

Authority in Religions/Worldviews and RE



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Authority: power or protection?

'The Authority' *His Dark Materials* P. Pullman

Laurie Anderson, 1982, 'O Superman' *Big Science*

'O Superman, O Judge, O Mom and Dad...

...when love is gone, there's always justice

And when justice is gone, there's always force,

And when force is gone, there's always Mom...

So hold me, Mom, in your long arms,

Your petrochemical arms. Your military arms.

In your electronic arms.'

What is Authority?

Power, Knowledge, Truth, Rules, Protection.

What should I believe?

How can I know?

How should I behave?

Who/what can look after me?

Who/what can make me do things?

Who/what can punish or reward me?

Fear of authority, for example...

Sources of Authority in Religions

- Institutions and leaders (Church, Sangha)
- Sacred texts, esp. Abrahamic
- Revelation or experiential insight, inspiration
- Scholars and saints
- God, Dharma(kaya) - ultimately
- Enlightened or omniscient individuals
- Experience of individuals/communities esp. women, LGBT+, black, poor, disability, class...
- All authority is relative apart from the omniscient (God or person)

Sources of authority in non-religious traditions

Key thinkers/authors

Expertise

Perception (empirical evidence)

Reason, evidence, testimony

Experience - individual and community

Institutional authority

Community authority

Authority in RE/R&W?

- *Power, Knowledge, Truth, Rules, Protection*
- *Power:* Government, DfE, LA/SACREs, Ofsted, Awarding Authorities, MATs, school heads/governors, CofE, RC Bishops...
- *Texts:* textbooks, REtoday, REonline...
- *Knowledge:* professional expertise, academic expertise, faith group expertise, the students
- *Influencers:* Reports eg CoRE, Media...
- *Experience:* of teachers and students

Where is the expertise in RE/R&W?

- *Academic*: Religious Studies, Education Studies plus Theology, History, Psychology, Sociology, Philosophy, Literary and Media Studies etc. Research, peer-reviewed journals, books, individuals and communities eg BASR, AULRE
- *Professionals*: Teachers, teacher trainers, advisers/consultants, individuals and communities eg NATRE, AULRE, AREIAC
- *Faith Groups*: Institutions, communities, individuals.

Whom would you personally trust to give you an accurate and authentic account of a religious tradition?

- a leading figure in the tradition eg archbishop, senior monk;
- a female teenager in the tradition;
- an ex-member who had been part of the tradition for 30 years;
- someone who converted to the tradition last year;
- a university professor who had studied the tradition for 30 years (from the scriptures in their original languages OR from scholarly books OR by living alongside the community as an ethnographer);
- a theologian (or equivalent) within the tradition;
- a university student who had studied the tradition for one module;
- a psychologist; a sociologist; an historian; a philosopher;
- an article in Wikipedia; a discussion on social media;
- the person who cleans the temple/church; yourself; no-one.
- 'The believer is always right' Kristensen; insider/outsider problem

Kalama Sutta for today

‘Do not go by hearsay, or what is handed down by others, nor what people say, nor what is stated on the authority of your traditional teachings *[or what’s in the media or social media]*. Do not go by reasoning, or inference, arguments, reflection on or approval of an opinion, nor out of respect. But, Kalamas, when you know of yourselves: “These teachings are not good...they are condemned by the wise...when followed out and put into practice, they lead to loss and suffering” – then reject them’. *Pali Canon, Anguttara Nikaya 1.188*

‘I like RE because in other subjects you get told what to think and in RE you can say what you think **and no-one can say you are wrong**’ Pupil c. 2009.

Vital importance of including questions of authority, provenance, evidence and critical thinking in RE!

NASACRE (and REC)

- Different sorts of authority working together
- Potential for clashes, power struggles, disputes BUT
- Authority as a chance for *service*
- The whole point is the children/students' entitlement to the best possible RE/R&W

“These teachings are good...they are praised by the wise...when followed out and put into practice, they lead to benefit and happiness [*and great RE*]” – then go with them’.

