

Glossary of Theological Terms

What follows is a brief discussion of a series of terms that the reader is likely to encounter in the course of reading.

adiaphora

Literally, "matters of indifference." Beliefs or practices which the sixteenth-century Reformers regarded as being tolerable, in that they were neither explicitly rejected nor stipulated by Scripture. For example, what ministers wore at church services was often regarded as a "matter of indifference." The concept is of importance in that it allowed the sixteenth-century reformers to adopt a pragmatic approach to many beliefs and practices, thus avoiding unnecessary confrontation.

Alexandrian school

A patristic school of thought, especially associated with the city of Alexandria in Egypt, noted for its Christology (which placed emphasis upon the divinity of Christ) and its method of biblical interpretation (which employed allegorical methods of exegesis). A rival approach in both areas was associated with Antioch. See pp. 18–19; 287–9.

Anabaptism

αναβαπτισμ (see my greek lexicon)

A term derived from the Greek word for "re-baptizer," and used to refer to the radical wing of the sixteenth-century Reformation, based on thinkers such as Menno Simons or Balthasar Hubmaier. See p. 61.

analogy of being (*analogia entis*)

The theory, especially associated with Thomas Aquinas, that there exists a correspondence or analogy between the created order and God, as a result of the divine creatorship. The idea gives theoretical justification to the practice of drawing conclusions concerning God from the known objects and relationships of the natural order. See pp. 135–6.

analogy of faith (*analogia fidei*)

The theory, especially associated with Karl Barth, which holds that any correspondence between the created order and God is only established on the basis of the self-revelation of God. See pp. 135–6.

Anglicanism

A branch of theology especially associated with the churches historically derived from the Church of England. In the past, characteristic emphases have included the recognition of the relation between liturgy and theology, and an emphasis upon the importance of the doctrine of the incarnation.

anthropomorphism

The tendency to ascribe human features (such as hands or arms) or other human characteristics to God. See p. 140.

Antiochene school

A patristic school of thought, especially associated with the city of Antioch in modern-day Turkey, noted for its Christology (which placed emphasis upon the humanity of Christ) and its method of biblical interpretation (which employed literal methods of exegesis). A rival approach in both areas was associated with Alexandria. See pp. 18–19; 289–91.

anti-Pelagian writings

The writings of Augustine relating to the Pelagian controversy, in which he defended his views on grace and justification. See "Pelagianism."

apophatic

A term used to refer to a particular style of theology, which stressed that God cannot be known in terms of human categories. Apophatic (which derives from the Greek *apophasis*, "negation" or "denial") approaches to theology are especially associated with the monastic tradition of the Eastern Orthodox church.

apostolic era

The period of the Christian church, regarded as definitive by many, bounded by the resurrection of Jesus Christ (c.AD 35) and the death of the last Apostle (c.AD 90?). The ideas and practices of this period were widely regarded as normative, at least in some sense or to some degree, in many church circles.

appropriation

A term relating to the doctrine of the Trinity, which affirms that while all three persons of the Trinity are active in all the outward actions of the Trinity, it is appropriate to think of each of those actions as being the particular work of one of the persons. Thus it is *appropriate* to think of creation as the work of the Father, or redemption as the work of the Son, despite the fact that all three persons are present and active in both these works. See pp. 254–5.

Arianism

A major early Christological heresy, which treated Jesus Christ as the supreme of God's creatures, and denied his divine status. The Arian controversy was of major importance in the development of Christology during the fourth century. See pp. 283–7.

atonement

A term originally coined by William Tyndale to translate the Latin term *reconciliatio*, which has since come to have the developed meaning of "the work of Christ" or "the benefits of Christ gained for believers by his death and resurrection." See pp. 341–60.

Augustinianism

A term used in two major senses. First, it refers to the views of Augustine of Hippo concerning the doctrine of salvation, in which the need for divine grace is stressed. In this sense, the term is the antithesis of Pelagianism. Second, it is used to refer to the body of opinion within the Augustinian order during the Middle Ages, irrespective of whether these views derive from Augustine or not.

Barthian

An adjective used to describe the theological outlook of the Swiss theologian Karl Barth (1886–1968), noted chiefly for its emphasis upon the priority of revelation and its focus upon Jesus Christ. The terms "neo-orthodoxy" and "dialectical theology" are also used in this connection. See pp. 98–100.

Black theology

A movement in North American theology which became especially significant in the late 1960s, which emphasized the importance and distinctiveness of the religious experience of black people. See pp. 107–9.

Calvinism

An ambiguous term, used with two quite distinct meanings. First, it refers to the religious ideas of religious bodies (such as the Reformed church) and individuals (such as Theodore Beza) who were profoundly influenced by John Calvin, or by documents written by him. Second, it refers to the religious ideas of John Calvin himself. Although the first sense is by far the more common, there is a growing recognition that the term is misleading. See pp. 60–1.

Cappadocian fathers

A term used to refer collectively to three major Greek-speaking writers of the patristic period: Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzen, and Gregory of Nyssa, all of whom date from the late fourth century. "Cappadocia" designates an area in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey), in which these writers were based.

catechism

A popular manual of Christian doctrine, usually in the form of question and answer, intended for religious instruction.

Chalcedonian definition

The formal declaration at the Council of Chalcedon that Jesus Christ was to be regarded as both human and divine.

charisma, charismatic

A set of terms especially associated with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In medieval theology, the term "charisma" is used to designate a spiritual gift, conferred upon individuals by the grace of God. Since the early twentieth century, the term "charismatic" has come to refer to styles of theology and worship which place particular emphasis upon the immediate presence and experience of the Holy Spirit.

Christology

The section of Christian theology dealing with the identity of Jesus Christ, particularly the question of the relation of his human and divine natures.

circumincision

See *perichoresis*.

confession

Although the term refers primarily to the admission of sin, it acquired a rather different technical sense in the sixteenth century – that of a document which embodies the principles of faith of a Protestant church. Thus the Augsburg Confession (1530) embodies the ideas of early Lutheranism, and the First Helvetic Confession (1536) those of the early Reformed church. The term "Confessionalism" is often used to refer to the hardening of religious attitudes in the later sixteenth century, as the Lutheran and Reformed churches became involved in a struggle for power, especially in Germany. The term "Confessional" is often used to refer to a church which defines itself with reference to such a document. Confessions (which define denominations) should be distinguished from creeds (which transcend denominational boundaries).

consubstantiation

A term used to refer to the theory of the real presence, especially associated with Martin Luther, which holds that the substance of the eucharistic bread and wine are given together with the substance of the body and blood of Christ. See pp. 441–2.

creed

A formal definition or summary of the Christian faith, held in common by all Christians. The most important are those generally known as the "Apostles' creed" and the "Nicene creed." See pp. 17–18.

Deism

A term used to refer to the views of a group of English writers, especially during the seventeenth century, the rationalism of which anticipated many of the ideas of the Enlightenment. The term is often used to refer to a view of God which recognizes the divine creatorship, yet which rejects the notion of a continuing divine involvement with the world. See pp. 184-5.

demythologization

An approach to theology especially associated with the German theologian Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976) and his followers, which rests upon the belief that the New Testament worldview is "mythological." In order for it to be understood within, or applied to, the modern situation, it is necessary that the mythological elements should be eliminated. See pp. 330-1.

dialectical theology

A term used to refer to the early views of the Swiss theologian Karl Barth (1886-1968), which emphasized the "dialectic" between God and humanity. See pp. 98-100.

dispensationalism

A Protestant movement, especially associated with North America, placing emphasis upon the various divine "dispensations" with humanity, and stressing the importance of eschatology. See pp. 472-3.

Docetism

An early Christological heresy, which treated Jesus Christ as a purely divine being who only had the "appearance" of being human. See p. 149.

Donatism

A movement, centering upon Roman North Africa in the fourth century, which developed a rigorist view of the church and sacraments. See pp. 407-10.

Ebionitism

An early Christological heresy, which treated Jesus Christ as a purely human figure, although recognizing that he was endowed with particular charismatic gifts which distinguished him from other humans. See p. 149.

ecclesiology

The section of Christian theology dealing with the theory of the church. See pp. 405-26.

eucharist

The term used in the present volume to refer to the sacrament variously known as "the mass," "the Lord's supper," and "holy communion."

Enlightenment, The

A term used since the nineteenth century to refer to the emphasis upon human reason and autonomy characteristic of much of western European and North American thought during the eighteenth century. See pp. 78–86 for a detailed analysis.

eschatology

The section of Christian theology dealing with the “last things,” especially the ideas of resurrection, hell, and eternal life.

evangelical

A term initially used to refer to the nascent reforming movements, especially in Germany and Switzerland, in the 1510s and 1520s. The term was later replaced by “Protestant” in the aftermath of the Diet of Speyer. In modern times, the term has come to be used of a major movement, especially in English-language theology, which places especial emphasis upon the supreme authority of Scripture and the atoning death of Christ. See pp. 110–13.

exegesis

The science of textual interpretation, usually referring specifically to the Bible. The term “biblical exegesis” basically means “the process of interpreting the Bible.” The specific techniques employed in the exegesis of Scripture are usually referred to as “hermeneutics.”

exemplarism

A particular approach to the atonement, which stresses the moral or religious example set to believers by Jesus Christ. See pp. 355–60.

fathers

An alternative term for “patristic writers.”

feminism

A major movement in western theology since the 1960s, which lays particular emphasis upon the importance of women’s experience, and has directed criticism against the patriarchalism of Christianity. See pp. 100–2.

Five Ways, the

A standard term for the five “arguments for the existence of God” especially associated with Thomas Aquinas. See pp. 132–5.

Fourth Gospel

A term used to refer to the Gospel according to John. The term highlights the distinctive literary and theological character of this gospel, which sets it apart from the common structures of the first three gospels, usually known as the synoptic gospels.

fundamentalism

A form of American Protestant Christianity which lays especial emphasis upon the authority of an inerrant Bible. See pp. 112–13.

Gnosticism

A movement placing especial emphasis upon a contrast between the material and spiritual realms, which became of major importance during the second century. Its most characteristic doctrines include redemption apart from the material world, a dualist worldview which held that different gods were responsible for creation and redemption, and an emphasis upon the importance of "knowledge" (*gnosis*) in salvation. See pp. 15–16.

hermeneutics

The principles underlying the interpretation, or exegesis, of a text, particularly of Scripture.

historical Jesus

A term used, especially during the nineteenth century, to refer to the real historical person of Jesus of Nazareth, as opposed to the Christian interpretation of that person, especially as presented in the New Testament and the creeds. See pp. 316–27.

homoousion

A Greek term, literally meaning "of the same substance," which came to be used extensively during the fourth century to designate the mainstream Christological belief that Jesus Christ was "of the same substance as God." The term was polemical, being directed against the Arian view that Christ was "of similar substance" (*homoiousion*) to God. See pp. 18; 250.

humanism

A complex movement, linked with the European Renaissance. At the heart of the movement lay not (as the modern sense of the word might suggest) a set of secular or secularizing ideas but a new interest in the cultural achievements of antiquity. These were seen as a major resource for the renewal of European culture and Christianity during the period of the Renaissance. See pp. 37–42.

hypostatic union

The doctrine of the union of divine and human natures in Jesus Christ, without confusion of their respective substances. See pp. 287–9. Also pp. 249–50, 252.

incarnation

A term used to refer to the assumption of human nature by God, in the person of Jesus Christ. See pp. 304–8. The term "incarnationalism" is often used to refer to theological approaches (such as those of late nineteenth-century Anglicanism) which lay especial emphasis upon God's becoming human.

justification by faith, doctrine of

The section of Christian theology dealing with how the individual sinner is able to enter into fellowship with God. The doctrine was to prove to be of major significance at the time of the Reformation.

kenoticism

A form of Christology which lays emphasis upon Christ's "laying aside" of certain divine attributes in the incarnation, or his "emptying himself" of at least some divine attributes, especially omniscience or omnipotence.

kerygma

A term used, especially by Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976) and his followers, to refer to the essential message or proclamation of the New Testament concerning the significance of Jesus Christ. See pp. 324-5.

liberal Protestantism

A movement, especially associated with nineteenth-century Germany, which stressed the continuity between religion and culture. See pp. 92-6.

liberation theology

Although the term could designate any theological movement laying emphasis upon the liberating impact of the gospel, it has come to refer to a movement which developed in Latin America in the late 1960s, which stressed the role of political action and oriented itself toward the goal of political liberation from poverty and oppression. See pp. 105-7.

limited atonement

An approach to the doctrine of the atonement, especially associated with Calvinist writers, which holds that Christ's death is only effective for those who have been elected to salvation.

liturgy

The written text of public services, especially of the eucharist.

Lutheranism

The religious ideas associated with Martin Luther, particularly as expressed in the Lesser Catechism (1529) and the Augsburg Confession (1530). A series of internal disagreements within Lutheranism after Luther's death (1546) between hardliners (the so-called "Gnesio-Lutherans" or "Flacianists") and moderates ("Philippists"), led to their resolution by the Formula of Concord (1577), which is usually regarded as the authoritative statement of Lutheran theology.

magisterial Reformation

A term used to refer to the Lutheran and Reformed wings of the Reformation, as opposed to the radical wing (Anabaptism).

modalism

A Trinitarian heresy, which treats the three persons of the Trinity as different "modes" of the Godhead. A typical modalist approach is to regard God as active as Father in creation, as Son in redemption, and as Spirit in sanctification.

neo-orthodoxy

A term used to designate the general position of Karl Barth (1886–1968), especially the manner in which he drew upon the theological concerns of the period of Reformed orthodoxy. See pp. 98–100.

nominalism

Strictly speaking, the theory of knowledge opposed to realism. The term is, however, still used occasionally to refer to the *via moderna*. See pp. 34–5.

ontological argument

A form of argument for the existence of God especially associated with the scholastic theologian Anselm of Canterbury. See pp. 130–2.

orthodoxy

A term used in a number of senses, of which the following are the most important: Orthodoxy in the sense of "right belief," as opposed to heresy (see pp. 145–9); orthodoxy in the sense of a movement within Protestantism, especially in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, which laid emphasis upon need for doctrinal definition (see pp. 68–71).

parousia

A Greek term, which literally means "coming" or "arrival," used to refer to the second coming of Christ. The notion of the *parousia* is an important aspect of Christian understandings of the "last things." See p. 466.

patristic

An adjective used to refer to the first centuries in the history of the church, following the writing of the New Testament (the "patristic period"), or scholars writing during this period (the "patristic writers"). For many writers, the period thus designated seems to be c.100–451 (in other words, the period between the completion of the last of the New Testament writings and the Council of Chalcedon).

Pelagianism

An understanding of how humans are able to merit their salvation which is diametrically opposed to that of Augustine of Hippo, placing considerable emphasis upon the role of human works and playing down the idea of divine grace.

perichoresis

A term relating to the doctrine of the Trinity, often also referred to by the Latin term *circumincession*. The basic notion is that all three persons of the

Trinity mutually share in the life of the others, so that none is isolated or detached from the actions of the others.

Pietism

An approach to Christianity, especially associated with German writers in the seventeenth century, which places an emphasis upon the personal appropriation of faith, and the need for holiness in Christian living. The movement is perhaps best known within the English-language world in the form of Methodism. See pp. 73-4.

postliberalism

A theological movement, especially associated with Duke University and Yale Divinity School in the 1980s, which criticized the liberal reliance upon human experience, and reclaimed the notion of community tradition as a controlling influence in theology. See pp. 102-5.

postmodernism

A general cultural development, especially in North America, which resulted from the general collapse in confidence of the universal rational principles of the Enlightenment.

Protestantism

A term used in the aftermath of the Diet of Speyer (1529) to designate those who "protested" against the practices and beliefs of the Roman Catholic church. Prior to 1529, such individuals and groups had referred to themselves as "evangelicals."

radical Reformation

A term used with increasing frequency to refer to the Anabaptist movement – in other words, the wing of the Reformation which went beyond what Luther and Zwingli envisaged.

Reformed

A term used to refer to a tradition of theology which draws inspiration from the writings of John Calvin (1510-64) and his successors (see pp. 68-72). The term is generally used in preference to "Calvinist."

Sabellianism

An early trinitarian heresy, which treated the three persons of the Trinity as different historical manifestations of the one God. See pp. 256-7.

sacrament

In purely historical terms, a church service or rite which was held to have been instituted by Jesus Christ himself. Although Roman Catholic theology and church practice recognize seven such sacraments (baptism, confirmation, eucharist, marriage, ordination, penance, and unction), Protestant theologians generally argue that only two (baptism and eucharist) were to be found in the New Testament itself. See pp. 427-47.

schism

A deliberate break with the unity of the church, condemned vigorously by influential writers of the early church, such as Cyprian and Augustine. See pp. 408–9.

scholasticism

A particular approach to Christian theology, associated especially with the Middle Ages, which lays emphasis upon the rational justification and systematic presentation of Christian theology. See pp. 32–6.

Scotism

The scholastic philosophy associated with Duns Scotus.

Scripture principle

The theory, especially associated with Reformed theologians, that the practices and beliefs of the church should be grounded in Scripture. Nothing that could not be demonstrated to be grounded in Scripture could be regarded as binding upon the believer. The phrase *sola scriptura*, "by Scripture alone," summarizes this principle.

Septuagint

The Greek translation of the Old Testament, dating from the third century BC. The abbreviation LXX is generally used to refer to this text.

Sermon on the Mount

The standard way of referring to Christ's moral and pastoral teaching in the specific form which it takes in chapters 5–7 of Matthew's gospel.

soteriology

The section of Christian theology dealing with the doctrine of salvation (Greek: *soteria*).

synoptic gospels

A term used to refer to the first three gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke). The term (derived from the Greek word *synopsis*, "summary") refers to the way in which the three gospels can be seen as providing similar "summaries" of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

synoptic problem

The scholarly question of how the three synoptic gospels relate to each other. Perhaps the most common approach to the issue is the "two source" theory, which claims that Matthew and Luke used Mark as a source, while also drawing upon a second source (usually known as "Q"). Other possibilities exist: For example, the Grisebach hypothesis treats Matthew as having been written first, followed by Luke and then Mark.

theodicy

A term coined by Leibnitz to refer to a theoretical justification of the goodness of God in the face of the presence of evil in the world.

Thomism, *via Thomae*

The scholastic philosophy associated with Thomas Aquinas.

transubstantiation

The medieval doctrine according to which the bread and the wine are transformed into the body and blood of Christ in the eucharist, while retaining their outward appearance.

Trinity

The distinctively Christian doctrine of God, which reflects the complexity of the Christian experience of God. The doctrine is usually summarized in maxims such as "three persons, one God." See pp. 247-69.

two natures, doctrine of

A term generally used to refer to the doctrine of the two natures, human and divine, of Jesus Christ. Related terms include "Chalcedonian definition" and "hypostatic union."

Vulgate

The Latin translation of the Bible, largely deriving from Jerome, upon which medieval theology was largely based. Strictly speaking, "Vulgate" designates Jerome's translation of the Old Testament (except the Psalms, which was taken from the Gallican Psalter); the apocryphal works (except Wisdom, Ecclesiastes, I and II Maccabees, and Baruch, which were taken from the Old Latin Version); and all the New Testament. The recognition of its many inaccuracies was of fundamental importance to the Reformation.

Zwinglianism

The term is used generally to refer to the thought of Huldrych Zwingli, but is often used to refer specifically to his views on the sacraments, especially on the "real presence" (which for Zwingli was more of a "real absence").