

Glossary

A

abortion: the removal of a foetus from the womb to end a pregnancy before the child is born, usually before the foetus is 24 weeks old

abuse: misuse; of the world and the environment

active euthanasia: ending a life by deliberate action, such as by giving a patient a lethal injection

adaptation: a process of change, in which an organism or species becomes better suited to its environment

addiction: physical or mental dependency on a substance or activity which is very difficult to overcome

adultery: voluntary sexual intercourse between a married person and a person who is not their spouse (husband or wife)

afterlife: belief that there is life in some form after the death of the physical body

agape: a word used in the Bible that describes selfless, sacrificial, unconditional love

age of consent: when a person is legally old enough to freely agree to have sex

agnostic: someone who thinks there is not enough evidence for belief in God

animal experimentation: using animals to conduct scientific experiments usually to try to improve human life

annulment: a Catholic Church ruling that a marriage was never valid

ascension: 1. action of rising to an important position or a higher level; 2. the event, 40 days after the resurrection, when Jesus returned to God, the Father, in heaven

atheist: a person who believes that there is no God

atonement: restoring the relationship between people and God through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus

awe: a feeling of respect, mixed feelings of fear and wonder

B

baptism: an initiation ceremony using water, through which people become members of the Church

Believers' baptism: initiation into the Church, by immersion in water, of people old enough to understand the ceremony/rite and willing to live a Christian life

benevolent: all-loving, all-good; a quality of God

bigamy: the offence of marrying someone while already married to another person

biological weapons: weapons that contain living organisms or infective material that can lead to disease or death

blasphemy: a religious offence which includes claiming to be God

C

Catholic Church: a branch of Christianity, based in Rome and led by the Pope

chemical weapons: weapons that use chemicals to poison, burn or paralyse humans and destroy the natural environment

Christmas: the day commemorating the incarnation, the birth of Jesus (25 December in most churches); the season of 12 days ending with the Epiphany (when Christians remember the visit of the wise men)

Church: 1. The holy people of God, also called the Body of Christ, among whom Christ is present and active; 2. (church) A building in which Christians worship

civil partnership: legal union of same-sex couples

cohabitation: a couple living together and having a sexual relationship without being married to one another

community service: a way of punishing offenders by making them do unpaid work in the community

conception: when the male sperm fertilises the female ovum

consent: give permission for something to happen

contraception: the methods used to prevent a pregnancy from taking place

convert: someone who has decided to become committed to a religion and change his or her religious faith

corporal punishment: punishment of an offender by causing them physical pain – now illegal in the UK

creation: the act by which God brought the universe into being

crime: an offence which is punishable by law, for example stealing, murder

crucifixion: 1. Roman method of execution by which criminals were fixed to a cross; 2. The execution and death of Jesus on Good Friday

D

Day of Judgement: a time when the world will end and every soul will be judged by God and either rewarded or punished

death penalty: capital punishment; a form of punishment in which a prisoner is put to death for crimes committed

deforestation: the cutting down of large amounts of forests, usually for business needs

denomination: a distinct group within the Christian faith, with its own organisation and traditions

Design argument: the argument that God designed the universe because everything is so intricately made in its detail that it could not have happened by chance

deterrence: an aim of punishment – to put people off committing crimes

discrimination: actions or behaviour that result from prejudice

the divine: God, gods or ultimate reality

divorce: legal ending of a marriage

dominion: dominance or power over something; having charge of something or ruling over it

E

Easter: the religious season celebrating the resurrection of Jesus from the dead; starts on Easter Day and finishes with the feast of Pentecost

emergency aid: also known as short-

term aid; help given to communities in a time of disaster or crisis, e.g. food during a famine, shelter after an earthquake

enlightenment: the gaining of true knowledge about God or self, usually through meditation and self-discipline; in Buddhist and Hindu traditions, gaining freedom from the cycle of rebirth

environment: the natural world; the surroundings in which someone lives

equality: the state of being equal, especially in status, rights, and opportunities

eternal: without beginning or end

eternity: a state that comes after death and never ends

euthanasia: painless killing of a patient suffering from an incurable and painful disease or in an irreversible coma

evangelism: spreading the Christian gospel by public preaching or personal witness

evil: the opposite of good, a force or the personification of a negative power that is seen in many traditions as destructive and against God

evolution: the process by which living organisms are thought to have developed and diversified from earlier forms of life during the history of the earth

exploitation: misuse of power or money to get others to do things for little or unfair reward

extended family: a family that extends beyond just parents and their children by including grandparents and other relatives as well

F

faith: a commitment to something that goes beyond proof and knowledge, especially used about God and religion

family: a group of people who are related by blood, marriage or adoption

festival: a day or period of celebration for religious reasons

First Cause argument: also called the Cosmological argument; the argument that there has to be an uncaused cause that made everything else happen, otherwise there would be nothing now

forgiveness: showing grace and mercy and pardoning someone for what they have done wrong

free will: Christian belief that God gives people the opportunity to make decisions for themselves

freedom of religion: the right to believe or practise whatever religion one chooses

freedom of religious expression: the right to worship, preach and practise one's faith in whatever way one chooses

fundamentalist Christians: Christians who believe that the statements in the Bible are literally true and believe there are certain basic beliefs that are essential to the Christian faith

G

gender discrimination: to act against someone on the basis of their gender; discrimination is usually seen as wrong and may be against the law

gender equality: the idea that people should be given the same rights and opportunities regardless of whether they are male or female

gender prejudice: unfairly judging someone before the facts are known; holding biased opinions about an individual or group based on their gender

general revelation: God making himself known through ordinary, common human experiences

God: the Supreme Being

grace: a quality of God which God shows to humans by providing love and support which they do not need to earn

greed: selfish desire for something

H

heaven: a state of eternal happiness in the presence of God; the place of eternal peace ruled over by God

hell: the place of eternal suffering or the state of being without God

heterosexual: to be sexually attracted to members of the opposite sex

Holy Communion: a service of thanksgiving in which the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus are celebrated, using bread and wine; also Mass,

the Lord's Supper, the Breaking of the Bread, the Divine Liturgy

holy: separate and set apart for a special purpose by God

Holy Spirit: the third person of the Trinity whom Christians believe is the inspiring presence of God in the world

holy war: fighting for a religious cause or God, probably controlled by a religious leader

homosexual: to be sexually attracted to members of the same sex

human rights: the basic rights and freedoms to which all human beings should be entitled

human sexuality: how people express themselves as sexual beings

human trafficking: the illegal movement of people, typically for the purposes of forced labour or commercial sexual exploitation

I

immanent: the idea that God is present in and involved with life on earth and in the universe; a quality of God

impersonal nature (of God): the idea that God has no 'human' characteristics, is unknowable and mysterious, more like an idea or force

incarnation: becoming flesh; taking a human form

infant baptism: the sacrament through which babies and young children become members of the Church, where promises are taken on their behalf by adults; the infant is freed from sin and introduced to the saving love of God and the support of the Christian community

informal prayer: prayer that is made up by an individual using his or her own words

J

just war: a war which meets internationally accepted criteria for fairness; follows traditional Christian rules for a just war, and is now accepted by all other religions

justice: bringing about what is right and fair, according to the law, or making up for a wrong that has been committed

L
liberals: Christians who believe that the Bible's authors were guided by God, but that not everything they wrote is a literal account of what actually happened

liturgical worship: a church service which follows a set structure or ritual

long-term aid: assistance given to a poor country over a long period of time that has a lasting effect

the Lord's Prayer: the prayer taught to the disciples by Jesus; also known as the 'Our Father'

M
marriage: a legal union between a man and a woman (or in some countries, including the UK, two people of the same sex) as partners in a relationship

Mass: ceremony, also called Eucharist, in which the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus is celebrated using bread and wine

mental illness: a medical condition that affects a person's feelings, emotions or moods, and perhaps their ability to relate to others

miracle: a seemingly impossible event, usually good, that cannot be explained by natural or scientific laws, and is thought to be the action of God

mission: the vocation or calling of a religious organisation or individual to go out into the world and spread the faith

missionary: a person sent on a religious mission, especially to promote Christianity in a foreign country through preaching or charitable work

monotheistic: a religion that believes there is only one God

N
natural resources: materials found in nature – such as oil and trees – that can be used by people

nature: the physical world including plants, animals and landscape; the environment or natural world

Nonconformist: English Protestant who does not conform to the doctrines or practices of the established Church of England

non-liturgical worship: a service that does not follow a set text or ritual; this type of worship is sometimes 'spontaneous' or 'charismatic' in nature

non-renewable resources: things the earth provides that will eventually run out as there is a limited amount of them; examples include oil, coal, gas and other minerals

nuclear family: a couple and their dependent children regarded as a basic social unit

nuclear weapons: weapons that work by a nuclear reaction, devastate huge areas, and kill large numbers of people

O
omnipotent: almighty, having unlimited power; a quality of God
omniscient: knowing everything; a quality of God

Orthodox: a branch of Christianity mainly, but not entirely, practised in Eastern Europe

P
pacifism: the belief of people who refuse to take part in war and any other form of violence

peace: an absence of conflict, which leads to happiness and harmony

peacemaker: a person who works to establish peace in the world or in a certain part of it

peace-making: the action of trying to establish peace

persecution: hostility and ill-treatment, especially because of race, or political or religious beliefs

personal nature (of God): the idea that God is an individual or person with whom people are able to have a relationship or feel close

pilgrimage: a journey by a believer to a holy site for religious reasons; an act of worship and devotion

pollution: making something dirty and contaminated, especially the environment

polygamy: the practice or custom of having more than one wife at the same time

positive discrimination: treating people more favourably because they have been discriminated

against in the past or have disabilities

poverty: being without money, food or other basic needs of life (being poor)

prayer: communicating with God, either silently or through words of praise, thanksgiving or confession, or requests for God's help or guidance

prejudice: unfairly judging someone before the facts are known; holding biased opinions about an individual or group

prison: a secure building where offenders are kept for a period of time set by a judge

private worship: when a believer praises or honours God on his or her own

procreation: bringing babies into the world; producing offspring

proof: evidence that supports the truth of something

protection of children: keeping children safe from harm

protest: an expression of disapproval, often in a public group

Protestant: a branch of Christianity, originally Protestants were called by that name because they protested against some of the practices of the Catholic Church; there are many Protestant denominations, but they agree on the central belief that the Bible is the only authority for Christians

punishment: something legally done to somebody as a result of being found guilty of breaking the law

purgatory: the intermediate state where souls are cleansed in order to enter heaven

Q
quality of life: the general well-being of a person, in relation to their health and happiness; also, the theory that the value of life depends upon how good or how satisfying it is

R
reconciliation: a sacrament in the Catholic Church; also, the restoring of harmony after relationships have broken down

reformation: an aim of punishment –

to change someone's behaviour for the better

remarriage: when someone marries again, after a previous marriage or marriages have come to an end

renewable energy: energy that comes from a source that does not run out, such as wind or the sun

responsibility: a duty to care for, or having control over, something or someone

resurrection: 1. rising from the dead; 2. Jesus rising from the dead on Easter day; an event recorded in all four gospels and the central belief of Christianity

retaliation: deliberately harming someone as a response to them harming you

retribution: an aim of punishment – to get your own back; 'an eye for an eye'

revelation: God showing himself to believers; this is the only way anybody can really know anything about God

S
sacraments: rites and rituals through which the believer receives a special gift of grace; for Catholics, Anglicans and many Protestants, sacraments are 'outward signs' of 'inward grace'

salvation: saving the soul, deliverance from sin and admission to heaven brought about by Jesus

same-sex marriage: marriage between partners of the same sex

same-sex parents: people of the same sex who are raising children together

sanctity of life: all life is holy as it is created and loved by God; Christians believe human life should not be misused or abused

Satan: name for the Devil – the power and source of evil

scriptures: the sacred writings of a religion

self-defence: acting to prevent harm to yourself or others

set prayers: prayers that have been written down and said more than once by more than one person, for example the Lord's Prayer

sex before marriage: sex between two unmarried people

sex outside marriage: sex between two people where at least one or both of them is married to someone else; adultery; having an affair

sexual stereotyping: having a fixed general idea or image of how men and women will behave

sin: 1. Any action or thought that separates humans from God; 2. behaviour which is against God's laws and wishes/against principles of morality

social justice: ensuring that society treats people fairly whether they are poor or wealthy and protects people's human rights

Son of God: a title used for Jesus, the second person of the Trinity; denotes the special relationship between Jesus and God the Father

special revelation: God making himself known through direct personal experience or an unusual specific event

stability: safety and security; a stable society is one in which people's rights are protected and they are able to live peaceful, productive lives without continuous and rapid change

stepfamily: a family that is formed on the remarriage of a divorced or widowed person and that includes a child or children

stewardship: the idea that believers have a duty to look after the environment on behalf of God

suffering: when people have to face and live with unpleasant events or conditions

sustainable development: building and progress that tries to reduce the impact on the natural world for future generations

T
Ten Commandments: ten laws in the Old Testament given by God to Moses over 3000 years ago

terrorism: the unlawful use of violence, usually against innocent civilians, to achieve a political goal

The Great Commission: Jesus' instruction to his followers that they should spread his teachings to all the nations of the world

theist: a person who believes in God

tithe: one tenth of annual produce or earnings

transcendent: the idea that God is beyond and outside life on earth and the universe; a quality of God

Trinity: the belief that there are three persons in One God; The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are separate, but are also one being

U
ultimate reality: the supreme, final, fundamental power in all reality

universe: all of time and space and its contents; includes planets, stars, galaxies, the contents of intergalactic space, the smallest subatomic particles, and all matter and energy

V
vegan: a person who does not eat animals or food produced by animals (such as eggs); a vegan tries not to use any products that have caused harm to animals (such as leather)

vegetarian: a person who does not eat meat or fish

violence: using actions that threaten or harm others

vision: seeing something, especially in a dream or trance, that shows something about the nature of God or the afterlife

W
war: fighting between nations to resolve issues between them

weapons of mass destruction: weapons that can kill large numbers of people and/or cause great damage

wonder: marvelling at the complexity and beauty of something

the Word: term used at the beginning of John's gospel to refer to God the Son

worship: acts of religious praise, honour or devotion