

CARIBBEAN EXAMINATIONS COUNCIL

**REPORT ON CANDIDATES' WORK IN THE
SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION**

JUNE 2010

**RELIGIOUS EDUCATION
GENERAL PROFICIENCY**

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GENERAL COMMENTS

The study of religion as an academic endeavour is intended to enable candidates to ‘develop an understanding of the meaning and purpose of life as advanced by different religious practices’. The academic enquiry into the phenomenon of religion must be differentiated from religious instruction, where the latter is intended to enable faith or proselytise individuals. The Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) examination in Religious Education is grounded in this understanding and candidates sitting the examination should be aware of the focus of this academic discipline.

The Religious Education examination consists of three components. Paper 01, the Multiple-Choice paper, assesses the core which comprises four major world religions (Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism) along with six Caribbean Indigenous Religions and the Essentials of Religions. Paper 02, the Structured Essay paper, assesses the in-depth study of one of the major world religions. To date only the Christianity option is available for Paper 02. However, for the 2012 examinations and onwards, all four major religions will be assessed. Paper 03 is the School-Based Assessment (SBA).

The examinations for 2010 were set to enable candidates to explore a variety of social and interpersonal issues through the lens of religious thinking and to inculcate moral thinking. Candidates were required to display Knowledge (Profile 1), Application of Knowledge (Profile 3), and Interpretation and Analysis skills using Biblical principles (Profile 2). The better able candidates were those who were able to apply their knowledge of Biblical principles to a given situation.

For the 2010 examination, it was clear that candidates’ skills were better than in previous years. Candidates’ performance in Profile 3 (Application) improved and this may be due to more time being dedicated to developing the skill of application in preparation for the examination. Additionally, the stimuli were very topical and relevant and candidates demonstrated a very good grasp of the issues. While candidates showed some improvement in Interpretation and Analysis (Profile 2), it is evident that more work is needed in this area. Candidates need to be assisted in learning how to explain the meaning of Bible passages and to understand that simply paraphrasing or restating the passage is not offering an explanation.

Additionally, candidates preparing for this examination need to be aware of various social issues. The better able candidates displayed an awareness of the world around them and were able to analyse the same through the lens of religious thinking.

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 is once again being stressed that Religious Education as an academic discipline is not the same as a Sunday School or Sabbath School class. Weaker candidates may not have understood this point and tended to approach the answering of questions from the vantage point of preaching or pontificating. While homiletic skills may be necessary for church, it is not a requirement for the Religious Education examination. Given the demands that the syllabus makes, it is advisable that only teachers who have been trained in this area should be engaged in its teaching. The tendency to believe that a teacher “who goes to Church frequently” is ably suited to teach the subject must be avoided.

DETAILED COMMENTS

Paper 01 — Multiple Choice

This paper consisted of 60 multiple-choice questions. Candidates are required to answer the 60 questions. There are 10 questions on each of the Core. Performance on this paper was quite satisfactory and consistent with the performance in previous years. Candidates demonstrated sound all-round knowledge and understanding of the content and objectives tested. The weakness noted in the candidates’ ability to deal with the questions relating to the Caribbean Indigenous Religions last year persists. There was some improvement, however, in performance on the questions in Hinduism and Islam.

Paper 02 — Structured Essays

Question 1 (Human Life Issues)

This question tested Specific Objectives 4 and 5 (Option A) which are

- discuss the responsibilities and rights of individuals in areas of family life and work as reflected in the Bible
- illustrate how the Biblical concept of love applies to different areas of life and relationships.

This was the compulsory question. It was geared towards eliciting from candidates their understanding of the Christian teachings on marriage and family life. The question also sought to encourage the candidates to use their knowledge of the Christian faith to seek solutions to a given family situation.

For the most part, candidates were able to use their experiences to answer the question and found many Biblical references to support their answers. The responses of candidates indicated that the roles and responsibilities of husbands and wives, as understood in the Bible, were being reinforced in the classroom.

Part (a) of the question which assessed Knowledge (Profile1) was answered well by the majority of candidates. Some candidates, however, experienced difficulty in responding to Part (b) of the question which assessed their ability to interpret and analyse information. While in many cases candidates were able speak about passages and even write what they could remember of the passage, in far too many cases the references made to the passages were incorrect. Many of the candidates displayed weak analytic skills and therefore had difficulty interpreting the passage. Classroom exercises need to focus on developing candidates' interpretive and analytical skills in preparation for the Religious Education examination.

The better able candidates were able to demonstrate their skills in the application of knowledge in Part (c) of this question. In many cases, candidates displayed a fair degree of maturity in dealing with the subject and offered in the main sound advice to the hypothetical parties. Direct referencing of scripture was limited, however, the candidates were able to use inferences to indirectly point to the Biblical teachings. The subject of the case study seemed to be within the scope of the candidates and they were able to perform creditably in this question. The mean for this question was 23.74 out of a total of 36.

Question 2 (The Bible)

This question tested Specific Objectives 3 and 4 of Section 2 (Option A) which are

- explain how Biblical passages may be applied to areas of daily life
- relate Biblical teachings to personal and social experiences.

This was the least popular of the optional questions. The question sought to examine candidates' understanding of the teachings of the 'Sermon on the Mount', the similarities between the 'Sermon on the Mount', the Ten Commandments, and the teachings of the Apostle Paul. The question also sought to test the ability of candidates to apply the teachings of the 'Sermon on the Mount' to everyday living.

While candidates were able to identify the place where Jesus preached the sermon and the persons to whom he preached (in the stimulus), they were, however, unable to make any connection with the teachings of Paul or with the Ten Commandments. In many cases, candidates did not know the answers required and simply wrote what perhaps seemed good in their eyes. It was equally unfortunate that many candidates offered New Testament passages when the question asked for guidelines from the Old Testament. Teachers may need to ensure that students are aware of the books of the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Many candidates did not seem to understand what was required in Part (c) of the question. In many instances, they adopted a preaching posture. They were generally unable to make a link between their study

of religion and social issues of their time. Teachers may need to assist students to link the information from their study of other subjects and the study of religion. In this case, integration with the study of Social Studies would have proven to be useful. The mean for this question was 15.32 out of a total of 32.

Question 3 (God)

This question tested Specific Objectives 1 and 2 of Section 3 (Option A) which are

- understand the nature and attributes of God
- understand specific teachings of Christianity about God

The question tested candidates' knowledge of the attributes of God. The question was attempted by more than 80 per cent of the candidates. It was evident, given the responses, that this section of the syllabus was well known.

Part (a) was generally well done as candidates were able to identify the answers in the stimulus. The candidates were also able to identify appropriate Biblical instances that depicted God as provider and gave names for God as used in the Bible. The weaker candidates ignored the passage and created their own responses. For example, "Jesus turned stones into bread and wine", was a popular response to Part (a) (ii) of the question.

Part (b) seemed to have posed the greatest level of difficulty for candidates. In Part (b) (i), the weaker candidates were unable to explain what the passage revealed about God as provider. In this case, many of them simply transcribed or paraphrased the passage which was presented as a stimulus to the question. The stronger candidates were able to offer varying degrees of explanation for the passage. In Part (b) (ii), the word 'challenge' was misunderstood by the weaker candidates and thus prevented them from responding well to the question.

Part (c) was generally well done by all candidates. It was evident from their responses that they could relate to the scenarios depicted in the question and that they had knowledge of morals, ethics and the Bible, and were able to apply these to the situation which was presented. The Biblical references given in response to the question were in the main, relevant and contextually appropriate. The candidates generally displayed that they had acquired the skills of application. The mean for this question was 20.43 out of a total of 32.

Question 4 (Sin and Salvation)

This question tested Specific Objectives 3 and 4 of Section 4 (Option A) which are

- explain how Biblical passages may be applied to areas of daily life
- relate Biblical teachings to personal and social experiences.

Approximately 70 per cent of the candidates attempted this question. Generally, candidates performed reasonably well.

Part (a) of the question was well done by candidates. The weaker candidates, however, were unable to identify one or two other passages which showed that a consequence of sin is alienation from others and from God.

The weaker candidates did a fair job of answering Part (b) (i). The stronger candidates competently discussed how forgiveness and reconciliation with others are important aspects of salvation. For Part (b) (ii), a few candidates suggested that salvation is by works because of their misinterpretation of the passage.

The picture stimulus used in Part (c) proved useful to those candidates who saw it. Unfortunately, it appeared that some candidates did not recognise that the question continued on the overleaf and therefore completely ignored this section. Part (c) asked candidates to apply their understanding of forgiveness and reconciliation to the issue of corporal and capital punishment. A few candidates apparently did not know the meaning of the word 'reconciliation' and this resulted in a lack of depth in their arguments. Again, candidates seemed quite comfortable applying their knowledge to the issue in question. The mean for this question was 18.41 out of a total of 32.

Paper 03 — School-Based Assessment (SBA)

Overall, the SBA samples presented were satisfactory. There were, however, instances that caused some concerns. For the third consecutive year, it seems that some teachers are unaware of the revised syllabus, effective for examinations from May/June 2007. Where this occurred it meant that samples were presented in the format outlined in the old syllabus. Teachers are urged to acquire a copy of the current syllabus for the examinations.

In the marking of the SBA samples the following issues were identified:

- A number of projects had no title, candidate registration number, table of contents and bibliography. Along with this, the layout of the SBA was incorrectly done, for example, the interpretation and analysis of information came before the summary of findings and, in some instances, the aims of the project came almost at the end of the project.
- In some of the projects, the specific topic on the cover page was not related to the project which followed and appeared irrelevant to the body of work. Additionally, the aims were not clear or specific. There were also instances where the information in the Table of Contents did not correspond to the material presented.
- Questionnaires were too lengthy, irrelevant to the topic and aim of the project.
- Some students failed to differentiate between the summary of findings, which were sometimes too long, and the analysis and interpretation of information.
- In some instances, topics presented were not relevant to the syllabus and were very vague. Students should be helped to refine their topics and care should be exercised to ensure that the topics are related to the syllabus.

Profile 2 (Interpretation and Analysis) was particularly weak in the samples presented. It seemed that candidates did not understand what they were required to do in terms of the interpretation of the information presented. Where graphs, tables and charts were used, in many cases, these appeared more like props which were not included in the discussion of findings and analysis of information. The weakness of interpretation and analysis was also visible where the conclusion of the project was merely a restatement of the aim with little or no development, interpretation or analysis.

Care should be exercised to ensure that students present their own work and not work that has been taken 'wholesale' from a third party. In some instances, the vocabulary used in projects seemed far beyond the scope of reasoning offered in the project. In other cases, it was very evident that the work of students was extremely similar to information present on the Internet. In one instance, a search engine was cited as a reference source. Students should be made aware of the consequences of plagiarism and the seriousness with which it is held in academic circles.

Students should be reminded that there is a word limit for the SBA and that lengthy SBAs will be penalised as stated in the syllabus.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS AND TEACHERS

1. Teachers should continue to assist students to develop their application, interpretation and analysis skills. Classroom activities which will assist students to develop and hone these skills should be undertaken in preparation for the examinations.
2. It must again be stressed that Religious Education as an academic discipline is not the same as Sunday/Sabbath School Class. The inability to make this distinction may be working negatively against some candidates. Every effort must be made to divorce the teaching of the subject from religious and denominational bias.
3. Care should be taken to enable the linking of subjects to enable students to apply the knowledge gained in other disciplines to the study and reflections about religion.
4. Adequate resources in the form of books and funding for field trips should be made available to teachers and students in the study of religion. Inviting subject specialists to speak to the class is also encouraged.
5. Greater care needs to be given to the preparation, presentation and assessment of research projects. It should be clear to students that plagiarism is frowned upon and that persons simply lifting information from the Internet are easily identified.
6. The bias which exists against the study of religion should be avoided by schools and school administrators. The tendency to offer the subject to the so-called 'weaker students' not accepted to do other subjects should be stopped. Schools are encouraged to see the study of religion as vital to the understanding of the cultural, social and moral context of their lives and the development of the total Caribbean person. The perception of Religious Education as a tool only for persons contemplating Ordained Ministry should be rejected by school administrators.