

Spiritual - Religious Words Definitions and Meanings



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The words below are ones that you'll often come across in spiritual and religious literature or talk. They're often intentionally twisted or spun into vagueness or a lie, so it's important to have a clear idea of what they really mean. This site is not a dictionary or lexicon, but a way of getting at what matters about these words. It gives a specifically **Christian** slant on the words, yet draws on their more basic or general meaning and on their origins. We hope you find the site helpful in clearing away the smoke.

- [affirmation](#),
- [aim](#),
- [anger](#),
- [anoint](#) and anointing,
- [anthropomorphism](#).
- [apostasy](#),
- [balderdash](#),
- [beauty](#),
- [blah blah blah](#), yada yada, and whatever...
- [blasphemy](#),
- [carnal](#),
- [celestial](#),
- [compassion](#) plus sympathy, pity, and commiseration.
- [creativity](#),
- [deism](#),
- [desire](#), with covet, crave.
- [diachronic](#), with [synchronic](#).
- [dogma](#) and dogmatics.
- [edify](#),
- [ephemeral](#),
- [epistemology](#),
- [escape](#), with aversion and avoidance.
- [eschatology](#),
- [ethereal](#).
- [excommunication](#),
- [faith](#), with belief, certainty, confidence, conviction,

credence, credibility, credit, dependence, and reliance.

- [faith experience](#),
- [fear](#), with alarm, dread, panic, phobia, and terror.
- [gnosis](#),
- [gnosticism](#),
- [grace](#).
- [guilt](#),
- [harmony](#),
- [heresy](#),
- [holism](#),
- [hope](#),
- [humble](#),
- [imagination](#),
- [irenic](#),
- [joy](#),
- [love](#),
- [mantra](#),
- [metaphysical](#),
- [metempsychosis](#),
- [monism](#).
- [material](#),
- [materialism](#),
- [mercy](#),
- [nirvana](#),
- [numerology](#),
- [numinous](#),
- [om](#),
- [pantheism](#)
- [paradox](#),
- [paranormal](#),
- [propitiation](#).
- [psychic](#),
- [psychokinesis](#)
- [redeem](#) and redemption,
- [reincarnation](#),
- [relativism](#),
- [in relationship](#).
- [remember](#),
- [respect](#),
- [sacerdotal](#),
- [sciolic](#),
- [sect](#) and sectarian,
- [self](#).
- [soul](#),
- [spirit](#),
- [sinner](#),
- [spiritual](#).
- [supernatural](#),
- [syncretism](#),
- [synergism](#),
- [tantra](#),
- [tautology](#),
- [teleology](#),
- [temperance](#).
- [telepathy](#),

- [theodicy](#),
- [theophany](#),
- [tradition](#),
- [trauma](#),
- [trust](#),
- [universalism](#),
- [yogi](#).

Affirmation

affirmation : in its best sense, it means **supporting the value of something or someone**. It is a 'Yes' in both attitude and deed. God affirmed us by making us, then by making us free, then by keeping us alive, then by coming as a human person (Jesus) to live among us. Jesus calls His followers to affirm ourselves and others, in much the same way as He has done for us. (Thus, when we cut people down with biting words and backstabbing deeds, we are not following Jesus. So why are we so quick to do it?) Affirmation is a positive act that helps us to give confidence and a sense of being supported. It gives voice to goals and hopes, and strengthens resolve. When God puts into us gifts to build up the faithful, God is affirming us as a group or a whole. Christians often affirm someone or something at hand by saying words like "Amen!" or "Hallelujah!". Mary affirmed by giving God a 'yes' that gave us a way to give God a meaningful 'yes'. In its worst sense (far too common in mainline-church circles), affirmation is a moral sop in which being nice is more important than giving people real help, which involves (at some point) helping them face the hard truth about the situations they face or the consequences of what they've done. 'No' has great value within the context of Christ's larger 'Yes'.

Aim

aim : **a determined, deliberate, focused effort to get some specific thing done** (such as a goal). Without aim, you go nowhere special. You have somewhere you want to go (a goal, a dream, a vision), but you get there by aiming for it. It's much better than random action, but on spiritual matters it still cannot stand by itself. Think of an arrow; we try, but no matter how hard we pull back on the bow or how well we aim, our vision wobbles, the gravity of sin pulls downward, the target is often missed. Our efforts need to be part of something bigger, aimed not by us but by the Spirit who can figure the right trajectory, supply the right power, and aim at the right target.

Anger

anger is **strong negative emotion**. It may be directed at someone or something or some circumstance, or just a generalized grrrrr at everything. Many things cause anger : loss, injustice, jealousy, loss of control, lack of hope, sleeplessness, chemical imbalances, physical pain. Anger can sometimes be a good thing that shows us something is not going right. Though we will be angry at times, Jesus said not to let the sun go down on our anger. We can (a) turn it over to God, so that by the Spirit's power the anger can relax its grip on us; (b) we can seek reconciliation and/or forgiveness with those to whom we have been angry; **and** (c) we can seek out why we are getting angry, so we can heal it within ourselves. That way, anger doesn't feed upon itself to rob the joy from ourselves and from those around us.

Anoint

to anoint : **To apply oil onto someone.** When the ancients wanted to heal a wound, they poured or daubed oil onto it. Oil then became **a symbol of God's healing powers**, and anointment became a sign of trust that God heals. It is still a practice among some Christian churches to anoint the sick with oil, as found in James 5:14-15. From there, oil became a symbol of other powers of God. A chosen person would be anointed to mark their being given special authority by God, including authority to govern. The word 'Mashiach' or 'Messiah' refers to the ultimate One who was chosen to make the ultimate rescue of God's people; the Greek word for this is 'Christ'. Christians hold that this Anointed One was **Jesus of Nazareth**.

There is also a specialized use of the term '**anointing**' by Pentecostal and Charismatic believers. When someone is said to be 'anointed', it means that the Spirit 'pours' onto them like oil -- that the person has been **given special power/authority by the Holy Spirit to work with the Spirit in accomplishing the task at hand**. The 'anointing' shows itself when the task is done well and has extraordinarily good results. (In some less-careful circles, 'anointed' has been dumbed down to mean 'good', even if there's no other reason to think that the Spirit might be involved rather than skill or knack.)

Anthropomorphism

anthropomorphism : **using human** (Greek *anthro-*) **forms** (Greek *-morph*) or **characteristics to describe spiritual beings** such as God, angels, or demons. Neither the Father nor the Holy Spirit have actual eyes, ears, hands, fingers, mouth or face, yet when such familiar terms are used, we can more easily grasp something important about God. Through them we can picture what God is doing, and get some hint of what God is like. God has honored these material-world body parts (and the words and ideas related to them) through the material-being Jesus who has such body parts, and by using them to communicate and to relate with us. The danger in using anthropomorphisms comes when we think of God like we do ourselves, when in fact God is quite different, much 'bigger'. Technically, all words and images we use about God are in some sense 'anthropomorphisms', since they all come from our experiences in a world of shapes and bodies. But some words and phrases are much better than others at catching who God is and what God is about. Some words prompt our minds to reach for something great, beyond ourselves. The Spirit gives special strength to those words and phrases, in the Bible, in prophecy, and even sometimes in theological shop-talk.

Apostasy

apostasy : [from Greek, meaning 'revolt'; *apo-* (away from, off) + *-(hi)stanai* (to stand)] defection; abandonment of what one once held or believed. It's usually used when someone makes a clear break with an orthodoxy or established teaching they once held dear. It's another of those words (like 'heresy', 'blasphemy', and 'excommunication') that are used by those in power to stomp on those who are not. Yet the word itself is about a change that happens all too often in real life.

Sometimes, it happens when someone finds out that their position has been built upon lies and accusations and anger instead of love and truth, and the truth demands that they rethink what they believe. More commonly, it happens when someone realizes there is more to gain personally by changing position - most likely, that they'd no longer be on the outside of those they seek to befriend. In the latter case, it's understandable but foolish.

balderdash :

1. nonsense; meaningless rant.
2. a rapidly-receding hairline.

Beauty

Beauty : [Old French *biaute*, from Latin *bellus* (pretty), influenced by Latin *beatus* (happy; blessed).] You don't define beauty; you behold it. Beauty takes us somewhere -- higher, lower, but most importantly, truer and more whole. It's a vibe, but more; a reality, but also a glimpse of what is beyond. It's a cover for the fake and an expression of the real, the half that is true in many things that are half-true. Beauty is better at communicating than naked fact or plain image, yet there is a beauty in logic and in abstract thought-as-an-art. There is the beauty of a life well-lived and a relationship well-loved. There is, most of all, the Creator of Beauty, who takes an ugly blood-dripped cross and makes it worthy of jewelry and art. If we follow this Creator, ought we not also bring at least a touch of beauty into what we do, especially as a body of believers?

Blah, yada, and whatever

The **blah blah blah factor** is an idea from advertising. At some point in the ad campaign, the message will have been received by its audience, and further repetition of it will neutralize it by making it ho-hum. The consumer says, 'Okay, so your product cleans teeth; tell me something more'. Smart advertisers alter the message, the product, or the campaign before it reaches that point. The **yada yada effect** is from Jewish sources. (In some US youth circles, it's called '**whatever**' and is expressed by putting the pointers out and thumbs together to form a 'W'.) In it, *when someone hears too much of something, there becomes no reason to bother listening. It's seen as all talk, nothing worthwhile, and goes in one ear and out the other.* It may even seem to have an ulterior motive ('what's he trying to get from this?'). These phenomena are happening to all institutions, to all the world's religions, and especially to Christianity. Most Christians have been saying the same things the same basic way over and over and over again for stretches of hundreds of years (on some matters, thousands of years).

Some Christians are tempted to alter the message of the faith, taking out all the 'negative' talk about sin and possible damnation (the stuff that Luther called "Law"), and taking the emphasis off of Christ and the Scripture that tells us about him and what he wants from us. The positive stuff then gets made fuzzy so that people can adapt it to their own frame of mind. But Christians are not advertising a product; we are sharing the truth about the Almighty and about the human species. Those truths can't be changed by us. We can, however, explain those truths in a different way, as Paul and John and Patrick and Francis and many others have in their times. They expressed those truths in ways that tied into the real lives of the people around them, so it was definitely worthwhile. They told it at their own expense and risk, so the motive was not ulterior. They did it with great imagination and daring style, so there was little room for ho-hum. And they relied greatly on the Holy Spirit to lead them, so it went in the ears and got stuck inside. In today's world, Christians (like everyone else) will need to be very aware of 'blah blah blah' and 'yada yada' and 'whatever', because it kicks in a lot quicker than it used to. The best way to find out if it's kicking in is to watch the teenagers; they are usually the first to show it.

Blasphemy

blasphemy : [from Greek; *blas-* (to curse, bring harm, or treat with contempt) + *-pheme* (speech)] Speaking about God with contempt, hatred or disdain; trash-talking against God. It's not about letting loose a swear word or doing some religious act in a so-called "profane" style. It's not even about being angry with God. Even the truest saints have done such things, in part because they were so true that they could be honest with God and humankind. (Remember that when the charge of so-called 'blasphemy' is used by authorities to silence their opponents.) However, true blasphemy is **verbally abusing the God who loves you**.

Can puny little you hurt the Almighty Creator of the Universe, All Stars and All Time? When you were a child, you probably said things that brought your parents to tears and anger; if so, you hurt them the way you can hurt God. Or think of someone you had a close friendship with, but somehow your trust was betrayed. You were close, but bitter words were said and you're now distant and separated. And it stings. Blasphemy is when it's done willfully, with intent and meaning. God forgives blasphemy, and tries to do something about the separation. But the true blasphemer won't accept that forgiveness, as if to say : "Let me get this right : *you* forgive **me**?? HA !! What nerve!". And so they seal their future. The bigger problem is that too often others join in the harangue, and when that happens, those others are also separated from God.

Carnal

carnal : **Meat-ish**. Stuff that's rooted in your bodily being; material, physical, biological, sexual. (Oh, you were hoping to see all that hot body talk, weren't you? Not here.) It is often used as a polar opposite of 'spiritual', especially among some strongly dualistic religions. Yet for Christians, the flesh was created 'good' by God, it's human beings that draw evil from it by reveling in its impulses as if those feelings were some sort of god. For this impulse-god, we contort our love relationships, glom great mounds of fatty foods, and stuff drugs into our bodies to kick them into even-stronger impulses. When you're seeking after these impulses, you're not seeking God. You're being 'carnal', and you're denying the spiritual nature which underlies everything else about you.

Celestial

celestial : **relating to the sky**; for occultic purposes, usually relating to the sky at dusk, night, and dawn, and the stars as located at those times. Otherworldly; heavenly; himlentukal; starry, nebular; outer-space.

Compassion

compassion : [Latin *compassus* (to sympathize); fr. *co-* (with) + *pati* (to suffer)] It's a powerful, **deep awareness of someone else's suffering, in such a way that you want them not to suffer**. The root word is the same as that of passion, something you want so much that you suffer in order to do or have or accomplish it. The root meaning 'to suffer' is also used of Christ en route to His crucifixion. For a Christian, any compassion we have is shaped by and rooted in Jesus' Passion, where His awareness of our suffering drove Him to do something about it. A sense of solidarity develops; your suffering becomes my suffering. A few people have been said to have empathic gifts, where they can actually enter into part of another's suffering or pain, and bear with them the part of it they can reach. (It probably feels as much like a curse as it does a gift.) But noone needs that kind of gift to have

compassion. You only need enough love in you to want someone's suffering to end or at least become more bearable.

There are some related words. **Sympathy** is being sad about others' sadness. **Pity** leads you to want to help them if you could. **Commisseration** is when that sorrow is expressed to the saddened ones. **Compassion** is more than a mere desire to help; it creates a determination, a decision to actually help, even if only in some small way. Compassion puts something of yourself on the line : perhaps your power over someone, or your time, or effort, or healing skills. When strong, it overrides angry or vengeful desires.

Creativity

creativity : making something out of what's deep down within us which makes for conflict or peace, insight or resistance. We make out of what is; even our thoughts are based on what we already have experienced/learned, so it's not quite the same thing as God can do. Yet even God doesn't usually create out of nothing.

Human creativity draws from the same kind of creative power that is part of the image of God in us, the same kind of creative power that God used in making us out of already-existing earthly stuff (represented in Genesis by the clay and the garden). We can create that which is ugly, false, selfish, deceptive, flimsy, superficial, distortive, evil, greedy, violent, controlling. We can create beauty, truth, compassion, solidity, durability, trust, justice, righteousness, solidarity, peace, community. Creativity cuts both ways, like everything else in this created realm (remember that next time anyone praises creativity). Creativity is not a matter of thought. **It must go somewhere, do something, become something, or make something happen.** Otherwise, it's not creative. It is spiritual by its nature; it lives. But often, being patient and wise are more important than being creative.

Deism

Deism : A rationalist Enlightenment philosophy, best represented by a school of thought popular among English writers of the 17th and 18th centuries. According to this view, God is seen as Creator, but as one who stopped being involved with the world once creation was done. God set up rational mechanisms for the world to keep operating while God is gone, and things work best when they follow those logical mechanisms. Many of the US Founding Fathers (though by no means all of them) were deists. This is a very different view of God than that portrayed by the Bible, which shows a hidden but very active God who is in a love relationship with the created world and the people in it.

Desire

desire : **A wish or longing.** Also: **covet, crave.** Desires can be very noble and positive; for instance, the desire to follow Christ, the desire to be the best at your craft, your sexual desire for your spouse, the desire to learn Scripture, the desire to reach a goal. Life without this sort of desire isn't much of a life. However, desire poses several spiritual problems.

One problem is in the nature of desire itself. Desire is overpowering. It takes over, overrides common sense, and causes rash decisions that can cause great harm to yourself and others. When desire does this, it's no longer a good force in your life. It becomes a new god that can't be satisfied. Once you've had the pleasure of fulfilling this sort of desire, it soon returns, demanding more. As long as you keep desiring, you suffer until you fulfill it, then enjoy until it rages again, and then you suffer again. That's why desire is sometimes described as 'passion', a word which originally meant '**suffering**'. (The original meaning of 'passion' is still used of the last week of Christ's life; it's also the root of the word 'patience'.) The same kind of cycle is found on the mental side of addiction.

Another problem is in desiring the wrong things : desiring what isn't yours, desiring what ought to be shunned. In the Ten Commandments, God told us not to covet (desire) our neighbor's goods, or (in this age of adultery, especially) our neighbor's beloved. Jesus spoke of the desire for wealth, and the fact that you can't take it with you. The desire for fame, for impulsive sex, or for power over other people, very easily twists one's life. The desire to avoid suffering is a good, protective desire on its best side. But on its worst side it can make us desperate to avoid hard truths that, if we faced them, would cause us to suffer for a while, but not nearly as much as the continued pain from avoiding the truth.

Desire can be idolatry, and can be a trap. Either way, problem-desires get in the way of spiritual living. And, in the end, the only way to end all desires and be truly satisfied is to be with God. You won't and can't get that in this life. But the Kingdom will come, and as much as you are living now as an expression of this Kingdom, you will be satisfied.

Diachronic and Synchronic

diachronic [Greek : *dia-* (across) + *chronos* (time)]. Studying something that happens as it changes itself, its form, or its role across time. This is the long view of something, not a snapshot at a particular time. It is usually called an 'historic' view.

synchronic [Greek : *syn-* (together) + *chronos* (time)]. Studying things that happen in the way they exist at one specific moment. This is the immediate-term (the 'now') view of one or more happenings as they happen at one time, a snapshot view, without reference to what happened before or after.

Dogma

dogma :

1. a female hound after giving birth;
2. a teaching that is seen as a key part of a religion's core tradition, spelled out in some specific way that is considered definitive, authoritative, or binding on all, usually by reference to some sort of holy writings.

Dogmas are found in most religions, and sometimes to non-religious systems as well (such as classic Communism and Freudian Psychiatry). The Roman Catholic Church still believes it can declare Christian dogma; other Christians do not accept that any one body can issue dogma, and some of them doubt that there is even such a thing as 'dogma'. Today, the word 'dogma' has a negative feel to it, because dogmas have often been used by those in authority as an excuse for limiting freedom. To declare dogma is in a sense to speak for (or as) God; 'dogma' spelled backwards is 'am God'. On the one hand, there are teachings without which a religion loses its meaning and purpose; on the other hand, if these teachings are not challenged and tested, they become stiff and un-living, and thus less true. A challenge to dogma is not to be done for advantage, or to take revenge on churchly authorities, or as a

call to a self-centered 'freedom'. Dogma is worth challenging only in the service of **truth**, which is at the root of any true and beneficial freedom.

Dogmatics is the study of dogmas and the source that they come from, done through the discipline and rigor of an orderly system. It is one of the key fields of study for those training to be ordained.

"The adequacy of dogmas depends on whether they claim to formulate or to allude; in the first case they flaunt and fail, in the second they indicate and illumine... All they can do is indicate a way, not mark an end, of thinking. Unless they serve as humble signposts on the way, dogmas are obstacles."

Abraham Heschel, *Protestant Renewal : A Jewish View*, Christian Century, 04
December 1963, p.1504

Edify

edify :

(1) to cause someone to become more like Ed (whomever Ed is);

(2) (Latin *aedes* = structure, temple) to build; also, to fortify, strengthen. When something 'edifies', it makes other things stronger or better or wiser or more mature. If spiritual gifts are given to 'edify' others, that means the gifts are to be used to **strengthen other peoples' faith**, or make them **wiser about the faith**, or help them to **better live out their faith**, or to make them **more effective in their ministry**. If the gifts do not build people up in this manner, then the gift is not being used to 'edify', and it is not being used the way the Spirit wants it used. We are called to do this for one another (Romans 14:18-19; 1 Corinthians 14:12-16). **Edification** is the process of being built up or made better. (See also Acts 20:32; Ephesians 4:29; James 4:1-6.)

ephemeral : **fleeting**, here-and-gone, transient, passing, short-lived. Transient and transitory are usually used for a brief something that leads to a longer-lasting something. Ephemeral bears no hint of that; it simply is, and then is gone.

epistemology [Greek : *episteme* (knowledge) + *logos* (word, theory, study)] The philosophy of the ways, grounds, and scope of how we know and understand. It looks at what makes up the knowledge-base of our way of viewing the world.

Escape

escape : also **aversion** or **avoidance**. There are some things that may cause inner pain, but which are ours to face up to. Things like **truth**, **responsibility**, and our own **death**. Because they are often painful, we'll go to great lengths to escape having to face them; **we run away, dump them on someone else, or dope ourselves into artificial bliss**. But it catches up with us, and becomes all the more painful because of the attempt to escape. God usually gives little nuggets of joy or reward to those who accept their part in such things instead of escaping.

Eschatology

eschatology : the study of matters relating to **the end times**. This would include talk and ideas about resurrection, heaven and hell, what the Kingdom of God is like in its fullness, and what is meant by eternal life or death. The Christian knows next to nothing about it. Even Jesus Himself claimed no special knowledge of when or how, even though He described some things about it. With so little data from God, the only kind of language that can even begin to take on the task is that of imagination, the making of vigorous images to catch the feel and pulse and fuzzy shape of it. That's what led to apocalyptic writings like Daniel, Ezekiel, and Revelation. People speak of it with terms such as the Rapture, the Millenium, the Reapers, Armageddon, the Bowls of Wrath, the Bottomless Pit, the Horsemen of the Apocalypse, the Final Trumpets, the Remnant, the Great Getting-Up Morning, the Judgement Day, the Lake of Fire, the Death of Time, and the New Jerusalem.

As long as we know that we don't know, it's fine, even exciting; the moment we claim to know for sure, we lie, and that's not fine with God. The wise Christian trusts the God who rose Jesus, the God who is with them in this life, to stay with them when this life is done. There are signs, however faint, of the Kingdom in the life we live now, kicking at the walls like a baby in the womb, out of sight but very much there and about to burst forth. The gathered believers, acting together, are an outpost of that Kingdom in our world today. So we are to live from the Kingdom today, and trust that it will come in full through God's power someday soon. Beyond that, we're free to speculate, dream, and envision (in keeping with the Kingdom), but not to know.

Ethereal

ethereal : **lacking in material/stuff**; outer-space-ish; otherworldly. It can be a wonderful effect in music or drama. Christians recognize and value what is ethereal, but treasure and value far more when the spirituality that is otherwise 'ethereal' comes to life in the material world we live in -- when it is 'incarnated'.

Faith

faith:

1. confident belief in the truth, value, or trustworthiness of a person, an idea, or a thing.
2. belief that does not rest on logical proof or material evidence.
3. loyalty or allegiance to a person or thing; esp. fidelity to a promise.
4. the theological virtue defined as secure belief in God and a trusting acceptance of God's will.

Faith indicates unswerving action, devotion, and direction of self, and is often charged with emotion.

Here are some other words that cover much of the same turf. **In what ways do these words describe how you are toward God, or toward the gospel message?**

- **assurance** is a confidence or sureness that is **not rooted in your intellect**. It usually comes about because of the action of someone else.
- **belief** :
 1. the mental act, condition, or habit of **placing trust or confidence in another**.
 2. mental acceptance and conviction in the truth, actuality, or validity of something.
- **'belief' vs. 'faith'** :

- 'Beliefs' are existing ideas that one holds to; 'faith' looks toward what is to come.
- 'Belief' relates most to knowledge and understanding; 'faith' relates most to hope and trust.
- 'Belief' may or may not imply that the believer is certain, whereas 'faith' implies a level of confidence that approaches certainty.
- **certainty** is not a form of faith, but of knowledge, based on **demonstrable evidence** that is so strong that it can be fairly labeled 'proof'.
- **confidence** suggests a lower level of emotional intensity (or, at least, a much less visible intensity) than 'assurance'; it implies stronger grounds for assurance.
- **conviction** is a **strongly-held belief or idea** on spiritual or moral matters. It is something that often grows out of life experiences and hard thinking or meditation. For Dietrich Bonhoeffer, his convictions were expressed as a 'yes' to what God had in store for him, knowing full well that it could (and did) lead him to death at the hands of the Nazis.
- **credence** suggests that **the mind accepts and agrees to it**, with nothing implied about the grounds of proof.
- **credibility** : It happens when **something or someone shows itself to be worthy of belief**. It's given to a movement or person whose report or action stands up to hard thinking and/or discernment. It is something given by others, not grabbed through one's own actions.

If someone is claiming that what they are doing is "God's move", that's a claim that may or may not be true. Discern whether this is so. If that person then says, "get in line with it, or be damned", then they are making a command. That is not theirs to do, and it is not God's way of doing things in a world after Christ rose. Their claim has no basis for credibility. If it were one of those few occasions when a command comes, God grants a sense of authority that is sensed even by non-believers and enemies, and has built it into the character of the leaders God chooses.

- **credit** is a 'yes' of the mind on **grounds that are indirect proofs**, such as the trustworthiness of the source. It is a *factor* in a decision, not the basis of it.
- **Dependence** suggests reliance on the help or support of someone else. It infers that without such help, the task at hand could be accomplished only with great difficulty, if at all. It also infers that the 'someone else' is of higher rank or esteem.
- **reliance** indicates a **confident and trustful commitment toward another**. If you're someone who runs a business or ministry, somewhere along the way you'll delegate responsibility to someone else for some important task. You are relying on them -- in a way, dependent on them to do the job, yet not in a way that makes you an inferior.
- **'trust'** : see under 'trust', below.

We are not made right before God because of faith, but **through** faith.

Justifying or **saving** faith is how one is brought into a right relationship with God, thanks to what Jesus did by dying for us.

faith experience : a conscious encounter with God himself or with an action of God, initiated by God, and having observable results in the lives of individuals and communities.

Fear

fear : a **strong emotion due to foreseeing or becoming aware of danger**. At its best, fear helps us protect ourselves, and helps remind us that we don't have control over everything in our lives (and never will). At its worst, fear can turn us into murderous bigots or quivering cowards. There are many kinds of fear : sudden fear (**alarm**), strong desire not to do something (**dread**), brief but strong loss of composure (**panic**), fear of one specific thing beyond all reason (**phobia**), fear of unfavorable results (**worry**), and the surrender to extreme fear (**terror**). Psalm 23 says "I shall fear no evil, for Thou art with me". Fears

that are turned over to God will be muted or will go away. When we stop trying to be in control and let God be in control, there is no cause for fear, for the One in Control loves us and seeks the best for us. Trust in God's love casts out fear. Go against God, and there is no reason not to be in terror.

Gnosis

gnosis : it usually refers to the '**secret**' or '**special**' knowledge that is said to set one free from the 'illusory' material world. [from Greek *gnosis* (knowledge)]. There is no such knowledge, according to Christian beliefs :

1. the material world is not an illusion for us to be freed from, it is a work of God's creation we were made to be a part of, and God is at work today to make it whole again;
2. the knowledge on which everything hangs is revealed by (and **as**) Jesus Christ, and God sent the Spirit to reveal to all believers what God is up to -- there is no 'secret', and even if there were, the Christian's duty would be to give it away freely anyway.

gnosticism : Gnosticism arrived when Christianity was a mere toddler, and it tried its best to suck in the strong, fledgling Christian faith and reshape it into its image. There was a lot of variety of practice and teaching among Gnostics, but there were certain core markers.

In gnosticism, the spiritual world was full of deep secrets. **Matter was evil or unreal or at best icky, and spirit was good.** Terms like 'vessel', 'container', 'jacket', 'package', 'can', or 'vehicle' are how they would today describe the human body. Some spirits were more 'good' than others, and part of the task (dare I say 'game'?) was to keep these spiritual superiors happy. A few people (that is, themselves) were learning about and evolving toward the spiritual world. A follower was to stay focused on spiritual things and to ignore or not value those who lacked such knowledge. The meaning of holy writings (including some of their leaders and pagan writers but didn't include most of the Old Testament) was uncovered by way of allegory ("this really means **that**"). God as a human?? God would never stoop so low as to be contaminated with our filth. Thus, of course, they had to re-translate Jesus : he was a human who had developed the highest level of contacts in the spirit world. His body either became, or always was, an illusion. A gnostic god could never really be 'God-with-us', nor could it be so focused on loving those wallowing in the earthly mire.

Old-fashioned Gnosticism morphed into new-fangled New Thought (Unity, Christian Science) and then New Age (Celestine Prophecy, and especially Urantia), and left its traces in other places (in some of the Faith Movement preachers, in the Course on Miracles, in the late Heaven's Gate, among some religion scholars, and in much of US pop religious culture). For reasons that are baffling given its lack of logical sense, these ideas have had their strongest appeal among the intelligentsia and the social elite.

Grace

grace : **God's unmerited favor.** It's given to all, freely. God gives us the faith that justifies us, and gives us the Spirit that changes us and gives us Christ's goodness. God keeps this grace from noone. However if we don't accept it, it sits there with no effect, like an unopened and forgotten Christmas present. And we humans don't like the implications of the gift, namely, that we have no way to do this ourselves. So we tend not to take this grace until we have nothing else left and nowhere else to turn, and even then we might spurn it. There's more than enough grace to go around to everybody, more than enough to do the job. More than enough for you.

Guilt

guilt : [Old English *gylt* (crime, wrongdoing)] **when you realize you had done something wrong**, in past or present. On the one hand, there is no way to turn away from wrongs or to reconcile without coming to understand that what you did was wrong. This is sorrow and repentance, arising from forensic 'guilt' or culpability for an action of a kind commonly found in a court of law.

On the other hand, that's not what is normally meant by 'guilt' outside of courts. Its usual use is to describe **a sense of self-reproach or shame or condemnation, which feeds a lack of overall self-esteem**. This is often a generalized sense of shame not tied to any one act.

- Self-reproach does not usually lead to a turning away from our wrongs. It typically leads to defensiveness, excuses, and evasions in order to escape the consequences of our wrongs. That creates a tangled web that traps us.
- It's often an excuse not to allow yourself to be forgiven, an excuse to punish yourself instead of fixing yourself, for staying apart instead of reconciling. Psychologists spend much of their time dealing with their patients' guilt.

This is where what Jesus did can give such a great release : "neither do I condemn you. Go, and sin no more." Since God does not condemn us, and in fact values each of us highly, we're free to enjoy what God has given us for our lives.

Harmony

harmony : in music, the effect of different singers singing different notes in a chord. In spirituality, a **sense of being in a right relationship with the rest of existence**. Harmony can't happen in a system where all things lose identity into an Absolute (like most Asian and New Age religions); the result would be one melody, no unison and no parts. It would just be a fancied-up solo. Christianity holds that each person -- and beyond that, each part of nature -- is loved by God for what they are. If all of them sing only what they feel like singing, it's just noise, not harmony. But if they follow the Conductor, there are melodies and harmonies, rhythms and raps, whistles and claps, leads and backup. It would all fit together. That is the Kingdom, not our current life. But we can live according to God's will as revealed in Jesus, and thus be a part of the harmony.

The three closest earthly things to this harmony are : (1) being a part of a loving community; (2) being in love with one special person; (3) being part of a singing group.

Heresy

heresy : **teaching lies about God**. In most religions that have a god, being truthful about that god is taken very seriously. If God is really supreme, then **God deserves the supreme honor of our taking the time and care not to run off rashly at the mouth, claiming this or that thing is true about or is done by God**. Many heresies seem hypnotic in their ability to lead people far astray, into spiritually deluded and destructive beliefs and behaviors. Thus, **a passion for truth is the root of the concept of heresy**. The idea of heresy runs into trouble, however, on several fronts, the biggest of which is, 'who determines what is heresy?'. Those in a position of power routinely use their power of defining heresy (or any other word) against those who challenge their authority, sometimes all the way to murder and war.

How can Christians honor the truth behind the concept of heresy, without letting it be a weapon in

defense of the powerful? The nearest way is to have full, frank and open discussion of such matters, among a people who take seriously their duty to keep testing and prodding, prayerfully using Scripture and the tools of discernment. And not putting up with any attempt to manipulate the dialogue, subtle or up front. Alas, even that doesn't work very well anymore, as some people become ever better at manipulating words and images to tell self-serving lies about God.

It adds up to this :

- apostasy is treason.
- blasphemy is insult.
- heresy is teaching a lie.

You know that it's wrong when it's done to you. It's even more wrong when it's done to God.

Holism

holism : **involving the whole** [Greek *holos* (whole)]. Holistic approaches treat something as a whole rather than examining its parts as if they were separate things. God treats us in that way. There are some activities, ways of thinking, and ways of living that do harm to the whole. For instance, pollution of one place is pollution of the whole earth, and it eventually starts spreading around. Some amount of tension and disbalance can be holistic; a tooth is 'disbalanced' in favor of calcium and hard materials but that makes it able to do a task that is healthy for the whole body. We can appreciate difference as potentially healthy, but some kinds of difference are not; for instance, cancerous cells will kill the whole, as will cells that have taken in certain viruses, and invader cells from the outside that have no commitment to the whole. Paul looked at the Church holistically, by likening it to a whole body in which the parts have to work together in order for it to function; in that sense it is one life. In history, God works mostly through little things whose effects add up.

Hope

Hope : **confidently expecting something good to come in the future**. (One does not hope for what one already has, though one can hope it continues.)

As usual, the Bible describes it, and says what it is there for. What God's followers hope for is that God's will be done on earth as in heaven. Or, said another way, the Christian hopes for the fruition of what has already begun, the full arrival of God's Kingdom. We pin our hopes on the God of that Kingdom.

Paul wrote in Romans (several places) about what hope leads to or makes : patience, courage, joy. Hope makes us stable (Colossians 1:23), and we are saved in hope (Romans 8:24). It is one of the three things that last : faith, hope, and love.

What we hope in are God's promises, and especially the fact that God delivers on His promises. The promises of God to us are found all over Scripture. Hoping in the wrong thing or the wrong source is eternally fatal. (It is also a kind of idolatry.)

Humble

to be **humble** : In Christian terms, to be humble is **to have an honest view of yourself**. It comes from the same root as 'humility', but also the same root as 'humiliation'. Being humble is not about being humiliated. It's about understanding that you are not *more* important or *more* valuable or *more* loved by God than anyone else, that God has given each of them something special. Christian pride is about understanding that you are not *less* important or valuable or totally loved by God than anyone else, that the Spirit has given you something special, too. Humble people have the right frame of mind for putting to use the gifts that God has given them. If you think yourself 'better than', you aren't likely to use the gifts to serve others; if you think yourself 'better than', you harbor the desire or hope that you can get others to serve you. If you follow Jesus, you follow a God who dined with tax collectors and traitors, washed his followers' feet, and died like a criminal with criminals. There is no 'better than' in that. This is the heart of being humble : serving a God who *is* greater than us.

Imagination

imagination : **the mind's testing ground**. By imagining, you can find out how things might become, even if you know through ordinary thinking that they can't be that way. Imagination finds ways, possibilities. Imagination is not reality, but it usually has at least some way of being reflected in reality. (When it doesn't, it's mere fantasy.) You can use your imagination to set yourself into what happens in the Bible, and thus let it have more impact on you. God's got a great imagination, though one that's a bit strange. (Would *you* have imagined a giraffe?) God imagined us before creating us. God uses imagination to make a way out of no way, to make good come from evil. When the Holy Spirit is inspiring someone, that person's imagination is engaged and running at full speed, taking them in new and unexpected directions.

Imagination can also give us a wholesale escape from truth. (For instance, TV shows are often vehicles for a craving to escape reality, triggering our imagination both when the show is on and when it's off.) Today's world has become so good and so thorough at the art of triggering escape that it is easier than ever to trick ourselves or let others trick us. Our imagination becomes trained to go in that same escapist rut, and is thus crippled in helping us deal with real life. We need less to 'expand' our imagination than to **redirect** it toward grasping a full vision for the real world.

Irenic

irenic : **bringing or causing peace** [from Greek *eirene*]. Also : frithening, peace-making, bridging, shalom, reconciliation. When something is done in an "irenic" way, it is being done in a way that helps find common ground, creates understanding and appreciation, or soothes sore points of dispute. Paul was calling Christians to be irenic when he wrote of his ministry as a "ministry of reconciliation". There are times when "irenic" is not what is needed; there's a time to break eggs to make the meal. But an "irenic" approach is usually more helpful and more in line with the ways of the Kingdom.

Joy

joy [< French < Latin *gaudere* (to rejoice)] **intense, ecstatic, or exultant happiness or pleasure**. Joy runs deeper than mere pleasure; especially in a spiritual context, it runs deep into the the core of us, and radiates throughout. It is the response of something deep in the soul to someone (such as God, or a

loved one) or something (such as liberation) supremely, even overpoweringly, wonderful.

The Bible sometimes defines by way of description rather than a "this is what it means" approach. So it is with 'joy'. In the Bible, there are several portraits of joy. One of the truest joys is in Psalm 113:9, the barren woman who becomes a mother. Isaiah 51 describes joy as a crown, and speaks of a future day when those whom the Lord ransoms will be "overtaken" by joy (v. 11b). In 1 Peter 1:8, loving and believing in Christ gives people the "inexpressible" joy of salvation. In 1 John 1:4, John says that writing about the fellowship with God and believers to believers makes joy "complete". For me, one of the most joyous things of life is singing; the prophet understood this in Isaiah 52:9, "songs of joy" over Jerusalem's return. A return to health also gives joy, and Philip caused much joy in Samaria by way of healings (Acts 8:4-8). And joy under fire, overflowing into generosity, was the hallmark of the Macedonian churches (2 Corinthians 8:2), something Paul treasured. The poverty and trust of the Macedonians fits well with what Habakkuk wrote in a psalm about when Judah was being conquered (Habakkuk 3, esp. v.17-18) : though there is nothing left, there is joy in knowing Who will save him.

The joy of God's kingdom is the subject of the parable of the Hidden Treasure (Matthew 13:44). In a section often used in liturgies, Psalm 51:10-12 is a prayer to God, in part, for the presence of the Spirit, and for joy to be restored to the pray-er of the psalm. God takes special joy in the person who turns away from evil and turns to God. This is apparent in the parables of the Lost Sheep and Lost Coin (Luke 15:1-10); these are immediately followed by the parable of the lost son (Luke 10:11-32), with the father's joyous mad dash to get to his son upon seeing the son far down the road on the way home.

There is also the joy of fools, rejoicing over the wrong things (Matthew 13:20, Proverbs 15:21, Revelation 18:7; also Isaiah 8:6, and in numerous OT passages where Israel's enemies are pictured as either celebrating or gloating over Israel's fall).

Again, all this doesn't define joy, it *sets the context* for joy, or *gives cause* for joy.

Love

love : I'd be a fool if I tried to define love. I can point you to its source, and say "God is love". I can point you to Jesus on the cross, and say, "this is what love does" (John 3:16). I can point you all around, for signs of God's love. I can point at you, and have you think about those you love, and those that have given you love. And I can point to Paul, in 1 Corinthians 13:1-13. All this should be enough; leave the rest for the dictionary folks. Now, **go do it**.

Mantra

mantra : A word. Your guru gives you a mantra that will reveal insights into your life. The word is to be repeated constantly while in a meditative state, which gets one into the vibrations which bring one into more of a union with the divine inside of you. (Either that, or you're coaxing your brain into something.)

Material and Materialism

material : **made up of matter** or that which can be felt; stuff-ness, object-ness; being of a tangible/physical nature. It's often said to be opposed to 'spiritual', 'supernatural', 'ideal', 'emotional', or

'intellectual'. To Christians, there is no wall of separation between material and spiritual; they draw life from each other. Indeed, if that wasn't so, we'd be wasting our time with all this 'spirituality' because we'd have no way to really get to it. All that lives is in some sense spiritual, yet also in some sense material. In that way, we're not different than Jesus. When the Kingdom comes, it is a material Kingdom as well as a spiritual one.

materialism: the belief that **the bodily senses, used with human reasoning, can find everything that exists.** (Except that other glove that you lost....) Spiritual-talk is without meaning to a materialist, because 'spirituality' is about the undetectable and the invisible, and there are no such things for a materialist. Thus, material stuff is all that matters. A materialist considers us all material beings and nothing more or less. A materialist can have values, and can have an ethic and can live according to it. (Some radio preachers miss this when they criticize materialists.) However, in the end there is no meaning because there is nothing ultimate. Material just is, and because there's nothing else to measure it by, it can only have the value we attach to it. It's lonely, cold, and fatalistic. There is no 'underlying', no 'deep'. No religion is truly materialistic, though Marxism tried to be. Any spirituality worth looking at is anti-materialist -- spirituality comes from reaching for the realm of the unseen and the ultimate. It grows from the sense that there's more to life than meets the eye. Christian spirituality springs from understanding that nothing is purely material, yet all that we encounter is in some way material. God, who is spirit, loves us through material things or 'means'. (This view is sometimes called 'incarnational' or 'sacramental'.) So Christianity can be both 'spiritual' and honestly 'material' -- but never, ever 'materialist'.

Mercy

"I have always found that mercy bears richer fruits than strict justice."

----- **Abraham Lincoln**, from a speech in Washington D.C. in 1865, said as he was preparing the United States for life after the Civil War.

mercy : [< Medieval Latin *merces* (compassionate action) < *merx* (merchandise)] compassionate action or treatment; relief from distress; a tendency from personal character to act compassionately. In scripture and in the Christian faith, it means **the giving of grace to people who don't deserve it**, or showing compassion to someone you have power or authority over. There is purpose for God's mercy :

- We can change.
- God wants us to be welcomed into the Kingdom.
- Mercy is part of the character of God, and God wants it to be part of our character.

Mercy is grace's effect on justice. It is rooted in love : God shows mercy because God loves us and forgives us. Mercy is cause for hope. It is what stands behind the Christian faith. It is limited only by justice, which in this context is an end to mercy for someone(s) in order that there be mercy for the rest. A biblical instance of the term "mercy" is found in 1 Timothy 1:16 :

"But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the foremost [of sinners], Christ Jesus might display his limitless patience, to make me an example for those who would believe on him for eternal life."

Metaphysical

metaphysical : **that which is beyond** (< Greek *meta*) **what can be grasped by the senses** (the realm the Greeks called *physikos*). The term comes from Aristotle, who meant by it some form of theological philosophy, but it means something else in today's world. The modern media often use the word to mean the same thing as 'spiritual'. There's lots of overlap, but the two words refer to different things. 'Spiritual' refers to the realm of spirits. 'Metaphysical' refers to that which underlies everything, of which spirits are a part. 'Metaphysics' deals with questions like, "what is real?", "what is important?" and "what is true?". Metaphysics is about ultimate mysteries, and so when people talk about metaphysics, they often end up talking in circles or (worse) out of both sides of their mouth. We can't help it, really; we've used up our ability to describe the awesome, mysterious stuff we're talking about.

For metaphysics to be meaningfully Christian, **it has to deal with, and be expressed in terms of, the stuff of the world we sense and touch and feel**. To use the traditional Christian term, it must be **"incarnated"**. The root of all-that-is, namely God, came to breathe, eat, walk, hurt, and die in this world, as Jesus of Nazareth. This is how God operates. If we are to follow God, then when we speak of that which underlies this world, we must take it through the same path, expressing it and living it out in ways that matter for and have impact on the stuffy world we live in. If God does it that way, so must we, or we are not following the way of Christ.

Metempsychosis

metempsychosis :

1. the depression that sets in when a single guy realizes that he's already asked out all the women around him, and has gotten nowhere;
2. a word designed for the purpose of tormenting spelling bee participants;
3. A belief in which **the soul goes from one body to another**, until either time ends or the soul is made pure or complete. Metempsychosis is older than recorded history, and was probably a feature of the early religions of the Indo-Europeans and South Asians. It is fully present in Hinduism and Buddhism. In Judaism, Kabbalists developed a limited form of it. In Greek philosophy, Plato was its best-known supporter; it was Plato's followers who first used the term. Through Plato, it influenced some early Christians, including Origen. Yet, Augustine of Hippo argued vigorously against it, and it was eventually condemned at the Council of Florence in 1439.

Metempsychosis conflicts with Christian belief in resurrection of the entire person, a belief that does not separate the body and the spirit from the soul. Metempsychosis treats the body as a 'container' that's not an essential part of who we are. Thus it stands with gnosticism in not treating the physical world and bodily life as being real or of any ultimate value.

Monism

monism : the belief that all that exists is rooted in one single essence or reality : **all is one**, we are united with each other, and the essence of that oneness is what we call 'god'. The Christian faith, like the Jewish faith it sprang from, has no problem in acknowledging that all things are somehow linked in a commonness we call 'creation', and that all people are dependent on one another. Where the Jewish, Muslim and Christian faiths differ sharply from monism is that God is someone entirely Other than us, and Other than anything else God created. The link that ties together all that exists is God's continuing love for us. And, while we humans are all linked together by that love and by our common sinful state, we are each distinctive persons, each capable of being linked together by what we call 'relationships'. In some religions, the highest level is a loss of personal identity into the Absolute. In Christianity, it is

transformation of the individual into the fully-developed distinct person God intends us to be, within a relationship to God and to the rest of God's creation. It takes distinct beings to be in a relationship; only such beings can really **love**.

-- >> **Guru to deli man: 'Make me one -- with everything.'**

Nirvana :

1. the band that made grunge music popular;
2. where male "Wheel of Fortune" fans most want to be;
3. **A state of existence where the burning itch of being and doing is finally relieved.** It's sometimes called 'bliss', but to Christians it sounds a lot like death.

Numerology

numerology : This belief is based on the truth that **numbers (like words) bear powerful symbolic meanings**. Numerology pushes this so far as to claim that the number itself bears the actual power of the One (or Force) that lies behind the symbol. According to numerologists, if you know how to use the numbers, you know how to control that force. Those who dabble in the Jewish Qabbalah or are immersed in the Hal Lindsay method of interpreting Revelation and Daniel are heavily influenced by numerology. So are many gambling addicts and Powerball freaks.

Numinous

numinous : filled with the sense of the **presence of divinity**. [Lat. *numen* (spiritual force of a place/object/being)] In Christianity, God is everywhere, but there are certain places at certain times where the sense of God's presence, and its special-ness, is stronger than at other times and places. (There is also the sense of God's deliberate absence, which the Lord sometimes does to remind people of God's usual presence.)



Om

om :

1. An Aussie's 'ouse
2. a unit of electrical resistance
3. A meaningless symbolic syllable which helps a person to momentarily blank out their mental processes and thus achieve a greater oneness with the universe. Its users are to so love the blissful blankedness that they seek (or non-seek?) to be further and further blanked until their minds can no longer interfere with their oneness.
4. (This is to say, there *is* no definition of "om".)

Paradox

paradox :

1. a situation where **two facts/situations are opposite or contradictory, and a link between them can seem absurd, yet both can sometimes be true at the same time, or can follow one upon the other.** Often the paradoxes involve how we think of things; for instance, when something ends, something else begins, so endings are beginnings too, and beginnings are endings.

A '**paradoxical tension**' is when the two contradictory truths hold each other accountable; in a sense, each keeps the other true. For example, one truth is that we are called on to be excellent, to do the best we can, to stretch our abilities for our own good and for others. If we don't, it renders us unable to be much help for anyone, no matter what is going on inside us. Another truth, though, is that we are not to measure our worth or our relationship with God by what we do or how well we do it. If we value ourselves on how well we do things, we'd either be ashamed or self-righteously proud. If we see others on such a scale, we pass judgement or idolize. The two truths (about excellence and true worth) hold each other in balance, giving us an attitude that is balanced and real.

2. a medical practice. (..... yeah, I know; it's an old one

"A real Christian is an odd number. He feels supreme love for One whom he has never seen; talks familiarly every day to Someone he cannot see; expects to go to heaven on the virtue of Another; empties himself in order to be filled; admits he is wrong so he cannot be declared right; goes down in order to get up; is strongest when he is weakest; richest when he is poorest and happiest when he feels the worst. He dies so he can live; forsakes in order to have; gives away so he can keep; sees the invisible; hears the inaudible; and knows that which passes knowledge." -- **A. W. Tozer**

Pantheism

pantheism :

1. The God of Fried Food
2. **the belief that all things (or nearly so) are gods**, good, evil or mixed. This is different from the Christian belief that created beings are something different than God. In that context, when Christians speak of 'oneness' with God, it is a relational oneness or unity (like with a family, a marriage or a friendship), **not** a oneness or equality of kind. When Christians (especially the Eastern Orthodox) speak of people becoming gods, it is not an equality with the Creator, but being adopted by the Creator by way of the love of Christ and the leading of the Spirit, only partially brought about before God's Kingdom comes in full. They are talking about our working with the Spirit to have us take on **the Creator's** drive, character and purpose. They are not talking about some spiritual or theological fairy dust that makes you into a part of the Creator.

Most pantheisms have a pecking-order, probably because they realized that if everyone is equally a god, then, in effect, noone is really a god - the term loses its meaning.

Paranormal

paranormal :

1. at its root : Greek *para-* (beyond) + *normal* (that which is normative or that which follows the general rule).

2. **that which doesn't happen within the normal limits of material living or which can't be explained by the laws of nature or physics.**
3. A catch-all category of popular thought, designed to mix together all that is weird, whether fairly or unfairly, related or unrelated. Also known as 'tabloid fodder' or 'woo-woo', and very much the rage on the Web. Are there paranormal occurrences? Christianity says yes, constantly, but not most of what you usually think of as paranormal. Put your faith not in the paranormal, but the God who is at the root of whatever real stuff there is, whether with us or beyond us.

For more, check here.

Propitiation

propitiation [from Latin *propitius* (favorable), from *pro-* (forward) + *-pitius*, (to eagerly volunteer or give of oneself) -- lit. 'rushing forward (to the altar or throne)' -- to please the angry god or ruler] : **To appease**. Many Christians (including myself) really don't like to use this word, because the God of the Bible is unlike idols and emperors who could be bribed or kissed up to with gifts, offerings and such. The wrath of this God is the anger of heartbreak. God doesn't want appeasement. God wants real justice, self-sacrificial service, and love. The problem is, such things are so difficult that they never come about without cost. The bigger the wrongs, the harder the changes, the bigger the cost. Picture then the cost of all wrongs bundled up and tied together. How much can even a loving God take? But God's love is so strong, and God's awareness of our limitations is so clear, that God came to be among us, knowing that He would be made to pay what for us is the ultimate cost - death. Thus, for Christians, 'propitiation' is **what Christ did by suffering and dying on the cross**. This act actually addresses the problem itself, and thus is *not* an 'appeasement'. Christ brought the pus to a head, and then lanced the wound.

Psychic

psychic :

1. As a noun : a medium or channeler, one through whom the dead or the other inhabitants of the spirit world are supposed to speak. As to its value, why is so much of what the supposed spirit beings say so shallow, trivial, and forgettable?
2. As an adjective : paranormal matters of the mind are described as 'psychic' phenomena.
3. Also used for those dial-up psychic services seen on TV. Those are (according to the fine print disclaimer) for entertainment purposes.

Found on line :

>>>> I almost had a psychic girlfriend, but she left me before we met.

Psychokinesis

psychokinesis : **mind over matter**. It's when someone wastes their mental effort and time on bending forks instead of helping provide food for people who have no forks and have nothing to put on them if they did.

Redeem and Redemption

redeem and **redemption** [< Latin *redimere* (to redeem) < *emere* (to buy)] **To recover ownership by way of payment.** In religion, it means to make good on the price of the consequences of sin or error, and thus to make the person free from the captivity due to that sin. In Christianity, it is a primary way to describe what Jesus has done -- his death was the price of our sin (1 Corinthians 6:20), releasing us from sin's captivity.

Reincarnation

reincarnation : In this belief, **the soul is a vagabond. It gets dis-embodied and re-embodied again and again in various sorts of creatureliness,** until it is finally blown into the Absolute, whatever that is (which may indeed be nothing at all). The Asian idea of 'soul' (as distinct from Greek, Jewish, and African ideas) has some of the attributes of what in other ways of speaking would be called 'spirit' or 'personality'. But like the Greek idea (and **not** like Jewish or African or New Testament Christian), it is separate, the core of what makes someone a person.

Qoheleth ('the Teacher', in Ecclesiastes) teaches that life is brief, and then comes to an end. Ezekiel (chap.18) teaches that it is a sad loss when the wicked die, for that robs them of the chance of ever changing to follow God -- that's because there is no other field of play for one's faith in God than life. The scriptural picture of both Sheol and Hades are without return; they are cut off by a great vault and the door is locked. Resurrection is different from reincarnation in that there is only one death; Jesus opened the vault door to rescue His own, never to die again. Thus, there is no cycling of the soul, just a permanent death or permanent rescue and life.

Relativism

relativism :

(1) when the members of your family keep butting into your life (for instance, when your mother moves in and your sister borrows money from you). See also 'nepotism', in which you are foolish enough to hire them.

(2) The idea that "**all truth is relative**". The scientific root of this is Einstein's theory of relativity, which states that the difference between mass and energy (which are all that materially exists) is just a conversion factor related to time. This means that all that exists changes in relation to all else that exists. Treated as an -ism or ideology, this means that the very idea of a definitive or absolute anything (even of an absolute, unconditional God, or a permanent or definitive revelation from that God) is seen as a harmful fiction. In relativism, there *can* be one who is a 'god' when compared to you, *and* a briefly-effective revelation of how that god is or was at a given moment. But it's a sometimes-God who kind-of-reveals sort-of-truths, who may love us in widely-varied amounts most of the time. In relativism, there is no such thing as clear morality, no such thing as authoritative or firm truth, and right and wrong are relative figures of speech which may or may not have short-term meaning but no lasting meaning.

If the Bible is right, the word 'relative' is not quite the right term here. It's better to say that "**all truth is in relationship**". The God of the Bible is in a relationship with a people (the Jews), called a "covenant". The Torah was given that we might know what it takes to live in relationship with each other in accord

with God. The actions of God's Son, Jesus Christ, are done to restore the broken relationship of all people and all creation with God. If God is a trinity, then there is a unique kind of relationship *within* God, though none of us are in any position to describe it. Also, it's said that "God is love" (1 John 4:8), but 'love' is a relational term that is meaningless outside of relationship. (You don't just 'love'; you love *someone* or *something*.) With love, the relationship itself becomes key to the self-definition of those who love. Prayer is the communication through which this relationship works.

Remember

to remember : **To not be held hostage to the now**. To be able to follow through on the greatness of past times, or to reject the sins of old when others repeat them today. To draw on the emotional impact of past love to help you through the dry times. If you do not remember, you cannot learn, and you are left unable to use the knowledge you might already have had. When Jesus broke the bread on that last supper with his disciples, he is reported to have said to do this "in remembrance of me". You can't follow a Christ you forget in your daily life.

Respect

respect. [< Latin *re-* (back, again) + *specere* (to look)] to look back at or refer back to > to be worth looking back at or returning to > to be worthy of special attention > to be esteemed. Thus, as a noun, the quality of being held to be of high value or esteem. Let Aretha spell it out for you.

Sacerdotal

sacerdotal [< Latin *sacerdotalis* (priestly)] Priestly. It also describes ideas which stress how important a priest is. "**Sacerdotalism**" is the belief, in any religion, that **a priest has been given the special authority to act as a mediator between God and humans**. In Protestant Christianity, there are no go-betweens, because each believer has the Holy Spirit in them. The Holy Spirit brings Christ to them, so the connection is already there. Thus, in some sense, all believers can be go-betweens for themselves and each other. A 'minister' is a servant, teacher of the faith, and coach of the faithful. While they're not mediators more than anyone else, they do have special responsibility to tend to the spirits of the whole body of believers, and God gives the gifts needed for carrying out that responsibility. The Roman Catholic tradition has 'priests'; they are not supposed to be seen as better or more Godly than others, but their role in the sacraments give them a go-between's role, as representatives of Christ's body on earth (the Church) and thus of Christ. The difference is especially noticeable in confession, Eucharist, and last rites.

Sciolic and Sciolism

sciolic : the quality of being **full of**, or being **built upon, superficial knowledge** (like much of theology, ancient and modern). Synonyms : "full of bull---t", "GIGO", "ruddy rubbish".

sciolism : **superficial** knowledge, especially when it's shown off.

Sect and Sectarian

Sect : it sounds like dissect and section, and it should, because it comes from the same Latin root word, meaning 'to cut into parts'. A sect, in its more general sense, is a **a group that broke off of (or was thrown out of) another larger group for some specific reason**. Such groups are usually small, but that's not always the case. Anglicans were a Roman Catholic sect, Methodists were an Anglican sect, Nazarenes were a Methodist sect. Christianity was a Jewish sect. The term should not be used after the group has established its own clear identity and place as a part of society over time. When that has happened, their place in society is no longer based on the split or separation. Thus the above examples *were* sects, but no longer are. The act of splitting off almost always involves turmoil, and sometimes blood can be shed even among the most peaceable and well-meaning groups. Thus, there is no such thing as 'safe sects'.

In the social sciences, the term 'sect' has a more specific meaning. It's applied to a group that rejects the established social order to form its own community built upon specific principles or persons. This, too, can be dangerous for all. But a sect may have its benefits for the society, if it can remain relatively peaceable. The sociologist Ernst Troeltsch wrote that sects could lead the overall religious community (which in this way of speaking is called 'church') into change and renewal; the sect can be a ***witness*** for a faithfully different way to live.

'**Sectarian**' means that the matter is of concern mostly to those who are either part of the sect or of the group it split from. To others, a 'sectarian' matter can be unimportant, weird, puzzling, or scary.

Self

self : **the whole of what makes up the entity called 'me'**. There are many ways to describe it so we can make some sort of sense of its inner workings (for instance, the Greek body/soul distinction). But to a Christian, these ways of speaking are just that; they have a function, but the core truth and mystery is that the self is **one whole thing**, which is a body / soul / spirit / whatever all in one. Beyond that, Christians believe that the self is **not a fully separate entity**. Each 'self' is a part of God's creation and a world of other beings. Each baptized believer is a part of the larger social organism known as the Body of Christ (the church universal). Like it or not, the bounds are so fuzzed and the links are so plentiful that all 'solo' concepts like 'individuality' and 'privacy' and 'self-esteem' can't even approach being absolute. This doesn't mean you are not yourself, or that you are not responsible for yourself, or that each of us will eventually be blended into a glob of eternal goo. There really is a you, of indescribable worth. It just means that you *are not* (and *cannot* be, and *should not* be, and *must not* be) the center of the universe, around which all else spins. Others are really 'other', but not in a way that their good doesn't matter for you. We're not identical, but connected by way of relationship.

Sinner

sinner : in ordinary speech, it means **someone who is deeply depraved, evil, bad**. However, that's not what the Christian faith means by the word. In Christian belief, '**sinner**' is **not a moral description, but a relational one**. Sin is the broken state of our relationship with God. There's a distance, a gap between us (with the rest of the created universe) and God, a distance far too wide for us to cross over, a distance bridged only by God's act of coming over onto our side of the gap through Jesus Christ (God-with-us) and the Spirit that Jesus sent in His place. The nicest, kindest, most virtuous of us is a sinner. The vilest, darthest, crookedest, most evil of us is a sinner. Everyone in between is a sinner. And each and all of

these sinners are loved by God.

Perhaps it would be best to use a word which lacks the moralistic overtone of 'sinner'. That overtone undercuts the Christian message of grace for those on our human side of the divide. Yet, the words often put forward to replace it fail to catch enough of the negative quality of that divide : it is very very bad (in fact, deadly) for us and is far from what God wants for us. Because the broken relationship is so bad for us, it has profound and deep effects on all of us and all we do. It is a part of our identity and character (that which makes each of us who/what we are), whether we want it to be or not.

Soul

soul : that which makes a person the distinct person they are. This would include our sense of identity, but also what makes up that identity, most especially what arouses our emotions, or awakens our spiritual or moral force and sense of destiny or purpose. It is where our freedom is rooted. (This is a Greco-Roman way of putting it. The Hebrew terms usually used in the Bible for soul and spirit have broader meanings, almost like the later idea of 'self'.) In many religions, the soul is seen as immortal -- that is, it's a side of you that does not come to an end. Christians believe that the soul is brought back together again with its body when God's Reign comes in full.

Spirit

spirit : that aspect of our being which **animates** us -- makes us live, move, change, do, be active, feel, think, interact. God put that into us. To be 'dispirited' is to hide ourselves away and let it just ebb out of us, like an untended wound leaks blood. To be 'inspired' is for the Holy Spirit to quicken that aspect of us, to power it up and get it going at peak effectiveness. (Think of God doing the original CPR, in Genesis (2:7), and again in a vision in Ezekiel (37:1-10.)) In Christian belief, God is a spirit, and is the source and creator of all other spirits.

Spiritual

spiritual : regarding **matters of the spirit(s)** or matters that are sacred. More than ever before, 'spiritual' has become the word of choice for vague, foggy, and shrouded things. To Christians, 'spiritual' means that which causes this world of 'stuff' or material to come alive, to move, to change or resist change, to take action (even when the action taken is deliberately not to take action). The spiritual realm underlies all that happens in the material world. The 'material' world is where the spiritual realm applies itself. Thus, the two worlds are different angles of the same reality, not different realities.

Supernatural

supernatural : regarding that which is **not from the observable, tangible or measurable universe**, especially regarding divine things /beings /actions /realms.

Syncretism

syncretism : When someone takes a pile of unrelated religious and philosophical ideas, stories, and symbols, then dumps all of them together into a sink, adds water, and stirs. The result is about as spiritually enlightening as drinking dish water.

Synergism

synergism : from the Greek *sun-* (together) + *ergos* (working). Synergists believe that in spiritual things humans are not wholly dead to being good, even if perhaps almost so; that human beings have a limited but nonetheless natural -- not Spirit-given -- capacity to work with God to make themselves holy. For them, the Spirit helps us to make ourselves like Christ in this life. This makes salvation at least partly into a work of the human will rather than solely a free gift of grace from God. Synergism may convey what a person **senses** is happening to them, but it does not convey what is **actually** happening. It is what inner change looks like from where we're sitting. But we're too close to what's going on to be able to see the real picture. To get beyond this, we must get outside of ourselves, and into the full Scriptural vision of what God is working toward. One of the best and most faithfully Christian synergists was the great Catholic scholar Erasmus, who lived in Reformation times and got into a famous dispute with Luther over the powers of the human will.

Tantra

tantra :

1. what you have to cope with when you're taking care of two or more young children;
2. **Hindi sayings about practices which lead one to enlightenment.** But if you can figure out what the tantra have to do with daily living, you must already be very enlightened.

Tautology

Tautological and circular thinking : When philosophers and theologians get to do enough thinking or talking, they eventually run themselves in a circle. It doesn't usually mean that's the way it really is, it just means that either (a) they've tripped over a paradox; or (b) words and thoughts have just simply run their course on the matter. They've bumped their brains on the ceiling of a mystery, but don't want to admit it, so they keep talking. It's when two different things are described as being the same, or when reasoning runs in a circle. Either they've 'proven' the equality of unequal things, or they're doing the philosophical equivalent of dividing by zero. One can only climb out of this rut by getting practical.

For instance, some liturgical specialists have talked so thickly about how the Spirit leads us to do what we do in worship that they forget there's actual people in worship. They are a very, very small step from the circular idea of Christ the puppeteer making worshippers tell Him how great He is : God praising Godself. Or, take Meister Eckhart, the spiritual philosopher, who stated that God is enjoying the Godself in all things. That sort of god is a self-obsessed, vain and egotistical character, one who probably thinks this song is about him. The Bible bears witness to a very different God : a suffering servant, a bestower of blessings, the Other-For-Others who sent the stern 'tough love' words of the

Prophets, a God who in all things is enjoying those who are **other**. God does not love just whatever of God is in you. God loves whatever of **you** that's in you. God is loving, and often but not always 'enjoying', all things and all creatures both for what they are and for what they can become.

Teleology

teleology [< Greek *teleios* (complete, finished)]. When looking at something's 'teleology', we're trying to find out what leads it to where it goes to when it's finished. This can be thought of as its purpose, or as its destination, or as result. When Jesus said on the cross, "it is finished", it was 'teleological' -- this moment was the purpose of his life, his culmination, what a life such as his led to, and also (what would ordinarily be called) its end or completion, in death. Christians believe the surprise, that there was and is more to come after that. Christians believe that time itself has an end or purpose, namely to bring us back into the arms of the One beyond time, the One who is never finished yet always complete, the One who will complete us. Everything that Christians do in faith is done to further that purpose.

Telepathy

telepathy : **making someone feel or think something from far away**. (Think, for instance, of how our mothers can make us feel guilty no matter where we are.) If telepathic ability does exist in all or even some of us, could it be that God has turned it off for our own good? **Could it be that we're to relate to each other based on trust and cooperation and love rather than by reading data from minds or directly planting thoughts to cause people to act?** And what would happen to the glories of symbolism, or of art, if we were feeding directly to the brain without going through something people had to interpret?

Temperance

temperance : **doing things in moderation; not being at a fevered emotional pitch; doing and responding in a measured and moderated manner**. Where is temperance? :

- in diplomacy
- where people listen
- where people turn the other cheek
- in the way a team works together
- lovers when they deal with each other's differences.

Where is temperance absent?

- at many soccer games;
- in the Israel-Palestinian conflict;
- among drivers in traffic jams;
- in troubled, argumentative courtships or marriages;
- in most personal discussions about religion or politics.

Temperance is one of the seven classic virtues, and also a spiritual practice that reflects the gift of self-control. It is being in enough control of our lives that we can dedicate it to God, rather than the pursuit of addictions or excess or what someone else is coaxing us into craving. Its absence leads to death, injustice, vengeance, fear, and loss of control. A system of law is, among other things, a way for

people in a society to be temperate with each other when dealing with injustices and with people that can't be trusted. They trust the temperate responses of law in part because they know that doing otherwise would create far more injustice by creating a spiral of rising vengeance. Without temperance, we do harsh actions to each other that are extreme and unloving, which cause other extreme and unloving actions to happen, and so on, until it reaches someone who is determined to be temperate. In some traditions, 'temperance' has meant refusing to drink alcohol. The Christian works to encourage (in a *temperate* way) moral awareness so that people of the faith, and hopefully others, will *choose* not to act in an extreme way.

In the Revelation passages against the Laodicean church, it is said that God will spit them out because they are lukewarm. This is not about temperance, but about a lack of caring, commitment, or focus.

Theodicy

theodicy : the attempt to rationally justify the belief that God is good despite the presence and strength of evil in the world. Why would such a good God allow such deep evil, such searing pain, such powerful oppression, such subtle deception, such waste of time, resources, and lives, such murder and mayhem? It is a mystery that has eluded the very best of logicians. Even the most blissful of Christians has to deal with this, eventually. It is, as Mr. Spock would say, illogical. Yet it is precisely this belief that God is good and is working for good in a world full of evil that is core to the Christian's belief. And there are so many signs of goodness, and even of a good God, that an honest non-believer has to deal with it eventually. Forgiveness is illogical. It is also available.

Theophany

theophany : Greek, from *theo-* (God) + *-phanein* (to show oneself, appear). A theophany is when God shows up, mostly in a majestic, Almighty-ish manner. That is, in a theophany it is rather impossible to miss that it is **God** who is there, and not a stand-in or a projected image. In the ancient world, the appearances of gods was said to provoke awe, quivering, total fear, and falling as if dead, preceded by earthquakes and thunderstorms. The small quiet voice that Elijah heard qualifies as a theophany for the Jewish or Christian or Sufi-Moslem God, as do other small-scale personal encounters; but even there, it is not what the term usually refers to.

For Eastern Orthodox Christians, it also refers to the holy day of the **Baptism of Jesus**. At that time, the Spirit descended upon Him in the form of a dove, and a voice from God spoke : This is my son. Thus, it was God showing Himself in human form, Jesus. Reflecting back on that, church thinkers noticed that the entire Trinity showed itself to those present (and to us who read it in the Gospel) at that moment, in some way.

Tradition

tradition : [from the Latin *trans-* (crossing, spanning, going beyond) + *dare* (to give)] that which is handed down from generation to generation; a characteristic manner, method, style, or way of life that is not new with the generation that is doing it. Hebrew *qabbala* ; Greek *paradosis* . Christian tradition is founded on Jesus Christ, as described and told about in the New Testament. (Not that it begins there; Christian tradition begins where Jewish tradition begins, with Abraham. And it still draws from Jewish tradition, even today.) The core tradition is fixed. It's called the 'apostolic tradition' because it is the story

of Jesus that the apostles, His closest associates, handed down to us. (Whether they themselves actually wrote it down or not, they were the sources of both the story and its meaning.) From that foundation, other traditions developed : schools of thought, approaches to the faith, various forms of worship, morals, and lifestyle. Some of these developments have been rejected on the basis of the apostolic tradition; other developments have made the apostolic traditions fresh for changing times. Tradition is not all bad or good. As each generation adds its own layer of tradition, the new tradition might get in the way of seeing the original work, like layers of grime on the Sistine Chapel, pre-cleaning. Or it can enlighten and energize the original, like when a great storyteller passes along a great story.

Trauma

trauma : Experience of a loss of control due to sudden circumstances.

You feel you're at the mercy of something else around you. This can make you think and act weird, or to not think much at all and just react. We usually sort ourselves out after a short while, but often the effects linger. Trauma comes from the fear, the anger, the overload of trying to get enough control of your situation to make sure it stops happening. The healing that you need is often physical and psychological, but your spirit needs healing too. Key to that is the fact that God loves you. God doesn't want you to go around numbed by what has happened to you. The shellshock eventually fades; the overload eventually loads under again. Through people who care, those who enter trauma can learn to trust and to assert one's responsibility over life again. Through them, God restores the fruit of self-control.

Trust

'**Trust**' indicates a depth and a sense of assurance that is based on strong but not logically-conclusive evidence, **or** based on the character, ability, or truth that someone or something has shown over time or across situations. Trust makes for a sense of being safe or of being free of fear, enough so that one's focus can be on other matters because that matter is taken care of. It becomes easier to simply *enjoy* life.

No human is totally trustworthy.

No human is totally untrustworthy.

No human can always trust themselves.

No human is totally trusting of any one other person.

Trust is a risk. We leave ourselves open for loss. Betrayal of trust hurts so much because the lost sense of security multiplies the damage.

Some keys to building trust :

1. **Communicate.** Say accurately what you are doing, and don't assume others 'just know'. Also helpful : suggest some way they can help out.
2. **Do what you've communicated.** Nothing is more important to building trust than actions that match the words, non-verbal cues, and stated reasons. (I mean, actions that don't have to have 'spin' to make them seem like they match.)
3. **No scorekeeping.** Tit-for-tat is a game that does not help create a sense of trust. Quit reminding others of what they did wrong in the past. Focus on what's happening *now*.
4. **Look in the mirror.** Are you giving others reason to distrust you? Were you acting the same way as in a past instance that you were shown to be untrustworthy?
5. **Repetition.** Each time you act in a trustworthy manner, you earn more trust. After a while, the trust starts adding up. Be thorough about it : build trust in *every* matter, big or small.

6. **Show trust.** People who are trusted are more likely to trust. Most people actually are trustworthy in most matters most of the time. Trust them, and the trust may spread. (That doesn't mean *blind* trust, which is a way to become an untrustworthy person's enabler.)

As Martin Buber put it in *Two Types of Faith*, " [One can believe that God is and live in his back; he who trusts him lives in his face.](#)"

Universalism

universalism: A universalist (small-u) believes that all people will in the end come to the same state. It's been said in many ways over the years : "everyone will be saved", "all will become one", "all will totally cease to be", and so on. This can be treated in many ways. For instance, a Christian-oriented universalist believes that **in the end everyone will come to the presence of an all-embracing God who transforms everyone into goodness through divine love.** An example of this view was author George MacDonald. Most universalists eventually come to believe that since all will end up the same, then it does not matter which God you believe in, or even that you believe in anything. (That is not to say that they are immoral; they may have other ways of understanding good and evil, other reasons for loving people and doing what even Christians would call "good".)

This is a starkly different view of things than is found in the Bible. In the Bible, it matters whether you worship God or Baal or Mammon -- both for right now and for the hereafter. It matters whether you follow Jesus or reject Him -- both for right now and for the hereafter. The Christian faith is not without its legitimately universal side : God loves all, Jesus' death on the cross applies to all, ethnicity and gender don't matter. But not all people accept this gift -- indeed, some despise it. However you may envision 'salvation', one thing the New Testament makes clear : it is not yours except through Christ (Acts 4:12). People can refuse God, and the Bible makes very clear that there are serious eternal consequences to that choice.

Yogi

yogi [Sanskrit, from assumed IndoEuropean *yeug-* (to join together), akin to 'yoke']:

1. a former Yankee catcher known for his sayings of great wisdom;
2. a cartoon bear who taught us all how to steal lunch;
3. a **master of the Hindi spiritual disciplines (yoga) who teaches those disciplines to others.** They are the key to passing these disciplines down through the generations. Modern yogis often introduce their own variations, especially with meditative techniques. Yogis are said to have a spiritual power -- sometimes treated as a spiritess -- which is found in the base of the spine. (This is one of the reasons yogis care so much about how they sit.) They are also masters of theories about chakra and the balance of inner energies.

Personal site: <http://members.aol.com/rlongman1/longman.html>
<http://www.spirithome.com/sitemap.html> (Spirithome.com site map)
<http://www.spirithome.com/foreword.html> (about Spirithome.com)
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