God – Part 1

➢ **Christian Monotheism**

One God, omnipotent creator and controller of all things; transcendent and unknowable; the doctrine of the Trinity and its importance; the meaning and significance of the belief that Jesus is the son of God; the significance of John 10:30; 1 Corinthians 8:6.

➢ **God as Personal, God as Father and God as Love**

The challenge of understanding anthropomorphic and gender specific language about God: God as Father and King, including Christian feminist perspectives.

➢ **The concept of God in process theology**

God as neither omnipotent nor creator.

Keywords

Keyword	Definition
anthropomorphism	
atonement	
covenant	
ex - Deo	
ex nihilo	
immanent	
incarnate	
Monotheism	
Omnipotent	
Omniscient	
Pantheon	
perichoresis	
polytheism	
redemption	
salvation	
Salvation History	
Shema	
transcendent	
Yahweh	

Task: research and fill in keywords table with definitions in your own words.

Christian Monotheism
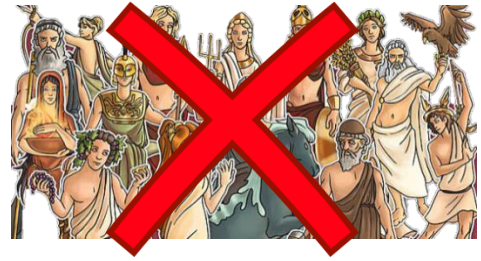
Monotheism

The belief that only one God exists and is worthy if worship. The Old Testament did not make this distinction straight away. Other Gods were believed to exist, although they had no power.

One of the names for God in the Old Testament is 'Elohim', which in Hebrew in is a plural form: 'gods', this shows that God was seen as a head of a **pantheon** of God. The different nations were thought to have its own deity, these gods made up **Yahweh's** council called the 'sons of God'.

"…I am He. Before me no God was formed, nor shall there be any after me…"

(Isaiah 43:10)

" Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: 'I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god'."

(Isaiah 44:6)

Ethical Monotheism

❑ In the Old Testament, good moral behaviour is at the heart of the **covenant** agreement between Israel and God, where God 'adopts' Israel in a special relationship, and in return Israel promises moral and religious obedience (Exodus 19:5-6). The Law given by God to Moses in the 'text' of that agreement, and is centred on the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20: 1-17).

❑ In the New Testament, Jesus tells his followers that whoever weakens in the obeying these commandments, or who teaches others to weaken, shall be called last into the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 5:19). Many Christians believe therefore that they are bound by the same moral laws. Others, of course, do not (e.g. those who prefer the approach of Situation Ethics).

❑ In Mark's Gospel (12:29), Jesus quotes from the preface to the first commandment in Deuteronomy 6:4: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is One'. This phrase forms the heart of the **Shema** prayer in Judaism, and is said to be the ideal expression of ethical monotheistic belief. This is the full text of Mark 12:28-31:

And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, 'Which commandment is the first of all?' Jesus answered:

'The first is, "Hear, O Israel, The Lord our God, the Lord is one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." The second is this, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these.'

Many Christians take this text as morally authoritative, depending on their view of the authority of the text itself and Jesus.

❑ Moral obedience is at the heart of salvation. The appearance in the world of Jesus as God's Son is part of 'Salvation History'. The ethical teaching of Jesus shows how Christians (by obeying that teaching) can be saved into the Kingdom of God. God (and God alone) has the complete power, authority and love to save humanity from its sins. Again, this is true for some Christians, depending on whether they accept that salvation is by works or by faith, for example.

God as the omnipotent Creator

For many, to say that God is the only God, means also that he must be omnipotent, the Creator of everything that exists and the controller of all things.

Since God is the only God, he cannot be challenged by any other power or authority, so Christians have deduced that God must be omnipotent (all powerful). For example, in Matthew 19:26 Jesus tells his disciples that '…with God all things are possible'.

Christians disagree about what it means for God to be omnipotent, because omnipotence can be defined in different ways:
1. For some, to say that God is omnipotent means that He can do absolutely anything, including the logically impossible; so if God wants to make l or to make murder a morally good act, or to make a stone too heavy for Himself to lift, He can do any of these things.
2. Others think that this is just logical nonsense, and that to say God is omnipotent means that He can do anything that is logically possible

You will remember that for many Christians, it is important to accept (2) as the right definition because of the problem of evil. If (1) is true, we are faced with the problem of why God does not control evil in the world. Scholars such as Hick and Plantinga maintain that (2) is true, and that it is not logically possible for God to allow humans to be truly free and to get rid of evil at the same time.

You will remember, however, that Process Theologians 'solve' the problem. of evil by denying that God is omnipotent in any sense, arguing that the sheer extent of evil in the world shows that God cannot be all-powerful You will have to make up your own mind on this.

Most Christians argue that if God is omnipotent, then he must be the Creator of everything that exists.
Most Christians accept this, although again they disagree about the method of God's creation:

1. Some Christians believe that the universe comes **ex Deo** (out of God's own being), but most reject this idea because it would imply that God and His creation are the same thing whereas most Christians believe that God is transcendent (beyond space and time) and 'wholly other' (completely different from the material world).

2. Most Christians think that God created the universe literally 'from nothing', **ex nihilo**. This might suggest that the universe is some kind of mental construct by God. Many Christian theologians insist that the idea of 'creation from nothing' can be found in the creation narrative of Genesis 1, where God 'brings forth' the universe by words of creative power: God simple says: 'Let there be...' (for example, verses 3,6,9).

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters, And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.

It may be true that God created the universe from nothing. The problem is that Genesis does not show this to be the case, because the Revised Standard Version's translation here is almost certainly wrong. A more likely translation of the Hebrew is this:

In the beginning of God's creating the heavens and the earth, **the earth being without form and void, and darkness being upon the face of the deep**; and the Spirit of God moving over the face of the waters, God said, Let there be light': and there was light.

The words in bold are describing an already-existing. dark, watery chaos God's creative acts are to bring order to this chaos, hence his first act is to create light to banish the darkness.

3. Those Christians who accept the second translation therefore believe that God created the universe by using already existing chaotic matter, which he put into an ordered state. You will remember that this the view of Process theologians who think that God/the material universe have always existed together.

Of the three views explained here, this is the closest to the text of Genesis not least because the Genesis texts reflect the Babylonian account of creation, the *Enuma Elis*, which also assumes primeval chaos. Lines 1-5 of the *Enuma Elis* refers to the mingled waters of heaven and earth, and to 'chaos, Tiamat, the mother of them both'. In Genesis 1:2, Tiamat is reflected in the word *Tehom*, which in the Revised Standard Version translation is 'the deep', referring the formless primeval waters surrounding the world. The mythological elements are subdued in Genesis, nevertheless the language reflects them.

None of this shows that the doctrine of creation out of nothing is not true - it is just that the Bible makes little effort to make a case for it. It is an idea which, like many others in Christian thinking, has evolved during the ongoing life of the Church. Balanced against that, the idea of creation as God ordering pre-existent chaos is much closer to the ideas of Process Theology. The important point is that for most Christians, God is the all-powerful Creator of everything.

There are <u>clear links with the problem of evil here</u>, because if God is perceived as the all-powerful Creator of everything, then he must have created evil. Augustine addressed this problem by denying that evil exists as a thing in itself, whereas others claim that what we perceive as evil is created by humanity, so God is not the sole creator of evil. Alternatively Hick argues that what we perceive as evil provides the stimulus for spiritual development into children of God.

God as the controller of all things

This idea follows naturally from the belief that God is the omnipotent Creator. If the universe was made by God, and if God is all-powerful, then God must in some sense control everything Another way of saying this is to refer to God as King or Sovereign', since a king has control over his subjects, although as an omnipotent King, God's control over everything is total (Romans 11:36; 1 Corinthians 8:6; 1 Timothy 6:15; Hebrews 13).

Perhaps the most important expression of this idea is that God sustain the universe, meaning that he holds it in existence and preserves it from destruction: God sustains the fabric of existence itself. This idea is expressed in many ways, for example:

➤ God preserves the universe from falling back into the watery chaos that He put into structured and ordered form at creation. This a frequent motif in the Psalms, for example, 89:9-10, where God rules the raging of Yam (the sea) and crushes Rahab like a carcass
➤ Equally, God set the earth on its foundations, so that it should never be shaken' (Psalm 104:5)
➤ We said above that monotheism for Christians is 'ethical' monotheism, so God sustains human morality by providing a code by which Christians are expected to live: basically, the Ten Commandments and the teachings of Jesus

Christians vary in their interpretation of God as the controller of all things.

➤ For some, since God is the only God, and since He is all-powerful He must also be **omniscient** (all-knowing). God must therefore know absolutely all of the past, present and future, which means that the future is fixed and unavoidable. This idea is called 'theological determinism Theological determinism comes in various forms, but in its strongest form it means that humans do not have free will, and so God has absolute control over a person's actions.
➤ One alternative to this view is to follow Aquinas view that God does not exist in time: rather he exists timelessly. For God, there is no today, tomorrow or yesterday: timeless God sees all times, rather like an unrolled scroll, so sees the entire history of the universe timelessly. Following this idea, some argue that God's omniscience means that God sees the results of our future free choices but does not cause them. On this view, God has the power to intervene and control, but does not - he permits human free choices.

The question of whether or not we have free will is a particularly important one, since many believe that without free will our moral actions are worthless, since we would be nothing more than 'moral robots'. This is an issue that is returned to in the A-Level Specification.

You might find it rather irritating that there seems to be no doctrine or belief that all Christians agree on, but the simple fact is that although some Christians claim to *know* God's nature and God's mind, that is a completely untestable claim. Some regard it as laughable to think that the mind of any creature, human or otherwise, can know the mind of an omnipotent being For some, this view is strengthened by the Christian belief that God is transcendent and unknowable, which we now turn to.

God as transcendent and unknowable

To say that God is transcendent means that God is above and beyond the space-time universe.

For Christians who have this understanding of God's nature, God is not thing or an object: God is not made of anything, and does not exist in anything (so cannot exist in time or in space, since to do so would limit him). God is eternal, having no beginning and no end The Catholic doctrine of God's aseity holds that as God is the omnipotent Creator, nothing is responsible for his existence. God was not created by something else; nor did He create Himself; God is his own existence and God's essence is to exist.

God's transcendence is expressed in many ways in the Bible, for example:

'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.'

(Isiah 55:8-9)

'…No one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.'

(1 Corinthians 2:11)

Think back, to Religious Experience, and the section on Rudolf Otto, on numinous experiences of God as an apprehension of the n the sense of his being wholly other Otto focuses on God's holiness in the sense of him being numinous and transcendent: for example in the narrative of Moses' call (Exodus 2:23-4:17), where God tells Moses to take off his shoes because he is standing on holy ground (3:5). Texts such as these show that God's transcendence means that God's true nature is unknowable. This idea is again central to Moses call narrative. Moses says to God:

If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, "The God of your fathers has sent me to you," and they ask me, "What is his name what shall I say to them?" **(3:13)**

In reply, God says to Moses: 'I am who I am.' (3:14). The Hebrew of this phrase is: ehyeh aser ehyeh, which is an etymology (an explanation of the meaning) of God's name, YHWH, and the etymology can be under in various senses, including: 'I will be what I will be'. Whatever the precise translation, most Christian commentators see the importance of God's answer in terms of his monotheistic status, and his complete transcendence and unknowability. God is the Creator, and cannot be categorised, known, or understood by any other being.

Task:

The doctrine of the Trinity and its importance

Trinitarian doctrine is not something that Christians put in place of monotheism rather interprets it in the light of historical revelation. Not all Christians accept Trinitarian doctrine, but for those who do: historically God is encountered in the Old Testament revelation as Father, Creator and Judge. In the New Testament revelation, God is encountered as a human being, Jesus, and the revelation of the Holy Spirit is also made explicit.

Jesus is conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 135) and at his baptism the Spirit descends on him in bodily form, as a dove (Luke 3:22). In the ongoing life of the Church, God is experienced in all three persons. A clear doctrine of the Trinity is not found in the New Testament writings, rather it is 'perceived' within them. To give some examples Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19).
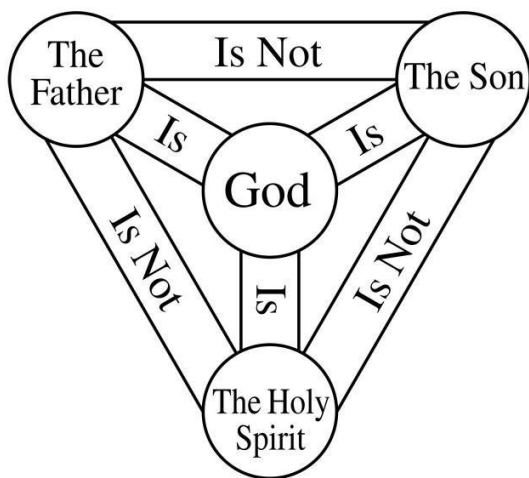
Religious Studies Transition Work

The Religious Studies A-Level course is broken down into three main topics: Philosophy of Religion, Ethics and The Study of Christianity.

I believe that this course is one of the most exciting things you can study. Philosophers ask some of the biggest questions in life and seek to find logical and coherent answers to them. Studying Philosophy will change the way you see the world, it will challenge your beliefs and help you to articulate arguments with clarity and precision. It is also the oldest academic discipline in the world dating back to around 600BC.

Philosophy is a Greek word which literally means 'love of wisdom'. A philosopher is not content with common sense or just accepting things as the way they are. They want to study the absolute fundamentals of our existence. For this reason you always do Philosophy 'of' something. Philosophy of Mind, Philosophy of Science, Philosophy of Mathematics etc. You will be studying Philosophy of Religion which involves studying the claims that people make about God or the divine world and interrogate these claims, holding them up to scrutiny to see if the arguments presented are valid or worthy of belief.

Here is a simple example of a philosophical exercise for you to practice. This philosophical question is one that looks at the idea of identity and what makes something what they are.

*Imagine a ship that is leaving port in Southampton. This ship is set to sail around the entire world before returning to Southampton. Over the journey every single part of the ship needs to be replaced. When parts of the ship are replaced they are replaced with **exactly the same** parts as before. By the time the ship gets back to Southampton there are no original parts of the ship left, but the ship looks **exactly the same**. Is it the same ship?*

TASK: Write your response to the exercise. Do you think the ship is the same ship or is it now in fact, a different ship? Why do you think this? Why might someone disagree with you?

Complete this below by typing in the **dark blue** font colour.

What would happen if we were to apply the same question to a person? If I think of myself through the stages of my life I am no longer the same person I was when I was a baby. Every cell in my body has changed completely, I don't really remember what it was like to be a baby and I no longer look anything like I used to. So, am I still me? What is it that makes me, me? Or, what is it that makes you, you? If for example, in the ship scenario, you argued that the ship is not the same ship as what gives the ship its identity is the parts it is made of, then are you comfortable with applying that argument to yourself? This is an example of some of the types of questions we will study in Philosophy.

Philosophy of Religion.

William Paley's Design Argument:

You will be familiar with this argument from GCSE, however at A-Level it becomes a little more complex.

TASK: Research who William Paley was type out five facts about his life below:

Paley's Analogical Argument: its basis in observation.

1. Paley's argument is **a posteriori**, meaning that it is based on sense experience: we observe the world through touch, taste, hearing, smell and sight, and we draw conclusions from what our senses tell us.
2. Further, the argument is **inductive**. Inductive reasoning is where we use premises to supply strong evidence for the truth of the conclusion. Inductive arguments are about what is probably true, and they give us new knowledge. Since I've owned many cats, here's an example based on my observations about cats:

●All the cats that I have observed have had fur.

●Tomorrow I am going on holiday to Canada.

●The cats I see in Canada will probably have fur.

TASK: Come up with your own inductive argument and type it below:

The third line of the argument gives us knowledge, but it can only be probably true. In fact, until the 1970s, my conclusion would probably have been true for every observation of cats I would ever make, but during the 1970s breeders developed a fur-less cat known as the Canadian Sphynx, and as a matter of fact one turned up two weeks ago in the house next to mine.

Since Paley's argument is a posteriori and inductive, his conclusion that the universe was designed is at best probably true, and it might turn out to be false.

3. Paley's argument is based on three particular observations about the world:

●Its complexity. Paley goes into great detail concerning his observations about the complexity of the natural world. He looks at the complexity of biological organisms and organs, such as the eye. He also looks at the complexity of the laws of nature by which everything is governed.

●Its regularity. Paley observes in particular the regularity of the orbits of comets, moons and planets and the regularity of the seasons of the year.

●Its purpose. Paley observes the machines that we make and infers that they are built for a purpose. The complexity and regularity of a watch implies that it has a purpose, even if we do not know what the purpose is. Our observation of the complexity and regularity of the world therefore implies that the world too has a purpose.

4. On the basis of these observations, Paley formulated his inductive Design Argument, which can be summarised as follows:

●Some objects in the world show clear evidence that they were designed because they exhibit complexity and regularity, from which we can infer that they were made for a purpose.

●The universe appears to exhibit complexity and regularity, from which we can infer that it was made for a purpose.

●So it is likely that the universe was designed.

5. In summary, Paley argues inductively from what we can see in the world (the appearance of design) back to the supposed cause (God).

Read the extract from Paley:

In crossing a heath, suppose I pitched my foot against a stone, and were asked how the stone came to be there; I might possibly answer, that, for any thing I knew to the contrary, it had lain there for ever: nor would it perhaps be very easy to show the absurdity of this answer. But suppose I had found a watch upon the ground, and it should be inquired how the watch happened to be in that place; I should hardly think of the answer which I had before given, that, for any thing I knew, the watch might have always been there. Yet why should not this answer serve for the watch as well as for the stone; why is it not as admissible in the second case, as in the first? For this reason, and for no other, viz. that, when we come to inspect the watch, we perceive (what we could not discover in the stone) that its several parts are framed and put together for a purpose, e.g. that they are so formed and adjusted as to produce motion, and that motion so regulated as to point out the hour of the day; that, if the different parts had been differently shaped from what they are, of a different size from what they are, or placed after any other manner, or in any other order, than that in which they are placed, either no motion at all would have been carried on in the machine, or none which would have answered the use that is now served by it....

This mechanism being observed ... the inference, we think, is inevitable, that the watch must have had a maker: that there must have existed, at some time, and at some place or other, an artificer or artificers who formed it for the purpose which we find it actually to answer; who comprehended its construction, and designed its use.

Paley's argument here is simple. If, while crossing a heath, I come across two objects, the first a stone and the second a watch, and I ask myself how they came to be there, I would have to give different answers to this question. For the stone, it would not be absurd to suppose it had been there forever; but the watch is quite clearly different, because closer inspection shows that it is a complex artefact.

To put Paley's mention of the watch into context (Natural Theology was first published in 1802), remember that watches then were rather different artefacts to the comparatively dainty objects that most of us wear upon our wrists. Paley would be thinking about something like the watch shown here, where unclipping the hinge between the front and the back would reveal a complex arrangement of gears and levers.

Looking at these pictures, we could not suppose of Paley's watch what we could suppose of the stone – that it had always been there. For example, the watch would contain brass – a metal that is commonly selected in watch-making because of its elasticity and anti-rusting properties. The front face would be covered with glass, both to protect the hands of the watch and to enable the numbers engraved on the face to be seen. The gears and cogs inside the watch would lead you to suppose that they were responsible for the regularity of the movement; moreover if only one part of the mechanism had been different (such as one cog being too large or too small), then the movement would fail. Eventually you would realise further that the movement had an obvious purpose – to tell the time. From the existence of the watch and its properties we could infer the existence of a watchmaker.

Like a good politician, Paley then anticipated some objections to his argument. For example:

● Some might object that if the watch is broken, or does not work properly, that would weaken his argument. Paley answers that even if that were the case, he would still know that the broken watch was designed.

● The same would be true if he could not work out what all the parts did.● Some might object to Paley by claiming that there just happens to be a principle of order in material things which had somehow brought the parts of the watch into their present form and situation. Paley sees this as nonsense – watches do not get made by any 'principle of order' other than that found in the mind of a watchmaker.

● Nor would he change his mind if somebody told him he was ignorant of the whole matter – Paley says that he would know enough to understand that the watch was designed.

From here, Paley went on to develop his analogy.

Paley's Analogy

An inference is a conclusion reached through evidence and reasoning. An analogy is an inference where information or meaning is transferred from one subject to another. Paley is transferring his inference about the organisation and design of watches to the organisation and design of nature.

Paley's analogy is this:

1 A watch has complex parts, each with a function, and the parts work together for a specific purpose.

2 So the watch must have been designed by a watch maker.

3 Similarly the universe has parts that function together for a purpose.

4 So the universe must have been designed by a universe maker.

5 The universe is a far more wonderful design than a watch, so its designer is much greater than any human designer.6 The universe designer is God.

.. Every indication of contrivance, every manifestation of design, which existed in the watch, exists in the works of nature; with the difference, on the side of nature, of being greater and more, and that in a degree which exceeds all computation. I mean that the contrivances of nature surpass the contrivances of art, in the complexity, subtility [subtlety], and curiosity of the mechanism; and still more, if possible, do they go beyond them in number and variety; yet, in a multitude of cases, are not less evidently mechanical, not less evidently contrivances, not less evidently accommodated to their end, or suited to their office, than are the most perfect productions of human ingenuity.

Paley gives some rather exhaustive examples of what he means, for example:

●The eye in all creatures is superbly adapted for vision. An eye has all the right parts in the right arrangement to achieve its purpose – to enable a person to see – just as a watch has all the right parts in the right arrangement to achieve its purpose – to enable a person to tell the time.

●Fish have fins and gills so that they are perfectly adapted to living in water.

●Equally, birds have feathers, bones and wings that are perfectly adapted to flight.

●Paley considered the grandest of God's works to be the heavenly bodies – the stars, planets and comets – and the awe-inspiring regularity of their orbits.

In summary, Paley's Design Argument is that from the purpose and regularity we observe in nature, we can conclude that these were the intentional design of God. The main argument being from purpose explains why Paley's argument is also called the 'Teleological Argument', telos being the Greek for 'end', or 'purpose'.

TASK: You need to write one side of A4 explaining Paley's argument in your own words, based on what you have read. Remember to give all the steps to his argument, ensure you include what is meant by an a posteriori inductive argument. Give lots of examples and quotes where applicable.

You now need to research a philosophical question from the list provided below and do your own research to produce an essay that is around 1,000 words long (900 words is the minimum and 1,100 words is the maximum).

If you are struggling, please email Mr Miller at:

ian.miller@paddington-academy.org

In order to be successful you must:

- Show at least two different opinions on your question.
- Have opinions from scholars included in your essay.
- Have evidence to support your arguments.

Essay questions list:

- Does the soul exist?
- If human beings could live forever, should they?
- What is philosophy for?
- Does God exist?
- Does suffering have a point?
- Should animals have rights?
- Should human cloning be allowed?
- Is it possible to have a meaningful conversation about God?
- What gives me my identity?