THEOLOGY & RELIGIOUS STUDIES

The study of religion covers, as one might expect in a discipline devoted to questions of history, meaning, truth and purpose, an astonishingly wide field. Accordingly, we offer introductory courses that examine the major wisdom traditions of the world: Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism. Upper-form courses challenge students to develop a worldview and a coherent personal ethic by studying different accounts of God and human nature, while also addressing pressing contemporary ethical issues such as euthanasia, war, abortion and genetic engineering, to name a few. Other offerings for fifth- and sixth-formers allow students to study some of the ways in which religious themes appear in modern literature and the impact of religion on life and politics in America. Naturally, no single course, or set of courses, can provide final answers to life’s ultimate questions. Yet, at this stage, we can foster habits of mind that are critical, constructive and affirmative, as called for, about the claims and practices of various religious traditions. Since an estimated 4 billion to 5 billion people worldwide are directly involved in religion it seems clear that religion in the future will continue to shape the lives of individuals and societies, for good or ill. As an Episcopal School, we provide students with the opportunity to develop and test, in the classroom and through intense study, a socially responsible and intellectually inhabitable worldview – or, more modestly, to at least get a good start on this lifelong project. We do this with the intellectual rigor that characterizes all of our pursuits at St. George’s School.

Biblical Studies/ The Hebrew Bible and the New Testament: TRS 311, TRS 312, TRS 313
Open to third- and fourth-formers each trimester

Through patient reading and guided critical analysis, students begin the first half of the course reading Israel’s sacred texts to discover their historical, literary and theological significance as well as to become familiar with the impact on Israel’s history of the geography of the Middle East. The Hebrew Bible develops a distinctive view of the nature of God and the role God plays in relationship to Israel and humanity. The implications, issues and challenges presented by the God of the Hebrew Bible are discussed in relation to the biblical texts as well as to contemporary social, political and religious themes and issues. The second half of the course begins with a preliminary discussion of the socio-political, cultural and religious climate of first century Palestine and the impact of those factors on early Christianity. With a close examination of the four Gospels, students explore the similarities and differences in the way the Gospel writers viewed Jesus from a theological perspective. The theological implications of Jesus’ death and resurrection are examined before beginning a review of the Pastoral Epistles and the impact of Saint Paul’s theology on the development of the early church. Offered fall (311), winter (312) and spring (313).

Spiritual Traditions of the East and West: TRS 321, TRS 322, TRS 323
Open to third- and fourth-formers each trimester

This course examines five of the major religions of the world: Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism. Readings from the sacred scriptures of each religion are studied (the Pali Canon, the Old Testament and the New Testament, the Vedas, the Qur’an and the Tanakh). Students investigate an area of personal interest by undertaking a project that examines a particular religion in closer detail. Students in this course will develop religious literacy, comfort in interfaith settings, and the sensitivities needed to engage in meaningful interreligious and cross-cultural relationships. Offered fall (321), winter (322) and spring (323).

Spiritual Memoirs: TRS 411, TRS 412, TRS 413
Open to fifth- and sixth formers each trimester

Spiritual memoirs are among the most engaging and thought-provoking forms of literature because they are personal stories that deal with enduring questions about human mortality, the meaning of life, and the existence of the Divine. Although the authors studied in this course come from different time periods and faith traditions, they share a desire to connect with a power greater than themselves. They write honestly
about their struggles with doubt and failure, as well as hope and joy, in their paths toward a deeper relationship with the Divine. Authors may include Teresa of Avila, St. Augustine, N. Scott Momaday, Maxine Hong Kingston, Anne Lamott, Andrew Krivak, Immaculée Ilibagiza, Gretel Ehrlich, Simon Weil, and Karen Armstrong.

**Freedom, Decision & Ethics: TRS 421, TRS 422, TRS 423**

*Open to fifth- and sixth-formers each trimester*

An introduction to the study of ethics, this course identifies from the outset two dominant ways of approaching moral questions. The first asks, “What should we do in difficult situations?” The second, following a more ancient tradition, asks, “What kind of people should we be?” In this course, we engage the study of ethics from both perspectives as we examine various accounts of the nature and purpose of humanity (biblical, Greek, enlightenment and post-modern). The course also engages difficult contemporary moral issues and dilemmas including energy and the environment, economic and social inequality and the tensions of freedom and responsibility in the information age. Students become familiar with key terms used in ethical philosophy and learn though engagement with primary texts and biographical histories of moral courage. This course demands a great amount of critical reading and thinking and also aims to be an encouraging catalyst for living lives of service to the world.

**Good & Evil in Sacred and Secular Literature: TRS 511, TRS 513**

*Open to sixth-form, and to fifth-formers by invitation*

The descent into hell, the ascent into heaven, the demonic and the divine... this course will look at sacred texts and modern interpretations to understand how humans define the holy and the profane. Within this topic, students should expect to encounter texts from a variety of historical time periods and from a number of different cultures and religions. Writing assignments will range from analytical to comparative, from argument to creative response. Offered fall (511) and spring (513).