passages requested or did not understand what was required of them. Many gave short essay type answers instead of just stating the answer.

Some candidates were able to express an understanding about the issues of discrimination and some were able to relate the concept of one “human family” to the ways in which all are affected by HIV/AIDS. Yet many answers displayed a lack of awareness on the part of candidates about the issues relating to HIV/AIDS and the ways in which the human family is either affected or infected with the disease. In many cases, candidates while able to define what is discrimination, and able to cite examples of the same, were unable to analyse how it negatively affected the human family. It was this failure to analyse which was the main concern for part (b) of the question.

Candidates were able to identify with the issues cited in part (c) of the question. Most candidates, however, simply defined the social issues mentioned in the question and discussed their definitions. For the most part application of knowledge was not displayed by the majority of candidates. In most cases, answers did not make much reference to the scriptures.

Question 2 (The Bible)

This was the most popular of the optional questions for candidates. Generally the responses given by candidates for this question were good.

While the majority of candidates were able to satisfactorily list books from the New Testament, it was noted that there was some difficulty with candidates doing the same for books from the Old Testament. Equally interesting was the fact that a significant number of candidates gave either Psalms or Proverbs as examples of books of the New Testament.

Some candidates misunderstood what was meant by “illustrate” in part (b) of the question and chose to draw diagrams to answer the question. Again, teachers are reminded to make students acquainted with the glossary of terms listed in the syllabus.

Most candidates were able to apply their knowledge in answering the question and gave several interesting and thought - provoking responses.

Question 3 (God):

This was the second most popular of the optional questions. The question dealt with the person and the work of the Holy Spirit. Of all the questions on the paper, this one dealt purely with a classical Christian doctrine, that of Pneumatology.

Generally the answers to the question were satisfactory.

While the responses to parts (a) and (c) were satisfactory, candidates showed some difficulty in responding to part (b) of the question. Responses tended to relate to the issue of the goodness of God and the love of God for the world. Few candidates were able to show the relation between the passage given and an understanding of the Trinity. In speaking about the work of the Spirit, most candidates spoke in general terms and some simply repeated the word “Counselor” without showing its meaning when applied to the Spirit.

Question 4 (Sin and Salvation):

This was least popular of the optional questions. The question sought to apply the concept of sin and salvation beyond the usual personal ways and looked at (1) social ills as a result of sinful actions and (2) ways of responding to these as ways of enacting redemptive actions. Specifically the question looked at the effects of pollution as sinful, and ways of cleaning the environment as a response arising from salvation.

Generally candidates were able to appreciate the concept of pollution and its effects on nature and society. However, most candidates were not able to make the connection between pollution and sinfulness. Responses showed that candidates had a difficulty to see in part (c) a response that could arise out of the concept of salvation. Answers tended therefore to be both vague and pontificating.

Paper 03 – School-Based Assessment

As in previous years, the overall performance of the candidates was commendable. There were quite a few well-researched and well-documented papers while others showed evidence of limited supervision resulting in poor analysis, faulty information and blatant plagiarism.

It was clear that some teachers followed the old syllabus. Thus the new set of criteria and corresponding components were either disregarded or dislocated.

Again there is need to highlight the teacher's role in ensuring that candidates produce research papers which reflect the quality standard expected by the Council. Generally, it is true that the performance of the students is linked to the preparedness of the teachers. Therefore only teachers who are trained in the subject area and who are suitably qualified in Religious Education should be allowed to prepare candidates for the subject.

Recommendations to School Administrators and Teachers

1. It must be stressed that Religious Education as an academic discipline is not the same as a Sunday/Sabbath School Class. This inability to make the distinction between the two was clearly manifested in the responses received. With the new syllabus, and the demands it makes, Religious Education must be recognised as a subject in its own right and only teachers who have been trained for this area should be engaged in its teaching.
2. Adequate resources in the form of books and funding for exploratory trips, must be available to teachers and pupils in the study of religion.
3. Those involved in the teaching of the subject must retain objectivity at all times and do everything necessary to ensure that their pupils become and remain curious and critical in their approach to the subject.
4. There should be more attention paid to helping pupils to interpret questions and write their answers with precision and creativity.
5. More attention needs to be given to the preparation, presentation and assessment of research projects.
6. Pupils should be persuaded to take the subject even though they may not be offering it for examination since it is so vital to their understanding of the cultural, social and moral context in which they live their lives.