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POCKET DICTIONARY OF
CHRISTIAN
SPIRITUALITY

Over 300 terms clearly
and concisely defined

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Biblical References and Abbreviations

All references to Scripture come from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), unless otherwise stated. They are used to illustrate the scriptural roots of beliefs, values, and practices related to Christian spirituality, rather than act as proofs of them.

The Hebrew Scriptures, known by Christians as the Old Testament, will be abbreviated as OT. The Christian Scriptures, known by Christians as the New Testament, will be abbreviated as NT.

In talking about spiritual formation, some foreign phrases (ancient and modern) are commonly used. In these references, abbreviations to other languages are as follows:

Aram. = Aramaic

Ger. = German

Gk. = Greek

Heb. = Hebrew

Kor. = Korean

Lat. = Latin

Old Eng. = Old English

A

abandonment, spiritual. A *detachment from the anxieties of the world and entrusting oneself wholly to God for the sake of spiritual *contemplation. Related terms include the renunciation of self-centeredness and disinterested *love for God, advocated for example, by seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French *quietists.

Abba (Aram., "father"). The intimate term for one's father that *Jesus Christ used for God. Although Jesus also used the Greek word *pater* to refer to his Father, the occasional appearance of this Aramaic word (transliterated into Greek) suggests it was his way of addressing God. The intimacy is thought to communicate a deeper, more filial relationship between ourselves and God. Later NT Christians also referred to God as *Abba*, showing that we may have the same kind of relationship with God as did Jesus (e.g., Romans 8:15). Spiritually, *Abba* helps Christians today to pursue God in a way that is filial, relational, and intimate.

abiding in Christ. Living in ways that acknowledge that *Jesus Christ is our source of spiritual power (John 15:4); Christians participate "'in Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:17), through the presence and power of the Holy *Spirit, and follow his teachings (1 John 2:27). Christians use the phrase to describe the proper place they should be spiritually in relationship with Jesus, both for their *salvation and spiritual growth.

absolution. The proclamation—for example, by a Roman Catholic or Orthodox priest—that the sins of a penitent have been forgiven by God after they have been *confessed and repented. Based on Matthew 18:18, a priest may choose to withhold absolution until a *penance (discipline) is completed, especially in cases of grave sin.

activist spirituality. A type of spirituality that emphasizes compassion and advocacy on behalf of those who are impoverished or unjustly treated, spiritually as in other ways—culturally, financially, and politically. Participation in compassion ministries and social activism is considered a heightened expression of Christian spirituality. Concerns of activist spirituality include advocacy for the poor, who have been ignored, marginalized, oppressed, and persecuted (*see* liberation).

asceticism. The practice of self-denial. Asceticism consists of extreme self-discipline for the sake of spiritual *purification, insight, and pursuit of other practices that enable Christians to abstain from physical and earthly concerns. Ascetics practice physical ascesis (i.e., self-denial) in aid of mental and spiritual ascesis, leading to tranquility as well as to *union (or communion) with God. Asceticism may be individual or collective. In the ancient church, there were various ways that Christians took “flight from the world” (Lat., *fuga mundi*). For example, *martyrs were viewed as those who most exemplified *fuga mundi*. After Constantine, *fuga mundi* expanded into communal withdrawal from the world, resulting in various *monastic movements.

ashram, Christian. Originally a monastic dwelling for Hindus. Catholic and Indian converts adopted them in emphasizing a similar lifestyle defined by external quiet, *simplicity, *meditation, and *worship. Christian ashrams—both Catholic and Protestant—became places of spiritual *retreat, or sometimes small communities in which members contribute to one another’s needs.

assurance of salvation. The confidence people have of their *salvation, attested to by God and other evidences. *Scripture promises that those who *repent and believe will receive eternal life; Scripture also says that the Holy *Spirit bears “witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (Romans 8:16). These assurances, along with other evidences that occur in the lives of believers, contribute to the confidence they may have for salvation—for example, “peace of God” (Philippians 4:7) and “*fruit of the Spirit” (Galatians 5:22-23). The assurance of salvation frees Christians to focus more on *spiritual formation and in expressing love to God and others. *See also* perseverance of the saints.

Augustinianism. The theology of Augustine of Hippo (354–430), which distinctively emphasizes the sovereignty of God, human depravity, and God’s unconditional decree of *salvation. In the fifth century, Augustine championed the biblical emphasis on salvation by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). He condemned the teachings of *Pelagius, whom Augustine

accused of works righteousness in regard to both salvation and *spiritual formation. Because God is sovereign, it is hubris (Gk., “pride”) on the part of people that they—as humans—contribute anything to the work of God. Lutheran and Reformed traditions have been greatly influenced by Augustinianism. *See also* semi-Augustinianism.

B

baptism. A *ritual of initiation into Christianity that involves water. In *Scripture, baptism occurs as a faithful act of obedience, and it serves to incorporate people into the *church. Some Christians consider baptism a *sacrament, which serves as a means of saving grace; other Christians consider baptism to be more of an ordinance, which serves as a symbol of *salvation. Jesus served as the model for participation in baptism, and baptism was repeatedly commanded of those who become part of the church. Sacramental views of baptism emphasize the spiritual empowerment mediated by participation in it. Ordinance-oriented views of baptism emphasize the unmerited favor of God’s *grace, and the ongoing spiritual empowerment available through the Holy *Spirit.

baptism, believer’s. The affirmation that only believers, who have reached an age of accountability (or *reason) and made a profession of *faith, should be baptized. Advocates for believer’s baptism argue that people experience the greatest spiritual benefit through their conscious *conversion and instruction in the meaning of baptism.

baptism, infant (or paedobaptism). The affirmation and practice that infants should be baptized, based on the *faith and authority of *churches to administer *sacraments. Advocates for infant baptism argue that people experience the greatest spiritual benefit through the faithful decision by parents and the church, emphasizing that *salvation is a gift, given by God’s *grace. There are biblical examples of entire households being baptized, presumably including children (e.g., Acts 2:38-39; 16:15). In both the Catholic and Orthodox traditions, biblical instruction is later given to those who are baptized as infants,

Prayer has been edited and revised many times, and in some churches has been replaced, for example, by the book titled *Common Worship*. But many Christians, both inside and outside of Anglicanism, continue to use the Book of Common Prayer as a guide for their personal *spiritual formation as well as for public worship.

bread. Religiously, unleavened bread was important for Judaism because of its use in celebrating Passover. With regard to *salvation, *Jesus Christ called himself the “bread of life” (John 6:35). Bread became ritualistically important for Christians when Jesus blessed and served bread to his disciples during their last supper together. Bread then became sacramentally important, along with *wine, in partaking of the *Eucharist (or *Lord’s Supper, *Communion). The use of bread in the Eucharist represents Jesus’ physical death and resurrection in order that people may be saved by *grace through *faith. The Catholic and Orthodox churches believe that the bread of the Eucharist becomes the actual body of Jesus through the calling down of the Holy *Spirit through the prayers of the priest. Protestants often talk about bread as a sign of Jesus’ body.

breath prayer. Repetition of breathy prayers, either of one’s own creation, from *Scripture, or from the *liturgy, in order to clear the mind of other thoughts and replace it with thoughts about God. The breath prayer may be inaccurately named; if prayer is talking to or with God, then breath prayer is, strictly speaking, not conversation but *meditation, with the exception of petitionary forms of the breath prayer. For instance, the *Jesus Prayer is an ancient form of breath prayer, and it is a *petition: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”

C

calendar, Christian (Christian Year, Church Year, or Liturgical Year). An annual calendar of seasons based on key events of the life, death, and resurrection of *Jesus Christ. These seasons include *Advent (and Christmas), Epiphany, *Lent, *Easter, and Ordinary Time (though certain names vary by tradition). Also included are major church events, *holy days, and the celebration

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