

# Revision schedule for A level religious studies.

## Paper 1: Philosophy of Religion

### Overview

#### Topics:

#### Philosophical issues and questions:

##### **1.1 Design Argument**

- a) Inductive reasoning, *a posteriori* types of arguments, interpretation of experience.
- b) Types of order and regularity, role of analogy, cumulative effect of evidence, anthropic principle, regularities of co-presence and regularities of succession.
- c) Strengths and weaknesses of Design Arguments: probability rather than proof, alternative interpretations, including evolution and deism. Challenges to the argument.
- d) Philosophical language and thought through significant concepts and the works of key thinkers, illustrated in issues in the philosophy of religion.

*With reference to the ideas of W Paley and D Hume.*

##### **1.2 Cosmological Argument**

- a) Inductive reasoning, *a posteriori* types of arguments.
- b) Principle of sufficient reason, explanation, interpretation of experience, movement, cause and effect, contingency, infinite regress, first cause, necessary existence, Kalam version.
- c) Strengths and weaknesses of Cosmological Arguments: probability rather than proof, brute fact, debates about infinite regress, necessary existence and God as a necessary being. Challenges to the argument.
- d) Philosophical language and thought through significant concepts and the works of key thinkers, illustrated in issues in the philosophy of religion.

*With reference to the ideas of Aquinas and D Hume, I Kant.*

##### **1.3 Ontological Argument**

- a) *A priori* compared to *a posteriori* types of arguments, deductive reasoning, not evidence based but understanding of concept 'God' as an analytic proposition.
- b) Definitions of 'God', necessary existence, aseity.
- c) Strengths and weaknesses of the Ontological Arguments: concept of proof compared to probability, debates about 'existence' and predicates. Challenges to the argument.
- d) Philosophical language and thought through significant concepts and the works of key thinkers, illustrated in issues in the philosophy of religion.

*With reference to the ideas of Anselm and B Russell.*

#### The nature and influence of religious experience:

##### **2.1 The nature of religious experience**

- a) Context of religious experience across religious traditions, range of definitions related to belief in God and/or ultimate reality, theistic and monistic views, ineffability, noetic, transience, passivity.

b) Types: conversion, prayer, meditation, mysticism, numinous. Relationship between religious experience and propositional and non-propositional revelation.

c) Alternative explanations, physiological and naturalistic interpretations, objectivist and subjectivist views.

*With reference to the ideas of W James and R Otto.*

## **2.2 Influence of religious experience as an argument for the existence of God**

a) Inductive reasoning based on evidence, the link between appearances, how things seem, how things really are and conclusions drawn from experience about reality and existence. Principles of testimony and credulity, the value and role of testimony to religious experience.

*With reference to the ideas of R Swinburne and J Hick.*

b) Strengths and weaknesses of religious experience as an argument for the existence of God: experiences influenced by the religious context of the believer, religious experiences interpreted as any other sensory experiences, complexity of interpretations, issues of probability and proof as relating to the argument, nature of God, including transcendent and immanent, limitations of language, lack of uniformity of experiences, refinements of and challenges to the argument.

*With reference to the ideas of M Persinger and R Dawkins.*

## **Problems of evil and suffering:**

### **3.1 Problem of evil and suffering (1)**

The nature of the problem across a range of religious traditions, types of evil and suffering, moral and non-moral. The challenge to religious belief posed by the inconsistency of the nature of God and the evident existence of evil and suffering challenging belief in the existence of God.

*With reference to the ideas of D Hume and J Mackie.*

### **3.2 Theodicies and solutions to the problem of suffering**

a) Belief that creation was good; evil and suffering is a privation of good due to the fall of the angels and man because of the misuse of free will, soul-deciding, significance of reconciliation.

b) Belief that creation is a mix of good and evil linked to the vale of soul making theodicy, including free will defence, best of all possible worlds, epistemic distance, eschatological justification.

c) Process theodicy: God is not responsible for evil and suffering, but he is co-sufferer and cannot coerce the free will of human agents.

d) Strengths and weaknesses of theodicies and solutions: compatibility or otherwise with modern views about origins of life, nature of God, innocent suffering, hypothesis of life after death.

*With reference to the ideas of Augustine and Irenaeus.*

## **Religious language:**

### **4.1 Analogy and Symbol**

a) Analogy: *via negativa*, knowledge about God may be gained by what God is not like, univocal language and problems of anthropomorphism, equivocal language and problems of attribution, significance of proportional similarities and dissimilarities.

*With reference to the ideas of Aquinas.*

b) Symbol: types of symbol across a range of religious traditions, distinction between signs and symbols, symbols identifying and participating in a concept. Problems interpreting symbols and their limited application to a particular faith context.

*With reference to the ideas of P Tillich.*

#### **4.2 Verification and falsification debates (2) (3)**

a) Context of Logical Positivism and the Vienna Circle, analytic and synthetic statements, implications for the claim that religious language is meaningless; view that religious claims are false because nothing can count against them; 'blik's' as unfalsifiable ways of framing our interpretation of the world compared to beliefs that are significant articles of faith which may be significantly challenged but not easily abandoned.

b) Strengths and weakness of these approaches, including realist and anti-realist views and eschatological verification.

*With reference to the ideas of A J Ayer and B Mitchell.*

#### **4.3 Language games**

a) Critique of picture theory, functional uses of language in the context of a form of life. Non-cognitive interpretation of language and criteria of coherence in the relevant language game, highlights the distinctive character of religious language, significance of fideism in this context – language can only be understood in the context of faith.

*With reference to the ideas of L Wittgenstein and D Phillips.*

#### **Works of scholars:**

##### **5.1 Context to critiques of religious belief and points for discussion**

a) Respective strengths and weaknesses of religious beliefs.

b) Alternative explanations, issues of probability and postmodern interpretations of religion.

c) Key terms, types of atheism and agnosticism.

*With reference to the ideas of R Dawkins and M Westphal.*

##### **5.2 A comparison between a critic of religion, Bertrand Russell, and a religious believer, Frederick Copleston (4)**

a) The context of the writings of Russell and Copleston and the way these ideas are applied to issues in religion and belief, including the argument from contingency and religious experience.

#### **Influences of developments in religious belief:**

##### **6.1 Views about life after death across a range of religious traditions**

a) Immortality of the soul: soul as non-physical and spiritual and continuing to exist after death of body.

b) Rebirth: belief there is no unchanging soul and importance of karma.

c) Reincarnation: transmigration of souls and importance of karma.

d) Replica theory: notion that one can die in one body and continue to live in a different body while being the same person, including after death.

e) Resurrection: belief that God will restore the dead in bodily form to eternal life.

*With reference to the ideas of J Hick.*

## **6.2 Points for discussion about life after death**

a) Relationship between mind and body, including variations of dualism and monism.

b) Life after death linked to moral reasoning, near death experiences, debates related to role of evidence, religious language.

*With reference to the ideas of Plato and Aristotle.*

## **6.3 Religion and science debates and their significance for philosophy of religion**

a) Methodologies with emphasis on observation, hypothesis and experiment, identifying connections and differences vis a vis religious belief and processes; miracles.

b) Creation themes and scientific cosmologies: Big Bang, steady state theories, intelligent design and irreducible complexity, creationism, cosmological constant, evolution, Gaia hypothesis.

*With reference to the ideas of C Darwin and R Dawkins.*

# Paper 2: Religion and Ethics

## Overview

### Significant concepts in issues or debates in religion and ethics:

#### 1.1 Environmental issues

a) Concepts of stewardship and conservation from the point of view of at least one religion and at least one secular ethical perspective; animal welfare and protection, sustainability, waste management and climate change.

b) Strengths and weaknesses of significant areas of disagreement and debate, assessment of relevant examples, legal changes and social attitudes, appropriateness and value of employing religious perspectives in these debates.

*With reference to the ideas of J Lovelock and A Næss.*

#### 1.2 Equality

a) Ethical and religious concepts of equality, including issues of gender, race and disability, the work of one significant figure in campaigns for equality in any of these areas, significant events in the progress of equality in these areas, perspectives on equality from at least one religion and one secular ethical perspective.

b) Strengths and weaknesses of significant areas of disagreement and debate, assessment of relevant examples, legal changes and social attitudes, appropriateness and value of employing religious perspectives into these debates.

*With reference to the ideas of Martin Luther King and Joni Eareckson Tada.*

### A study of three ethical theories:

#### 2.1 Utilitarianism

a) Concepts of utility, pleasure, hedonism and happiness, influences on the emergence of the theory, including social, political and cultural influences, the significant contribution of Bentham and Mill to a recognised theory. Act and Rule Utilitarianism, the development of the theory, including Preference, Negative and Ideal Utilitarianism, the application of the theory in historical and contemporary ethical situations, including political and social reform, the concept of relativism in ethics.

b) Strengths and weaknesses of the theory and its developments, appropriateness of its continuing application and use, assessment of relevant examples, change in the law and social attitudes vis a vis the theory, compatibility or otherwise with religious approaches.

*With reference to the ideas of J Bentham and J S Mill.*

#### 2.2 Situation Ethics (1)

a) The 'new morality' of the mid-20th century: social, political and cultural influences on the development of Situation Ethics, concepts of *agape* and situationalism in ethics, the application of the theory to specific case studies, biblical examples of situationist thinking, such as illustrated in the ministry of Jesus.

b) Strengths and weaknesses of the theory and its developments, appropriateness of its continuing application and use, assessment of relevant examples, change in the law and social attitudes vis a vis the theory, compatibility or otherwise with religious approaches.

*With reference to the ideas of J A T Robinson and J Fletcher.*

## **2.3 Natural Moral Law**

a) Concepts of absolutism and legalism in ethics, early development of natural moral law, biblical and classical foundations of the approach, concepts of purpose, *telos*, primary and secondary precepts, contemporary applications and adaptations, including proportionalism.

*With reference to the ideas of Aquinas and B Hoose.*

## **Application of ethical theories to issues of importance:**

### **3.1 War and peace**

a) The contribution of at least one religion to issues of war and peace, including the teaching of sacred text(s), the Just War Theory, including principles *jus ad bellum*, *jus in bello* and *jus post bellum*, reasons for and influences on the development of the theory, examples of wars, including contemporary conflicts that may be evaluated against the theory, special issues arising from nuclear war.

b) Concepts of pacifism, including absolute, relative/selective and nuclear pacifism, the role of pacifist movements and pressure groups. The success of the Just War Theory as a theory and in practice, the practicality of pacifism in its different forms, perceived advantages of war such as technological development, relevance of religious contributions, success of named wars in achieving their goal.

*With reference to the ideas of Augustine and Aquinas.*

### **3.2 Sexual Ethics**

a) The contribution of at least one world religion on issues in sexual ethics, including the teaching of sacred text(s) and understanding of the diversity of religious approaches, sexual relationships in and outside of marriage, including pre-marital sex, adultery, promiscuity, same-sex relationships, including marriage and civil partnership, contraception and childlessness, secular ethical approaches to these issues and social and cultural influences on them.

b) The continuing relevance and application of religious teachings and beliefs on sexual ethics, strengths and weaknesses of changing social attitudes, the success or otherwise of contributions from ethical theory in making decisions in matters of sexual ethics.

*With reference to the ideas of P Vardy and J Dominion.*

## **Ethical language:**

### **4.1 Meta-ethics**

a) Cognitive and non-cognitive uses of language, realism and anti-realism, language as factual or symbolic, the nature of ethical assertions as absolutist or relative, ethical naturalism, the naturalistic fallacy, the is-ought gap, the problem of the open question, ethical non-naturalism, intuitionism, prescriptivism.

b) Emotivism, the influence of the logical positivism on emotivist theories of ethics, ethical language as functional and persuasive. Developments of the emotivist approach and criticism of it.  
*With reference to the ideas of G E Moore and A J Ayer.*

## **4.2 The relationship between religion and morality**

a) Dependence, independence, autonomy, theonomy, heteronomy, divine command ethics, challenges from atheist and anti-theist perspectives, moral arguments for the existence and nonexistence of God.

b) Contemporary focuses, including the Westboro Baptist Church, religion and terror, conservative movements, including Quiverfull, biblical parenting.

*With reference to the ideas of R Dawkins and R A Sharpe.*

## **Deontology, Virtue Ethics and the works of scholars:**

### **5.1 A comparison of the work of Immanuel Kant and Aristotle with regard to Deontology and Virtue Ethics respectively.**

a) Kantian deontology – social, political and cultural influences on Kant’s ethical theory, duty-based ethics, the categorical imperative in its different formulations, prima facie duties, and contemporary applications of rule and duty-based ethics. (2)

*With reference to the ideas of W D Ross and T Nagel.*

b) Aristotelian virtue ethics – historical and cultural influences on Virtue Ethics from its beginnings to modern developments of the theory, concepts of eudaemonia and living well, the golden mean, development of virtuous character, virtuous role models, vices, contemporary applications of virtue theories. (3)

*With reference to the ideas of P Foot and A MacIntyre.*

c) Strengths and weaknesses of the theories and their developments, appropriateness of their continuing application and use, assessment of relevant examples, changes in the law and social attitudes vis a vis the theories, compatibility or otherwise with religious approaches.

## **Medical ethics: beginning and end of life issues:**

### **6.1 Issues in medical ethics with a focus on beginning and end of life debates**

a) The status of the embryo, concepts of sanctity and value of life from religious and secular perspectives, embryo research, pre-implantation genetic diagnosis (PGD), stem cells and cord blood, fertilisation *in vitro* and destruction of embryos, abortion.

b) Assisted dying, euthanasia, palliative care. Religious and secular contributions to all these issues, legal position, concepts of rights and responsibilities, personhood and human nature, options and choices.

c) Strengths and weaknesses of significant areas of disagreement and debate, assessment of relevant examples, legal changes and social attitudes, appropriateness and value of employing religious perspectives into these debates, assessment and comparison of contrasting positions.

*With reference to the ideas of P Singer and J Glover.*

# Paper 4: Study of Religion Christianity

## Overview

### Religious beliefs, values and teachings:

#### 1.1 The nature of God as personal and as Creator

- a) Personal relationship, omnipotence and immutability; ex nihilo, emanation, construction and artistic expression, goodness of creation, stewardship.
- b) Implications of these teachings about God for an understanding of the self, the meaning and purpose of life, death and the afterlife.
- c) Interpretations of these teachings and evidence for these views, the challenges of these interpretations and their significance for Christianity, the experience of these roles of God in the life of a Christian.

*With reference to the ideas of M Buber and Augustine.*

#### 1.2 The Trinity

- a) Biblical basis for ideas about the Trinity.
- b) Notions of relation and analogy to understand the Trinity.
- c) Modern views on the Trinity, their strengths and weaknesses, the impact of these views on the life of a Christian and their significance for Christianity.

*With reference to the ideas of K Barth and K Rahner.*

#### 1.3 The nature of the Church

- a) Key concepts of unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity.
- b) Interpretations of these teachings, challenges to these views and their impact on the life of Christian communities and individuals.

*With reference to the ideas of Cyprian of Carthage and M Luther.*

#### 1.4 Key moral principles

- a) The concept of Love as the principal Christian value and the basis of all other values and qualities.
- b) The love of God as revealed in creation, the incarnation and the Trinity as the basis of this value.
- c) The relationship of all Christian values with the key principle of love.

### Sources of wisdom and authority:

#### 2.1 The Bible

- a) Role as a source of authority, its compilation and use, including as a basis for ethical teaching of the Church and the role of tradition.
- b) The Bible as revealed theology and its relationship to natural theology, role of Spirit in revelation/mysticism.



c) Strengths and weaknesses of various models of interpretation of the text.

## **2.2 The nature and role of Jesus, including the strengths and weaknesses of key ideas, their impact on the development of Christianity and understanding the nature of Jesus in the life of Christians (1)**

a) The Early Church – the Arian heresy and the Chalcedonian definition concerning the two natures of Jesus and his work in salvation.

*With reference to the ideas of Arius and Athanasius.*

b) The Reformation – views on salvation and justification, including notions of sin, sacrifice, justification by grace, revelation of God, Mediator, Prophet, Priest and King.

*With reference to the ideas of M Luther and J Calvin.*

c) Modern views – whether and how God suffers in or through Jesus, context to these thoughts and the relationship of biblical texts on suffering to notions of impassibility.

*With reference to the ideas of J Moltmann and T Weinandy.*

## **Practices that shape and express religious identity:**

### **3.1 The diversity of practice in the Eucharist**

a) The importance of sacraments in some denominations, the context of differing practices of the Eucharist, interpretations of the variety of practices and their meaning and significance.

b) Key ideas, including sacrament, grace, transubstantiation and transignification, Real Presence, memorial.

c) The experience of believers when taking part in the Eucharist, reflection and self-awareness. Implications for Christian practice in the experience of a believer and Christian communities.

### **3.2 The diversity of practice in creative expressions of religious identity**

a) The depiction of the Nativity and the crucifixion in Christian art and its interpretations and role in Christian devotion.

b) The role of music in Christian worship in a variety of denominations.

c) The role of prayer in private and public devotion, including the use of aids to prayer.

d) The significance of these creative expressions and their impact on Christianity and the lives of Christians as an expression of religious identity and as a connection to, or vehicle for, religious experience.

## **Social and Historical developments:**

### **4.1 Science (2)**

a) The challenge to Christian belief of modern science, including cosmology and evolution, and the view that science may replace a religious interpretation of the universe.

b) Strengths and weaknesses of these challenges, the responses to them and the impact of these debates on Christian thought.

*With reference to the ideas of Galileo and Darwin.*

## **4.2 Secularisation**

- a) Religion in today's society, declining numbers, the role of the Church in formal worship and in modern life and the strengths, weaknesses and impact of the teachings of popular atheists.
- b) The rise of New Religious Movements and definitions of 'spiritual' and 'religious'.
- c) Disillusionment with some aspects of traditional religion compared to hard line atheism.

*With reference to the ideas of C Hitchens and R Dawkins.*

## **4.3 New movements in theology**

- a) The context and key themes of Liberation theology, Feminist theology and Black theology.
- b) The global development of Evangelicalism, and of the nature and influence of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity in the US and beyond, migration as a factor in the spread of a variety of forms of Christian worship, notably in the African Christian diaspora.
- c) The development of these ideas and their impact on the lives of believers and communities in Christianity today.

*With reference to the ideas of G Gutiérrez, S McFague and J H Cone.*

## **Works of scholars**

### **5.1 Atonement theory**

- a) An analysis of the key terms atonement and soteriology.
- b) Models of atonement, including sacrifice, victory, substitution and moral exemplar.

*With reference to the ideas of Anselm and G Aulén.*

### **5.2 A comparison of key ideas in the work of Karl Barth and John Hick (3) (4)**

- a) Barth's work on Jesus' death as a substitution for sinful humanity and taking God's judgment on himself, the idea of 'the Judge Judged in Our Place', biblical background, context of the Reformed tradition, the context of the language and traditional imagery of guilt, judgment and forgiveness.
- b) Hick's work on the role of Jesus as a moral exemplar, divinity and resurrection of Jesus as myth and metaphor, implications for doctrines of incarnation and Trinity, notions of sin, the role of the cross in the modern age, context of 20th century atrocities for an understanding of sin and human nature, the impact of Hick's ideas for interfaith dialogue.
- c) The strengths and weaknesses of these views, their meaning and significance for Christians and the impact of these views on Christianity in the modern age.

## **Religion and society**

### **6.1 Pluralism and diversity**

- a) The sociological reality of multicultural societies and the philosophical sense of pluralism in terms of equally valid routes to the same ultimate reality.
- b) Key concepts, including particularism, inclusivism and pluralism.
- c) A study of the context and content of modern Christian thought on other religions.
- d) The relative strengths and weaknesses of these views and their significance for Christians today.

e) The work of the Ecumenical movement and its impact on the unity of Christianity.

*With reference to the ideas of K Rahner and J Hick.*

## **6.2 Equality and discrimination – gender**

a) A study of the concept of equality in Christianity, including biblical bases and emphases in Christian teaching across denominations.

b) Views about progress in gender equality in Christianity and reasons for its status, focusing on the debates about the role of women in the ministry of the Church and its relationship with equality debates in society.

c) The significance of these debates for individuals and the community.