Hi 6.1 hope you’re all well. I have attached session 1 of our new topic. If there are any problems then please let me know.

Thanks Mrs Mullings
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Introduction to Religious Experience

LO: I will understand what is meant by religious experience
Know different types of religious experiences with examples
To evaluate Otto’s ideas concerning religious experience

Starter:
Create a mind map on religious experience.
3. God and the World
Learners will study the nature and influence of religious experience, and the challenge posed to religious belief by the problems of evil and suffering

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Key Knowledge</th>
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<tr>
<td>Religious experience*</td>
<td>• the nature and influence of religious experience, including:</td>
<td>• examples of mystical and conversion experiences and views about these, including:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>o mystical experience</td>
<td>o views and main conclusions of</td>
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<td>o conversion experience</td>
<td>William James</td>
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<td>• different ways in which individual religious experiences can be</td>
<td>• as union with a greater power</td>
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<td></td>
<td>understood</td>
<td>• psychological effect such as illusion</td>
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<td>• the product of a physiological effect</td>
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Learners should have the opportunity to discuss issues related to arguments for the existence of God based on reason, including:
• whether personal testimony or witness is enough to support the validity of religious experiences
• whether or not corporate religious experiences might be considered more reliable or valid than individual experiences
• whether or not religious experience provides a basis for belief in God or a greater power

**Contextual references**
For reference, the ideas of William James listed above can be found in:
• James, W. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, lectures 9,10,16,17 and 20

**Suggested scholarly views, academic approaches and sources of wisdom and authority**
Learners will be given credit for referring to any appropriate scholarly views, academic approaches and sources of wisdom and authority, however the following examples may prove useful
• Acts 9.4–8, 22.6–10, 26
The Religious Experience Research Unit was founded in 1969 by Sir Alister Hardy to discover more about religious experience:

*Research and note their findings.*

For those who have religious experiences, these phenomena have authority and convince them that their religious beliefs are true or, in some cases, persuade them to change their religious beliefs.

**Task:**
Come up with your own definition of religious experience.

Key question

What does ‘experience’ mean?

- Feelings?
- Impact on others?
- Just empirical?
- Personal knowledge? I.e. to know

Terry Virgo is a Charismatic Christian. What can we learn from what he says here

(First 3 mins only)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=89aShPFiHoc&feature=results_video&playnext=1&list=PL9909CB035ACDCCD5
‘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. This made me very fearful, as does every new experience that I have when the Lord is beginning to grant me some supernatural favour. A few days later I also saw the divine face, which seemed to leave me completely absorbed. I could not understand why the Lord revealed Himself gradually like this since He was later to grant me the favour of seeing him wholly, until at length I realised that His majesty was leading me according to my natural weakness.’

How would you explain why experiences like this happen?
What does the phrase religious experience mean?

There are many definitions of religious experience which can in a general way be divided into two groups:

**Indirect Religious experience:**

Experiences of God prompted by events in daily life.

**Direct Religious experience:**

Experiences where God reveals Himself directly to the person having the experience (Revelation).

**Key Point** - If you are asked to answer in the exam a question on religious experience and to define it – say that it is extremely difficult to give an exact definition on religious experience due to its individual nature prior to launching into the various explanations.

**Ineffable:**

Experiences which are beyond human powers and abilities to fully describe and communicate.
Mini Plenary

Ordinary and ineffable...
Can you think of events or incidents in daily life, of your life, that are ineffable?

Religious experience and ordinary experience...
Think of an event that was very important to you. Try to describe the feelings evoked by this event. Was this experience religious? If so, what made it religious?

RE-view: Give some examples of direct/indirect religious experiences.
Why can religious experiences be so different?

Wittgenstein developed the concept of ‘seeing-as’ in his *Philosophical Investigations* (1958, p.194)

We interpret our experience in a particular way.

Is it a rabbit or a duck?
Is it a young lady or an old lady?
John Hick
Developed Wittgenstein’s idea of ‘seeing-as’ into a rather richer notion of ‘experiencing as’. For Hick the important point here is that the world and everything in it can be experienced in different ways, even though the facts experienced are the same for the two- or more- experiences.

Two people may see the same beautiful sunset.
Each sees it in its splendor
Each agrees that it is a thing of beauty

But ones experiences it as mediating the greatness of God, and feels touched by the divine
Whereas, the other believes it to be just an extraordinary natural event

A difference in experience not a difference in fact
What is the problem?

When we apply this to religious experience, we can see why some may see evidence of God in everyday life.

However, in the real world, we have the problem of truth claims.

When people claim that they see something, they are also saying that they believe they are seeing the world as it really is.

Vincent Brümmer ‘What are we doing when we Pray’? Has pointed out that the problem with the duck/rabbit picture is that it is neither a duck nor a rabbit. It is just a line drawing. Neither the believer nor the unbeliever wants to admit that it is just a matter of interpretation.
Religious Experience

- Most are said to be **mystical**. This means the person feels a sense of ‘union’ with the divine.
- Many are classified as ‘prayer’ experiences. This usually refers to experiences brought about by meditation and reflection.
- The effects can sometimes be permanent and life changing. These are often classified as conversion experiences.

**Task**: Note down the key features of the religious experiences
# Swinburne – Types of Experience

## Private Experiences

1. **Describable in ordinary language** – Experiences such as dreams and visions (Joseph’s dream in the Bible)

2. **Non-describable experiences** – Direct experiences of God in which God/the wholly other/the divine is revealed to people. These experiences go beyond human powers of description (ineffable).

3. **Non-specific experiences** – looking at the world from a religious perspective. E.g. Looking back on past events, a believer might say ‘God’s hand guided me.’

## Public Experiences

1. **Ordinary Experiences** – experiences where a person interprets a natural event as having religious significance (the beauty of nature or the natural world).

2. **Extraordinary Experiences** – Experiences that seem to violate normal understanding of the workings of nature. (Jesus turning water into wine)
In which of Swinburne’s categories would you put the following:

1. Awe and beauty and intricacies of God’s creation such as DNA
2. A young girl called Bernadette seeing a vision of Mary, the mother of Jesus
3. John Wesley feeling that his heart had been ‘strangely warmed’ and his sins removed by Jesus
4. The Qur’an being revealed to Muhamad by Allah
5. Moses receiving the Ten Commandments from God
6. Siddartha Gautama achieving enlightenment
7. The story of John Paul II’s life

Add these to your notes in different colours or highlight them.
Summary – Types of experience from Swinburne

Private Experience
- Describable
  - Non-Describable
- Non-specific

Public Experience
- Ordinary
- Extraordinary