

11. What do Christians say about science?

Crucifix, p. 227

Victims of crucifixion died from asphyxiation, as well as from blood loss and exposure. A foot rest, as shown on many crucifixes, was unlikely and would inhibit death. The upright pole was permanently set into the ground, and the victim carried the crosspiece to the place of execution.

Quotes and Images

p. 229: In 1837 Charles Darwin drew in his notebooks this first simple sketch of the tree of life as depicting natural life.

p. 230: The Whitehead quote indicates that scientific knowledge, although it may require the church to change the language of its proclamation, is finally welcomed as helpful education about the world in which we live.

p. 231: The hymn “How Great Thou Art,” written by Carl Boberg (1859–1940) in Swedish, exists in many English translations. This one was made famous by its regular use in the mid-twentieth century by the Billy Graham crusades. Birds singing “sweetly in the trees” are actually marking their territory.

p. 232: Calvin’s knowledge of Newton’s First Law of Motion typifies the scientific knowledge of many practicing Christians.

p. 233: Giovanni di Paolo (c. 1403–1482) painted this image of the creation and the expulsion of Adam and Eve from paradise as one of the illustrations for Dante’s *Paradiso*.

p. 235: Origen (c. 185–c. 254) is renowned as an exceedingly learned biblical scholar and creative theologian who favored allegorical interpretations of Scripture.

p. 240: The Rev. Arthur Peacocke (1924–2006) was a Christian theologian and biochemist known for his extensive and eloquent writings demonstrating the compatibility between church teaching and Darwinian evolution. The term panentheism is to be distinguished from pantheism.

p. 241: It is easier to ridicule than to understand. This cartoon lampooning Darwin is one of many that were popular in the nineteenth century.

p. 242: Henry M. Morris (1918–2006) was a conservative Protestant professor of civil engineering who is credited with popularizing Creationism as the scientific understanding of the origin of the universe that is most compatible with Christian faith. He wrote extensively to demonstrate the facticity of the Bible.

p. 242: Sallie McFague (b. 1933) is an American feminist Protestant theologian most renowned for her study of biblical metaphor. She urged that only by understanding biblical metaphor can its existential meaning function for contemporary readers. She has written about both God as mother and the earth as God’s body.

p. 243: Ian Barbour (b. 1923) is a retired Protestant professor of science and professor of religion who was awarded the 1999 Templeton Prize for his extraordinary contributions to the field of the relationship between science and religion.

p. 243: John Breck is a contemporary Orthodox Christian bioethicist.

p. 244: Cyril, bishop of Jerusalem (c. 313–98), wrote lectures on the meaning of the sacraments that are still admired today. Note his wide meaning of the word “heaven.”

Suggestions, pp. 245–46

7. “The Question of Rain” (1988) is a short story by William Hoffman (1925–2009), an American author of novels and short stories. In the midst of a Virginia drought, a pastor is being urged by his parishioners to dedicate the next Sunday as a Special Prayer Day for Rain, but his theological understanding of prayer is prohibiting him from “doing a rain dance.” Ironically, his intent instead is to preach about baptism. He decides to dedicate Sunday to prayer for rain, and of course it then rains. Discussion of this story can focus on the Christian practice of using intercessory prayer to affect nature.

8. The novel *Lying Awake* by American author Mark Salzman (b. 1959) describes the dilemma of Sister John of the Cross, a poet and member of the contemplative Carmelite convent outside of Los Angeles, who after twenty years is blessed with visions of God, but then discovers that they are linked to a curable form of epilepsy. The novel raises the question of the sources of individual religious experiences.

9. The 2009 film *Agora* describes the Christian suppression of pagans and Jews in fourth- and fifth-century Alexandria, Egypt. The film focuses on the conflict between the pagan philosopher, mathematician, and astronomer Hypatia (c. 350–415) and the Christian community under the leadership of bishop Cyril of Alexandria (c. 378–444), who is remembered for both his contributions to Christological doctrine and his autocratic rule. A mob of monks murdered Hypatia. Although some of the film’s details are speculation, it is historically accurate that Cyril and other Christian leaders rejected Hypatia’s heliocentric science and the teaching authority of a woman. Discussion of the film can focus on the resistance through the centuries of some Christians to scientific advances.