GLOSSARY OF TERMS
(EXPLICATIO TERMINORUM)

Aesthetics
The principles for judging beauty. Theology needs aesthetic criteria drawn from artistic, cultural, and contemplative experience, so as to appreciate the material images that manifest and communicate the spiritual and divine realities.

Agnosticism
The view that we cannot know anything with certainty about God, the ‘other’ world and the afterlife. In common parlance, the term covers various forms of religious scepticism.

Analogy
The use of a common term or known reality to designate other realities that are both similar and dissimilar with regard to the same point; e.g. anthropomorphic designations of the characteristics of God.

Analogy of Being
Analogy regulates talk about God in human words and indicates that not all information communicated in this way violates the absolute mystery of God.

Analogy of Faith
A term in Catholic theology to recall that a passage of scripture or an aspect of faith should be interpreted in the context of the one, whole and indivisible faith of the Church.

Analysis of Faith
Analysis Fidei – a study of the motives that lead to faith in God based on Revelation. The analysis of these motives shows that the auctoritas Dei revelantis (the authority of God who reveals) is the decisive factor in the act of faith.

Anonymous Christians
Karl Rahner’s term for those who are saved by Christ’s grace, even if (through no fault of their own) they remain unbaptised and outside the Christian community.

Anthropocentrism
An approach to theological questions that takes human experience as its point of departure and subsequent guide. Open to the risk of a purely humanist theology.

Anthropology
The interpretation of human existence in its origin, nature, and destiny in the light of Christian faith.

Anthropomorphism
The attribution to God of human characteristics, both physical (e.g., ‘Lord let your ears be attentive to my pleading’) and emotional (‘Lord, will your anger last forever’?).

Apologetics
The intellectual defence of Christian beliefs about God, Christ, the Church and our common human destiny.
Apostolic Succession
The unbroken continuity in essential belief and practice between the Church today and the Church
founded by Christ through the apostles. This continuity is expressed by calling the bishops the
successors of the apostles.

A priori
Prior to and independent of empirical sensory experience. Self-evident.

Assent, Notional
A merely abstract assent to some truth without fully grasping or being grasped by the reality of that
truth.

Assent of Faith
The confession of God’s self-revelation in the full mystery of Christ that involves a personal
commitment to Christ as Lord and the hope of eternal life. This free and reasonable act, made possible
through the power of the Holy Spirit, enables one to be baptised and enter the Church.

Assent, Real
A full assent to truth, especially concrete rather than abstract truths. John Henry Newman popularised
the distinction between real and merely notional assent.

Atheism
The denial of God’s existence, in theory or in practice. The many forms of atheism range from
tolerant indifference to a militant rejection, which varies according to the particular concept of God
being rejected and the socio-ecclesiastical setting for the conflict.

Authority
In the Church, all authority comes from Christ and is to be exercised under the guidance of the Holy
Spirit as a service, not as an assertion of power.

Autonomy
‘Self-government’. The right and the state of being self-determining in the spheres of moral freedom
and religious thought. As this independence is exercised in a universe created and conserved in being
by God, our autonomy can only be relative.

Catechesis
The instruction given to impart and deepen Christian faith. Including instruction to those already
baptised. The ultimate responsibility for catechesis lies with the whole community.

Cathedra
The bishop’s seat in his cathedral which is the oldest sign of his office, particularly that of teaching.
The expression *ex cathedra* applies to solemn pronouncements by the pope in virtue of his highest
authority.

Catholicism
That worldwide unity in belief and conduct frequently identified with the Roman Catholic Church and
also claimed by Anglicans and Orthodox Churches.

Christ Event
The term used to designate Christ’s incarnation, death, and resurrection as the decisive fact of
salvation history.
**Christ of Faith**
An expression to indicate the gap between the results coming from a merely historical study of Jesus and the stance of faith, which accepts Jesus as son of God and universal saviour. Often used to indicate its distinction from the historical Jesus of Nazareth as spoken of in extra-biblical historical texts.

**Christocentric**
A systematic focusing of all theology and spiritual life on the person and mystery of Jesus Christ.

**Christology**
The theological interpretation of Jesus Christ, clarifying systematically who and what he is in himself for those who believe in him.

**Church**
The community founded by Jesus Christ and anointed by the Holy Spirit as the final sign of God’s will to save humanity. God’s abiding presence among human beings is expressed in the preaching, sacramental life, pastoral ministry and organisation of this community that consists in a communion of local churches presided over by the Church of Rome.

**Cognitive**
Description of the mental act or process of knowing; including perception, judgement, and intuition.

**Collegiality**
The responsibility for the whole Church shared by the bishops in communion among themselves and with the head of the college of bishops, the pope.

**Conciliar**
Relating to the ecumenical councils of the Church. Commonly used to refer to the acceptance of and commitment to the spirit and teachings of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65).

**Consciousness**
Regarded as the focal point of awareness, feeling, perception, and knowledge. Identified with the mind.

**Contextual**
Relating to context, the particular setting, and situation of something in history, culture and other particular determinants.

**Correlation**
Literally, a one-to-one correspondence. The method of correlation in theology as proposed by Paul Tillich, which makes an analysis of the human situation out of which the existential questions arise, and it demonstrates that the symbols used in the Christian message are the answers to these questions. Modified by David Tracy whose method of critical correlation reminds us that the Christian message and the human situation must be creatively interpreted.

**Creed**
A concise version of the chief points of Christian faith. There are a number of creedal formulas that have arisen in response to questions and debates concerning specific areas of doctrine.
**Deism**
An all-embracing term for the beliefs of the North Atlantic intellectual milieu that in various ways stressed the role of reason in religion and rejected revelation, signs of faith and any providential involvement in nature and human history.

**Deposit of Faith**
All that God definitively revealed through Christ for human salvation, considered as a treasure entrusted to the Church to be preserved, interpreted and proclaimed faithfully for posterity.

**Determinism**
An interpretation of the universe according to which all state of affairs and events come about inevitably and without any exercise of freedom.

**Development of Doctrine**
Growth in Church’s teaching since the apostolic age. Authentic development requires identity-in-change between the new teaching and the original deposit of faith or revelation that reached its climax with Christ. In grappling with the issue much depends on one’s theory of understanding and interpretation.

**Dialectic**
The process of attempting to resolve philosophical and theological issues by juxtaposing contradictory ideas. A process that leads to a deepening of understanding through a continuous interplay of concepts.

**Doctrine**
Church teaching in all its many forms, which is intended not only to communicate orthodox beliefs but also to nourish Christian life and worship. Not to be confused with Dogma, an authoritative declaration of a truth of faith. All dogma is indeed doctrine, but not all doctrine is dogma.

**Dogma**
A divinely revealed truth, proclaimed as such by the infallible teaching authority of the Church, and therefore binding and requiring the assent of faith. Despite their importance, dogmas are not ultimate norms. “The supreme rule of faith” is found rather in “the Scriptures, taken together with sacred Tradition (DV 210, and celebrated in the Church’s worship.

**Ekstasis**
A Greek term for ‘standing outside oneself’ or being in a state in which one’s normal consciousness is enhanced, often in relation to a transcendent reality; the divine.

**Empiricism**
Absolutising all human cognition to only that which is perceptible to the senses.

**Epistemology**
Gr. ‘theory of knowledge’; that branch of philosophy that investigates human knowledge, its nature, sources, criteria, possibilities, and limits.

**Existential, Supernatural**
A term coined by Karl Rahner (1904-84) to indicate that even prior to their accepting or rejecting salvation, in the basic structure of their existence (‘existential’) all human beings are already affected by the freely offered (‘supernatural’) grace of God communicated through Christ.
**Existentialism**
The philosophical school of thought dealing with the awareness that one *is* and that one is an acting, choosing being creating and expressing one’s self-identity in the process of acting and choosing responsibly – the experience of being intensely involved in living, its fulfilments and predicaments.

**Faith**
The objective, revealed truth believed in (*fides quae*) or the subjective, personal commitment to God (*fides qua*) made possible through the help of the Holy Spirit. Faith is a free, reasonable and total response through which we confess the truth about the divine self-disclosure definitively made in Christ, obediently commit ourselves and entrust our whole being to God.

**Fideism**
The tendency (a) to undervalue the role of reason in examining religious claims, and (b) to overemphasise the free decision of faith. At best, fideism rightly challenges attempts to demonstrate scientifically the truth of Christianity. At worst, it represents faith as a blind leap in the dark that finds no conditions for its presence in human reason.

**Fides Fiducialis**
‘Faith as trust’ – the major element of faith according to Martin Luther. While maintaining the priority of this confident trust in the salvation effected by Christ, later Lutheran theologians included the role of knowledge and assent in their account of faith.

**Fides Quarens Intellectum**
‘Faith seeking understanding’ – the title which St. Anselm of Canterbury (ca. 1033-1109) originally gave to one of his works (later named *Proslogion*). The title, a variant on the Augustinian *credo ut intellegam* (I believe in order to understand), indicates that in theology, faith inspires and guides intellectual understanding.

**Foundationalism**
A philosophical term (adopted and adapted for theology) referring to a particular theory of the way knowledge is (or ought to be) structured and the way beliefs are justified. That there is an ultimate basis upon which beliefs find final justification beyond which there is no further foundation otherwise this would lead to infinite regress, which is untenable.

**Freedom**
The power of self-determination – that is, of deliberately choosing and following a course of action. Created in the likeness of God, human persons have the capacity that has been impaired but not destroyed by sin (*DS* 1965-67). Through redemption, Christ has set us free, and this freedom is the foretaste of our future freedom in glory.

**Fundamental Theology**
That branch of theology which studies foundational issues: in particular, the divine revelation in the history of Israel and Jesus Christ; the conditions that open human beings up to this self-communication of God; the signs that make faith in and through Jesus Christ a reasonable option; the transmission (through Scripture and Tradition) of the experience of God’s self-communication.

**Gnosis**
Gr. ‘knowledge’ – a way of describing eternal life. No mere intellectual grasp of things, this life-giving knowledge of Father and Son arises from a deep personal relationship. For St. Paul knowledge is imperfect and even useless, if it is not animated by love.
Grace
Any undeserved gift or help freely and lovingly provided by God, but above all the utterly basic gift of being saved in Christ through faith, a grace that God wishes to give all human beings. The fullness of Christ’s grace brings us new birth and the gift of the Holy Spirit, making us adopted children of God and members of Christ’s body. The self-communication of God (uncreated grace) means the deification of human life and lifts to a new and undeserved level the relationship of creature to creator, thereby transforming human nature (created grace) and anticipating the future life of heaven.

Hierarchy of Truths
A principle for interpreting (not selecting!) truths of faith by their nearness to the central mystery of faith, the revelation of the Trinity that Christ brought and through which we are saved. While all truths should be believed, classifying and interpreting these truths according to their relative importance can eliminate false emphases and facilitate ecumenical dialogue.

Historical Consciousness
A theological and philosophical mentality that is attentive to the impact of history on human thought and action and which, therefore, takes into account the concrete and the changeable. A dynamic worldview as opposed to a classical one. Historical consciousness is the condition for the possibility of creative theology.

Immanence
Referring to God it recognises God’s presence everywhere and in everything. If not understood in relation to transcendence, it may lapse into pantheism.

Incarnation
The process and event of the enfleshment of the Word of God, the Logos, in the person of Jesus Christ.

Initium Fidei
The beginning of faith. The grace of God as necessary for the whole act and process of faith.

Indifference
The lack of interest in religious matters, which is a consequence of secularism. The absence of a proper religious education or a personal failure to practice one’s faith in God.

Inculturation
A new term for the old obligation to contextualise and indigenise the Christian message and way of life in the various cultures and peoples of the world. The principle behind this is that the gospel does not make one culture normative but should be incarnated in every culture for the salvation of all peoples.

Infinity
The quality of being unlimited and endless. Properly attributed to God. Also considered as an attribute of the human spirit, which though created in time is not bound by physicality and historicity.

Intentional
Besides expressing our willed purpose (intentionality), also refers in various ways to human concepts, knowledge, and consciousness. Intentionality as a derivative is a central concept in Phenomenology.

Kerygma
The basic saving message of the Gospel preached and proclaimed by the apostles.
**Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi**
The law of prayer is the law of faith. Christian faith is expressed in worship; worship is, in turn, a norm of faith.

**Materialism**
Any belief that denies such spiritual entities as God and the human soul and accepts the existence only of perceptible extended reality.

**Metaphysics**
Beyond or after physics. The study of the ultimate causes and constituents of reality. Because of this, metaphysics tends toward the building of systems of ideas which give us some judgement about the nature of reality.

**Methodology**
The selection of a procedure for reaching an end in view. In the most general sense methodology is a constituent of logic, which itself is related to epistemology. In theology it is a way of examining, classifying and coherently presenting Christian faith from a particular point of reference, which itself is determined by a set of presuppositions. Thus, the methodology employed in a theological approach is determined by the outcome one is consciously or unconsciously seeking.

**Modernism**
A movement rising from the application of modern critical methods to the study of biblical texts and to the history of dogma. An openness to progress in science and philosophy. The movement tended to stress the ethical and experiential aspects of Christianity over its creedal and dogmatic aspects.

**Mysticism**
A stress on the spiritual/experiential mode of knowledge of God, or transcendent reality. Often in the form of immediate intuition, direct experience of God and union with him that defies adequate linguistic articulation. Contrasted with knowledge of God through reasoning, sourcing of scripture and tradition, and examining the beliefs of faith.

**Mystery**
Not merely obscure or inexplicable but rather in a general sense applied to God’s loving plan for human salvation disclosed through revelation. While definitively revealed in Christ, the mysterious reality of God transcends human reason and comprehension.

**Natural Theology**
Theological attempt to attain knowledge of God through nature and human reasoning without recourse to revelation. However it is a valid theology when it relates its insights to revelation. Historical development goes back to Thomas Aquinas (ca. 1225-74).

**Nature**
The entire cosmos which is good because created by God (Gn 1-2), or else something developing and acting according to its own essential characteristics. In the latter sense, Christian doctrine refers to the one nature of God and two natures (divine and human) in Christ. Catholic theology has distinguished grace (= what comes to us through God’s redeeming activity in Christ and through the Holy Spirit) from nature (= that which belongs to human beings as human beings). A classical axiom states that grace does not destroy but presupposes and elevates nature.
**Numinous**
The awe inspiring divine presence. In *The Idea of the Holy* (German original 1917), Rudolf Otto (1869-1937) argued that religion originates with the numinous experience of the “*Mysterium tremendum et fascinans (fascinosum)*” The mystery which is both awe-inspiring and fascinating.

**Ontic**
Gr. ‘being’. An identifiable existent. Heidegger uses the term to describe the perspective of looking at the world from the standpoint of the entities that make it up. The attitude of the ontic perspective is existential.

**Ontology**
The study of the necessary truths of beings as existent beings. Brought into common use by Christian Wolff (1679-1754), ‘ontology’ is often synonymous with ‘metaphysics.’

**Paradigm**
‘A pattern, model, or plan.’ Plato used the term with respect to his Ideas or Forms, thus indicating their role in the world. In contemporary philosophy the centre of analysis and criticism is often a paradigm case, presented as exemplifying the issues which are at stake. Thomas Kuhn (b1922) holds that scientific theories are constructed around basic paradigms – e.g. the solar system model of an atom – and that shifts in scientific theory require new paradigms.

**Person**
Boethius (ca. 580-ca. 524) classically defined ‘person’ as “*rationalis naturae individual substantia*” – an individual substance of rational nature. Over the centuries, various aspects of what it is to be a person were added: relationships, incommunicability, self-consciousness, freedom, duties, Inalienable rights, and dignity. Contemporary developments stress the way persons are always persons-in-relationships (*ngesizulu, umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*), constituted through relations with other persons and the environment.

**Personalism**
A philosophy centred on the unique value of human persons. One the one hand, it opposes totalitarian ideologies (which subvert the welfare of individuals to that of the collectivity), behaviourism and any psychology which understands human beings as case studies to be interpreted simply in terms of their functions and reactions. On the other hand, true personalism excludes any selfish individualism bent on furthering one’s own interests at the expense of others.

**Phenomenology**
That philosophy that emerged on the Continent in the early years of the Twentieth century as a descriptive, retrospective in depth analysis of all forms of consciousness and immediate experiences. It emphasises the intentional character of consciousness without assuming the conceptual presuppositions of the empirical sciences. It studies and describes the intrinsic qualities of phenomena as they are revealed to consciousness.

**Phenomenon**
That which appears to human consciousness as the object of perception. A perceptible object of sense experience.

**Pluralism**
Any philosophical or theological outlook that does not attempt to reduce everything to one ultimate principle and/or subject matter. According to whether it accepts a variety of cultures, political parties, or religious confessions, pluralism takes a cultural, political, or religious form. Over against a rigid
uniformity, the Second Vatican Council endorsed a proper diversity in Christian traditions and worship.

**Political Theology**
A theology that protests against the privatisation of religion and insists on the social responsibility of Christians. The political theology of Johann Baptist Metz (b. 1928) and others aims to express the implications of Christian faith for the social and political order – above all by protesting against the injustice in our world and emphasising solidarity with the crucified Jesus and countless victims of the world’s past and present history.

**Positivism**
The philosophy popularised by Auguste Comte (1798-1857) who held that we know only what we can perceive through the senses, rejected theological and metaphysical claims, and wished to reorganise society on scientific lines. Modern logical positivism is a philosophical movement stressing empirical verification and the natural scientific method.

**Postmodernism**
The position describing the present intellectual and cultural situation, particularly in advanced capitalist societies. It is in discontinuity with modernism and represents a stage beyond it.

**Preambles of Faith**
Those presuppositions of Christian faith that can be made explicit to show how the act of faith is also a reasonable human act.

**Rationalism**
Any system that privileges reason in the search for truth, including religious truth. Some of the figures of the Enlightenment used reason to reject revelation while others went on to reject all religious belief. While acknowledging (against the fideists) the capacity of human reason to know God from the created world, against rationalists Vatican I asserted the ‘supernatural,’ divine revelation to which we owe the assent of faith.

**Reductionism**
Any attempt to explain or explain away the complex data of reality by appealing to only one of its aspects. Thus, a philosopher may identify reality at large with the immediately available sense data. Rejection of faith in God usually takes the form of reductionism.

**Relativism**
The view that there are no absolute truths or values but they are all determined by particular periods, cultures, societies, and persons. In the area of dogmatic definitions, historically conditioned formulations should be distinguished from the lasting truths being taught.

**Scholasticism**
An academic and monastic tradition that used Aristotelian and Platonic philosophy to understand, interpret systematically and speculate about the truths of faith.

**Soteriology**
The systematic interpretation of Christ’s saving work for human beings and the world. In general, recent western theology has tried to end the divorce between Soteriology and Christology.

**Systematic Theology**
The attempt to expound in a coherent and scholarly fashion the main Christian doctrines. While often coinciding in practice with dogmatic theology, systematic theology may differ by including a
treatment of moral issues. It may also differ from dogmatic theology by paying more attention to methodology, terminology, the use of philosophical principles, a strictly unified perspective, and issues concerned with the conditions and limits of theological knowledge.

**Theandric**
An adjective coined by Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite (ca. 500) to describe the acts of the God-man Jesus Christ. In and through his two natures and two wills (which are neither confused nor separated) the one (divine) person of Christ performs divine-human acts.

**Theism**
The belief in a transcendent, personal God, who creates, conserves and intervenes in our world. Unlike pantheism, theism does not push the divine immanence to the point of identifying God with the world. Unlike deism, theism holds that God is not a mere remote creator but through providence, revelation and a variety of salvific acts is ceaselessly engaged on our behalf.

**Tradition**
The process of handing on (tradition as act) or the living heritage that is handed on (tradition as content). Through the Holy Spirit (the invisible bearer of tradition), the whole people of God are empowered to pass on their memory, experience, expression and interpretation of the foundational self-revelation of God which was completed with Christ and the New Testament community.

**Transcendence**
The otherness of God whose existence ‘goes beyond’ the universe and is not to be identified with it.

**Transcendental Theology**
A theological orientation similar to transcendental philosophy and associated with Karl Rahner and Bernard Lonergan. It asks about the possible answers that open up when we consider the human subject. To use Rahner’s own example, penance is not simply an objective duty to be carried out but a virtue impelling the subject to change. Every objective question has its subjective side, which, when explored, throws new light on the theological issues at stake.