



Religious Studies
Summer Independent Learning
2021

Philosophy of Religion: Religious Experience

Read the booklet and then complete all the tasks.

Bring in on the first day back after the holidays, assume you have RS on that day!

Task Checklist – Tick when completed and again when you have revised the content

You will be tested on your knowledge of these topics when you return to college.

Note: Task 10 is very important!

Task	Completed	Revised
Task 1 Create flash cards for the key terms on pages 3-4 These can be either online or on card. You will be tested on these terms in September		
Task 2 Introduction to the study of religious experience questions		
Task 3 Summary questions on visions		
Task 4 Example of a vision – notes on Bernadette and Lourdes		
Task 5 Questions on conversions experiences and examples (first Pentecost and St Paul)		
Task 6 Explanations and examples of mysticism (Rumi and St Teresa of Avila)		
Task 7 Activities on St Teresa of Avila’s types and stages of prayer		
Task 8 Explanation and essay task on William James’ definition of mystical experiences		
Task 9 Explanation and summary task on Rudolf Otto’s definition of numinous experiences		
Task 10***** Really important! Keep going over and revising all your notes from Year 12. Make flash cards and ensure that you understand everything.		
Task 11 Something to watch, to listen to and to read. Choose a minimum of 3 tasks, write a one paragraph summary and/or review of it that we can discuss them in September.		

THEME 3 : RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

TERM	DEFINITION
asceticism	Deliberate self-denial of bodily pleasures for the attainment of spiritual fulfilment.
charismatic	Christians of various groups who seek an ecstatic religious experience, often including speaking in tongues.
conversion	To change direction or to turn around.
description-related	Relating to descriptions of mystical experiences as a basis for challenging their authenticity.
foundational belief	A belief that needs no further proof to support it.
Franks Davis, Caroline	Caroline Franks Davis - scholar who demonstrated how the authenticity of religious experiences could be challenged.
Holland, R.F.	R.F. Holland (1923-2013), an English philosopher who advocated that miracles could be explained as a set of coincidences. They do not break natural laws, but are seen as having religious significance.
Hume, David	David Hume, (1711-1776) 18th Century philosopher, whose work relating to empiricism was hugely influential on the twentieth century logical positivists. His <i>Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion</i> (published after his death) are particularly influential on the development of the philosophy of religion.
immanent	Existing or remaining; in theology it refers to God's involvement in creation.
ineffable	Defies expression, unutterable, indescribable, indefinable.
James, William	William James (1842-1910) 19th/20th Century American psychologist renowned for investigations into religious experience and mysticism.
miracle	Act of wonder; variously defined including a violation of the laws of nature (Hume) and an unusual and striking event that evokes and mediates a vivid awareness of God (Hick).
monism	The view that there is only one basic and fundamental reality.
mystical	Experiences or systematic meditation, which causes a heightened awareness of the divine or an ultimate reality.
noetic	Gaining special knowledge or insights that are unobtainable by the intellect alone; usually as a result of a mystical experience.
numinous	An experience of the holy; something wholly other than the natural world and beyond comprehension.
object-related	Relating to the object (that that was experienced) of mystical experiences as a basis for challenging their authenticity.
Otto, Rudolf	Rudolf Otto (1869-1937) in his book <i>The Idea of the Holy</i> defined the concept of the holy as that which is numinous.
passive	Where the recipient(s) of the mystical experience do not bring it about themselves – the actual moment is governed by a being or force external to

	the will of the recipient.
subject-related	Relating to the subject (recipient) of mystical experiences as a basis for challenging their authenticity.
subjective	Having its source within the mind.
Sufism	The mystical tradition within Islam.
Swinburne, Richard	Richard Swinburne (1934-) British philosopher and Christian apologist writing on numerous issues in philosophy of religion. On the topic of miracles, he argued that miracles not only broke the laws of nature but also had religious significance.
transcendent	Having existence outside the material universe.
transient	The experience may be short-lived, but the effects tend to last much longer than the experience itself.
veridical	When the object of the experience actually exists as a reality and not just in the imagination.
vision	Something seen other than by ordinary sight.

Task 1

Create flash cards for these key terms

These can be either online or on card.

You will be tested these terms in September

Religious Experience

There are many different ways of categorising religious experiences without actually defining what it actually is. Put simply, we may say that **a religious experience is an encounter with the divine.**

It is a non-empirical occurrence that brings with it an awareness of something beyond us. However, the variety of religious experiences is such that it is difficult to find a common theme.

Nevertheless, we may note that some of the main features of religious experiences can be set out as follows:

- God is experienced as opposed to everyday physical objects. There is a spiritual change that clearly has a religious dimension.
- Religious experiences are often subjective as opposed to objective.
- Religious experiences are not universal i.e. not everybody experiences them as opposed to ordinary experiences e.g. a tree, the weather etc.
- Human beings often use the same conceptual scheme when they describe an ordinary experience. Thus regardless of culture we all describe a tree in the same way. However, with religious experiences, though the feelings may be similar (e.g. awe and wonder, joy, peace etc.) the object is different e.g. Jesus, Allah, Krishna etc.
- Religious experiences can be understood as pragmatic in that they bring about life changing behaviour.

There is a wide variety of religious experiences, including:

- **Visions** – used to describe experience of God or another religious figure appearing with a message.
- **Conversion Experiences** – used to describe an experience that leads to an adoption of a new religious belief that differs from a previously held belief.
- **Mystical Experiences** – used to describe experience of direct contact or oneness with God or ultimate reality.
- **Prayer** – used to describe the experience of communicating with God or a higher power through the medium of prayer.

David Hay's book *Religious Experience Today* presents some of the findings of The Religious Experience Research Unit. These findings, which are based on a random sampling of the public include:

- 31% of British people and 35% of Americans have had an experience that they might consider religious.
- These experiences often last for a few seconds but can last much longer.
- They generally give awareness that there is more to reality than this physical world.
- They can produce a change in both behaviour and attitudes – including a sense of altruism, increased self-esteem and a feeling of purpose.

For many people throughout history the strongest demonstration of the existence of God comes from personal experience. Figures like Paul and Muhammad (pbuh) are famous examples of religious experience. However, it is not just famous people or figures from history who have religious experiences; ordinary people have experiences which have a dramatic and lasting effect on them.

Generally, we divide religious experiences into two groups: *direct* and *indirect* experiences.

Direct religious experiences refer to cases where a person encounters God in a direct way. The passage below is the account of Paul on the road to Damascus where he meets the risen Jesus, who then communicates with him. This is an example of a direct religious experience because it is an event where God reveals her/himself directly to the person having the experience, in this case Paul. This experience is not willed or chosen by the person; the person experiences or observes God in some way.

Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest **2** and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. **3** As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. **4** He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

5 "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. **6** "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

7 The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. **8** Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. **9** For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything. Acts 9

Indirect religious experiences refer to experiences, thoughts or feelings about God that are prompted by events in daily life. For example observing a sunrise and having thoughts about the greatness of God the Creator. Acts of prayer are seen as indirect religious experiences as God is not directly revealed to a person, nor is knowledge of God revealed; instead the person learns something about God through what is observed.

Task 2 Introduction to the study of religious experience questions

1. Write a definition of a religious experience using the information above.

2. How would you challenge the reality of a religious experience like receiving a vision from God?

3. How might a religious person respond to your challenge?

3 A The nature of religious experience with particular reference to:

Vision Experiences

A vision involves 'seeing something' beyond normal experience.

Religious experiences of visions and voices are unusual in that they are usually described in terms of ordinary perceptions. People who experience visions and voices describe them using phrases like 'I saw' or 'I heard'. However, these sights and sounds aren't usually heard or seen by other people. Both visions and voices occur in a variety of forms and in various faiths.

Vision experiences can happen when a person is awake or in a dream. In the vision, information may be revealed to the recipient. Visions are usually divided into three types:

1. Sensory/Corporeal: A vision has a sensory characteristic if it is to do with sense experience. In other words, it is where external objects, sounds or figures appear before the recipient. Sensory visions can be summarised in three ways.

Groups – Angel of Mons, during the First World War a vision of St George and a phantom bowman halted the Kaiser's troops.

Individual – seen by only one person, for example St Bernadette of Lourdes had several visions of the Virgin Mary. In one of these visions, she was told to dig in the ground at the feet of Mary. When she did, she discovered a mountain spring. People still visit the spring at Lourdes to pray and bathe, and many report being healed in some way.

Corporeal – an object that is external and appear to be physical in nature, but only visible to certain people, for example, St Bernadette saw Mary as a form or image like a physical person.

2. Intellectual: A vision can have an intellectual quality if the vision brings the recipient a message of inspiration, insight or instruction. It can also contain warnings!

For example Peter being told that all foods are 'clean' – Acts 10. **Peter's Vision**

⁹ About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. ¹⁰ He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. ¹¹ He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. ¹² It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds. ¹³ Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat."

¹⁴ "Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean."

¹⁵ The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."

¹⁶ This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.

Sensory example - St Bernadette (1844–79)

Bernadette Soubirous was born in Lourdes, France in 1844. On a February day in 1858, Bernadette went to the river and heard, to her alarm, a sudden rush of wind, and saw a golden cloud float out from the grotto. In the cloud stood a beautiful young woman, who seemed to float to a space in the rock. The woman wore a white robe, blue girdle and white veil, and golden roses adorned her bare feet. Her eyes were blue and gentle, and when she smiled and beckoned to Bernadette, the girl's fear vanished.

Bernadette drew closer, fell to her knees and began to say the **rosary**. The woman in the vision also had a rosary. Bernadette later said, *'The Lady let me pray alone; she passed the beads of the rosary between her fingers, but said nothing; only at the end of each decade did she say the Gloria with me.'* When they had finished saying the rosary, the Lady vanished. This experience affected Bernadette so powerfully that told others what had happened, and the news began to spread through the village.

When Bernadette told her priest of the vision, he made light of it, thinking the girl had suffered from a **hallucination**. On the following Sunday, Bernadette returned to the **grotto** accompanied by friends. She knelt before the grotto and the vision reappeared. Although the others saw nothing they began to tell what they had 'seen', and more and more local people began hearing reports of what had happened.

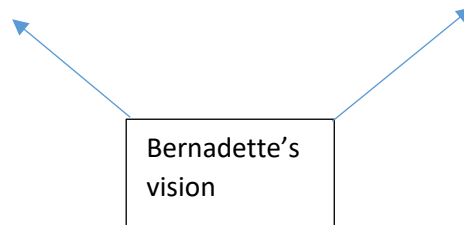
Bernadette had a third vision. The same figure appeared, smiled and asked Bernadette to come every day for 15 days. The next day her mother and aunt went with her, and on each subsequent visit crowds of people gathered nearby, hoping to see or hear something miraculous. Others were sceptical, and the police questioned Bernadette, trying to make her admit that it was all a hoax, but she remained firm in her insistence that her visions were genuine.

On Sunday 21 February, Bernadette was accompanied by many doubters, and on this occasion, Bernadette reported later, the apparition said to her: *'You will pray to God for sinners.'* On 26 February, while still in the trance-like state brought on by her vision, Bernadette crawled into the grotto and, at the Lady's direction, uncovered with her bare hands a trickle of **water** from which she drank and with which she washed her face. The water continued to well up and by the next day was flowing steadily down to the river. It continues to do so to this day; its discovery is regarded as a miracle. On 2 March, the apparition told Bernadette to tell the priests that 'a chapel should be built and a procession formed'. The priests, still doubtful, told Bernadette to ask the Lady her name. On 25 March, when the vision next appeared to her, Bernadette asked, 'Would you kindly tell me who you are?' The Lady replied: 'I am the **Immaculate Conception**. I want a chapel here.' This answer identified the Lady as the **Virgin Mary**; only four years before, the **dogma** of the Immaculate Conception had been introduced into the Catholic Church. The term Immaculate Conception was a term for the Virgin Mary that Bernadette would not have known.

Lourdes became place of pilgrimage. Any claims of a cure as a result of visiting Lourdes must be immediate and permanent to be regarded as a miracle. A patient's medical records prior to the trip and their subsequent medical history are studied before a cure is accepted as a miracle. Only about 70 such cures have been recognised as miracles, thousands visit Lourdes each year to be washed in the waters of the spring, to share in the processions, the singing, the prayers and the rites. Many who visit Lourdes are simply searching for a renewal of faith.

Task 4 Example of a vision

- 1 Write a summary of Bernadette's experiences from the first vision to the final vision on the 25th of March. Include the words in bold and ensure that you explain what they are.



- 2 What evidence supports Bernadette's visions as a genuine religious experience?

- 3 If they were not genuine religious experiences, what other explanations could be given for Bernadette's visions?

Conversion Experiences

Conversion – ‘change direction’ or ‘to turn around’. It usually refers to a change in beliefs or orientation.

Conversion experiences raise interesting issues; although the inner experience cannot be empirically observed, the resulting changes in behaviour are something that can be empirically seen. Often these changes occur dramatically over days and weeks, which for many believers is a powerful piece of evidence for the existence of God.

5. a. Write a definition of conversion religious experiences

Conversion is also not limited to individual experience.

Communal conversion experiences can occur, in which a group of people experience a change in behaviour or beliefs at the same time.

For example, the communal conversion in **Acts of the Apostles** chapter 2.

The disciples were gathered in a room and received the Holy Spirit.

*‘When the day of **Pentecost** came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from Heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.’ Acts 2*



[Acts 2 video](#)

Click of the link, find the video and watch it.

5. b. Write a definition of communal conversions experiences and an explanation of religious experience that led to communal conversions in Acts 2.

Individual conversions

Conversion may be from one major religion to another — Christianity to Buddhism, or from within one religious tradition — for example, Anglicanism to Catholicism. One example is Paul's conversion, when he saw blinding light and heard the voice of Jesus calling him to ministry. His life was changed forever or

From no religious tradition to a religious tradition e.g. Alister McGrath, Anthony Flew, Nicky Cruz or **Augustine** who is an example of a **moral conversion**, in that his wayward life was challenged when he read the words from St Paul's letter to the Romans, which encourages the reader to abandon the works of the flesh and be clothed with Christ.

From faith (believing) to faith (trusting) e.g. John **Wesley** had a vivid experience that enlivened his faith. He wrote: 'I felt my heart strangely warmed, I felt I did trust Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me, that he had taken away my sins...'

Furthermore, **C.S.Lewis'** conversion is an example of an **intellectual conversion**. He recounts how in 1931 he walked and talked for hours with the author J.R.R. Tolkien about myth and Christianity and became convinced that Jesus was the Son of God.

Two types of mental occurrence lead to a difference in conversion processes:

Active The conversion is deliberately sought, perhaps by going to an evangelistic meeting with the intention of responding to the preacher. This is a conscious and voluntary experience, called 'volitional type'

Passive The conversion is not deliberately sought but comes upon them unexpectedly. This is an involuntary and unconscious experience also called 'self-surrender type' (sudden conversion)

Gradual means the conversion takes place over a length of time, possibly even years.

Sudden means the conversion takes place suddenly, when a clear decision is made and a particular date can be given for the event.

5. c. - Write a summary and example of:

Individual conversion experiences including one religion to another, not faith to faith and believing to trusting

Gradual

Sudden

Passive

Active

Individual Conversion – Paul's Road to Damascus Conversion Story Summary by Jack Zavada

The story of Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus is told in [Acts 9:1-19](#) and retold by Paul in [Acts 22:6-21](#) and [Acts 26:12-18](#).

Saul of Tarsus, a Pharisee in Jerusalem after the [crucifixion](#) and resurrection of [Jesus Christ](#), swore to wipe out the new Christian church, called The Way. Acts 9:1 says that Paul was "breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples." Saul obtained letters from the [high priest](#), authorizing him to arrest any followers of Jesus in the city of Damascus. On the Road to Damascus, Saul and his companions were struck down by a blinding light. Saul heard a voice say, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" (Acts 9:4, [NIV](#)) When Saul asked who was speaking, the voice replied: "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." (Acts 9:5-6, [NIV](#)). Saul was blinded. His companions led him into Damascus to a man named Judas, on Straight Street. For three days Saul was blind and didn't eat or drink.

Meanwhile, Jesus appeared in a vision to a disciple in Damascus named Ananias and told him to go to Saul. Ananias was afraid because he knew Saul's reputation as a merciless persecutor of the church. Jesus repeated his command, explaining that Saul was his chosen instrument to deliver the gospel to the Gentiles, their kings, and the people of Israel. So Ananias found Saul at Judas' house, praying for help. Ananias laid his hands on Saul, telling him Jesus had sent him to restore his sight and that Saul might be filled with the Holy Spirit. Something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He arose and was [baptized](#) into the Christian faith. Saul ate, regained his strength, and stayed with the Damascus disciples three days. After his conversion, Saul changed his name to Paul.

Historical Context

Saul of Tarsus possessed perfect qualifications to be an evangelist: He knew Jewish culture and language, Greek language and culture and Jewish theology which helped him connect the [Old Testament](#).

Paul's life-changing experience on the Damascus Road led to his baptism and instruction in the Christian faith. He became the most determined of the apostles, suffering brutal physical pain, persecution, and finally, martyrdom. He revealed his secret of enduring a lifetime of hardship for the gospel:

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." ([Philippians 4:13](#), [NKJV](#))

Points of Interest for Christians

- Paul's conversion showed that Jesus himself wanted the gospel message to go to the Gentiles.
- The men with Saul did not see the risen Jesus, but Saul did. This miraculous message was meant for Saul.
- The scales falling from Paul's eyes symbolized a spiritual transformation that allowed him to see the truth. Once he knew the truth about Jesus, there was no going back.
- Saul witnessed the risen Christ, which fulfilled the [qualification of an apostle](#) ([Acts 1:21-22](#)). Only those who had seen the risen Christ could testify to his resurrection.

5. c. Write a summary of Paul's experience and the consequences for him and Christianity, use the information and click on the video link below to help you.

[St Paul's conversion experience](#)

Mystical Experiences

Mysticism: a religious experience where union with God or the absolute reality is sought or experienced.

Mystical experiences refer to a variety of religious experiences in which the subject is transformed and reports the loss of individuality, the oneness of all reality, union with the deity and the unity of the subject of the experience with the object of the experience. Mystical experiences involve special mental states or events that allow an understanding of ultimate truths.

Mystical experiences have several common features that have been identified by scholars such as **Walter Stace**:

- A sense of union with the divine.
- A sense of dependence on God.
- A sense of separateness from God.
- Time is transcended – this means ‘rising above’
- ‘Noetic’ experiences (William James) or a ‘showing’ (Mother Julian of Norwich) – something is clearly revealed to the person receiving the experience.
- A sense of joy and well-being.

Paul Tillich described two stages in a mystical experience: The first is an event or encounter. The second is a special understanding of that event as the result of ecstasy, a special way of looking at the event which reveals its religious significance.

There are mystic traditions in all major world religions; Sufism in Islam, Kabbalah in Judaism and the writings of Ramakrishna in Hinduism. Often, people will invoke mystical experiences through various methods; meditation, pilgrimage, fasting, hypnotic movement and sensory restriction or over-stimulation.

Ed Miller

Miller regards mystical experiences as ‘the pursuit of a transcendent, unitive experience with the absolute reality’ and created the following summary:

1. Transcendent: not localisable in space and time, lies beyond the everyday realm of physical senses.
2. Ineffable: not expressible in language, can’t be described
3. Noetic: conveying illumination, truth. Knowledge is gained through the mystical experience that would otherwise not be available to the recipient through ordinary means.
4. Ecstatic: filling the soul with bliss, peace, overwhelming
5. Unitive: uniting the soul with reality. The feeling of complete oneness with the divine

Task 6

- a. Write an explanation of mystical experiences with reference to Stace, Tillich and Miller.

Example Rumi, Sufism and transcendent mystical experiences

The word transcendent comes from the Latin prefix *trans-*, meaning "beyond," and the word *scandare*, meaning "to climb." When mystics achieve *transcendence*, they have gone beyond ordinary limitations, moving beyond physical needs and realities. This includes experiencing other worldly, different dimensions, the realm of the other, feelings of ecstasy and disengaging from the temporal world

Sufism is a Muslim movement whose followers seek to find divine truth and love through direct encounters with God. Sufism arose from within Islam in the 8th-9th centuries C.E. as an aesthetic movement. Sufis could be described as devout Muslims but, they are distinctive in nurturing theirs and others' spiritual dimension. The practice of Sufism is the intention to go towards the Truth, by means of love and devotion. This is called the *tarikat*, the spiritual path or way towards God. Ihsan is to worship Allah as though one sees him.

Sufis engage in a variety of ritual practices intended to help them realize union with God this includes distinct forms of ritual prayer (*dhikr*, literally "remembrance"), including the recitation of God's names, bodily rituals such as those practices by the so-called "**Whirling Dervishes**," a Turkish Sufi order that practices meditation and contemplation of God through spinning.



Rumi was born in 1207, he was a Persian Sunni Muslim poet, jurist, Islamic scholar, theologian, and Sufi mystic. He was the founder of the Mevlevi order / Whirling Dervishes of Sufi tradition. In 1244 he met a wandering mystic known as Shams they had a very close friendship for three years. Shams disappeared, possibly murdered by a jealous son of Rumi.

Rumi's poetry *Song of the Reed Flute*

*Listen to the reed and the tale it tells,
how it sings of separation:
Ever since they cut me from the reed bed,
my wail has caused men and women to weep.
I want a heart torn open with longing
the share the pain of this love.
Whoever has been parted from his source
longs to return to the state of his union.*

Interpretation

We have a yearning to be reunited with Allah
It is the nature of our existence to have a relationship with the divine.
All love and relationships are mystical gateways will allow you a closer connection to God.
Poetry, music and dance are direct doorways to the divine

- b. What is Sufism?
- c. Who was Rumi? Outline his beliefs.
- d. What is the message of his *Song of the Reed Flute*?
- e. Who are the Whirling Dervishes?

Example of mystical experience - St Teresa of Avila (1515–82)

There is no evidence that she was a pious teenager, and her interests were flirting with boys, clothes and rebelling. By 16, her father decided that she was out of control and sent her to a convent. Because of the belief that she was a sinner, Teresa decided to become a nun, because she was bound to go to hell. Her father was opposed. Teresa reported that he said, 'When I am dead you might do as you please.' One night she ran away to the Carmelite Convent of the Incarnation in Avila.

Life in the Carmelite convent was not harsh, and the nuns could travel when and wherever they wished. The wealthier nuns kept servants and lapdogs, wore jewellery, colourful sashes and perfume, and lived in private suites, while their poorer sisters slept in a dormitory. There was a parlour where they could meet friends and relatives, and the nuns could have *devotos*, men who would visit them regularly (in theory) for spiritual guidance.

After a year in the convent, Teresa's health began to fail; she suffered fevers and fainting spells and was believed to have tuberculosis. She left the convent and stayed briefly with an uncle who introduced her to mental prayer through Francisco de Osuna's *Third Spiritual Alphabet*. The prayer of quiet was just what Teresa needed as she suffered what she described as 'noise in the head'. As she grew worse, her father brought her home to die. She fell into a deep coma and soon it was thought that she was dead. Her grave was dug, and she would have been buried if her father had not insisted she was not yet dead. Several days later she awoke from her coma, although she was unable to open her eyes because they had been sealed shut with wax in preparation for her burial. Teresa described her own state on waking:

My tongue was bitten to pieces; nothing had passed my lips: and because of this and of my great weakness my throat was choking me so that I could not even take water. All my bones seemed to be out of joint and there was a terrible confusion in my head. As a result of the torments I had suffered during these days, I was all doubled up, like a ball, and no more able to move arm, foot, hand or head than if I had been dead, unless others moved them for me. I could move, I think, only one finger of my right hand.

<http://www.catholic.org/clife/mary/app.php?id=1>

She went back to the convent and when she was almost 40 she began to have a series of remarkable visions, which she said were 'seen not with the eyes of the body, but the eyes of the soul':

*One day, when I was at prayer, the Lord was pleased to reveal to me nothing but His hands, the beauty of which was so great as to be **indescribable** ... A few days later I also saw that Divine face, which seemed to leave me completely absorbed. And finally, there stood before me the most sacred humanity in the full beauty and majesty of His resurrected body ... The visions were lit by an unearthly light: It is a light so different from what we know here below that the sun's brightness seems dim by comparison ... It is like looking upon very clear water running over a bed of crystal and reflecting the sun, compared with a very muddy stream running over the earth beneath a cloudy sky. It seems rather to be natural light, whereas the other is artificial.*

http://www.cs.drexel.edu/~gbrandal/Illum_html/Teresa.html

Prayer Experiences

Prayer is the experience of communicating with God; in some ways, all religious experiences can be seen as a form of prayer. This 'communication' can be an independent request from the devotee, a form of praise or, alternatively take on a more mystical and collaborative encounter with the divine object.

Teresa's types and stages of prayer

St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1582) was a Spanish mystic and Roman Catholic saint. She had several religious experiences during her life, and wrote about the importance of mystic prayer to religious life. Teresa believed that the purpose of life was union with God, which is also the purpose of prayer. Therefore, the purpose of life is union with God through prayer. She wrote of the seven types of prayer in her work, *The Interior Castle*, and the stages of prayer in the analogy of the garden.

The Garden Analogy

The analogy is presented in the Autobiography of Teresa of Avila, and gives the metaphor of a garden; with the earth representing the soul and water being the understanding of grace. Teresa stated that *"a beginner must look on himself as one setting out to make a garden for His Lord's pleasure, on most unfruitful soil which abounds in weeds. His Majesty roots up the weeds and will put in good plants instead."*

Task 7 a - Read through the following explanation of the **four stages of prayer**. Make notes on the stages under the following headings:

1. First Water (mental prayer)



2. Drawing Water (prayer of quiet)



3. Irrigated Garden (imperfect union)



4. Rain (perfect union)



The first stage consists of **drawing, or attempting to draw, water** from a well by one's own effort. She calls this "the First Water" or "mental prayer". In it, we withdraw our minds from the outside world, and focus our minds upon seeking penitence and meditating upon Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. This is a slow and painful stage, in which we are filled 'drop by drop'. There is considerable strain involved. But through these efforts we can draw up some of our inward understanding of Grace. She says, "We shall do alright if we walk in righteousness and cling to virtue, but we shall advance at a snail's pace. Freedom of spirit is not to be had in that way." God has placed the water in the well of our garden. At other times, the well is dry and we must await more water. It is not helpful or healthy to grasp at the water that isn't there. We must wait for the well to again fill up before we can again draw water. God sometimes suspends our understanding. We must accept this. We must wait and prepare our garden for the life sustaining water. This stage, or beginning method is useful at first, and all men will have to fall back on it in their prayer life, but it is the lowest stage and least effective.

Still maintaining the metaphor of a garden, she describes the second stage as drawing water by means of a "**windlass**" (which evidently is a kind of pulley). In this way we are aided, by God, in our drawing of understanding. This is the "prayer of quiet". Much less labour is now required, "the soul becomes recollected", and one begins "to come in contact with the supernatural. One still strains but the burden is much less. We are starting to be won over by the divine and we have a greater and more frequent understanding of things. "On arriving at this state, the soul begins to lose desire for earthly things." We begin to become detached. There are fewer and fewer distractions. We are given over to a state of quietude. After our justification, we begin our process of sanctification. We are given over to Christ and are transformed, through Him, into more perfect people. In this stage, we are interiorly made aware of our transformation.

The third stage is described as a garden which has been **irrigated**. We no longer must continually strain but leave our soul open to understanding. The Lord takes over our work and becomes a gardener Himself. We are essentially enraptured and in a state of perfect joy. The garden is beginning to flower. "The soul's humility is now greater and more profound than it was before. It clearly sees that it has done nothing except consent to the Lord's granting it graces, and embraces it with its will." St. Teresa admits that a perfect union with God is possible in this lifetime, at least temporarily. This stage is almost a complete union, except that one is conscious of this rapture.

The fourth stage is this union. She likens it to **rain** falling upon the garden. We make no effort, no strain. We are completely enraptured. This rapture is a result of a perfect, though, temporary union with God. It is a special grace. She compares the union with God to a blazing fire and the state of one's soul to slug of iron. In this fire the iron slug will change its nature and glow. This is the soul enraptured. Both Martin Luther and Thomas a Kempis use similar analogies to describe the union of man and God. In this state we can no longer consciously analyse our experience. In this way it differs from the third stage, though it is contingent on that earlier stage. Such a stage is brief. St. Teresa herself says he has only experienced it for periods of less than half an hour. In this stage, time, memory and imagination melt away, leaving one only in the presence of God. It is as if one has been lifted into heaven.

The Interior Castle – types of prayer

This work describes the ‘seven mansions’ or ‘seven dwelling places’ that each represent a step towards unity with God. It is a guide for spiritual development through service and prayer. Initially, we are introduced to those outside the castle who are described as paralyzed and crippled by sin. This level represents those who are spiritually and morally bound by evil.

The seven mansions are as such: Fill in the missing words – Jesus, mansion, marriage, God, castle, earthly

Mansion 1	The souls are surrounded by sin and are only just starting to seek God’s grace through humility, in order to achieve perfect. The souls are still distracted by their earthly endeavours.
Mansion 2	The mansion of the practice of prayer. The souls seek to advance through the _____ by daily thoughts of God, humble recognition of God’s work in the soul and ultimately, daily prayer.
Mansion 3	The mansion of exemplary life. In this mansion the souls have a love for ____ that is so great that they have an aversion to both mortal and venial sin, and a desire to do works of charity for the ultimate glory of God.
Mansion 4	The prayer of quiet. During this time _____ comes to the person in their imagination where a relationship of personal love grows towards great depths of intimacy. The person becomes inwardly quiet and peaceful, absorbed in love, love within and without. Nothing else is important.
Mansion 5	In this _____, the soul begins to prepare itself to receive gifts from God, and becomes aware of the unity with God. Teresa says it is like God becomes the cocoon in which the person dies. It is a period of darkness, but yet the soul is certain beyond doubt that it is with and in the Lord.
Mansion 6	The mansion of spiritual betrothal. The person also receives special teachings and revelations that fit its inner needs. The results of these events create within the person intimate knowledge of each person of the Trinity, a deep self-awareness that is rooted in humility, a rejection of all _____ things that are not necessary to the continuance of this great love relationship, and finally a sense of joy so overwhelming they must shout it from the rooftops.
Mansion 7	The mansion of spiritual _____. When the person is ready for spiritual marriage, the Lord removes the scales from their eyes and they see and understand how beautiful they have been made by the Lord. Thus, fortified, they are united in marital love deep within the Self. They become one, and no longer fall into ecstasy.

7 b Write a summary of the types of prayer

2018 AS marking scheme

(a) Examine the nature of mysticism, with reference to transcendent, ecstatic and unitive experiences. [AO1]
Candidates could include some of the following, but other relevant responses should be credited.

- In mystical experiences, God is encountered beyond ordinary empirical evidence. This is usually individual and subjective, though may be corporate. Mystical experiences can be the experience of having apprehended an ultimate reality.
- Looks at people who claim to have had direct and intimate experiences of God.
- Such experiences draw upon common range of emotions, including happiness, fear and wonder.
- All are directed at the divine and give the experient an overwhelming feeling of desire to belong to God.
- A transcendent experience is one which is 'other-worldly'. This experience goes beyond the normal range of physical human experience.
- An ecstatic experience is one which involves a feeling of overwhelming happiness or joyful excitement. It can be accompanied by a sudden and intense over-powering emotion, almost a 'frenzy'.
- Unitive experiences lead to a feeling of being at one with the divine or a higher reality.
- The aspects of the nature of a mystical experience may be exemplified with reference to specific mystics, e.g. Teresa of Avila. or particular cases of claimed mystical experiences.
- It could be that these three aspects may not be dealt with separately as a mystical experience may compromise a number of these aspects. This is not a checklist, please remember to credit any valid alternatives.

2017 Examine the nature of religious experience with reference to visions and mysticism. [AO1]

Candidates could include some of the following, but other relevant responses should be credited. • It can be claimed that God is experienced beyond ordinary empirical evidence, through what may be known as a religious experience. It is usually individual and subjective, though may be corporate. • Visions may be sensory, involving external objects, sounds or figures, often containing a message or warning. • They can be dream or intellectually-based, for instance as inspiration, insight or instruction. Occasionally, they can come as a revelation of inner truth. • A vision is a message from God and supported by Biblical reference (e.g. Moses in Exodus 3). This possibility is supported by wide personal testimony - Lourdes, Fatima, Walsingham and by Tillich's feeling of 'ultimate concern'. • Visions often require prayer, interpretation and response from the experient – for example, a change of life-style. Noted mystics and visionaries include St Teresa and Julian of Norwich. • Visions may be sensory if they are encountered by a group, for example the Angel of Mons or Lourdes. • Most occur when the experient is conscious and able to differentiate between the experience and a dream. Experiencers testify to feelings of great joy, exultation and intellectual illumination which is impossible to describe, sense of reality and truth – the 'otherness' of God. Alternatively, they may be ineffable and beyond human expression. • Mysticism is an experience of having apprehended an ultimate reality - an awareness of the presence of God and the unity of all things in one substance and one life. It may be a sense of union with God, a sense of dependence, separateness or a sense of great joy and well-being. It can be classified as either extrovertive (outward-looking) or introvertive (inward-looking). • Sometimes, the experience may be ecstatic - a filling of the soul with bliss and peace, as, for example, experienced by Teresa of Avila. • Unitive experiences suggest a uniting of the soul with reality, sometimes involving a feeling of separation from God or a sense of loss. • Other possibilities include feelings of transcendence – that is, not localisable in space and time. This is not a checklist, please remember to credit any valid alternatives.

3 B Mystical experience:

Eduqas Knowledge Organiser Mysticism

Mysticism In Our Time

William James' four characteristics of mystical experience

William James was a philosopher and psychologist, and the author of *The Varieties of Religious Experience: a study in the human nature*. In his book, James aims to survey the types of religious experience as a psychologist and to present the findings of this survey and its implications for philosophy.

James felt that religious experience was at the very heart of religion. He said that religion was *'the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine...'* (*Varieties: Lecture 2*).

James noted that religious experiences have great authority for the person who has them and can often have a marked effect in a person's life. He observed that conversion experiences are characterized by religious beliefs becoming central to a person's life (see Saul's Conversion). As religious experiences can so noticeably change people's behaviour, James suggested that religious experiences were the inspiration and source of religious institutions.

Much of his book concentrates on descriptions and first-hand accounts of experiences. Sceptics viewed some of these as examples of psychological disorder, but James disagreed and placed such accounts as central to any understanding of religion.

Four characteristics were found to be particularly prominent in mystical religious experiences of God:

1. **Ineffable:** The experience is beyond proper description. The direct experience of God goes beyond human powers of description.
2. **Noetic:** Mystics receive knowledge of God that is not otherwise available. In this sense religious experiences are direct revelations from God.
3. **Transient:** The experience is a temporary one that cannot be sustained, although it may have long-lasting effects.
4. **Passive:** The experience is not initiated by the mystic but rather they feel that something is acting upon them. (*James saw this as evidence against arguments claiming that a religious experience can be explained by saying a person willed it*)

James suggested that religious experiences were 'psychological phenomena'; a part of a person's psychological make-up. However, he did not see this as a criticism of his argument, but explained that religious experience is natural to a person, just like other psychological experience like thinking and self-awareness. James' conclusions rest on three key principles: **empiricism**, **pluralism** and **pragmatism**.

- Empiricism: The many case studies produced are empirical evidence of the effects of religious experience. This evidence provides us with clues as to the reality beyond what we see and hear. In response to those who might object that he is interpreting the data, James argues that we interpret all our experiences.
- Pluralism: James' research into experiences in different faiths led him to conclude that they were similar. Those having experiences may be experiencing the same ultimate reality, but interpreting it

as their religious belief structure. Therefore a Christian might interpret an experience as the Holy Spirit, whereas a Sikh may interpret it differently.

- Pragmatism: James believed that truth was not fixed and that what is true is whatever has great value to us. As a religious experience has great value to those it affects, we have to conclude that there is truth to be found in religion.

William James believed that all religious experiences indicated the probability of God (although as a pluralist he referred to 'the spiritual' and 'higher aspects' of the world and the self). He was more interested in the effects of religious experiences. To James, the validity of a religious experience rests upon the effects it produces – are lives changed? James' argument for God is very general; the phenomena of religious experiences point to a higher order of reality.

Task 8

- a. Apply James' characteristics to the account of Rumi or St Teresa.

Example

- b. Explain James' principles of empiricism, pluralism and pragmatism.

Extension – search for James' Varieties of Religious Experience or use the link below, read pages 252-282. Make notes on the following topics. <https://library.um.edu.mo/ebooks/b13622948.pdf>

Characteristics of mystical states of consciousness

Examples of mystical states of consciousness

Are they authoritative?

8 b. Essay skills activity

Explain James' characteristics of mystical experiences

William James is, arguably, the most famous commentator on religious experience. He had a deep interest in philosophy and psychology. His famous work *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) was originally a series of lectures (The Gifford Lectures) given at Edinburgh University at the beginning of the 20th century.

In it, James aims to survey the various types of religious experience as a psychologist and to present the findings of this survey and its implications for philosophy. He used a variety of case studies of first-hand religious experience in the words of the people who told him their stories such as a homeless drunken man who "seemed to feel some great and mighty presence. I did not know then what it was. I did learn afterwards that it was Jesus, the sinner's friend." The man went on to become a preacher.

He defined religious experiences using four characteristics. He said they were ineffable, the experience was beyond proper description and no adequate description can be given in words. Language limitations prevent description.

He also claimed they were irresistible, not just 'feelings,' but a deep and direct knowledge of God which could not have been achieved through reason alone. The 'truth' was revealed to them

Furthermore, he identified that they were transient, the experience is incommunicable and cannot be sustained, although its effects may last a long time. It can develop and deepen with subsequent experiences and the effects can last a lifetime

Finally, he described the experiences as passive. The experience was not volitional by the mystic but rather they have a sense that something is acting upon them. The experience is controlled from outside themselves

These experiences are the 'true' heart of religion and can be exemplified by. . . .

Religious experience for James is at the heart of religion - whereas religious teachings, practices and attitudes are 'second hand' religion.

He believed experiences can be studied scientifically and his aim was to take an objective a stance as he could, to take accounts of religious experiences seriously and to make observations about them. Much of his book concentrates on firsthand accounts of experiences however, sceptics view many of these are examples of psychological disorders. James saw them as central to understanding any religion.

James believed that all religious experiences indicated the probability of God, although as a pluralist, James does not directly speak of God but of the 'spiritual' and the 'higher aspects' of the world and the self.

Therefore, James offers an argument for God in very general terms, the phenomena of religious experiences points to a higher order of reality.

However, he claimed it was best to ask: 'what effect do these experiences have?' rather than: 'are they true?'

He wanted to examine the experiences objectively and did not try to prove if they were true or false. Religious experience does not give proof of anything however it is reasonable to believe that there is a personal God who is interested in the world and individuals. It is not reasonable for anyone to reject clear evidence of religious experience just because they started from a position of scepticism. He was particularly interested in the effects of religious experience on people's lives and believed that the validity of the experience rests upon the effects it produces e.g. are lives changed? This was his way of testing them. He was more concerned with 'does it work?' as opposed to 'is it true?'

The experiences of great religious figures can set patterns for the conventional believer to study. He cites examples of 'saintliness' in people such as St Teresa of Avila. He shows how such Christians can be strong people who help others to progress and for people to learn from

James draws on his knowledge of psychology and neurology in accepting that religious experiences are psychological phenomena that occur in our brains. This does not mean that they are just psychological and they may well have a supernatural, as well as a spiritual element. He bases this on his three key principles.

Use the booklet to add a paragraph on empiricism, pluralism and pragmatism

Rudolf Otto and the numinous – the human predisposition for religious experience

Rudolph Otto pointed out that a central element of direct experiences of God was an *'apprehension of the wholly other'*. He described this wholly other as **'numinous'** (from the Latin word *numen*, which refers to a supernatural divine power)– meaning the world that is beyond the physical observable universe in which we live. Therefore, Otto refers to direct experiences of God as being completely outside of our possible knowledge and experience.

Otto also noticed that people who have had religious experiences describe them using words like 'awe' and 'wonder', but the actual nature of the experience was **ineffable** (*experiences which it is beyond human powers and abilities to fully describe and communicate*).

Numinous: Religious experiences of awe and wonder in the presence of an almighty and transcendent God. It is the awareness of human nothingness when faced with a holy and powerful being.

In his book **The Idea of the Holy**, Otto coined the term 'numinous' to describe the event; the individual was both attracted and repelled by a sense of awe and wonder. Simon Peter's words to Jesus after the miraculous catch of fish express this paradox well: *'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord'* (Luke 5:8).

He analysed this type of experience in terms of the Latin phrase *'mysterium tremendum et fascinans'*.

The tremendum component of the numinous experience comprises of three elements:

1. *Awe-fulness – inspiring awe.*
2. *Overpoweringness – inspires feelings of humility.*
3. *Energy – impression of vigour and compelling.*

The mysterium component has two elements:

1. *Wholly other – totally outside our normal experience.*
2. *Fascination – the person is caught up in the experience.*

9 a.

According to Otto, what is a numinous experience? Include the three components.

An example of a numinous experience

The numinous grips or stirs the mind powerfully and produces the following responses: Numinous dread. Otto calls the feeling of numinous dread, aka awe or awe-fullness, the *mysterium tremendum*. C.S. Lewis's illustration makes clear the nature of numinous dread and its difference from ordinary fear:

*'Suppose you were told that there was a **tiger** in the next room: you would know that you were in danger and would probably feel fear. But if you were told "There is a **ghost** in the next room," and believed it, you would feel, indeed, what is often called fear, but of a different kind. It would not be based on the knowledge of danger, for no one is primarily afraid of what a ghost may do to him, but of the mere fact that it is a ghost. It is "uncanny" rather than dangerous, and the special kind of fear it excites may be called Dread. With the Uncanny one has reached the fringes of the Numinous. Now suppose that you were told simply "There is a **mighty spirit** in the room" and believed it. Your feelings would then be even less like the mere fear of danger: but the disturbance would be profound. You would feel wonder and a certain shrinking—described as awe, and the object which excites it is the Numinous.'*

C.S. Lewis, 'The Problem of Pain' 1940.

The human predisposition for religious experience

Religious growth has occurred not because of any development in human capacities, but because of a predisposition towards religious experience that was always present but only gradually awakened. Otto emphasises that this predisposition is a characteristic not just of some individuals, but also of the whole human species.

Otto goes on to identify and discuss a series of phenomena he associates with the earliest expressions of the human predisposition for religion. His eight phenomena are not part of religion as he understands it, but of pre-religion.

He begins with:

Magic,

Worship of the dead,

Ideas regarding souls and spirits,

Belief that natural objects have powers that can be manipulated by spells etc.,

Belief that natural objects like mountains and the sun and the moon are actually alive,

Fairy stories (and myths).

A little more advanced are belief in daemons (pre-deities, so to speak), notions of pure and impure.

The beginnings of religions

Otto claimed religion proper starts only when feelings prompted by the predisposition for religious experience are no longer projected on to things out there in the natural world, but are accounted for in terms of gods. From then on the progress of religion is a matter of the gradual refinement of people's understanding of their experience of the divine, till the culmination in Christianity.

Otto's view of Christianity as the end product of religious development: for example Christianity

... "stands out in complete superiority over all sister religions". [p 142] The Idea of the Holy)

Task 9 b.

Create a revision aid of Otto's ideas on the numinous, the predisposition for religious experience and the beginnings of religion. Include Biblical examples such as Moses and the burning bush 'At this Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God' Exodus 3 Click of the link





<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Exodus%203&version=NIV>



REP – Something to watch, to listen to and to read.

We strongly recommend that you complete these tasks as they will help you develop your knowledge and understanding of the many topics covered during the Religion, Ethics and Philosophy A Level course.

Choose a minimum of 3 tasks, write a one paragraph summary and/or review of it that we can discuss them in September.

	<p>The Panpsycast Aimed at A Level RS and Philosophy students. Thought-provoking and witty. Useful episodes include, 1, 2, 32 or 42 or any that you find interesting!</p>	<p>Philosophy Bites, Ethics Bites and Philosophy the Classics podcasts Brilliant introductions to key texts and ideas in philosophy and ethics Trolleys-killing-and-the-doctrine-double-effect?</p>	<p>History of Philosophy without any gaps This is a podcast that tells the story of philosophy but without the focus on the Western tradition. Introduction to the ideas of Aquinas</p>
	<p>The Good Place Comedy on Netflix exploring the afterlife and ethics (it is very funny!) Some clip are available on YouTube.</p> 	<p>Religion for Breakfast YouTube series of short, 6 minute videos on a huge range of religious topics and movements.</p>	<p>The Root of all Evil? 2-part documentary series from Richard Dawkins that outlines the main arguments of the New Atheists regarding the dangers of religion</p>
	<p>Article on Jurgen Moltmann An influential theologian looks back on his life and ideas.</p>	<p>Challenging Learning Journal - articles Journals aimed at A levels students e.g. Autumn 2020 has articles on Jesus, faith in a pandemic and religion and science.</p>	<p>Current and archived news articles on religion BBC ethics Keep up to date with religion in the news.</p>