



Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms

Stanley J. Grenz, David Guretzki, Cherith Fee Nordling

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Beginning to study theology is like stepping into a conversation that has been going on for two thousand years.

How do you take part in this conversation—or even make sense of it—if you don't understand the vocabulary or know the contributions made by other participants?

The *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* is the perfect companion to your theological studies. Among its three hundred-plus definitions are

- English terms, from *accommodation* to *wrath of God*
- foreign terms, from *a posteriori* to *via media*
- theological movements and traditions, from the Alexandrian School to Wesleyanism
- theologians, from Anselm of Canterbury to Ulrich Zwingli

Here is an affordable and easily accessible resource for your theological readings, lectures and writing assignments. It's a must-have for every theological student.

Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms Details

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From Reader Review Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms for online ebook

Jeannine says

Simple intro level explanations.. again I have nothing to contrast this with.

Jane Riebe-Tritten says

This was a good reference book. Although I would have liked more words included in this dictionary; for I still need to purchase another dictionary for further edification.

Brett says

This is a helpful little book to keep in your bag for those times when you hear a phrase, term, name, movement etc... that you may not have heard before or are not familiar with. It is by no means exhaustive or very thorough, but it gives you enough to grasp the idea and stay with the sermon, lecture, or even talkative friend.

Jason says

This is a great resource for anyone who wants to learn the basic terms for theological discussions.

Just a reference.

I had to basically read it from start to finish for my Christian Theology 2 class at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary so let me warn you, it gets quite boring when you start to actually read it.

Why would they make us read it when it is a dictionary anyways?

Michael says

A helpful short reference booklet that is a great resource for novice and scholar alike. It is part of a series published by IVP Academic. After perusing it I decided to work on a similar idea: a "Pocket Dictionary of Ellen G. White" and came up with 350 entries based upon my work in the nine volumes of "Testimonies for the Church." My friend, Jud Lake, has agreed to co-author the volume and we hope to have it done later this year. Sometimes perusing books can lead to other great ideas: just like the C. S. Lewis Encyclopedia was an inspiration for George R. R. Martin to pursue a similar Encyclopedia about Ellen White that has just come out.

Osvaldo says

Nice little dictionary to read up on some common theological terms. Probably not meant to be read cover to cover as I did, but whether as a reference tool or a crash course in terms, it's an excellent dictionary for clarity and conciseness.

Susannah says

This is an awesome reference. I've got extra copies if anyone wants one. It's small and super-handy.

Tyler says

Handy little book, easy to understand definitions.

Daniel Bastian says

Gatekeeping in Dictionary Form

A decent reference if you're looking for an alphabetized listing of common theological parlance. Not so good if you're looking for one not colored by denominational agenda. *IVP's Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* is exactly as the title suggests, but unfortunately its use as an educational tool is compromised by a pervasive gatekeeping mentality common in evangelical circles.

And then I came across this nacre of doctrinaire clumsiness:

atheism. A system of belief that categorically asserts that there is no God. Atheism usually affirms as well that the only form of existence is the material universe and that the universe is merely the product of chance or fate.

If this is the kind of willful distortion coming down from the top in evangelical institutions, it's no wonder why interfaith discourse is so heavily deformed in this country. The trinity of authors here have of course misdefined atheism.

Very few atheists say, "God definitely does not exist." The vast majority say, "It's unlikely that gods exist, and I see no good reasons for believing they do." Just as most Christians don't sashay around claiming Amun-Ra, Hermes, Zeus, Quetzalcoatl or unicorns don't exist, neither are most atheists in the business of making the positive claim that no gods exist. It's just not something they concern themselves with, just as most people don't concern themselves with belief in unicorns or other cryptids.

As many an atheist are wont to emphasize, positive disaffirmation is a spectrum's length away from nonbelief. Most inclusively, then, atheism is simply a linguistic placeholder we use to denote the nonbelief in personal deities. Often enough, it is a conscious conclusion based on the consideration of available evidence.

Likewise, atheists do not have an ideological bias toward materialism. It's just that a material universe is all that can be supported by the evidence. To persuade a materialist to accept some form of dualism, supernaturalism or paraphysical causality, the advocates of those views would need to produce probative evidence (or at least a soundly reasoned case) in their favor. The burden of proof lies with those positing alternate dimensions of reality. At any rate, atheists are usually not in the habit of making universal or absolutist claims, but of simply voicing skepticism in the face of unchecked fanaticism.

Another area in which the authors' doctrinal commitments seep through is in the various definitions connected to Christology (the nature of the Jesus of Scripture). One example is adoptionism:

adoptionism. The theory that asserts that God adopted Jesus as his Son...This theory fails to reflect scriptural texts that point to Jesus' eternal relationship with the Father (e.g., Jn 17:5).

If only it were so simple. Of course, in order to defend your favorite theology as "biblical" or "scriptural", you have to advertise a univocal, monolithic view running throughout the Christian New Testament, a view which fails to hold up under any modicum of scrutiny or grasp of Christian history.

Examination of early Christian documents reveals that as stories about the historical Jesus developed, a diverse spectrum of thought began to take shape. The surviving exchanges and the manuscript tradition of the canonical gospels and other New Testament texts provide a window into these 1st-4th century conversations. The gospel narratives, for example, originated in different communities from different authors speaking to different issues to address different needs. These men had their own perspectives, their own beliefs, their own needs, their own concerns, their own desires, their own theologies. And this kaleidoscope of inspirations is what we see preserved in the Christian New Testament.

It should also be emphasized here that none of the Greek writers thought they were writing (what was later to become known as) 'Scripture' or imagined that their writings would one day be canonized and subsequently compared, contrasted and hyper-scrutinized alongside other period texts. How could they? Such foresight was alien to them. As we might expect, once these disparate texts were smashed together and consolidated many centuries later, the multivocality came along for the ride. Given this scenario, it should not be surprising in the least that the gospel writers, in several respects, did not agree with each other; they expressed different views about Jesus, God, and the linkages therein.

As a result, adoptionist Christologies, widespread in early Christian thought, along with docetic and separationist Christologies and others, all made it into the eventual Bible. Moreover, when we compare later manuscripts with earlier manuscripts, we find dozens of examples of where those holding anti-adoptionist, anti-docetic, anti-separationist perspectives, and everything in between, altered the words in an effort to bludgeon the texts into an artificial conformity. (Ostensibly, antiquity's concern for internal harmony was anticipatory of modern day evangelicals.) If there were not this diversity of voices, there would have been no motivation to amend the texts in the first place.

To recap, where did this mishmash of views come from? They originated *with the texts* (and any associated oral tradition from which they derived), ideologically dissimilar as they were. Because the New Testament documents, taken together, are inconsistent, conflicting and contradictory on several matters of theological importance, of course there are passages in one book which suggest *against* adoptionism, just as there are passages in others which gesture *toward* adoptionism. This is what happens when you consolidate texts from different authors. Ultimately, doctrine is best organized by text, not by denomination.

This is also why "prooftexting"—mining for verses in an effort to extrapolate a biblical-wide perspective—is

irretrievably flawed in approach. Pointing to passages like 2 Timothy 3:16 or 2 Peter 1:20-21 as denoting biblical ‘infallibility’ or ‘divine inspiration’ is a naive way of using the Bible to inform theological beliefs. How could the authors of one text make any claim for texts that had not yet been written and for texts they had no clue would one day accompany their own? Nowhere in the Bible does it mention which books it should include (its authors had no forethought of ‘canon’).

Prooftexting thus fails as a hermeneutical device, not least because you are using the words of one author to interpret the words of another, while papering over the local context within the text itself (i.e., the specific needs, concerns and issues the author is addressing), all while ignoring the complex, arduous and interesting history of the formation of the biblical canon, itself the product of a long line of human decisions. There can be no substitute for, and no escape from, working out meaning and context for oneself.

Closing Thoughts

Instead of suppressing these facts or deeming them a problem, those in thrall to evangelical tradition might try accepting the Bible for what it is instead of forcing it to be something it isn't. The Bible isn't a book; it's a library (the very word Bible *means* "library"). And hence contrary to the reflexively tendentious language plastered up and down this handy dictionary, the Bible is not an ideological monolith; it contains a wealth of competing ideas and mutually exclusive viewpoints. That such diversity of voice and dialectic tension were preserved demonstrates that the editors of the biblical texts were not overly concerned with conveying a single, consistent message or doctrine.

To push against this fact is like a library patron complaining that something she read in a book from one part of the library contradicts something she read in a book from another part of the library. We would probably question this person's mental maturity. Just as we expect different perspectives from different books in a library, so we should not be surprised or otherwise disturbed by the presence of discrepancies and inconsistencies in the biblical texts. Like so much of evangelical scholarship, this resource is contaminated with theological insularity. **Gatekeeping in dictionary form.**

Note: This review is republished from my official website. Click through for additional footnotes and imagery.

Eric says

I read this. I forget what I thought about it because it was so long ago. It apparently didn't change my life. I hope that helps.
