

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 2005**

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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RELIGIOUS EDUCATION
GENERAL PROFICIENCY EXAMINATION

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GENERAL COMMENTS

The number of candidates increased by 363 or 17 per cent over that of the previous year. The number of countries entering candidates for the examination also increased.

The overall performance on Paper 01 (Multiple Choice) improved slightly over that of 2004. The questions on this paper covered Section 1 of the syllabus and candidates demonstrated a sound grasp of the content covered.

As in previous years, unsatisfactory responses to questions in Paper 02 (Essay Questions) manifested the same weaknesses identified in other reports. These were lack of familiarity with the requirements of the syllabus, ignorance of the biblical text, ignorance of the difference in the contents of the Old and New Testaments, inability to interpret questions and lack of practice in the writing of responses to examination questions.

The inability of a significant number of candidates to express themselves clearly and precisely was once again a cause for concern.

In a large number of responses candidates failed to demonstrate an understanding of the difference between 'God' and 'Jesus' or 'Christ'. This might be attributable to the need for teachers to be familiar with the basic concepts of Biblical Theology.

Performance on the 'Application' part of the question was generally less satisfactory than in previous years. Responses tended to be 'preachy', following the popular practice of regurgitating familiar moralisms, thus betraying lack of creativity and less than satisfactory understanding of the contents of the syllabus.

Despite the weaknesses referred to, however, commendable work was done by large numbers of schools as is reflected in the distribution of the grades. There was ample evidence in the responses of the nearly three thousand candidates that the syllabus is appreciated and approached with a high degree of seriousness at a large number of schools across the Caribbean region. Understandably, this is reflected in the grades earned by candidates.

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.

Paper 02 – Essay

Question 1 (Human Life Issues and the Bible)

This question sought to test candidates on specific objectives 3, 7 and 10 of Unit I and objectives 8 and 9 of Unit VI, with special reference to Jesus' teachings on evidences of the impending end of time as reported in the thirteenth chapter of the Gospel of Mark.

In Part (a) (ii) the weaker candidates failed to see the distinction between 'signs' of the approach of the end of time and characteristics of the situation that will obtain after the 'end of time' as the latter are described in the twenty-fifth chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew and the Book of Revelation. Many candidates failed to locate the answers to the question in the stimulus passage appearing on the question paper.

Many candidates found parts (b) (i) and (ii) to be challenging. Most did fairly well on the issue of God's justness in requiring a responsible approach to other persons and the physical environment, but not very many were able to find three reasons to support the position they took in relation to God's justness.

A large number of candidates tended to be emotional about child abuse and failed to produce biblical references to the issue.

Most responses to the issue of war were disappointing. Candidates tended to be quite vague in their attempts to explain how persons engaged in war go against the purpose of God in whose image all human beings are made. Reference to the 'image of God' seemed to have been new to many candidates. Only the more outstanding candidates gave clear, relevant explanations as required in the question.

Most responses to part (c) of the question reflected both the relevance of the issue of drug trafficking and the awareness of the candidates of the danger of the activity to themselves and the rest of the society. The weaker candidates were unable to use biblical texts to support their understanding of the issue.

Question 2 (Concept of Sin)

This question sought to test the candidates' grasp of specific objectives 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 of Unit II.

From the responses given by many candidates it would seem that many candidates were so eager to express their disgust for homosexuals that they failed to focus on what parts (a) (i) and (ii) of the question asked for.

Most responses to (b) (i) and (ii) revealed a good grasp of the concepts tested by these parts of the question. Responses were mostly sound but the explanations of the weaker candidates were superficial, reflecting a rather shallow understanding of either the biblical views or the social implications of sin.

Responses to part (c) were predictable but the rationale offered for the decision to decline the invitation to the party tended to be shallow and lacking in biblical content. All responses indicated the prevalence of the awareness among adolescents of the dangers of the irresponsible involvement in sexual activity and the use of illegal substances, especially in peer groups.

Question 3 (God)

This question sought to test candidates' grasp of specific objectives 1, 3 and 4 of Unit III, with special reference to what is usually referred to as Divine Revelation and modes of God's involvement with human beings and the rest of creation.

The question was a very popular choice. The weaker responses betrayed the failure of candidates to identify the answers to part (a) in the passage itself. While answers to part (b) were for the most part correct, the explanation given by many candidates lacked depth and revealed the inability of all but the more able candidates to offer their own analysis or explanation for either their beliefs or their convictions.

In part (c) most candidates moralised about the issue of intercessory prayer rather than empathised. Answers highlighted the prevalence of the approach based on the understanding of God as being biased towards some petitioners rather than on that exemplified in the story of the importunate widow found in Luke 18: 1-8 or Jesus' admonition against undue anxiety as in Matthew 6: 25-34.

Most responses exposed the need for more to be done in helping candidates to understand the relationship between what is known about God as portrayed in the specific objectives of the Christianity option, and what might be expected in response to prayer or as a consequence of being in a meaningful relationship with God who is deemed to be faithful and responsive to those who are in a faith relationship with God.

Question 4 (Salvation)

This question sought to test candidates' understanding of specific objectives 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, and 8 of Unit IV, with special reference to the Christian understanding of what it means to be reconciled to God through Christ and committed to God's purpose for the world as demonstrated in the suffering and death of Jesus the Christ.

As the distribution of scores on this question indicated, those who were thoroughly prepared for the examination responded with the same degree of creativity and imaginativeness as was characteristic of their responses on other questions. The weaker responses highlighted the need for better preparation in the basics of Christian theology, with special reference to what is referred to as the doctrines of the Atonement and the Christian Life.

The weak responses betrayed the candidates' inability to distinguish between ideas and personalities of the Old Testament and those of the New Testament. For instance, in some responses Daniel and his friends were referred to as New Testament characters.

In part (b) many candidates demonstrated their inability to conceive of the social dimensions of the redemptive work of Christ. The weaker candidates were unable to relate their knowledge of scripture to the positions they took on social and moral challenges.

Responses to part (c) testified to the candidates' understanding of the relationship between what is traditionally referred to as 'Faith and Works'. However, only the better prepared candidates gave explanations that showed depth and evidence of knowledge of the scriptural background to the Christian position on such issues.

Question 5 (Reign of God)

This question sought to test the candidates' grasp of specific objectives 7, 8 and 10 of Unit VI, with special reference to the well-known injunction in the sixth chapter of the Book of Micah (Micah 6: 8)

Most candidates seemed to have had no difficulty with the interpretation of the passage, hence the appropriateness of most of the answers. However, as with most questions requiring personal explanations, there was much vagueness in attempts to give the reason for the position taken.

In a number of responses the scripture passages cited in support of the position taken on the issue were unrelated to the issue under consideration. A feature of many responses was the preoccupation with problems related to sex, especially homosexuality.

Most responses to part (c) of the question exposed the need for candidates to broaden their understanding of other faiths and become more sensitive to the issues related to the challenge throughout the world of living with persons with religious beliefs and convictions that differ from those with which one is familiar and comfortable. In relation to this, it is important for candidates to be made aware of the injustices practised against persons on the basis of ethnicity, politics, gender, age and religion.

Note needs to be taken by teachers, administrators in education, and parents that one of the objectives of the Religious Education syllabus is to bring about the diminution of a number of the prejudices that lead to many of the conflicts among categories of persons across the globe and thereby help to create a world in which persons and groups co-exist more amicably

Paper 03 – School Based Assessment

Students should be commended on the tremendous amount of research and quantity of information gathered for the preparation of their projects. In some instances there was evidence of attention to details and presentation of information and this should be commended. However, as noted last year, evidence points to the need for many students to have more guidance in the arranging and presentation of their information as it relates to the required areas of research. More care needs to be given in assisting students to write a research paper

In some cases there was evidence that teachers were either not familiar with the requirements of the syllabus for this aspect of the examination or simply chose to ignore them. Students should not be simply given the assignment topics and left to their own devices thereafter. The role of the teacher is crucial to the effective presentation of the final information. Sadly, in some cases there was evidence that this input was missing. To this end it would seem that support must be given to schools which have recently started to enter candidates for the examination.

A great quantity of information was presented by students. There is need to ensure that the application and analysis of findings are adequately done. The development of points to arrive at the stated aim of the project is necessary for the successful outcome of projects. Students should be cautioned against padding their presentation with information which is unnecessary and not germane to the aim of the projects.

Teachers are reminded that the use of half marks (e.g. $4\frac{1}{2}$) is not permitted when marking the research paper.

Teachers are also reminded that 2006 will be the final year for examinations on the current syllabus. They will need to use the guidelines in the new syllabus to assess their students preparing for the 2007 examinations.

Recommendations:

1. Insist that teachers follow meticulously the requirements and guidelines for the preparation of the research paper for school-based assessment, as outlined on page 38 of the syllabus.
2. Arrange workshops nationally and regionally for all teachers engaged in the teaching of the subject.

Suggestions to Teachers

1. Teachers should use all the channels available to them to get their respective Ministries of Education to provide them with the opportunities to upgrade their knowledge and skills in the teaching of the subject. As far as possible teachers securing better results should be used as resource persons in those workshops.
2. Candidates should be given more guidance and practice in the interpreting and answering of questions.
3. Make every effort to ensure that books and other resources related to the syllabus are made available to both teachers and students at every school.
4. Use every opportunity at PTA meetings and elsewhere to get parents to appreciate the value of the study of religion in the preparation of their children for the relational challenges of our increasingly globalised world.