

12. What do Christians say about religious truth?

Cross, p. 247

This First Nations grave is marked both by the cross of Christ and by the eagle feathers of traditional Indian religious practice. Some Christians approve of such amalgamation, others do not.

Quotes and Images

p. 249: The quote from John Hick states his postmodern views in simple language. Some Christians welcome, and others reject, seeing “God” as an example of the Real.

p. 251: Dr. Anthony Campolo (b. 1935) is a Baptist minister and retired seminary professor whose evangelical lectures and books are widely popular. It is rare for a prominent evangelical voice to admit to doubts.

p. 252: The sixteenth century witnessed European Christians dividing up the discoveries of their explorers and claiming the authority to forcibly Christianize the native peoples. King Ferdinand II reigned over areas of Spain from 1452 to 1516 and along with his wife Queen Isabella ought to eliminate religious practice other than Roman Catholic.

p. 252: In 1747 Johann Valentin Haidt painted *First Fruits*, a depiction of the native peoples who had been evangelized by Moravian missionaries. Moravian Protestants were famous for their respectful interactions with and ministry among the natives of Pennsylvania.

p. 254: In some Western churches, the long prayers appointed for Good Friday include a petition for the Jews. In medieval times, this prayer denounced the Jews as “perfidious.” In 2006, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America published this new version of the petition as more congruent with its contemporary theology.

p. 254: Karl Rahner, SJ (1904–84) was the most influential Roman Catholic theologian of the twentieth century. He was both praised and criticized for his proposal of “anonymous Christians.”

p. 255: The popular book *The Faith Club*, coauthored by the Muslim Ranya Idliby, the Episcopalian Suzanne Oliver, and the Jew Priscilla Warner, inspired and accompanied many interfaith conversations in the United States.

p. 257: The religious community Jews for Jesus is one of several Messianic Jewish groups that have adopted some Christian doctrines and practices. Their very existence is controversial in both communities.

p. 259: One of the beloved stories about Francis of Assisi is that in 1219 during the Crusades, when Christians and Muslims were murdering each other, Francis traveled to Egypt to visit with, and perhaps convert, the Sultan Malik al-Kamil. This fresco was painted in about 1300 in the upper church in the Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi, perhaps by Giotto.

p. 260: Compare the size of Christian practice to that of other world religions.

p. 261: Diana L. Eck (b. 1945) is a Methodist professor of religion and director of the Pluralism Project. She is renowned for her advocacy of interfaith dialogue.

p. 262: The Yaqui Christians of Arizona and Mexico are a living example of syncretism. Evangelized in the seventeenth century by Roman Catholic Jesuits, the Yaquis were encouraged to keep some of their native rituals and symbols and to blend them into Christianity. The Yaquis keep Holy Week and Easter with syncretistic worship.

Suggestions, pp. 262–63

6. In Acts 17:16-32, Paul preaches to Greeks in Athens and identifies their “Unknown God” as the God he is preaching. On the other hand, the author of 1 John condemns other religious communities as marked by the Antichrist, the spirit of error.

7. Leslie Marmon Silko (b. 1948), a Laguna Pueblo author, is recognized as a major figure in the Native American Renaissance of literature and the arts. In her short story “The Man to Send Rain Clouds” (1974), the sheepherder Teofilo is found dead, and the community buries him using their traditional ritual. Note that the local Catholic church displays symbols of Christ as the Lamb. The Franciscan priest is then asked to sprinkle water on the grave, which the people view as a ritual that will bring rain, even though the Christian meaning is to mark the grave with the sign of one’s baptism. Discussion of this story can focus on the syncretistic beliefs and practices that are maintained by some Christians around the world.

8. The 1994 novel *Knowledge of Angels* by English novelist Jill Paton Walsh (b. 1937) is the most philosophical novel suggested for this semester’s reading. Walsh presents as it were a postmodern engineer who finds himself on a medieval island, on which to escape execution as an atheist, he is catechized with Thomistic proofs of the existence of God, which he politely refutes. The happenstance of the town’s finding a wild child who has never heard about God offers the local ecclesiastical authorities a way to test whether knowledge of God is inherent. The phrase “knowledge of angels” refers to a medieval speculation about divine truth.

9. The 2010 film *Of Gods and Men* narrates the devotion and the doubts of a community of Cistercian monks who operated a clinic and ministered in other significant ways to a Muslim village in Algeria. In 1996, seven of the community were martyred by Muslim terrorists. The monks’ hesitancy to leave for a safer monastery arises in part from their Trappist vow of stability: since they are to live and die in the community in which they first reside, monks will not continually seek a better monastery. Discussion of the film can focus on the monks’ decision to live in faithfulness to the truth of their vows, despite the likelihood of their deaths.