

Key Words for Religious Studies

Believing in God

agnosticism not being sure whether God exists
atheism believing that God does not exist
conversion when your life is changed by giving yourself to God
free will the idea that human beings are free to make their own choices
miracle something which seems to break a law of science and makes you think only God could have done it
moral evil actions done by humans which cause suffering
natural evil things which cause suffering but have nothing to do with humans
numinous the feeling of the presence of something greater than you
omni-benevolent the belief that God is all-good
omnipotent the belief that God is all-powerful
omniscient the belief that God knows everything that has happened and everything that is going to happen
prayer an attempt to contact God, usually through words

Matters of life and Death

abortion the removal of a foetus from the womb before it can survive
assisted suicide providing a seriously ill person with the means to commit suicide
euthanasia the painless killing of someone dying from a painful disease
immortality of the soul the idea that the soul lives on after the death of the body
near-death experience when someone about to die has an out of body experience
non-voluntary euthanasia ending someone's life painlessly when they are unable to ask, but you have good reason for thinking they would want you to do so
paranormal unexplained things which are thought to have spiritual causes eg ghosts, mediums
quality of life the idea that life must have some benefits for it to be worth living
reincarnation the belief that, after death, souls are reborn in a new body
resurrection the belief that, after death, the body stays in the grave until the end of the world when it is raised
sanctity of life the belief that life is holy and belongs to God
voluntary euthanasia ending life painlessly when someone in great pain asks for death

Marriage and Family Life

adultery a sexual act between a married person and someone other than their marriage partner

civil partnership a legal ceremony giving a homosexual couple the same legal rights as a husband and wife

cohabitation living together without being married

contraception intentionally preventing pregnancy from occurring

faithfulness staying with your marriage partner and having sex only with them

homosexuality sexual attraction to the same sex

nuclear family mother, father and children living as a unit

pre-marital sex sex before marriage

procreation making a new life

promiscuity having sex with a number of partners without commitment

re-constituted family where two sets of children (stepbrothers and stepsisters) become one family when their divorced parents marry each other

re-marriage marrying again after being divorced from a previous marriage

Religion and Community Cohesion

Religion and community cohesion

community cohesion a common vision and shared sense of belonging for all groups in society

discrimination treating people less favourably because of their ethnicity/gender/colour/sexuality/age/class

ethnic minority a member of an ethnic group (race) which is much smaller than the majority group

interfaith marriages marriage where the husband and wife are from different religions

multi-ethnic society many different races and cultures living together in one society

multi-faith society many different religions living together in one society

prejudice believing some people are inferior or superior without even knowing them

racial harmony different races/colours living together happily

racism the belief that some races are superior to others

religious freedom the right to practise your religion and change your religion

religious pluralism accepting all religions as having an equal right to coexist

sexism discriminating against people because of their gender (being male or female)

Religion: Rights and Responsibilities

Bible the holy book of Christians

Church the community of Christians (with a small c it means a Christian place of worship)

conscience an inner feeling of the rightness or wrongness of an action

the Decalogue the Ten Commandments

democratic processes the ways in which all citizens can take part in government (usually through elections)

electoral processes the ways in which voting is organised

the Golden Rule the teaching of Jesus that you should treat others as you would like them to treat you

human rights the rights and freedoms to which everyone is entitled

political party a group which tries to be elected into power on the basis of its policies (eg Labour, Conservative)

pressure group a group formed to influence government policy on a particular issue

Situation Ethics the idea that Christians should base moral decisions on what is the most loving thing to do

social change the way in which society has changed and is changing (and also the possibilities for future change)

Religion, Environmental and Medical Issues

artificial insemination injecting semen into the uterus by artificial means

conservation protecting and preserving natural resources and the environment

creation the act of creating the universe or the universe which has been created

embryo a fertilised egg in the first eight weeks after conception

environment the surroundings in which plants and animals live and on which they depend to live

global warming the increase in the temperature of the earth's atmosphere (thought to be caused by the greenhouse effect)

infertility not being able to have children

in-vitro fertilisation the method of fertilising a human egg in a test tube

natural resources naturally occurring materials, such as oil and fertile land, which can be used by humans

organ donation giving organs to be used in transplant surgery

stewardship looking after something so it can be passed on to the next generation

surrogacy an arrangement whereby a woman bears a child on behalf of another woman OR where an egg is donated and fertilised by the husband through IVF and then implanted into the wife's uterus

Religion: Peace and Conflict

aggression attacking without being provoked
bullying intimidating/frightening people weaker than yourself
conflict resolution bringing a fight or struggle to a peaceful conclusion
exploitation taking advantage of a weaker group
forgiveness stopping blaming someone and/or pardoning them for what they have done wrong
just war a war which is fought for the right reasons and in a right way
pacifism the belief that all disputes should be settled by peaceful means
reconciliation bringing together people who were opposed to each other
respect treating a person or their feelings with consideration
the United Nations an international body set up to promote world peace and cooperation
weapons of mass destruction weapons which can destroy large areas and numbers of people
world peace the ending of war throughout the whole world (the basic aim of the United Nations)

Religion: Crime and Punishment

addiction a recurring compulsion to engage in an activity regardless of its bad effects
capital punishment the death penalty for a crime or offence
crime an act against the law
deterrence the idea that punishments should be of such a nature that they will put people off (deter) committing crimes
judgement the act of judging people and their actions
justice due allocation of reward and punishment/the maintenance of what is right
law rules made by Parliament and enforceable by the courts
reform the idea that punishments should try to change criminals so that they will not commit crimes again
rehabilitation restore to normal life
responsibility being responsible for one's actions
retribution the idea that punishments should make criminals pay for what they have done wrong
sin an act against the will of God