Development and Effects of Religion During the Classical Era

AP World History
Units I and II – Organization and Reorganization of Human Societies, to c. 600 CE
Introduction

A. As states and empires increased in size and contacts between regions multiplied, religious and cultural systems were transformed.
   a) Provided a bond among the people
   b) Provided an ethical code to live by

B. Shared beliefs also influenced and reinforced political, economic, and occupational stratification.

C. Religious and political authority often merged
   a) Idea of a divine king/ruler
   b) Used religion as well as military and legal structures to justify their rule
D. Religious and belief systems could also generate conflict due to the variation and diversity of beliefs and practices within and among societies.
Religion as a Unifying Force

A. An important concept to keep in mind as religions developed into unifying forces was the idea of **Syncretism** = the process by which people blended new beliefs with older, more traditional beliefs.

B. The codification (collection and systematic arrangement) of existing religious traditions provided a bond among the people and an ethical code to live by
   a) The development of Jewish monotheism included the codification of the Hebrew Scriptures
      1. This was influenced by Mesopotamian cultural and legal traditions
      2. The Assyrian, Babylonian, and Roman invasions of Jewish territory led to the spread of Jewish monotheism
         1) These invasions created the Jewish Diaspora – the Jewish migration and settlement in areas outside the traditional Jewish homeland
The Jewish Diaspora
The Jewish Diaspora
Religion as a Unifying Force

C. The development of Hinduism included the codification of the Sanskrit scriptures of the Vedic religions

a) Influenced the development of the social and political roles of the Vedic caste system
   1. This lead to social and political stability as people performed the roles of their class in order to be reincarnated to a higher caste

b) Established the basis for the importance of multiple manifestations of Brahma
Buddhism

A. Buddhism was a reaction to Vedic beliefs and rituals
   a) Buddhism was primarily concerned with beliefs about desire, suffering, and the search for enlightenment preached by the historic Buddha
   b) Buddhism rejected the institution of a caste system because Buddhism believed in the equality of believers
      1. This meant that ALL believers could attain enlightenment despite social or economical class

B. Spread of Buddhism throughout Asia
   a) How did it spread???
      a) Support of the Mauryan Emperor Ashoka
      b) Efforts of Buddhist missionaries to spread the religion
      c) Trade with other areas meant merchants spread the religion
      d) Establishment of educational institutions (monasteries, schools, etc.)
The 1st century AD witnessed a schism in Buddhism: the resultant Mahayana Buddhism offered universal salvation and spread through Central Asia and China, while the more conservative Theravada Buddhism became influential in Southeast Asia.

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New Belief Systems Spread

Confucianism

A. Originated in the writings and lessons of Confucius
   Example = *The Analects*

B. Further developed and spread by Confucius’ key disciples (followers)
   Example = Mencius

C. Promoted social harmony after a period of much warring in China

D. Outlined proper rituals for all people in China including the rulers/emperors to provide stability
Confucius
New Belief Systems Spread

Daoism

A. Originated in the teachings of Laozi
   Example = *Tao Te Ching*

B. Core belief is the balance between humans and nature
   a) As a result, the Chinese political system would be altered indirectly
      1. This was a contrast to Confucianism which stated that people had a direct and active role in the political system

C. Daoism also influenced the development of Chinese culture
   a) This can be seen in Daoist advances in:
      1. Medical theories and practices
      2. Poetry
      3. Metallurgy
      4. Architecture
Daoism Poetry

Poem by Lu Tung Pin

People May Sit Till the Cushion is Worn Through

People may sit till the cushion is worn through,
But never quite know the real Truth:
Let me tell you about the ultimate Tao:
It is here, enshrined within us.
New Belief Systems Spread

Christianity

A. Based on the core beliefs about the teachings and divinity of Jesus of Nazareth
   a) Based on Jewish beliefs and traditions
   b) Initially rejected Roman and Hellenistic influences BUT later Church structure and theology was influenced by the beliefs and practices of these cultures.

B. Despite initial Roman imperial hostility, Christianity spread through many parts of Afro-Eurasia
   a) Through Christian missionaries
   b) Through merchants trading in new areas

C. Eventually Christianity gained Roman imperial support by the time of Emperor Constantine
The Spread of Christianity. Christian churches appeared first in the major cities of the Empire and spread only gradually into the countryside, in part due to the establishment of monasteries.
Belief Systems Affected Gender Roles

A. Buddhism and Christianity encouraged a monastic life (life lived in a monastery devoted solely to prayer and meditation) for both men and women.

B. Meanwhile, Confucianism emphasized filial piety – respect for one’s parents and/or ancestors

Example: 24 Filial Exemplars
In the Han dynasty, the family of Dong Yong was very poor. When his father died, the promised himself as security to borrow money to bury him. Then he went to work for the lender to pay back the debt. On the way he met a woman, who asked to become Yong’s wife, and she went with him to his master’s house. The master ordered them to weave 300 bolts of silk and then they could return home. His wife wove for a month and then was finished. They returned as far as the locust tree where they had met, when she bade Yong good-bye and vanished. There is a poem praising him saying:
Filial Exemplar No. 6 = He Sold Himself to Bury His Father

To bury his father he has to borrow money

A fairy concubine appears upon the road and

Weaves the silk to repay his debt

Filial feeling moves the heavens
Other Religions

A. Other religions and cultural traditions continued to parallel to the codified, written belief systems in core civilizations
   a) Shamanism and animism continued to shape the lives of people within and outside of the core civilizations due to their daily reliance of the natural world
   b) Ancestor veneration persisted in many regions:
      1. Africa
      2. The Mediterranean region
      3. East Asia
      4. The Andean areas (southwest South America)