

Teacher Resource Bank

GCE Religious Studies

Unit 4C Topic I *Religious Authority*

Example of Candidate's Response



**GENERAL CERTIFICATE OF EDUCATION
ADVANCED LEVEL**



**RELIGIOUS STUDIES UNIT 4C
Religious Authority**

RST4C

EXAMPLE OF CANDIDATE'S RESPONSE

For this paper you must have:

- a 12 page answer book.

Time allowed: 1 hour 30 minutes

Instructions

- Use black ink or ball-point pen.
- Write the information required on the front of your answer book.
The *Examining Body* for this paper is AQA. The *Paper Reference* is **RST4C**.
- Choose **one Section** only.
- Answer **one** question.

Information

- The maximum mark for this paper is 75.
- The marks for questions are shown in brackets.
- In each question, part (a) tests your knowledge and understanding, while part (b) tests your skills of reasoning and evaluation.
- You will be marked on your ability to use English, to organise information clearly and to use specialist vocabulary where appropriate.

RST4C Topic I *Religious Authority*

1 (a) Examine challenges to religious authority.

(45 marks)

AO1

Candidate Response

Almost all religious authority faces challenges from within the religious tradition itself and from outside the particular religious tradition and indeed from the secular world. I shall use Christianity as my example in this essay. Religious authority within the broad Christian tradition varies, in almost all cases Christian scripture has a degree of religious authority and in some denominations it is the most significant authority by far, for example most evangelical Christian movements vest the highest degree of authority in the scriptures. By way of contrast the Roman Catholic Church certainly grants authority to the scriptures but in addition there is the authority of the Pope as God's representative on earth, and the magisterium. In a number of Christian denominations there is the authority of the Holy Spirit often seen as the ongoing influence and presence of God after the death of Jesus Christ. In some Christian denominations the church is granted authority to pronounce on behalf of the Christian community and for some is seen as the central body with whom the Holy Spirit interacts. In many cases the church leaders have specific religious authority and sometimes even individual authority as in the Anglican church where the priest is granted considerable religious authority both sacramentally and institutionally.

I shall firstly consider the scriptures. For most Christians the Bible is seen to be the Word of God in one way or another, some consider that there should be a distinction between the Old and the New Testament, seeing the latter as fully Christian scripture and thus more authoritative. Some would suggest that the New Testament is the absolute word of God, others that it is the inspired Word of God and some suggest that the New Testament is man writing about his experiences with God. Even this leads to challenges in that those that maintain the New Testament is the absolute Word of God when others suggest that this is not the case but rather the New Testament is a collection of mans' writings. The former see this as challenging the authority of the New Testament, arguing that if it is not the absolute Word of God how can it carry any more authority than any thing else written by Christians and thus the whole foundation of Christianity is undermined since the messages and the teachings found in the New Testament carry no more authority than other ideas. Along side this is a similar approach towards biblical criticism which is also seen to undermine the authority of the New Testament, if it is not John the disciple who wrote John's gospel then the credibility of the messages in the gospel is undermined similarly the approach adopted by both Form and Redaction criticism is seen to further undermine the authority of the New Testament since this may suggest that John's gospel may have more than one author, that it was subjected to a process of editing, that it lifts text and accounts from earlier material written by others. This leads to a conclusion that John's gospel cannot, as it currently exists, be seen as a single written document and thus cannot be called the absolute Word of God and so its authority is certainly challenged. A similar concern is expressed for those who seek to grant similar authority to the Old Testament where once again biblical criticism is seen to challenge the authority since, for example, it is suggested that the Pentateuch has four editorial sources according to the documentary hypothesis.

There are also those who see the secular world challenging the authority of the scriptures, and the book of Genesis is a good example of this. When science is seen to largely accept the theory of evolution this is regarded as a direct challenge to the Genesis account of creation by God. How can there be evolution for mankind when Genesis clearly states that God created man and then women and therefore if people accept the scientific theory of evolution they must reject the Genesis account of creation and if this is rejected then surely any other aspect of the scripture can be rejected in a similar way, that is if challenged by the secular world therefore giving the scriptures little or no authority against the secular world at all.

The authority of the church is frequently challenged particularly where the church is considered to have much religious authority vested in it. The Anglican church is a good example of this. The current dispute in the Anglican church over the position of homosexuals. In America there has been a recognition in the Anglican church that homosexuals should be treated like any other men and thus they can be ordained and they can become bishops. This has been opposed by many others in the Anglican communion, in particular the African Anglican churches. The division has become so significant that there are those who believe that it will lead to a schism in the Anglican church, clearly threatening the authority of the church especially as it represented by the authority of the Archbishop of Canterbury. There are also many examples of the Anglican church's authority being challenged by the secular world. This ranges from the attempt by the church to oppose the changes to Sunday trading laws which has now allowed shops to trade freely on a Sunday in most cases, through to the church's opposition to the UK taking an active role in the Iraq war. In both cases the church spoke against government proposals and in both cases the church was totally ignored by the government. Some might argue that this is particularly significant since the Anglican church in England is the state church and thus one would expect it to have a particular authority.

Finally there are examples of challenges to the religious authority of individuals, perhaps a good example is to be found in the Roman Catholic church where the priest exercising his delegated authority seeks to encourage members of his congregation to adhere to the church's requirement that they should not use artificial contraception since this leads people to breaking God's requirement that sexual intercourse is for procreation. All of this was firmly established in *Humanae Vitae* issued by Pope Paul 6th in 1968. Many in the Roman Catholic church do not accept this and freely use artificial contraception. On a less specific note many would suggest that the status of the priest, whether Anglican or Roman Catholic has diminished in the latter part of the twentieth century clearly in society as a whole where there are two factors which probably explain this, one being the increase in the number of people who follow religious traditions other than Christianity. The second factor is the growth of secularism where many people simply do not consider that religion has anything relevant to say and indeed more seriously can be regarded as nothing to do with reality.

Commentary

The answer seeks to deal with challenges from both religion and from the secular world, which is quite acceptable given the question set. This answer is largely an 'in depth' approach since it focuses a lot of the material upon scripture, again because the answer is well informed and gives well placed examples, this is quite acceptable. In some cases, whilst there are plenty of examples the challenge to authority is not always fully established. Nevertheless a very sound response.

Level 6 (38 marks)

- (b) **Religious authority can never be defeated since it simply adapts to absorb any criticism.'**

Evaluate this assertion.

(30 marks)

AO2

Candidate Response

There are some examples which seem to support this assertion. The challenge to the authority of scripture generated by both higher biblical criticism and by science as in the case of the first two chapters of Genesis is a good example. It would appear that the claim that the material was the product of at least four separate traditions often referred to as JPED and that an acceptance of the theory of evolution must mean that these chapters in Genesis have not validity whatsoever. However, the reaction of many in the Christian church to this challenge has been to re-evaluate texts like Genesis and to suggest that the material is myth. By this they mean that the accounts are not literally true, but that they do contain fundamental truths in this case that God was in some way involved in creation but the detail found in Genesis is simply the thoughts of early man about how the world was created.

A rather different example might be the way Judaism has reacted to the Holocaust. The event challenges many of the traditional Jewish views about God and His relationship with the Jews as His Chosen People. Essentially how could God allow six million to die when He is good and omnipotent and they are His Chosen People. Faced with such a challenge one might expect Judaism to say that they must be wrong and there is no God and certainly not one with a special relationship. Yet, with one or two exceptions this has been far from the case and Jewish holocaust theology has sought to provide answers which continue to embrace traditional views of both God and His relationship with the Jews.

Some would suggest that the recent changes in the Anglican church with regard to the issue of women priests is another example of religious authority being challenged and then later adapting. In this case the challenge was that Anglican church was wrong to suggest that Christian tradition, as established by Jesus and the disciples, was that only men could represent Christ on earth and thus only men could be priests. The challenge suggested that this was never the case and even if it was it was only like this because the early church developed in a society which placed men above women. Since this was not the case in the second half of the twentieth century the church must change. Of course that is exactly what the church did having for many years resisted any such thing. Some have suggested that the church's attitude towards divorce has been very similar, and in this case it appears to reject teaching found directly in the New Testament in favour of keeping up with secular society and its attitudes.

Of course there are examples where the church has been challenged and has been defeated in that it has not won its case. The examples mentioned early with the Christian church in the UK opposing the Iraq war and Sunday trading both demonstrate a defeat on the part of the church. On a wider scale it is questionable as to whether what happened to the Christian churches in both Russia and China represents defeat or not. In both cases although rigorously persecuted the church went underground only to emerge when the time was right. Thus today in both Russia and China the Christian church is flourishing.

It might be possible to conclude that religion does adapt on occasions, but not always and even when it does not the religion continues to survive albeit in a different form for at least a time. Equally there are occasions when the religion chooses to embrace a criticism and see it as a further development of the religious tradition.

Commentary

A sound response which seeks to keep focused upon the question. Whilst there are a number of illustrations about how religious authority has 'adapted' it would have helped had the candidate also spent a little time considering, for example, what the consequences might have been had there been no adaptation. Equally, there was an opportunity to consider one or two examples where religious authority chose not to adapt. Also, there could have been a little more emphasis upon authority rather than religion in general.

Level 5 (21 marks)