

R C I A

Rite for the Christian Initiation of Adults



Science And Religion



The Aim of Science is to explain what the world is like, how it works, and how it came to be; and this is the rightful province of scientists. Everything they discover can be proven to be true by the experiments that lay open the workings of substances, natural processes, and living beings which can be tested and examined by our senses. Scientists also produce theories, unproven ways of understanding difficult questions: they don't have to be provable to be useful (*Evolution* is still only a theory, not a proven reality. Nevertheless it is a very useful frame in which to unite things we actually know - such as the ages and histories of different rocks, fossils, and other palaeontological relics).

The Aim of Religion is to unite the whole of reality in a single view, so that we can come to live in an integrated way, guided by the same wisdom that lies behind the whole Creation. Believing that one divine mind unites all the features of the cosmos, the Judaeo-Christian faith seeks to discover and to live according to the mind of the Creator. Nothing, therefore, can be discovered by science that does not accord with religion; and religion must be ready to accommodate anything that science presents: because we believe that all truth is reconciled in the mind of God.

Scientists sometimes ask how we can speak of God when they find nothing in their experiments which would "prove" his existence. The question suggests its own answer: if the existence of God were detectable in the data of the Cosmos, he would have to be part of what he had made, which is nonsense. The Creator is precisely *not part of the Creation*.

Are you happy that your faith keeps pace with the rest of your life, or would you like it to be more mature or developed?

Do you feel you could defend your faith in argument?

Do you defend it if you hear it mocked, traduced, or parodied?



The Image Of God



Some words to think of: Jesus to Philip (Jn 14:9)

"To have seen me is to have seen the Father."

Philip was looking at Jesus with an ordinary pair of human eyes when he said these words. He could never "look at" the Father in that way, because the Father has no physical shape, body, or appearance. It isn't that he is *beyond* our sight, like the Taj Mahal, which we could look upon if we sold our gas shares and bought a ticket to Agra. You can't travel and then see God, because God remains invisible. But Jesus was/is a physical fact like you and me.

- How do we cope with the invisibility of the Father?
(contradict it by imagining an image; imagining something transcendent in the floodlight and firework department; closing your eyes and imagining a voice in a dark space; imagining a Presence, wordless, unseen, but real and warmly positive: etc, etc)
- How do we respond to the humility of God's presence in Jesus?
("You are only a man and you claim to be God" - Jn 10:33. In what sense can the sight of a carpenter-turned-rabbi equate to *seeing the Father*? When we think of Jesus *glorified*, what does our imagination do to his physical image? Painters give us light-and-colour spectaculars; but is that really how it is when a human being is clothed in the glory of the *invisible* God? We always talk of "seeing" God at the end of our earthly pilgrimage...here is another place where we acknowledge the weakness of our understanding and power of expression.)
- The fact that we (some of us) have seen Jesus of Nazareth licenses us to make images of him in art. There are also *conventions* that have grown up about how this should be done (long hair, beard, sad eyes, piercing gaze, no laughing, etc) which makes people able to say of this or that picture: *That looks/doesn't look like Jesus*: a quite unwarranted claim! We haven't any idea what Jesus looked like, except that he was a first-century Jewish man. The rest is our imagination.
Nor should we draw from this a license to produce images of the Father (old or very large authoritative bearded figure in robes, usually enthroned, commonly very cross). To think that this is a true image of the Father is nearly blasphemous, and does great damage to our faith, as Moses could have told us.
Finally, to think that the Holy Spirit commonly floats around in the shape of a white pigeon, just so that people know he's on the scene, is particularly inane. On the day of Pentecost Luke depicts the Spirit not as any avian form, but in a complex of symbols including a tremendous wind and flames descending onto people's heads. This too is a conventional way of expressing a spiritual reality, not a glimpse of what God "looks" like. We smile when we hear of the Elector of Saxony, who collected relics: including a feather from the Holy Spirit's wing.
Our habit of thinking of pigeons when the Holy Spirit is mentioned is no less daft.



Searching for Meaning



Our search for the purpose of our lives is always open to review. Something that seems vital when we're young may recede quite quickly when we gain experience; while something we neglected or despised in youth may suddenly begin to grow in significance later on.

- Can you recall any such happenings in your own journey?
- Do you now believe you have lost real treasure at any point in the past?
- Have you learned really precious lessons? If so, from whom?
- Are the signs that you are refining your search, or is it simply a matter of doors opening or closing?