

1. Why is the Bible central to Christianity?

Crucifix, p. 9

In about 1200, someone designed a pattern of teaching the meaning of Jesus Christ through biblical references. By 1500 this pattern was painted on church walls throughout Europe and reproduced in handwritten manuscripts and printed blockbooks that are called *Biblia Pauperum*. On the center of each of the forty pages is a scene from the life of Jesus. It is flanked by pictures of two Old Testament stories that have some relationship to the Christ episode. Each page includes four other Old Testament quotations. According to the hermeneutic of the *Biblia Pauperum*, Christ is understood in terms of Old Testament.

Quotes and Images

p. 10: The quotation from Mircea Eliade summarizes his view of the religious role of myth. Some Christian students may be uncomfortable in applying the category of myth to the Bible.

p. 11: Not all students are familiar with standard biblical notation.

p. 11: This simplified outline of the biblical books uses minimal technical terms. Especially important terms will be defined in sidebars.

p. 12: *Hieroglyphick Bibles* were popular in colonial and early America to teach children both to read and to know important biblical content. This page has been chosen to coordinate with the textual discussion of Genesis 1 and 2. God's name is given in Hebrew letters.

p. 15: Thomas Cranmer (1489–1556) is considered one of the masters of liturgical language in English. He was instrumental in crafting the 1552 *Book of Common Prayer* for the Church of England. Under Queen Mary, he was burned at the stake. This prayer is a beloved one in Anglican churches.

p. 16: The main crucifix in the Roman Catholic Church in Jingzhou, China, depicts Christ as a Chinese man wearing a topknot. The tabernacle, where the consecrated bread is kept, is shaped as a pagoda. The infant Jesus is wearing bright yellow, the color reserved for the Chinese emperor.

p. 18: The 1988 ecumenical translation of the Lord's Prayer/Our Father may be interesting to students who know only an older version. The class may discuss the pros and cons of newer translations of classic worship texts. This version strives for a more accurate rendering of the Greek original.

p. 19: The elaborate designs that characterize the seventh-century *Book of Kells* are one indication of the high value given to the biblical text. The four gospel writers are symbolically depicted as a winged man, a lion, an ox, and an eagle, images brought into Christianity in the Book of Revelation from their source in Daniel 7.

p. 21: The fourth-century Codex Sinaiticus, although incomplete, is one of the oldest and most valued manuscripts of the Bible. It was found at the monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai rather by accident in 1844 by Constantin von Tischendorf and is now on display at the British Library in London.

p. 22: The Anglo-Saxon language was spoken on the English island from the seventh century until the Norman Conquest, when French became the preferred language of the court and the educated. Anglo-Saxon resembles present-day German more than it does present-day English, but students may be able to decipher this passage.

p. 23: The Eastern Orthodox icon of Christ as the Word depicts the divine figure holding the word of the Bible open to Matt. 9:28, "Come to me." Thus the majesty of the figure, surrounded by angels and the four evangelists, is contrasted with the welcome of the Savior.

p. 25: Because John 3:16 is so well known, it was chosen to show differences in translation. Eugene H. Peterson (b. 1932) is a Presbyterian minister whose translation of the Bible into colloquial English is titled *The Message*.

p. 25: Beginning when she was nineteen, Sarah Morgan of Baton Rouge kept a diary from 1862 to 1866. It is judged one of the finest records of the Civil War from the viewpoint of the citizenry. The quotation may bring smiles to anyone who attends worship services.

p. 26: The six-day-long 1801 Revival in Cane Ridge, Kentucky, which was attended by 12,000 people, is judged one of the most influential events in American Christian history. It popularized the revival as a significant method of encouraging Christian faith that was also entertaining. Indeed, one observer made the famous comment that at Cane Ridge "more souls were begot than saved."

p. 27: The two boxes present contrasting Christian hermeneutics. The fundamentalist Henry Morris (1918–2006) is considered the father of Creationism. The Episcopalian Marcus Borg (b. 1942) is a New Testament scholar and theologian with a career teaching undergraduates.

p. 28: Miriam Adeney (b. 1945), professor of global and urban ministries at Seattle Pacific University, includes a chapter about biblical translators in her book.

p. 28: *The Green Bible* edition of the New Revised Standard Version was published in 2010 by Harper. "Green Christianity" is growing around the world.

p. 29: From the *African Bible Commentary* comes a quote from Miriam Kwame Bediako. Africa is now one of the fastest-growing centers of the Christian church.

Suggestions, pp. 29–30

4. Students can be asked to find similarities and differences in the four biblical accounts of Jesus' resurrection. Attention should be paid especially to the uniqueness of Paul's account and to the increasing details in subsequent decades.

7. The short story “God’s Goodness” was first published in 2002 by the American author Marjorie Kemper (1944–2009). The primary characters are sixteen-year-old Mike Tipton, who is dying of cancer, and Ling Tan, a young immigrant who is providing him custodial care. Ling, a devout believer in God’s goodness and in the possibility of miracles, reads aloud to Mike from the Book of Job and must face Mike’s decline and death. In the story, the Book of Job challenges Ling’s optimistic faith in God. Discussion of the story can focus on the complexity of Christian uses of the Bible.

8. *Go Tell It on the Mountain* is the 1952 semi-autobiographical masterpiece of African American novelist and essayist James Baldwin (1924–1987). Like his protagonist John Grimes, Baldwin became a preacher at age fourteen in a Pentecostal Holiness church. The novel is replete with literary references and textual citations in the King James Version of the Bible, which readers unacquainted with the KJV may miss. For example, the worship event that situates the novel is called a tarry service, after the gospel narrative (KJV Matt. 26:38) of Jesus in Gethsemane asking the disciples to “tarry” with him; in one paragraph alone in Part Three, there are twenty-three biblical references. Students can be asked to choose a page, and assisted with a King James translation biblical concordance, find oblique and specific references.

9. The 1995 film *Dead Man Walking* is based on the experiences of Sister Helen Prejean, CSJ (b. 1939), who became an opponent of capital punishment when serving as the spiritual advisor to a murderer on death row. “Dead man walking” is the phrase called out by the guard when escorting a prisoner to execution. In the film, the sister uses the Bible in her counseling. The film does not take sides in this controversy, but characters cite the Bible both for and against capital punishment. Discussion of the film can focus on the ambiguity of the Bible in addressing contemporary issues.