

C A R I B B E A N E X A M I N A T I O N S C O U N C I L

**REPORT ON CANDIDATES' WORK IN THE
SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION
MAY/JUNE 2004**

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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RELIGIOUS EDUCATION
GENERAL PROFICIENCY EXAMINATION

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GENERAL COMMENTS

The number of candidates entered for the examination this year increased in comparison with 2003, and the general level of performance was slightly better than that of the previous year.

A significant feature of this year's examination was the increase in the number of candidates from schools in the Eastern Caribbean, and quite appropriately there were two examiners from outside of Jamaica.

The overall performance on Paper 01 (Multiple Choice) was quite satisfactory. The questions on this paper covered the major areas of Section I of the syllabus and were at an appropriate level of difficulty for candidates at this level.

As in previous years, the responses to the questions in Paper 02 (Essay Questions) betrayed lack of familiarity with the syllabus on the part of the weaker candidates. Much of what was written by such candidates appeared to reveal a lack of preparation for the examination. Their responses tended to be sermonettes based on superficial understanding of familiar texts of the Bible that are widely known but often misinterpreted. This superficiality could be due in large measure to what seems to be the hesitancy on the part of some teachers to adopt a critical approach to the interpretation of the scriptures.

As in previous years a major weakness of many responses was due to the inability of candidates to express themselves confidently and clearly in standard English. Where this inability resulted in failure to communicate their knowledge and understanding of the subject matter tested, candidates' marks would have suffered.

In several instances, candidates performed satisfactorily on those parts of the questions that required recall of factual information but did not do as well on those parts that required interpretation and application of knowledge. In this regard teachers and candidates are reminded to pay attention to responding appropriately to key words in questions, such as "explain", "outline" and "advise".

Questions couched in these terms require interpretation, and credit is given for clear, fully developed and relevant answers. In addition, the latter part(s) of the essay questions require candidates to demonstrate the ability to apply scriptural teachings to issues that they are likely to encounter in their daily lives. Candidates must remember that any advice or argument that they provide in response to these questions must be grounded in and supported by relevant references to the scriptures.

Despite the weaknesses referred to, and as the examination results demonstrate, there were responses of very high standard from candidates in many schools reflecting thorough preparation of candidates for the examination, depth of commitment to the subject and insight in the interpreting of the questions and the writing of responses.

DETAILED COMMENTS

Paper 01 – Multiple Choice

Overall performance on Paper 01 declined in comparison with 2003, but, nevertheless, was quite satisfactory. Candidates demonstrated equal ability on items testing Profile 1 (Knowledge) and those testing Profile 2 (Interpretation/Analysis).

Paper 02 – Essay

Question 1 (Human Life Issues and the Bible)

This question set out to test candidates' knowledge of Jesus' teaching regarding how believers should behave towards other persons, their understanding of why persons might shy away from expressing their views on moral issues and their ability to apply the precept in Proverbs 3:9 to daily living. For many candidates, it turned out to be quite challenging. Far too many candidates had wrong answers to (a) (i) and (a) (iii) and (b) (i) a) and b) and in too many cases responses to b (ii) b) were lacking in imaginativeness and depth.

There is obviously the need for candidates to get practice in the reading and interpreting of questions and the application of their knowledge of scripture to real life experiences. In too many responses candidates were satisfied with simply generally advising their friends to give their hearts to the Lord, go to church and keep the commandments. The better candidates provided responses that were more analytical and applied basic tenets of ethics and Christian theology to the situation presented in those parts of the question that required interpretation and application of knowledge.

Question 2 (Concept of Sin)

This question sought to test candidates' knowledge and understanding of the consequences of sin and their ability to apply knowledge of biblical teachings on sin to their everyday existence.

Responses were generally quite satisfactory. Most candidates scored fairly well on those parts of the question that required them to demonstrate adequate understanding of the word 'alienation' and the concept 'sense of guilt'. By the same token part (c), testing the Application profile, and requiring an explanation of the effects of exposure to popular forms of entertainment and the positive features of the same, attracted responses that were mostly appropriate and well written.

Most responses showed evidence of knowledge of the scripture portions dealing with matters related to sin and its consequences. It was obvious that candidates were well prepared on this aspect of the syllabus.

Question 3 (God)

This question tested candidates' knowledge and understanding of humans' attempts to explain the occurrence of what is perceived to be evil and misfortune within the context of the Judeo-Christian notions of the sovereignty of God over creation, and God's love and intention to do only what is good for those who are objects of divine love.

Candidates found the question to be quite challenging. It was not one of the more popular choices among the optional questions. However, responses to the parts of the question testing knowledge and recall of factual information were generally satisfactory and many who attempted this question showed much maturity in their responses on all parts of the question. They and their teachers deserve commendation for the quality of their work.

Among other things this question was a challenge to teachers to give more attention to basic theological concepts in preparing their charges in this area of the syllabus.

Question 4 (Salvation)

This question tested candidates' understanding of the Christian view of salvation and ability to apply biblical teachings on salvation in the context of someone who is guilty of serious crimes and has given up all hope of being saved.

Despite its high theoretical content this question was satisfactorily answered by most of the candidates who attempted it.

A common flaw in the weaker responses was the failure of candidates to conceive of freedom in terms other than the specifically religious. In many of these responses there was evidence of the inability or hesitance of candidates to write about salvation/freedom in language other than that of the King James version of the Bible. There were also numerous instances of candidates using the same set of words to respond to two or three parts of the question. For instance, in a number of cases the word 'salvation' was used in four sentences consecutively, thus highlighting the restrictive effect of limited vocabulary and common misconceptions about the 'sacredness' of the English of the King James version of the Bible.

Another weakness in many of the weaker responses to this question appeared to be due to failure to respond appropriately to the words 'outline' and 'describe' in both sections of profile three. Much could be achieved in minimising the prevalence of the weaknesses referred to, by ensuring that candidates be exposed to as many versions of the Bible as possible and encouraging candidates to express religious beliefs in the language of their respective cultural and linguistic contexts.

Question 5 (Reign of God)

This question was the most popular of the four optional ones. Part (a) (ii) required that candidates recognize in the passage reference to human sacrifice as practised in ancient Hebrew religions.

Parts (b) and (c) required candidates to show their understanding of why qualities of justice and kindness were more important than of giving sacrifices to God. The performance of the majority of candidates revealed maturity of those who attempted this question. Many answers were creative and satisfactory and both the candidates and their teachers deserve commendation for this.

Paper 03 – School Based Assessment

This year showed that a considerable amount of work and research had been done by students in the preparation of their research projects. Students, however, continue to need more guidance in the arranging and presentation of their information as it relates to the required areas. While it is commendable that students were willing to go to great lengths in their research and presentation, a word of caution must be sounded to students (and by extension to the teachers) that actual samples of illegal substances (e.g. marijuana) should not be included in their presentations.

Generally there was a need for students to better marshal their findings so that the relevant information could be discovered more readily. Greater care is needed, also, to ensure that the analysis and application of findings should not be combined and each should stand on their own merit. In many cases development of points was weak and there was a tendency for students to pad their presentations with much unnecessary and irrelevant information.

In far too many instances SBA marking forms were absent from the projects presented. Consequently it was not easy to follow clearly the trend of marking by the teachers. Teachers are reminded that half-marks should not be awarded.

Recommendations:

1. Greater care needs to be taken in following the requirements and guidelines for the research paper as is outlined on page 38 of the syllabus.
2. Whereas there are no major changes being envisioned in the SBA component of the CSEC Religious Education Syllabus that workshops be held for teachers to assist them to prepare students to complete the SBA project.

Suggestions to Teachers

1. Everything should be done to ensure that adequate resources are provided for the pursuit of the study of religion in secondary schools.
2. Ministries of Education should provide for the holding of workshops on a regular basis for teachers of Religious Education with a view to enhancing their effectiveness as instructors and motivators.
3. Students of the subject should be given more direction and opportunities for practice in the interpreting and answering of questions.
4. More attention should be given to the requirements and guidelines for the research paper as outlined on page 38 of the syllabus.
5. Workshops should be arranged throughout the region with emphasis on the preparation of teachers who work with students on the completion of SBA projects in Religious Education.