

CARIBBEAN EXAMINATIONS COUNCIL

**REPORT ON CANDIDATES' WORK IN THE
SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION
MAY/JUNE 2009**

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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GENERAL PROFICIENCY EXAMINATION
JUNE 2009

GENERAL COMMENTS

The CSEC examination in Religious Education consists of three papers.

Paper 01 consists of 60 compulsory multiple choice items. These items are based on the specific objectives of the Compulsory Core: Essentials of Religion, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Caribbean Indigenous Religions.

The Paper 01 examination contributes 50% of the marks to the Religious Education examination.

Paper 02 is an essay paper which consists of four questions. Candidates are required to do three questions: Question 1 and any two of the other three questions. For Option A – Christianity, the questions are set as outlined in the syllabus.

Question 1 – Human Life Issues	(36 marks)
Question 2 – The Bible	(32 marks)
Question 3 – God	(32 marks)
Question 4 – Sin and Salvation	(32 marks)

The Paper 02 examination contributes 30% of the marks to the Religious Education examination.

Paper 03/1 is the School-Based Assessment; it is a research paper. Students are required to explore the denominations and sects of selected world religions and Caribbean Indigenous religions.

The School-Based Assessment contributes 20% of the marks to the examination.

The examination in 2009 was the third under the revised syllabus for Religious Education. The study of religions under the Caribbean Examination's Council CSEC syllabus aims to allow candidates to study the phenomenon of religion and to enable an understanding of the meaning and purpose of life through the lens of the religions under investigation. Religious Education, as understood in this syllabus, is different from religious instruction which aims to convince persons of the truthfulness of any religion. It must always be understood that Religious Education is not synonymous to a Sunday/Sabbath School experience or attempts to evangelise or proselytise candidates.

It appears that some schools continue to operate with the understanding of the 'old' syllabus. This is seen mostly in the School-Based Assessment (Paper 03), as some teachers continue to assess projects using the old scheme of assessment. In Paper 01, Multiple Choice, it is evident that candidates are not as familiar with the Caribbean Indigenous Religions as other religions. The inclusion of the Caribbean Indigenous Religions in Paper 01 is a feature of the revised syllabus and the trend of responses to the questions about these religions suggests that candidates have some difficulty in this area. As in previous years the concern continues to be that candidates may not have effectively covered the syllabus in time for the examinations.

A major concern has been the weakness of the candidates to analyse, interpret and apply their knowledge. While it is clear that for the most part candidates have the information covered by the syllabus, it must be remembered that the examinations require more than simply the regurgitation of information. The better able candidates have been able to analyse situations through the lens of religion and apply their knowledge to a wide range of contemporary issues. Profiles 2 and 3 (i.e. Interpretation and Analysis, and Application) were not adequately demonstrated by a significant number of candidates. This continues to be a source of concern as it appears to be a reflection of the way that the syllabus was taught. 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.

With the revised syllabus, and the demands it makes, Religious Education must be recognised as a subject in its own right. As such only teachers who have been trained for this area and subject should be engaged in its teaching. Ideally, only persons who have been trained to teach Religious Education or those who hold a Theology degree and have studied Contemporary Religions, 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 a major difference in respect to the preparation and overall performance of those who enter as candidates for the examination.

For the most part the performance of candidates was commendable.

DETAILED COMMENTS

Paper 01 – Multiple Choice

Candidates’ performance in this paper was quite satisfactory. Candidates demonstrated sound, all-round knowledge and understanding of the content and objectives tested. There continues to be a weakness however, on questions which dealt with the understanding of the Caribbean Indigenous Religions.

Paper 02 – Essay

Question 1 (Human Life Issues)

This question tested Specific Objective 2 and Content 2(iv) of Section 1, (Option A).

This was the compulsory question and was attempted by 3, 695 candidates. The question sought to allow candidates to reflect on the issues of image and identity through the lens of Christianity. The question also sought to allow candidates to indicate if Christianity dealt with the acceptance of self or if the religion was silent on this issue.

The stimulus for the question was Jesus’ interaction with children and babies. The questions which followed in Parts (a) and (b) were knowledge based and required candidates simply to identify the answers that were within the stimulus. Most candidates had little difficulty with understanding the passage.

Part (c) of the question assessed Interpretation and Analysis. Candidates were required to display their understanding of the encounter of the boy, Jesus, in the temple. Using the passage, candidates were asked to offer an interpretation of the passage as it relates to Jesus’ relationship with God, his parents and with himself. Responses showed a general weakness by candidates to interpret the passage and to offer an analysis of the issues. In too many cases candidates offered generalisations or simply regurgitated scripture passages. The stronger candidates would have included the following issues: the ‘Son-ship’ of Jesus, Jesus’ willingness to be obedient to God and Jesus’ understanding of himself as human and divine.

The application component of the question, Part (d), asked candidates to look at the issue of skin bleaching. Candidates were able to use their experiences to answer the question and were clearly able to identify with the issues being raised in the question. For the most part, issues of identity and acceptance of self were brought to the fore and dealt with by the stronger candidates. Generally, candidates were able to display awareness about the issues of race and colour, discrimination and self-acceptance. However, while able to discuss the issues candidates' arguments were often times not supported with appropriate scriptural references. Consequently, while there was general discussion about the issues these came across as general moralising which were not anchored "in the light of biblical teachings." The mean mark for this question was 17.19 out of a total of 36.

Question 2 (The Bible)

This question tested Specific Objective 4 and Content 4(iii) of Section 2 (Option A).

This was the second most popular of the optional questions, with approximately 2,456 candidates choosing to answer this question.

The question sought to engage candidates in the biblical teaching on suffering. The stimulus for the question was taken from the Apostle Paul's letter to the Corinthian church in which he spoke about his weaknesses.

For the most part, candidates responded adequately to Part (a) which assessed knowledge. However, Part (b) (Interpretation and Analysis) proved to be a challenge to some candidates. In many cases, candidates simply transcribed the passage instead of offering an explanation of what the passage means. The application section of the question (Section (c)) asked the candidates to apply their understanding about suffering to a case dealing with breast cancer.

The question revealed that there was a general understanding on the part of candidates that suffering always occurred as a direct result of sinfulness or wrong doing. No doubt while there are sections of Christianity that hold to this view, it was unfortunate that a more broad-based understanding of the biblical teaching on this topic was not displayed by the majority of candidates. The result was, therefore, that the teaching on suffering appeared as a punitive response from God. This perspective is regrettably too narrow and did not allow candidates to reveal a full understanding of the scriptures.

In Part (c) of the question many candidates showed a woeful lack of understanding about breast cancer and its effect on the life of women. Consequently, candidates generally were unable to see the genuine experience of suffering. For the most part, candidates gave the impression that the incidence of breast cancer was as a result of the wrong doing of the cancer patient and was therefore an act of judgement on the part of God. There was a tendency on the part of candidates to 'over-spiritualise' on this matter and suggested moralising statements in an attempt to respond to the issues raised by the question. Few candidates were able to consider suffering as a means for persons to learn some of life's lessons or that things which cause suffering happen and they may not be as a result of the wrong doing of others.

The mean mark for this question was 18.20 out of a total of 32 marks.

Question 3 (God):

This question tested Specific Objective 3 and Content 3(ii) of Section 3 (Option A).

This was the most popular of the optional questions with approximately 3,293 candidates attempting it. This question was distinctively Christological in nature and looked at the titles given to Jesus in scripture. Specifically the question centred on the title of "Bread of Life" and to a lesser extent on the title "Lamb of God".

Part (a), which assessed knowledge, was satisfactorily done by most candidates. Likewise, candidates showed little difficulty in offering an explanation of the passage. The stronger candidates were able to move their responses to the spiritual understanding of the “bread of life.” They were able to discuss the view of Jesus as the source of life and the one who sustains life.

Part (b) (ii) presented difficulty for the candidates. Many candidates sought to make a connection between the titles of “bread of life” and “Lamb of God” and did not see that the question did not request such a connection.

Part (c) also presented some degree of difficulty to the candidates. Many candidates failed to make the connection between the physical need for food and the claim of Christianity to meet the needs of people. Candidates tended to see the Christian claim only in spiritual terms and many continued to make a strict distinction between the spiritual food and physical food. The stronger candidates were able to apply the Christian teaching about care and concern for others as a means where Christianity meets the needs of persons who are hungry. They were also able to make the clear connection between the provisions of God and the effects of human greed.

The mean mark for this question was 17.98 out of a total mark of 32.

Question 4 (Sin and Salvation):

This was the least popular of the optional questions with approximately 1,623 candidates choosing to answer it. The question tested Specific Objective 4 and Content 7 (iii) of Section 4 of Option A.

The question sought to test the candidates’ understanding of how Christianity presents forgiveness. The question called upon candidates to apply their understanding of forgiveness to a variety of issues and situations.

The question utilised a picture as the stimulus for Part (a). Candidates were able to use the stimulus effectively to answer this part of the question and it also assisted some candidates in answering Part (b). Candidates were able to provide good examples of biblical acts of forgiveness.

Candidates were also able to discuss the issue of Jesus forgiving sins. In this regard, candidates were able to display a good grasp of the issues of sin and salvation as seen in the work of Jesus.

In general, candidates were able to display good application abilities in Part (c). Many cited good examples of ways in which government and parents could show forgiveness. However, many candidates failed to anchor their responses in scripture and in that regard there was little to differentiate the response as being distinctively Christian.

The mean mark for this question was 19.30 out of a total of 32 marks. It was the highest mean for any of the questions.

Paper 03 – School-Based Assessment

Overall, the SBA samples presented were satisfactory. A number of good projects were completed by candidates and the samples presented for moderation made evident this fact. Projects were on a variety of topics and indicated that much serious research was done by candidates throughout the region.

There were, however, instances that caused some concern. In the marking of the samples for the 2009 examinations the following were identified:

- i. Schools were still using the old syllabus to guide the candidates. In far too many cases the marking forms from the old syllabus were being used to record the candidates’ scores.
- ii. All the tasks that were required by the examination body were not properly laid out.

- iii. Care needs to be taken in helping candidates to identify the specific area of study and in summarising their findings. Candidates should be helped to determine the specific aim for their study.
- iv. In some instances the word limit as indicated in the syllabus was not adhered to.

The School-Based Assessment draws on a cross-section of skills which are not unique to the study of Religious Education. To this end, it may be in the best interest of schools to entrench the teaching of writing reports on research projects. The skills learnt will benefit many of the current subjects at the secondary school level and will definitely put the candidate in better stead for post-secondary education. This fundamental weakness may be why in far too many cases the summary of findings, analysis and conclusions were misinterpreted; candidates displayed difficulty in showing the difference in content placed under these headings. At the same time, there was also much generalising of findings and in some cases these had no relation to the stated aim of the project.

Candidates also need assistance in citing their sources. In many instances, while many sources were cited in the bibliography, only one source seemed to have been used, mentioned or highlighted in the analysis of information. This could mean that in reality only one source was used for the project and others were cited in an attempt to “pad” the bibliography. At the same time, candidates should be made to understand the serious consequences of plagiarism and dishonesty when doing a project for academic purposes.

Candidates should be cautioned about simply downloading information from the World Wide Web and presenting as if it were their own work. In some cases, information was presented which contained no summarising of information. In one instance a project was presented from the Eastern Caribbean on a particular topic and yet another project came from the Western Caribbean on the same topic, yet both projects were approximately 90% the same work – word for word. The source for both projects came from the same site on the Internet.

In some cases, there was clear evidence of how the teachers arrived at their final grades. In some instances, teachers did not adhere to the guidelines of the syllabus and a number of important areas in the projects were missing. Among those areas missing were the aim, analysis of data, collection of data and bibliography. In these instances, the conclusions that were made did not appear relevant to the specific topic or summary of findings. The evidence seems to suggest that some teachers do not know how to mark the projects and need urgent assistance so that candidates are not disadvantaged.

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 is an academic discipline and candidates who display the ability to analyse, interpret and apply knowledge should not be steered away from the subject.
3. Teachers employed to teach the subject should be trained in the field. Effort must be made to divorce the teaching of the subject from religious and denominational bias. Religious Education must not be seen as a means of proselytising.
4. Those teaching the subject must retain objectivity at all times and do everything necessary to ensure that their candidates become and retain curious and critical thinking in their approach to the subject.
5. Every effort should be made to teach project writing as a cross-discipline approach in the curriculum of schools. This would enable the writing of projects not only for Religious Education but also for other subjects requiring projects for School-Based Assessments for CSEC.
6. Adequate resources in the form of books and funding for exploratory trips must be available to teachers and candidates who are pursuing the study of Religious Education.

7. More attention must be given in the teaching of the subject to help candidates to sharpen their ability to interpret and apply their knowledge.
8. Greater care need to be given in warning candidates about the serious consequences of plagiarism and dishonesty in the academic circles.
9. Given the fact that religious issues and the need for deeper understanding and appreciation of cultural and religious differences have become critical retain have become in today's world, candidates should be encouraged to take the subject even if they do not intend to sit the examination. Religious Education is becoming a vital ingredient in the understanding of cultural, social and moral issues in the world in which they live. The perception that Religious Education is needed only for persons who are contemplating Ordained Ministry is totally outdated and should be rejected by school administrators.