

4.1 THE NATURE OF CHALLENGES TO RELIGION OVER TIME

Area of Study 4.1

Outcome: To analyse and compare stances and supporting responses taken by religious traditions or religious denominations as they are challenged

The first part of this Area of Study requires exploration of the nature of challenges over time to religion generally. (*This is preparatory to the analysis and comparison of 3 examples of challenges over time to theology, ethics and continued existence of a particular religious tradition/denomination.*) In order to demonstrate this first part of the Area of Study, the following knowledge and skills need to be developed.

For Religion Generally over time – Discussion, Comparison and Examination of Challenges involving theology, ethics and continued existence for religious traditions

- the sources of significant challenges to religious traditions generally
- why the challenges were significant to religious traditions generally
- the aspects of religion involved
- why those aspects are involved
- the stances adopted by religious traditions generally in the face of challenges
- why those stances were adopted

(Key Knowledge points 1, 2, 3 page 27 SD)

Interpret, Synthesise and Apply

Reference to a variety of both Primary and Secondary Resources is required in order to support the above analysis, explanation and comparison.

Sources

Historically, one source of challenge to religion has been invasion of the home territory of a particular religion.

Such invasion usually meant wide spread destruction of the invaded territory, including the physical and social infrastructure of a religion. As if that was not enough, if the invasion was overwhelmingly brutal and destructive, it led to another source of challenge to religion, the perceived failure of the deities of a religion to fulfil the expectations(beliefs) of the adherents.

Behind such perceived failure may be climatic changes, natural phenomena, opposing worldviews or human aggression by adherents of a different religion or by adherents of a different sect of the same religion.

But for the adherents, no rain, failed crops, water ways changing course and creating arid conditions in once fertile regions, infant mortality, inability to conceive, being conquered, did not auger well for their gods of Rain, Fertility, Protection or War.

There were other sources of challenge to religion such as:

Internal power struggles among the leadership of a religion. This may have expanded to include followers of those leaders, leading to widespread hostility or it may have been contained within the elite of the religion.

Power struggles may have been due to personal ambition or greed or animosity or disagreement over the interpretation and expression of some belief or over the interpretation and implementation of an ethical principle.

If such disagreements remained unresolved, hostile factions may have split into sects of the parent religion.

These sects may have managed to co-exist (however tenuously) in the parent religion and society or they may have severed completely, establishing separate territories and intolerant relations, each continuing to claim true representation of the parent religion.

Since the 16th century (1500s) CE there have been further sources of challenge to religion as the developments of science brought new ways of understanding the physical world and the different worldviews of rationalism, humanism, atheism, socialism, communism, fascism, capitalism and secularism offered other ways of answering existential questions once the prerogative of religion or philosophy.

Significance

The perceived and apparent failure of gods to protect their own from calamity, invasion, war, destruction, defeat and exile brought disillusionment and loss of faith.

Heightening this sense of abandonment by the gods was the destruction of places of worship, execution or exile of religious leaders decimating the social structures of a religion, defilement of sacred artefacts, places and spaces, disrupting the sacred times for observance and devastation of the worldview of the adherents.

The various “isms” of post 16th century (1500s) CE challenged religion in its truth claims, posing different explanations of the nature of truth and how it can be known.

Aspects

In varying degrees all the aspects of religion would be confronted by these sources of challenge. But initially it is the aspects of: Beliefs; Ethics; Places, Spaces, Times and Artefacts; the roles and authority of leadership and membership in Social Structures; that are challenged and then there is flow on to the other aspects because of their interrelationship.

The Aspects are involved in challenges in two ways. They are not only what is challenged but also what is used to respond to the challenge.

Stances

Whatever the causes of the challenges to religion, a stance in relation to the challenge is taken by the whole religion or various groups within the religion (groups may take different stances) or by the surviving remnant of a decimated religion.

In general, a stance is a principled position statement arising out of conviction that an essential part of the theological, ethical or actual physical existence of a religion is engaged by the challenge.

The Study Design states this stance may be **for**, **against** or **indifferent** to the challenge. Though as the challenge is to be **significant**, a tradition is hardly likely to be indifferent to it. Rather a tradition may be hesitant/tentative/indecisive/reluctant to make a strong stance in rejection or acceptance of the ideas and practices of the challenge.

A stance **for** a challenge would involve recognising, acknowledging, welcoming, approving, including, praising, promoting and supporting, in total or in part, whatever the challenge is promoting.

A stance **against** a challenge would involve recognising, acknowledging, criticising, denying, negating, counteracting, suppressing, in total or in part, whatever the challenge is promoting.

A stance of **indifference** to a challenge would involve some form of recognition and low key acknowledgement, that there is a movement, theory, text, interpretation, behaviour, practices, events that do or may impinge on the tradition, but they are not perceived as important to the status quo of the religion.

Though not required for AOS 4.1, each of these stances would see religions developing strategies and actions (supporting responses) that would promote the stance taken towards the challenge, such as:

- ❖ Abandoning the old gods/beliefs and adopting new gods/beliefs (perhaps those of the conquerors/scientists/developers).
- ❖ Retaining the existing gods/beliefs with some adjustment of what was believed about them.
- ❖ Retaining the old gods/beliefs and assimilating other gods/beliefs (from neighbouring territories or of conquering powers/technologies/scientific developments), including adapting to other beliefs and practices.
- ❖ Retaining the old gods/beliefs and creatively rethinking existing beliefs and practices to facilitate a new way of adhering to the religion.