

SLSS Religious Education Support

Leaving Certificate Religious Education

Section C World Religions Topic 4.1 A Living Tradition

Section C Part 4: 'Other living Religions' includes the following:

- The Bahá'i Faith
- Chinese Religion
- Sikh Religion
- African Traditional Religion

Outcomes: Students should be able to

- Research and present an introduction to and overview of **one** living tradition from the list, including
 - distribution graph / map
 - description of lifestyle
 - origins
 - persecution / conflict
- Compare and contrast the living religion chosen and **one** major world religion under the following headings
 - origin
 - development
 - contemporary context

Section C Topic 4.1 A Living Tradition: The Bahá'i Faith

- Homework question: (A) Summarise the origins and lifestyle of believers of members of the Baha'i Faith
(B) Compare and contrast the Bahá'i Faith with Christianity under the following headings:
- Origin
 - Development
 - Contemporary context

What follows is one student's response to this question. Using the AfL technique of **comment only marking**, how would you respond to this student? What assessment criteria might you apply? Try to address the following:

- Aspects of the work that deserve merit and praise
- Understanding of the relevant objectives (refer to KUSA square)
- Detail and coherence of the work
- Relevance to the question asked
- Any errors or omissions?
- Advice / recommendations / suggestions for improvement
- Other

Answer 1:

There are about 5 million members of the Bahá'í Faith in the world today. This religion began in Iran and it owes its origins to the Islamic Faith and to the Bab.

The main message of this religion is world peace. Bahá'í's work towards unity and peace in the world, hoping to unite all religions into one universal religion. For them all religions are equal and women are equal to men. They are well known for gathering together in each others' homes for firesides. They study the sacred scriptures from all of the world religions and they are all seen as equally important. They also try to live good lives so that they are pleasing to God. This means that good works as well as faith are important to them. There are about 40 Bahá'í communities in Ireland. Their church is shaped a bit like a dome with 9 sides. It looks like a lotus flower. The number nine represents peace and unity. Bahá'í is monotheistic. There is one God and one human race. They believe in prophets like Muhammad who tried to show us how to live in peace and harmony. They also believe in heaven and hell. They have festivals just like other religions. In April they have the festival of Ridvan (Lord of Feasts) and it lasts for 12 days. It marks the leaders' announcement of his mission in Ridvan which is outside Baghdad. They have a time of fasting a bit like Ramadan and they also like to educate their children. In this religion you cannot take drink or drugs, gamble or have sex before marriage. The headquarters of the Bahá'í Faith are in Haifa in Israel. Sometimes in the Middle East Bahá'is are deprived of their human rights and the right to belong to this religion because some people don't like how they broke away from Islam.

The Bahá'í religion is like Christianity because it believes in one God and that God has been revealed through the prophets. Both religions believe in peace and unity and read the sacred scriptures. Both religions pray to God. Both religions have founders who were persecuted. Both religions are found all over the world and began in the Middle East. Both religions have festivals to mark important occasions. *(380 words)*

AFL Comment only marking	Answer 1	Answer 2
Merits of this work		
Understanding of relevant objectives		
Detail and coherence of work		
Relevance to the question asked		
Errors or omissions		
Advice /recommendations/ suggestions for improvement		
Other:		

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Answer 2:

The Bahá'i Faith

The word 'Bahá'i comes from an Arabic word meaning *glory* or *light*. The Bahá'i Faith was founded by a man called Ali Muhammad (the Báb / the Gate) in Iran in 1844. Bahá'is believe this to be the fulfillment of previous religions as well as being the most recent divinely revealed living religion in the world. Its first outstanding religious leader was Mizra-Husayn-Ali, who had been a Shi'ite Muslim and later a follower of the Báb. He assumed the title ***Bahá'u'llah*** which means *Glory of God*. He was born in 1817 and died in 1892. In 1863 Bahá'u'lláh was publicly declared to be the Chosen One of God – the One foretold by the Báb and by the scriptures. The Bahá'i Faith traces its origins primarily to Bahá'ulláh, who is regarded as its founder. He was exiled and spent most of his life in prison for his claims, having being banished by the Sultan of Turkey to Palestine to the penal colony of Akka (now in Israel). Bahá'is have their administrative base and spiritual centre at Akka-Haifa in Israel.

Bahá'is are particularly interested in building global peace and respectfully promoting their faith. On a day to day basis they follow basic ethical principals that have much in common with Christian ethics. They strive towards justice and fairness as well as moderation and purity of motives. Actions rather than words are seen as true reflections of the faith. Followers are expected to live life in a positive way rather than a selfish way. Men and women are understood as equal. Bahá'u'llah also urged people to respect the equality of races, classes and nations. Prejudice is discouraged.

One interesting aspect of the Bahá'i Faith is that its followers today are tolerant of and actively study a variety of religious texts from different religious traditions. They do this in order to understand how Bah'u'llah has fulfilled earlier prophecies. Members of the Bahá'i Faith are obliged to pray every day in addition to reading from Bahá'u'llah's writings. They do not have any predetermined rituals for prayer or worship, unlike a Catholic celebration of Mass for instance. It is customary for Bahá'is to meet together in each others' homes for prayer. Every nineteen days they gather as a community for devotion, to discuss matters of faith and to socialise. These gatherings are known as 'firesides'. They also have study circles and R.E. classes for young Bahá'is. Certain anniversaries are marked as Holy Days in the Bahá'i calendar. Every March Bahá'is mark the nineteen day fast (from sunrise to sunset) by gathering together to worship and to share Bahá'i teachings. Another way in which they worship is through doing various types of work in a spirit of service to God and fellow humans. Bahá'is are actively involved at

local, national and global levels in the promotion of justice and peace and the promotion of economic and social equality, human rights and equality for women. Gambling, alcohol, drugs and extra-marital sex are all forbidden.

(B) Compare and contrast the Bahá'í Faith with Christianity

Origin: The three monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam are all part of the origins and founding story of the Bahá'í Faith, although Islam was the most significant influence in the origins of the Bahá'í religion. Just as Christianity looks respectfully to Judaism to trace its origins and history, so too the Bahá'í Faith looks back respectfully to Islam to trace its beginnings. Therefore there is a particular bond and relationship between Christianity and Judaism on the one hand, and on the other hand between the Bahá'í Faith and Islam. In Christianity the central figure of Jesus Christ is believed to be the divine Son of God. The doctrine of the Incarnation declares that Jesus was the Word made Flesh, - or God became man in the person of Jesus Christ. However, it must be remembered that Jesus himself was born and raised as a Jew and was clearly very familiar with Jewish prayer customs and the lifestyle of Judaism. Although Jesus tended to avoid using the title 'Son of God' or 'Messiah' it is clear that he came to understand himself in this regard, claiming that 'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life' (Jn 14:6). Thus he saw himself as fulfilling the Old Testament Messianic expectations of the Jews, although not in a way that the Jews were expecting. A point of comparison can be made here with the Bahá'í Faith, for Bahá'u'lláh grew up as a Muslim yet he maintained that his mission was to fulfill and supersede Islam as well as all other religions.

Development: Another point of comparison is the culture in which these two religions began and developed. In both instances these were clearly times of religious orthodoxy which had reached its peak and then declined. Israel had been colonized by the Roman Empire and there were deep political tensions between the people of Israel and the Roman political rulers who were seen as alien autocrats. This tension was compounded by religious unrest. Members of the Sanhedrin called the Sadducees were rewarded for their allegiance to Rome through positions of social power. Zealots wished to oust the Romans through violent insurrection. Pharisees struggled to uphold and enforce the Jewish Law on the Jews for fear of their religion being thwarted by the pagan Romans. Essenes retreated to their monastic communities in the hope of the arrival of a new age. All longed for the arrival of a Messiah who would liberate them from Roman occupation and domination. John the Baptist announced the imminent arrival of Jesus – both of them were executed. Jesus was perceived to be too much of a political threat to the Romans (he was charged with treason, claiming that he was the King of the Jews) as well as the religious Jewish authorities (he was accused of blasphemy and horrified Jewish leaders by healing on the Sabbath, performing miracles in God's name and claiming to be the Messiah). In the early church many Christians (e.g. Stephen, Peter) were martyred or put to death for the strength of their Christian convictions. In a similar vein the mid 19th century saw deep political and social change in America, Europe and the Middle East. This was the time of the revolutions – The American Revolution, the French Revolution and Revolution in Ireland. In parts of America and Europe this age was accompanied by religious movements that fervently believed that the end of the world was arriving and that Christ's Second Coming was imminent. At this time Shi'ah Islam was the official state religion in Iran. Here also some believed that the messianic expectation was about to be fulfilled. Then Ali Muhammad (The Báb) announced in 1844 that he was heralding the arrival of the Promised One as the end time was near. The mission of the Báb was to usher in an era of world peace, unity and justice for all. Followers were soon attracted to the Báb's messianic message of hope. Iran's political and religious authorities reacted negatively to this development. In 1850 the Báb was executed. Many thousands of his followers were also executed in the aftermath of his death. The Báb could be compared to John the Baptist in the Christian tradition. Both were attempting to herald the imminent arrival of the Promised One.

Another point of comparison is the area of Israel. Both Bahá'ís and Christians regard Israel as the Holy Land since both Jesus and Bahá'u'lláh suffered, died and were buried there. However, one difference between them is that Christians believe that Jesus also rose from the dead in Jerusalem, after which time he ascended to heaven and sent his Holy Spirit to be with his followers. Bahá'ís make no such claims of resurrection of Bahá'u'lláh. Neither do they speak of any holy spirit sent to continue his spiritual presence in the world.

Another point of comparison and contrast is around the mission of both men. Jesus' central message was around the Kingdom of God – an existence dominated by justice, love, mercy, inclusion, welcome of the poor and marginalised and the presence of God. In the Sermon on the Mount and elsewhere in Matthew's gospel Jesus spoke of hard-hitting values that are necessary to enter the Kingdom of God. These include being meek, merciful, being persecuted in the cause of righteousness...he who is first shall be last...love of God, self and neighbour and even love of one's enemies. Similarly Bahá'u'lláh preached a world of universal justice and unity. However, he claimed that this revelation was not final and that God would continue to be revealed at various times in future history just as He had done in the past. In contrast to this, Jesus' mission was more definitive. He claimed to be the divine fulfillment of Old Testament promises, the Alpha and Omega, the fullest revelation of God possible. This is the belief of contemporary Christians about Jesus, indicating a somewhat different understanding of divine revelation to the Bahá'i Faith. Jesus said that he was the way, the truth and the life...no one can come to the Father except through me...the Father and I are One... In this respect Christianity and the Baha'i Faith depart from each other.

Contemporary Context: It took time for both Christianity and the Bahá'i Faith to spread in the Western world. Once both religions moved outside of their initial homeland they spread throughout the West. At first both religions were viewed with some degree of suspicion and intolerance. However, Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire under Constantine and similarly the 1950s saw the restraints on the Bahá'i Faith loosen to allow its spread. Both religions have commanded large numbers in terms of their widespread distribution, although their actual size of membership is radically different. Christianity has the largest following in the world: 2.1 billion followers (see http://www.adherents.com/Religions_By_Adherents.html) whereas the Bahá'i Faith has a following of some five to seven million. The Bahá'i religion consists mainly of converts, unlike Christianity where most followers are born into the religious tradition. This means that more members of the Bahá'i Faith do not have ancestral lineage in that religion and consequently some are nominally identified with the religion and do not participate in it. That said, since people are not usually assigned to the Bahá'i Faith at birth it means that its followers have primarily deliberately chosen this religion and therefore it is meaningful for them, unlike many nominal Christians who are born into the Faith and do not actively participant in it or choose it. Both religions take an active role in promoting global peace and justice as well as peace and justice at local levels.

In recent times we have seen the growth of the ecumenical movement within the Christian tradition, since the Christian Church has suffered many divisions such as the 11th century schism between the West and Eastern Orthodox Christians, and the 16th century Reformation. Efforts are made to concentrate on matters that unite the Christian traditions, while acknowledging that there remain key theological differences between the Christian denominations. However, in the Bahá'i Faith no such major schisms have occurred and the religion has remained fundamentally united. This is because Bahá'u'llah created the continuity of a legitimate central authority after his death. He appointed his son as head of the faith and the legitimate interpreter of the Bahá'i scriptures. This created a patriarchal lineage in terms of leadership and direction. It also protected the authorised interpretations of his writings in modern times. Christianity is different in this respect since Jesus had no son or heir to his leadership except the Christian Church entrusted to Peter (the first Pope). Although the Church was founded by the early Christians in Jerusalem there were few or no clear instructions left by Jesus on what was to happen to his community of followers after his death, except that they were to make disciples of all nations. Whereas the Bahá'i Faith is led by an elected governing body, the Christian Church is not only divided into various denominations (some with elected leadership), but is more bureaucratic in that many of its key leaders in the Catholic Church are appointed by the Pope rather than elected.

A final difference between the two faiths in our times is that some of the Christian Churches (e.g. Roman Catholic) are guided by priests and clergy in the interpretation of scripture and the celebration of sacraments. Scripture scholars and theologians interpret the divine Word of God and this is communicated to the adherents through priests and clergy – although many of the Protestant Churches do not see the role of clergy in this manner. The Bahá'i Faith is

different in that there is no clergy and people are responsible for their own spiritual development. It depends on its Spiritual Assemblies (elected governing bodies) to discern the truth, and they function at three levels: local, national and international. (2,151 words)

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