Theology and Religion modules

Please note: due to study leave etc not every module is available every year. Please check with the Department to see what is running in a given year

First Year

Open all sections

Introduction to the Study of Religion

This module surveys wider theories and debates in sociology, cultural studies and anthropology as a basis for the study of religion, focussing especially on the social and cultural analysis of religion.

Assessment: One essay of 3,000 words and one 90-minute examination

Sample Essay/Exam/Discussion Question: Critically assess the representation of religion within a book, film, monument or website.

Value: 20 credits

Introduction to Islam

This module introduces students to the core elements of Islamic faith and practice with reference to the key Islamic sources and methods of religious thought. It summarises the development of Islamic thought, and the current state of Islam in majority and minority situations.

Assessment: Two essays of 2,500 words each

Sample Essay/Exam/Discussion Question: What is the importance of the Qur'an in Islamic legal, theological and social thinking?

Value: 20 credits

Introduction to the History of Christianity

This module introduces students to the history of Christianity from the early church to the present, with particular focus on schisms and denominational histories including Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, the early and later Protestant Reformation, non-conformist churches, and the Pentecostal and Charismatic movement of the twentieth century.

Assessment: One essay of 3,000 words and one portfolio of 3,000 words

Sample Essay/Exam/Discussion Question: Debate and discuss African Independent Churches as a critique of colonialism.

Value: 20 credits

Introduction to Biblical Studies

This module aims to give students an introduction to Hebrew Bible and New Testament from the perspective of academic Biblical Studies. Topics covered relate to the historical background to these texts; questions of authorship, dating, and original audience; literary relationships between biblical books; the historicity of the biblical narratives; different theological interpretations of the events the Bible describes; and the relationship between academic and confessional approaches.

Assessment: Two essays of 2,500 words, one per semester

Sample Essay/Exam/Discussion Question: What is the role of Biblical Archaeology, and how can it be treated as an independent source?

Value: 20 credits

Module Outside the Main Discipline (MOMD)

You will need to choose a module that is of interest to you from outside Theology and Religion. There will be a 'MOMD Fair' at the beginning of the academic year, which you attend in order to make your choice of a module.

Value: 20 credits

Defining Jews, Jewishness and Judaism(s)

This module introduces and explores a number of different and competing narratives (or accounts/explanations) of'who is a Jew?', Jewishness, and the nature of Judaism(s), how they have developed over time andhow they relate to each other. Considerable attention is paid throughout the module to questions of definition and methodology, paying particular attention to key moments in Jewish history, suchas Second Temple Judaism, Haskalah (the Jewish Enlightenment)and the contemporary period.

Assessment: One essay of 2500 words

Value: 10 credits

Introduction to the Study of the Holocaust

The module explores contemporary debates about how to define, describe and account for the Holocaust, including the nature of non-Jewish victimhood and whether or not this should be understood as part of 'the Holocaust', and how events were written about and understood differently from the perspective of victims and perpetrators.

Assessment: One essay of 2,500 words

Sample Essay/Exam/Discussion Question: Is it possible for an individual or group of people to be both a victim and a perpetrator of the Holocaust? Or is it necessary to maintain a clear-cut distinction between these two categories?

Value: 10 credits

Contemporary Christianity

This module focuses on the role of Christianity in contemporary society, investigating distinctive beliefs, practices, worship, ethics and buildings. The module investigates larger-scale contemporary challenges and opportunities as well as scrutinising 'ordinary' Christian belief among Christians in the UK (and in the city of Birmingham in particular) today.

Assessment: One essay of 2,500 words or a portfolio of 2,500 words

Sample Essay/Exam/Discussion Question: Does the concept of original sin make sense in contemporary society?

Value: 10 credits

Global Christianity

This module explores the incredible diversity of expressions of the Christian faith that exist in the world today, considering the different denominational, regional and theological traditions of the religion and the phenomenology of Christianity as a world faith in the twenty-first century.

Assessment One essay of 2,500 words or a portfolio of 2,500 words

Sample Essay/Exam/Discussion Question: What role does 'Biblicism' play in global expressions of Evangelical Christianity?

Value: 10 credits

Second and final year

Buddhism

This module will provide an overview of the Buddhist tradition, covering historical backgrounds and subsequent development; key concepts and teachings, including the Four Noble Truths, concepts of 'no-self', emptiness, rebirth and enlightenment; the diversity of traditions; and practice. Contemporary movements and issues will be explored, and there will be an opportunity to engage with Buddhist communities in the West Midlands.

Assessment: One essay of 2,500 words

Value:10 credits

Research Methods and Dissertation Preparation

This module provides a structured framework enabling you to gain professional skills in research through presentation and teamwork, as well as identifying an appropriate dissertation area, research question and supervisor, and completing the initial planning and research for your dissertation.

Assessment: Two portfolios, one per semester

Value: 20 credits

Dissertation Preparation

This module provides a structured framework enabling you to gain professional skills in presentation and teamwork, as well as identifying an appropriate dissertation area, research question and supervisor, and completing the initial planning and research for your dissertation.

Assessment: One portfolio of 2,500 words

Value: 10 credits

Placement

The placement module allows you to spend time in a school, charity, or other situation in the UK or abroad for about two weeks and then to reflect critically on this in a written report in the light of your studies in Theology and Religion and your career aspirations.

Assessment: One essay of 3,000 words

Value: 20 credits

Religion in Contemporary Society

A variety of critical methods and approaches (e.g. sociology, anthropology) are used in this module to understand the nature and diversity of religion in the UK today. The module will enable students to begin to read effectively and appreciate the nature of religion in urban and other settings with some focus on lived religions in the City of Birmingham.

Assessment: Two essays of 2,500 words, one per semester

Value: 20 credits

Jewish Religious Responses to the Holocaust

This module analyses a broad range of Jewish religious responses to the Holocaust both as events were happening and in their aftermath.

Assessment: One essay of 3,000 words AND one critical reflection of 1,000 words

Value: 20 credits

Themes in Christian Theology

This module critically assesses some of the main doctrines in Christianity from a wide variety of perspectives and using the work of many different theologians. It aim is to provide a good understanding of how Christian doctrine is being shaped and developed in the contemporary world.

Assessment: Two essays of 2,500 words each

Sample Essay/Exam/Discussion Question: Does Christianity have three gods? Discuss this question in the light of recent theological developments in the relational understanding of the Holy Trinity.

Value: 20 credits

Theological Ethics

This module will introduce you to the nature, methods, insights, and contested dynamics of contemporary Christian ethics. For example, is there anything distinctive about Christian, as opposed to other kinds of ethics? What are some of the norms and principles that might inform such ethics? In what ways might theology, the Bible, common reason and the life of the church help to shape Christian ethics? Why do Christians using the same sources seem to come to very different conclusions about ethical issues? How does Christian ethical thinking and practice relate to other kinds of moral reasoning and practice in the contemporary world? How do and might Christians contribute to contemporary moral debates and issues?

Assessment: 1 essay of 3,000 words, plus seminar handout, plus one 90 minute seen exam

Value: 20 credits

Use and interpretation of the Bible

This module encourages you to think creatively about how a biblical text can be read and interpreted, moving beyond the historical-critical method to consider newer reader-oriented approaches (narrative, queer, feminist and gender criticism) to biblical texts and how they have developed within recent scholarship.

Assessment: Two essays of 3.000 words each

Sample Essay/Exam/Discussion Questions: What are the aims of feminist approaches? What reading strategies do they employ? How does a man read 'as a feminist'?

Value: 20 credits

Islam in Britain

This module will study contemporary Muslim communities in Britain with a view to understanding the key sociological and theological dynamics of these communities in terms of how they interact and relate to each other and wider British society within the context of Europe.

Assessment: One essay of 25000 words

Value: 10 credits

Women in Islam

This module surveys the position of women in Islam, dealing with their legal, social and political status by analysing the institutions of education, marriage, inheritance, divorce and family life.

Assessment: One essay of 3,000 words

Sample Essay/Exam/Discussion Question:'Honour killing is a crime against the sacred text of Islam; nevertheless, some Muslims continue to commit it.' Discuss.

Value: 10 credits

Hinduism

Starting with a brief historical and geographical background to Hinduism, this module focusses on key concepts, values, religious practices and texts, within Indian tradition as well as for Hinduism in diaspora.

Assessment: One essay of 2,500 words

Value: 10 credits

Sikhism

This module covers the origins and fundamental beliefs of Sikhism, as well as analysing religious and cultural issues facing Sikhs today. Particular attention is paid to women and children, and to the Sikh diaspora.

Assessment: One essay of 2,500 words

Value: 10 credits

Arabic I

Aimed at absolute beginners in Arabic, this module introduces the alphabet and sound system though dialogues and moves on to teach the primary structures of phrases and sentences, emphasising the functional use of the language in daily life situations.

Assessment: One essay of 2,500 words

Value: 20 credits

Beginners Greek

Aimed at absolute beginners in Greek, this module enables you to gain a basic grasp of the Greek so you will be able to read and understand ancient texts such as the New Testament and the early church fathers.

Value: 20 credits

Biblical Hebrew Language

This module is designed to help you to read and understand the texts of the Hebrew Bible at a basic level and as a foundation for further study.

Assessment: Four class tests, two per semester

Value: 20 credits

Sufism: Belief and Practice

This module examines the diverse beliefs and practices of contemporary forms of Sufism, considering the historical and cultural antecedents of Sufism, and discussing various interpretations and understandings of Sufi origins and practice.

Assessment: One essay of 2,500 words

Value: 10 credits

Special Study

This module enables students to pursue a specific area of interest through tutored independent study.

Assessment: One essay of 4,000 words

Value: 20 credits

New Age and Alternative Spiritualities

This module aims to examine the beliefs and practices of New Age and Alternative Spiritualities, providing an understanding of the context, culture and impact of such traditions on society and popular culture. An optional fieldtrip to Glastonbury is a feature of this module.

Assessment: Two essays of 2,500 words each

Sample Essay/Exam/DiscussionQuestion:'New Age is Old Occult.' To what extent might this statement be true?

Value: 20 credits

Dissertation

This is a major piece of independent work for which a topic is identified and research is carried out with supervisory help to produce a 12,000 word essay.

Assessment: One dissertation of 12,000 words

Value: 40 credits

Cyber Religion

This module introduces students to the Internet in terms of its technology, culture and social function, focussing on areas of specific interest and case studies of religious traditions such as Islam, Christianity, Judaism, alternative spiritualities and New Religious Movements in virtual contexts.

Assessment: One essay of 2,500 words and one weblog of 3,000 words

Sample Essay/Exam/Discussion Question:What are some of the forms of religion and spiritualities in cyber environments?

Value: 20 credits

Dead Sea Scrolls: Text and Context

This module examines the contribution of the Dead Sea Scrolls to our understanding of the history of the Second Temple Period. Particular emphasis is placed on the nature of the collection and various attempts to classify the material. A variety of scholarly assessments of the social realities reflected in the Qumran texts and the site of Qumran are critically evaluated.

Assessment: One essay of 2,500 words

*Sample Essay/Exam/Discussion Question:*You have been invited to put together a television documentary about the archaeology of Khirbet Qumran. Which scholars would you invite to participate and what conclusions would you, as editor and presenter, draw at the end of the programme?.

Value: 10 credits

Islamic Philosophy

The module traces the development of philosophy in the Islamic world from its beginnings in the ninth century to its full flowering in the thirteenth century and beyond. It examines the relationship between Islamic philosophy and its Greek and Persian antecedents, focussing on the contributions made by the major philosophical figures of the Islamic world.

Assessment: One essay of 3,000 words

Sample Essay/Exam/Discussion Question:Who was the first true philosopher in Islam?

Value: 10 credits

Pentecostal and Charismatic Theology

The Pentecostal movement is one of the largest and fastest growing traditions in contemporary world Christianity. This module critically examines the key distinctive theological ideas that characterise this movement including concepts of healing and speaking in tongues and reads these developments against the background of contemporary Evangelicalism.

Assessment: One essay of 4,000 words

Sample Essay/Exam/Discussion Question: Give a theological assessment of the Alpha Course.

Value: 20 credits

Set Texts A

An opportunity to engage in depth with a theologically or religiously significant text in detail in a small group with a member of academic staff. Texts will vary and might include scriptural, philosophical or literary works.

Assessment: One essay of 2,500 words

Value: 10 credits

Set Texts B

An opportunity to engage in depth with a theologically or religiously significant text in detail in a small group with a member of academic staff. Texts will vary and might include scriptural, philosophical or literary works.

Assessment: One essay of 2,500 words

Value: 10 credits

Intercultural Theology

This module studies the theology of culture and cultural expression and highlights the significance of contextual and cross cultural interpretations of contemporary Christian theologies and biblical texts.

Assessment: One essay of 2,500 words

Sample Essay/Exam/Discussion Question: What is the value of cultural artefacts as an interpretative tool for the student of theology and religion?

Value: 10 credits

Contemporary Christian Thought

Building on Themes in Christian Theology in the second year, this module allows students to engage with some of the main ideas and methods of contemporary Christian theologians from a variety of backgrounds and traditions.

Assessment: Two essays of 2,500 words each

Sample Essay/Exam/Discussion Question: What is the contribution of 'Eco-theology' to contemporary theological discourse?

Value: 20 credits

Thealogy: Transgressive Travels with the Goddess

This module, unique to Birmingham, offers a critical consideration of key themes in thealogy ('goddess spirituality'), its thinkers and its theoretical concerns. Female spirituality and feminist critiques of conventional religions are just two aspects of this unique and diverse module.

Assessment: One essay of 4,000 words

Sample Essay/Exam/Discussion Question: what kind of 'liberation' is available through programmes such as What Not to Wear?

Value: 20 credits

Christian/Muslim Relations

This module considers the theory, theology and practice of contemporary inter-religious interaction, mainly between the faith traditions of Islam and Christianity.

Assessment: One essay of 2,500 words

Sample Essay/Exam/Discussion Question: Is it possible to identify shared values between Islam and Christianity?

Value: 20 credits

Arabic II

This module consolidates, develops and extends Arabic listening, speaking, reading and writing skills.

Value: 20 credits

Bible and Sacred Space

This module looks at spatial concepts within biblical texts and reads them using spatial-critical theory. There is an emphasis on the original settings of the texts and also on the history of their interpretation in different contexts, including the ethics of examing biblical space in light of contemporary political conflicts (Israel/Palestine and Jerusalem in particular).

Assessment: One essay of 2,500 words

Sample Essay/Exam/Discussion Question: Is it possible for the study of biblical sacred space be non-political?

Value: 10 credits

Religion and the Arts

Assessment: One portfolio of 2,500 words

Sample Essay/Exam/Discussion Question:

Value: 10 credits

Contemporary Sufi Movements

Assessment: One essay of 3,000 words

Sample Essay/Exam/Discussion Question:

Value: 10 credits

Queer Bibles and Theologies

What happens when gay and lesbian people read the Bible? How do Christian congregations cope with someone who is transitioning to another gender? This module looks at LGBT and Queer ways of engaging with religious life, including reading biblical texts and constructing theologies.

Assessment: One essay of 2,500 words

Sample Essay/Exam/Discussion Question: 'Welcoming and Affirming, yes, but Queer worship is a utopian dream'. Discuss critically how far you agree with this statement

Value: 10 credits

The Study of Christian Worship

This module will begin with a look at the history of Christian worship over the last 2000 years. Within the context of this history, we will look at questions of theology, architecture and space, music, language, gender, popular devotions and styles of worship. The final 6 weeks of the course will focus upon worship within the contemporary context and the social and pastoral issues that are raised both by contemporary worship and the study of worship within this context.

Assessment: One report of 2,000 words and one 2.-hour exam

Value: 20 credits

World Christianities

This module studies the enormous changes in the nature and demography of world Christianities from the 19th Century to the beginning of the 21st Century, with particular focus on schisms and denominational histories, including Roman Catholicism, Protestant churches, ecumenism, evangelical churches, independent churches, and Pentecostalism. This module studies the enormous changes in the nature and demography of world Christianities from the 19th Century to the beginning of the 21st Century, with particular focus on schisms and denominational histories, including Roman Catholicism, Protestant churches, ecumenism, evangelical churches, independent churches, and Pentecostalism.

Assessment: One essay of 3,000 words and one written task of 1,000 words

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