

### 3. What do Christians believe about Jesus?

Crucifix, p. 51

What is striking about this famous crucifix by Matthias Grünewald (1455–1528) is that Jesus' body, in a greenish tone, is covered with lesions, thus showing that he is suffering from ergotism, the disease afflicting the patients in the hospital for which his altarpiece was painted. Thus Christ suffers not only for but with humankind. To the viewer's right is John the Baptist and, in keeping with the Baptist's message, a lamb signifying Christ as the suffering Lamb of God. To the viewer's left is the beloved disciple John and Jesus' mother Mary, as recorded in John's Gospel, and, in keeping with tradition, Mary Magdalene and her jar of ointment. INRI is an abbreviation of the Latin: Jesus of Nazareth, king of the Jews.

#### Quotes and Images

p. 52: In this citation, C. G. Jung refers to the narrative of Saul/Paul being converted to faith in Christ (Acts 9:1-18).

p. 53: The great Italian Renaissance painter Raphael (1483–1520) depicted the legend of St. George slaying the dragon. Jungians speak of the archetypal image of the dragon as the primordial monster that civilization must conquer.

p. 55: Mechthild of Magdeburg (1207–1282), first a Beguine and later a nun, recorded her visions in poetic descriptions that feature especially the language of love.

p. 56: For Watterson, see p. 39. Once again in this cartoon, Calvin asks the most profound religious questions. Here, why are people evil?

p. 57: Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) was a Congregational and Presbyterian minister in colonial Massachusetts and New Jersey whose learned writings and powerful sermons were seminal influences in America’s First Great Awakening. Uncharacteristic of his usual focus on a loving God was his famous and rhetorically brilliant sermon “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.”

p. 59: Giovanni della Robbia (1469–1529) was an Italian Renaissance ceramic artist who in this piece sculpted the face of the serpent to match that of Eve. It was common for artists to give the serpent a female face, thus tying women to evil, although some artists made the serpent male, which suggested sexual seduction.

p. 61: Gustavo Gutiérrez, OP, (b. 1928) is a Peruvian Dominican priest famous for his articulation of liberation theology. Liberation theologians understand Christ’s work of salvation as applying not solely to a life after death, but to freedom from oppression on earth. Liberation theologians received some support from the emphasis in Vatican II about God’s preferential option for the poor.

p. 62: The Nicene Creed, which took its current form in 381 at the first Council of Constantinople, employed categories from current Greek philosophy to articulate the mystery of the incarnation. In 1988, the ecumenical commission called the English Language Liturgical Consultation published this translation.

p. 63: The earliest Christian graphic imagery is found in the catacombs of Rome, where Christians were buried and where worshipers met to commemorate the faithful departed. This mid-third-century symbolic depiction of Christ as a young shepherd is in the Catacomb of Priscilla.

p. 64: In his Orthodox icon, Sergius of Radonezh (1314–1392), a monastic reformer of medieval Russia, depicted Christ sitting on a throne and dressed as an Orthodox priest wearing a bishop’s crown. Worshipers kneel in adoration. The imagery means to work in both directions: Christ is like an emperor and a priest, and emperors and priests are like Christ.

p. 65: Thérèse of Lisieux, popularly called Little Flower (1873–1897), was a Carmelite nun who before dying of tuberculosis wrote an autobiography titled *The Story of a Soul*, her “little way” of spirituality. The Roman Catholic Church canonized her in 1925 and in 1997 named her Doctor of the Church.

p. 68: C. S. Lewis’s (1898–1963) children’s story *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* combines several theories of atonement for its allegory of Christ’s salvation. This citation places the atonement at the resurrection, while the ransoming of Edmund from the White Witch grounds atonement in Aslan’s death.

p. 69: This Easter cross adheres to the biblical injunction that forbids drawing pictures of God. Instead, this artist shows light for God the Father, the crown of thorns for the Son, the dove for the Holy Spirit, and the cross for Christ’s death.

## Suggestions, pp. 71–72

6. Most scholars judge Colossians to have been written in the late first century by a disciple of Paul. It describes Christ as divine, a cosmic being who is now embodied in the church.

7. The short story “The Deacon” (1999) by the American author of novels, essays, short stories, and literary criticism Mary Gordon (b. 1949), narrates Sister Joan Fitzgerald’s frustration with sixty-four-year-old Gerard Mahoney, a Roman Catholic deacon, who was ordained to assist the clergy, but who is serving as an incompetent teacher in the Catholic elementary school of which she is principal. To remove him from the classroom, she invents a job for him in the school’s computer lab, and then organizes an honorary retirement event for him, which is an embarrassing failure. Gerard mistakes her motives and sees in her the love that Christ commands. The Bible passage that Joan reflects on (Mark 14:3-9) suggests that Gerard is

either a type of Jesus or is the poor she is hoping to serve. Discussion of the story can focus on Christianity's teaching about Jesus.

8. The 1897 novel *In His Steps* by Charles Sheldon (1857–1946) is the source of the popular question “What would Jesus do?” seen in our day on the WWJD bracelets. Although we might be shocked by its descriptions of the city's poor as “broken, sinful, dirty, drunken, vile, depraved, coarse, brutish,” the novel sold over 30 million copies and served as a primary impetus for the American move toward Prohibition. The Protestant minister Henry Maxwell challenges the residents of his Midwestern city to do only what Jesus would do, and many lives are changed. Sheldon, prominent in the Social Gospel movement, believed that Christian faith should alter society, and that since what Jesus did was suffer, so Christians are to suffer. Primarily, however, they are to close saloons. The Endeavor Societies that figure in the novel were active youth groups supported by various Protestant churches. The words “queer” and “gay” did not for Sheldon connote homosexuality.

9. In the 1989 film *Jesus of Montreal*, a group of actors presents an unconventional passion play at a Roman Catholic pilgrimage shrine. The text of the nonsentimental play reflects current scholarly research concerning Jesus and crucifixions, and the church authorities stop a performance. The film presents many parallels to biblical episodes. At the end the Jesus character dies, and his organs are donated for the life of others. Discussion of the film can focus both on current research concerning crucifixions and on the transformation in the lives of the actors achieved by their connections with each other and with the story of Christ.