

CARIBBEAN EXAMINATIONS COUNCIL

**REPORT ON CANDIDATES' WORK IN THE
SECONDARY EDUCATION
MAY/JUNE 2008**

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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RELIGIOUS EDUCATION
GENERAL PROFICIENCY EXAMINATION
JUNE 2008
GENERAL COMMENTS

The examination in 2008 was the second examination 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 1, to date only the Christianity Option is currently being examined in Paper 2. The examinations for 2008 were therefore set to enable candidates to explore various social issues through the lens of religious thinking and to inculcate moral 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.

While the syllabus would have been in operation for at least three (3) years, evidence continues to be seen, especially in Papers 2 and 3, 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.

Examination taking techniques continue to be found wanting for a number of candidates. Many candidates were apparently unaware of the meaning of certain 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. Candidates should be encouraged to note the differences in mark assignments as a guide to depth of information needed.

Profiles 2 and 3 (i.e. Interpretation and Application) were not adequately demonstrated by candidates and performance was well below expectations. In fact, statistics this year for these two profiles were lowest for the past two years. This was both surprising and a source of concern, but seemed to be a reflection of the way the syllabus was taught. In many cases persons were unable to adequately apply their knowledge to the situations at hand. In too many cases persons tended to be either vague or “preachy” in their responses.

It would seem that both students and teachers continue to grapple with the serious academic discipline that is required for the study of Religious Education. It should be stressed that Religious Education as an academic discipline is not the same as a Sunday/Sabbath School Class. 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. The same would be true of any other academic discipline.

Teachers who are thoroughly prepared for the teaching of the subject, committed to objectivity in their approach and possess 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

Performance on this paper was quite satisfactory. Candidates demonstrated sound all-round knowledge and understanding of the content and objectives tested. There was some difficulty in Paper 01 on questions which dealt with the understanding of the indigenous religions, and particularly those which dealt with Vodun.

Paper 02 – Essay

Question 1 (Human Life Issues)

This question tested Specific Objective 2, and Content 2 & 3 of Section 1 of Option A

This was the compulsory question. The question sought to address the social ills of discrimination and ostracism and its effects on the human person and society. The question also sought to address the ways in which these issues could be addressed through the lens of the Christian religion.

The question used as a stimulus, the encounter of Jesus with the ten lepers. Most candidates had little difficulty with understanding the passage.

While candidates were able to interpret the passage and explain the reasons why gratitude should be displayed, they had some difficulty in their ability to apply their knowledge to everyday life situations. The twining of mental illness with HIV/AIDS, for example, proved for some candidates to be difficult. Many were able to deal with the concept from the perspective of HIV/AIDS or from the perspective of mental illness, but not the two together.

The real difficulty for candidates came in applying biblical teachings. While in many cases candidates were able to give general moralising, these were often time not backed up with appropriate scriptural references. Some candidates were able to express an understanding about the issues of restoring individuals who were discriminated against and some were able to relate this to the concept of the worth of the human individual.

Many answers displayed a woeful lack of awareness on the part of candidates about the issues relating to being an outcast in the modern society.

Question 2 (The Bible)

This question tested Specific Objectives 3 and 4, and Content 3 (i) (f) and 4 of Section 2 of Option A.

This was the most popular of the optional questions, with approximately 86% of the candidates attempting this question.

It is likely that this question was popular because it dealt with the concept of love. The passage of scripture selected as a stimulus for the question was itself well known and candidates were able to adequately handle the knowledge portions of the question. However, the concept of love may have proven to be deceptively deep for the majority of the candidates. This resulted in many candidates giving superficial responses in the interpretation and application portions of the question.

In part (c) of the question many candidates assumed that the excerpt of the dialogue was about premarital sex and chose to deal with that issue rather than applying an understanding of Christian love to deal with situations of manipulation, coercion and undue influence.

Many candidates were unable to adequately explain ways in which an understanding of life may be misunderstood or abused. In this regard candidates tended to be preachy or moralising, instead of addressing the issues needed for the question.

Some candidates, however, were able to apply their knowledge in answering the question and gave several interesting and thought provoking responses.

Question 3 (God):

This question tested Specific Objective 4, and Content 4(vi) and (x) of Section 3 of Option A.

This was the second most popular of the optional questions. The question dealt with the issues of God's presence in a world which seems to be plagued with evil. The question called upon candidates to identify how God is at work in the world although so many things seem to be going in an ungodly direction.

Generally the answers to the question were satisfactory.

Candidates, however, showed some difficulty in interpreting the passage of scripture selected for part (b) (i) of the question. However, most candidates showed little difficulty in explaining how God is watching human kind.

Few candidates were able, however, to provide appropriate biblical references to support their answers.

Question 4 (Sin and Salvation):

This question tested Specific Objectives 6 & 7, and Content 6 & 7(ii) of Section 4 of Option A.

This was least popular of the optional questions. The question sought to apply the concept of faith and works as it relates to salvation. The question called upon candidates to display their understanding of salvation through faith and the place of good works as a result of, and not as a precursor for, salvation.

Generally, candidates were unable to make the connection between faith as a requirement for salvation. In many cases, candidates seemed to have confused the concept of having faith with the concept of being saved. At the same time, most candidates were unable to demonstrate an understanding of the place of good works in the life of the person saved by faith.

Many candidates were unable to see the relationship between having faith and addressing a social issue. Indeed several of the candidates attempted this section of the question by moralising instead of displaying their ability to interpret the scripture passage offered.

While some candidates displayed a strong ability to deal with the issues raised by the question, in far too many instances answers tended to be both vague and pontificating.

Paper 03 – School Based Assessment

Overall the SBA samples presented were satisfactory. There were, however, instances that caused some concern. Among these were that some teachers seem to be unaware of the revised syllabus, effective for examinations from May/June 2007. In these instances samples were presented in the format outlined in the old syllabus. In these cases the marks were significantly reduced after the sample was marked using the revised criteria that were set out in the new syllabus.

Teachers are reminded that candidates should include all the criteria (e.g. method of data collection and conclusion) in their work as marks are allocated for these areas.

Candidates should be reminded that they are required to choose only one aspect of the religion for research. Some candidates were attempting to consider the entire religion or denomination in their work. This, however, makes analysis difficult and their research too extensive. Candidates are reminded that the origin of a religion or religious denomination could be a topic of its own and that a detailed examination of the origins of a religion or denomination is no longer required as part of the research.

Generally the ability to analyse information seemed to be weak and the analysis tended to be unrelated to the data presented in the work.

Candidates should be encouraged to research thoroughly their topics and assisted in developing summary skills. In far too many cases candidates were simply presenting the work of other sources (e.g. from the Internet) with little or no modification. This tended to give the impression that there was a lack of understanding of the data gathered. Candidates should be helped to understand the moral, ethical and legal implications of plagiarism and should be encouraged not to be involved in those situations.

More attention needs to be given to helping candidates master the writing of bibliographies.

Teachers are reminded that half marks are not accepted in awarding grades for the SBA.

Recommendation to School Administrators and Teachers:

1. Teachers should ensure that they have and are using the most up to date version of the syllabus. It may be prudent for schools to collaborate and seek to hold workshops on the new foci of the revised syllabus.
2. It must again be stressed that Religious Education as an academic discipline is not the same as Sunday/Sabbath School Class. This inability to make the distinction between the two was again clearly manifested in the responses received.
3. With the new syllabus, Religious Education must be recognised as an academic discipline in its own right. This has implications not only for the teachers who are employed to teach the subject but also for the assumptions which are brought to bear on the subject. Every effort must be made to divorce from the teaching of the subject, religious and denominational bias. Indeed the teaching of Religious Education must not become a means of proselytising.
4. 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.
5. Adequate resources in the form of books and funding for exploratory trips must be available to teachers and candidates in the study of religion.

6. Candidates must be assisted in sharpening their ability to interpret and apply their knowledge.
7. Greater care needs to be given to the preparation, presentation and assessment of research projects. Schools will greatly assist candidates if plagiarism is frowned upon.
8. Pupils should be encouraged 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. The perception of Religious Education as a tool only for persons contemplating Ordained Ministry should be rejected by school administrators.