THEOLOGY, RELIGION, AND PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

"It's an amazing course that lets you choose to study the things that really interest you!"
Welcome

Cambridge University is a great place to be, and to be yourself.

We know from our students that Theology here at Cambridge is a diverse, engaging and enlightening degree programme. We have renamed our course to better reflect this and demonstrate to prospective applicants that you can choose a range of paths through the intellectually stimulating options open to all students.

Whether your interest is in philosophy, ethics and metaphysics, anthropology, history, literature, sociology, or the study of the Bible and Qur’an (and much else besides) you will find something here just for you. Above all, you will find a welcoming community of teachers and fellow students who believe that ‘beliefs’ matter.

It’s a pleasure for me to encourage you to visit us and find out more about what we can offer you.

Janet Soskice, Head of the Faculty of Divinity

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Our degree

This fascinating course is so much more diverse than anything you will have encountered at school.

It is a rigorous and thought-provoking degree that draws on aspects of subjects from across the arts and humanities.

The breadth of opportunities available to you are reflected in the course title and we encourage you to sample all that we offer.

Theology

Literally, theology means, ‘words about God’. It has come to refer to the reasoned reflection of a faith tradition on its own received scriptures, inherited texts and practices. Such reflection may be philosophical, textual, historical, literary or all of the above. Images and icons can be as rich in theological meaning as manuscripts and sermons. We embrace the epic of poetry of Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, St. Augustine’s *Confessions*, and the works of feminist theology as all theological, in its own distinctive way. Some Jewish and Muslim writers are happy to use the term ‘theology’ for what they do, while others are not. By studying theology you will seek to work out what we might call the ‘internal logic’ of a religious tradition: the key concepts, sources, and norms that shape the lives of communities of faith.

Religion

Religion at Cambridge encompasses the practices and beliefs of a range of religious traditions: Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism. Teaching often examines them through broad sociological questions such as: What is the relationship between religion and politics? Do men and women have different reasons for belonging to the same religious groups? How do religious organisations use media? The nature and influence of religious traditions is contested by commentators and the social actors that are part of religious movements. You will examine this contestation through social theory, current themes and the academic debates that surround them.

Philosophy of Religion

Philosophers of religion often focus on a topic that lies at the conceptual heart of religious systems – whether their diverse elements fit together into a meaningful, and more or less coherent, whole. To begin with, philosophers grapple with the basic question of whether there is a God, which leads, in contexts of religious diversity, to the question of which God. There are also debates that are specific to a religious tradition, for example whether the existence of an all-loving Christian God and the pervasiveness of seemingly pointless suffering are consistent, or inconsistent. Across religious traditions, if you are intrigued by the question of whether we can use our finite conceptual resources to talk about the ineffable Ultimate, philosophy of religion is where you will find, if not quite the answer, the tools with which to think.
Academic Community

Our teaching staff, students and researchers comprise a supportive and enriching Faculty. There is no stereotypical member of this community; some align themselves with a particular faith tradition, while others do not. They come from a range of educational backgrounds, having studied all sorts of subjects before coming to Cambridge.

We have around 140 undergraduates, and over 100 masters and doctoral students. Staff and students meet in a relaxed environment every weekday morning in term for tea and coffee.

The wider university is a fantastic place to explore your interest in the subject. In addition to relevant debates and talks that take place across Cambridge almost every night, you may also consider joining societies that are dedicated to exploring religions and the philosophy of religion such as the Buddhist Society, Hindu Cultural Society, Intercollegiate Christian Union, Islamic Society, Jewish Society, or the Moral Sciences Club (the Faculty of Philosophy’s student society).

Broad degree programme

Cambridge’s degree programme reflects the breadth of the subject area including Philosophy of Religion, Biblical Studies, Ethics, Religious Traditions of India, Christian Doctrine, Islamic Studies, Jewish Studies, and the History of Christianity.

Flexibility

Many students enjoy sampling this breadth, choosing a deliberately diverse range of papers (modules) to ensure that they develop an expansive knowledge of the subject. However, the Cambridge course also allows you to focus on an area of interest for one or more years. To find out more about how you might wish to combine papers during your degree visit www.divinity.cam.ac.uk/study-here/undergraduate/study/what#tracks

Outstanding resources

The Faculty’s award-winning building has lecture theatres and seminar rooms, fully equipped with state-of-the-art audio visual facilities. Our light-filled Library sits at the top of the Faculty. It houses over 62,000 books and journals and there are nearly 50 reader places. You will have exceptional access to online books and journals which are available to you wherever you are studying.
World class teaching

Our students consistently praise our teaching. In the 2016 National Student Survey, 97 per cent said that overall, they were satisfied with the quality of the course, agreed that the staff are good at explaining things, and felt that the course is intellectually stimulating.

In addition to the papers you choose, you’ll also take our four-week Undergraduate Study Skills course to give you the best start to your degree.

The supervision system is highly valued by students. Here, Sophia gives an account of what makes teaching at Cambridge special:

The teaching style in the Faculty of Divinity at Cambridge differs greatly from that at school. Formal contact takes place in lectures, classes and supervisions. Each paper in the first year generally has one fifty-minute lecture per week, where a lecturer will give a presentation to everyone taking the paper on an aspect of the topic. During this it is useful to take notes, in order to make revision easier in Easter term.

Supervisions are the most unique and exciting part of the Cambridge learning experience, where you will meet with an expert in your paper topic.

You generally have six supervisions per paper meaning that, when these are spread throughout the year, you average one to two supervisions per week. In preparation you will generally need to read articles and books from a reading list relating to an essay title your supervisor will give you. Your essay will need to be 1500-2000 words, and you will have around a week to complete it. The supervision will take place either one-on-one with your supervisor, or with one or two other students joining you. The supervisor will discuss your essays and raise points that you may not have considered, overall enriching your knowledge of the subject area and making you eager to read more around the issue in question.

Most essays don’t count towards your final degree mark so you get lots of opportunities to try new approaches to writing before the end of year exams.

It takes a while to get used to this system, but your Director of Studies (the subject specialist in your college) will help you greatly at the beginning with advice on time management and what supervisors expect. Supervisions in particular soon become enjoyable; there is something very rewarding about researching a topic independently, and putting forward personal opinions (which sometimes differ greatly from your supervisors’!).

You do of course have to structure your hours wisely and the varied and fascinating subject matter of the course means that those hours go incredibly quickly!
Applying to Cambridge

If you decide to apply to Cambridge, you’ll need to submit your application by 15 October. If you have a realistic chance of being offered a place and are predicted to meet our entry requirements, you’ll be invited to interview at the College you selected or the one allocated to you if you enter an open application.

All these applicants will take a short assessment when they come Cambridge for interview.

Unusually for Cambridge, you will also be invited to an interview at another College with a different set of interviewers. If your first College is unable to offer you a place, but you still impressed the interviewers, both sets of interview notes may be taken to the Winter Pool. Colleges that have not been able to make enough offers to fill their places use the Pool to identify strong candidates who applied to other Colleges. One in three of our offers is made this way and it ensures that the brightest and best students are able to come to Cambridge regardless of which College they applied to.

Interviews vary from College to College but in many cases you’ll be expected to submit school work, respond to an unseen text or image, and to discuss what interests you about religion.

Quick Facts

**Tripos name:** Theology, Religion, and Philosophy of Religion

**Typical offers:**
- A-level: A*AA (in any subjects); some colleges may require an essay-based subject
- IB: 40-41 points with 776 at Higher Level (in any subjects)
- Scottish Advanced Highers: AAA

**Useful subjects:** Classics, English Literature, History, Modern Languages, Philosophy and Ethics, and Religious Studies

**Colleges:** All except Churchill

**2016 entry:**
- Applications: 99
- Offers made: 56
- Number accepted: 43

More information about applying to Cambridge is available at [www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/applying](http://www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/applying)
The bread of the course is unrivalled; I have had the opportunity to study languages, history, sociology and more, all in one degree. Because of its breadth, it attracts people from a wide variety of faiths, leading to very interesting and open dialogue. This is a course which my non-religious historian, sociologist, philosopher and classicist friends all wish they had chosen to study, as it incorporates their interests with other disciplines too.

Sophia (Religious Studies, Russian, History A-levels)

“This is an amazing course and a great subject. Every idea is taken seriously and discussed no matter if many people agree with you or not. It is also very subjective which means there are often no wrong or right answers. This makes it fantastic to study as you can form your own opinions and ideas.

The course at Cambridge is particularly amazing as the lecturers and professors are often the foremost in their fields. Despite this they make time for undergraduates as supervisors and read the essays we produce. Cambridge is also wonderful as it covers world religions rather than just focusing on Christianity, it means that we are able to tailor our courses to what we are interested in by choosing the modules that we want throughout our three years.”

Emma (Philosophy, Ethics and Religious Studies, English Literature, Early Modern History, Psychology A-levels)

“I chose Theology at Cambridge simply because I love the subject. Being able to delve into familiar material that I have held as truth, in a new way, and look at critical approaches to it, as well as different layers of interpretation is not only academically stimulating, but actually really fun! I feel we are so fortunate that our degrees and professions don’t necessarily need to match. It meant that I could choose a discipline out of pure interest. It is testament to the degree structure that I have peers who are interested in completely different areas of the subject. Although it is the oldest degree at Cambridge, it’s clear that the Tripos stays relevant. It is great to have had the opportunity to be taught in a subject that I am genuinely interested in by vanguards in the field, for three years!”

Peter (Maths, Economics, Politics, Religious Studies A-levels)
We believe that your degree should be guided by your interests and so we give you the freedom to select from a wide range of papers to shape a course that fulfils your intellectual curiosity.

Textual Analysis forms the core of the degree. Across our papers you will evaluate historic and contemporary texts in the form of scripture, literature, historical sources, philosophical treatises and academic debates. Our degree teaches you how to critique the material and form well-developed and reasoned arguments in both verbal and written forms.

In your first year you will select five papers, two of which develop foundational skills that you will need throughout your course of study.

All students study a scriptural language, usually from scratch. Currently you can choose from Hebrew, New Testament Greek, Qur'anic Arabic or Sanskrit. If you choose Greek, an online course is available to prepare you before you arrive in Cambridge www.greek.divinity.cam.ac.uk See page 9 to find out more about why studying a language is an integral part of our degree.

Students also select a Biblical paper. Textual analysis is a core part of your education in all fields of religion and theology. By taking the Old or New Testament paper you will be well prepared for undertaking further study in any of the major world religions.

Detailed descriptions and readings for all papers are available online, see page 14 for details. Below, some of our students tell you what they think about our current options.

**Biblical papers**

**David: Israel’s Greatest Hero?**
“A really fun topic that begins the study of the Old Testament by focusing on the well known figure of King David. A subject where you can learn all the ins and outs of Old Testament ruling, including the scandals and bloody wars! “

“Really engaging and fun course”

**Jesus and the Origins of the Gospel**
“Amazing course that looks first at general debates in the New Testament and then at set texts from Jesus' life. Really enjoy exploring what Jesus said and did. “

“It works like a puzzle where some of the pieces are missing.”
You will choose a further three papers (which can include the other Biblical paper)

English Christianity before and after the Reformation
“Fascinating look at how theology has played out in real life.”
“The lectures and seminars were excellent. I took away something valuable each time. Not only that, but this paper succeeds in bridging the gap between ‘theology’ and ‘religious studies’.”

The Question of God
“Absolutely essential to the course. This gives you the tools to question the fundamental concepts and claims of religion.”
“My favourite module. In this we look at how we can actually speak about God and whether or not he can be said to really exist. This is where we grapple with the conflict of science and religion and wonder about the creation of the universe.”

Understanding contemporary religion: The sociology of religion
“A fantastic way of using sociology in a religious context.”
“It took me into territories I have never explored before. It opened my eyes to the subtle nuances in the ways religious identities are conceived. If you’re interested in history, sociology, literature, anthropology and just a bit of everything, then this is definitely for you!”

World religions in comparative perspective
“A coursework module that allows us to explore religions other than Christianity in depth - this is a great way to learn more about other cultures and compare the beliefs of different religions.”

Philosophy of religion and ethics
“A mind-boggling subject that stretches the limits of how you think! This module looks at ancient philosophers and studies how ideas have developed over time. Life suddenly seems very different than it first appears!”
“This will probably be different from A level philosophy for most. It will change the way you think about philosophical theology “

As not all students have studied Theology or Religion before, prior knowledge is not expected and the papers are designed to introduce you to key themes and topics in core areas of the discipline. This will help you decide whether you want to specialise in your second and/or third year, or if you’d prefer to keep your options open.
For the majority of our students, learning a scriptural language is a new, and often daunting, experience. However, they go on to find that developing this useful skill is rewarding and enjoyable. Knowledge of a scriptural language will give you a deeper understanding of the religion it relates to and will support your wider study in that area. You’ll also become aware of the impact of translations on studies of scripture.

You do not need to achieve certain grades in modern or classical languages at A-level or GCSE to apply to study Theology, Religion, and Philosophy of Religion at Cambridge. In fact, a good proportion of students have not studied a language beyond the age of 14. Our classes are therefore designed to cater for a range of expertise, including complete beginners, and no prior experience is assumed.

The teaching of scriptural languages is of an excellent standard at Cambridge. They are taught in the written form, with the emphasis is on learning the grammar and vocabulary you will need to be able to start reading. You will learn pronunciation in class but there is no assessed oral component.

There are three classes a week, lasting between one and one and half hours. This will enable you to become familiar with terms and concepts quickly.

You will be in small groups and, where numbers permit, students may be divided into different classes depending on their aptitude for language learning.

You will study a small section of each text and be very familiar with it by the end of the year. Details of the specific texts that are currently covered are available at [www.divinity.cam.ac.uk/undergraduate/data/Part1.pdf](http://www.divinity.cam.ac.uk/undergraduate/data/Part1.pdf) In the exam, it is likely that you will be asked to translate passages from the scriptural language into English, comment on grammatical forms, and translate sentences from English into the scriptural language.

Students are only required to study a scriptural language in their first year but a number choose to carry on with the language in the second and third year. It is also possible to start a new language.

Comments from current students demonstrate the positive atmosphere around language learning in the Faculty:

“Great intro to Greek. Goes at a good pace through grammar/vocabulary basics, before covering set texts. I really enjoy being able to see Biblical passages as they were originally written and (trying to) translate them!”

“It’s hard but so worth it!”

“Challenging and rewarding.”
Second and third year

Your second year builds on the skills you have developed in the first. There are no compulsory elements so you can tailor the course to your interests. You can study a wide variety of papers currently including a new scriptural language, your first year language in more depth, Great Theologians, Israel in Exile, World Christianities, Religious Themes in Literature, Introduction to Islam, Philosophy of Religion, Life and Thought of Religious Hinduism and Buddhism, and Ethics and Faith. You can also study the Logic paper taught by the Faculty of Philosophy.


Detailed descriptions for both years are available at [www.divinity.cam.ac.uk/undergraduate/paper-descriptions/](http://www.divinity.cam.ac.uk/undergraduate/paper-descriptions/)

At this level you can also choose to be assessed for a dissertation in place of one paper. This gives you the opportunity to explore in greater depth a topic that you are particularly interested in. It allows you the freedom of independent study, to shape a topic according to your interests, to gain research experience, and present an extended and coherent argument.

The diverse topics chosen by our students last year included:

- A comparison and evaluation of the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church and the thinking of Peter Singer and John Harris in relation to human cloning.
- A Room of One's Own? The contemporary role of the mikveh in the lives of British Jewish women.
- 'Spiritual Communion' and the search for a 'Higher Inward Life' in George Eliot's Middlemarch.
- 'And fit us for heaven to live with thee there': an Exploration of the Place of Purgatory in the Contemporary Doctrine of the Church of England.
- God as the intimate stranger: the dialectic of divine presence and divine absence in early modern Jewish mysticism and Hindu Bengal Vaishnavism.
- A discussion of Dostoevsky’s use of John’s gospel and specifically the raising of Lazarus in the novel Crime and Punishment.
- Not a revealed religion and nobody could set himself up to be its defender: the construction of the arguments against Egyptian Baha’is.
Olga is now studying for a PhD in the faculty. She chose to do a dissertation in her third year:

My dissertation focused on the motifs of divine presence and absence in one of the most unorthodox psalms in the Hebrew Bible – Psalm 88. In addition to a close reading of the psalm, my study branched out into the wider theological issues surrounding divine presence and activity in the world as portrayed in the Hebrew Bible.

Since I started at Cambridge, I knew I wanted to write a dissertation. Over the summer before the final year, I did a fair amount of wider reading and research that helped me clarify my interests. Even if you already have a topic you want to study in depth, you may have to refine it further to make practically feasible.

In my experience, one of the most exciting things about writing a dissertation is working with your supervisor. I had an excellent supervisor who helped me sharpen not only my arguments, but also my research skills: after all, as well as some theological sparkle, a dissertation requires planning, discipline, commitment, and motivation. If I got stuck in my research, she expertly diagnosed the situation and helpfully pointed me in the right direction. In short, although a dissertation at its heart is an independent study project, you can expect advice and guidance, both theological and practical, from your supervisor and you are certainly not left wandering about in the dark.

You do, however, have to be prepared for a lot of independent study. I enjoyed the research stage immensely, as I got to pursue my own interests and formulate my own arguments – I found the creative freedom of a dissertation exhilarating rather than intimidating. As you work on your dissertation, you essentially become a specialist in a particular area, however small it may be, and this is an extremely rewarding experience.

After the thrill of the research comes the final leg of the journey: the writing-up stage. I enjoy writing but it was certainly a long trek that required a lot of discipline, especially as it was mostly over the Easter vacation. On the bright side, after you submit at the beginning of the Easter term, you do not have as many exams to worry about!
Opportunities for graduates

Our graduates are highly employable, offering inter-disciplinary skills much valued by employers, and detailed knowledge of diverse world views and issues. This means that they go on to a strikingly broad range of jobs as well as options in further education.

By studying theology you will be able to:

- Sift, select and retain complex information and identify key issues
- Express ideas clearly through essay writing and discussion
- Take a critical view of contemporary geopolitical and societal issues
- Tackle new languages from scratch
- Use imagination and creativity
- Understand and take a sensitive approach to different cultures and beliefs
- Take a disciplined approach to problem solving
- Use investigative, analytical and critical evaluation skills
- Demonstrate a genuine curiosity in people and world cultures

Of those who went into employment, some made direct use of course content by entering jobs that value religious sensitivity in our multi-cultural society. Others applied the transferable skills that they developed to gain employment in a range of sectors.

Graduates in 2015 went on to be:

- Account Assistant - freuds (Public Relations)
- Apprentice Producer - Emma Brunjes Productions
- Business Intelligence Executive - City Football Group
- Civil Servant - Department of Work and Pensions
- Consultant - EY
- Consultant - Brand Genetics
- Guild Administrator - The Art Workers’ Guild
- Junior Account Executive - Prosek Partners
- Methodist One Programme Participant - The Methodist Church
- Officer Cadet - British Army
- Operations Graduate Scheme - Barclays
- Paralegal - Active Legal

These are exactly the sort of skills that are very sought after. I’ve got no qualms about the usefulness of the degree.

The Lord Tim Clement-Jones, London managing partner, DLA Piper (international law firm)
Some recent graduates reflect on the value of their degree:

There can sometimes be a misguided perception that Theology is an inward looking degree. It is quite the opposite: I am certain that I learnt more about people’s beliefs in the modern world and how these affect the ways that we live our lives today - both in Britain and abroad - then I could have done in another subject.

James Dacre, Artistic Director of Royal & Derngate Theatres

Theology gave me the tools to be able to see life from perspectives that might differ to your own. It taught me how to present other people’s points of view – the foundation of journalism.

If I had to do it all over again, I’d choose theology – and what better place to do it than at Cambridge University?

Chine McDonald, Director of Communications, Evangelical Alliance

Learning how to think, research, write, structure an argument and communicate effectively are fundamental skills that are essential to the vast majority of jobs. And in my experience doing something generally perceived as unusual tends to have more benefits than costs.

Jamie Pleydell-Bouverie, Advocacy and Campaigns Manager, Crisis Action

My degree definitely inspired me to travel to the MENA region, and an interesting and rewarding career path has unfolded for me as a result. If you want to work across diverse local and international boundaries, one of the advantages of Theology is that it really explores the histories, languages and identities of people and societies - unlocking to a certain extent what makes us all ‘tick’, enabling mutual understanding and cooperation.

Sharon Booth, Education Programme Director, Solutions Not Sides
This prospectus aims to give you an overview of the Theology, Religion, and Philosophy of Religion degree at Cambridge. However, there is much more information available online, so please have a look starting at:

www.divinity.cam.ac.uk/study-here/undergraduate

These pages will give you in depth information about the papers you can choose www.divinity.cam.ac.uk/study-here/undergraduate/study, as well as the opportunity to find out what more of our current students think www.divinity.cam.ac.uk/study-here/undergraduate/profiles and what alumni have gone on to www.divinity.cam.ac.uk/study-here/undergraduate/alumni-profiles

If you are interested in learning more about the sort of topics taught in Cambridge have a look at HE Plus, which has a range of online resources designed for sixth formers: www.myheplus.com/subjects/religious-studies

Our web pages can help you decide whether the course is right for you, but to get a real feel for the subject at Cambridge we urge you to visit us, whether with your school, on your own, or as part of an open day. Dates and details are available at www.divinity.cam.ac.uk/study-here/undergraduate/open-days

Our open days in particular give you the opportunity to speak to staff and students who are there to answer your questions and ensure that you have all the information you need about studying Theology, Religion, and Philosophy of Religion at Cambridge.