

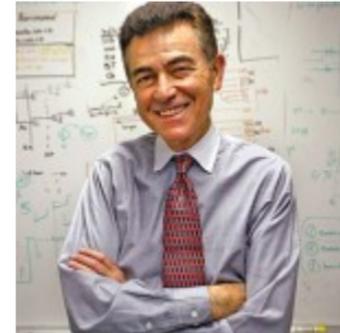


# The 20 Most Influential Christian Scholars

Super Scholar's 20 most influential Christian scholars have profoundly influenced the world by advancing Christian belief, by reconceptualizing it, or even by fundamentally challenging it. In any case, each of the thinkers below has deeply impacted Western culture's self-understanding.

## 1. Francisco Ayala

Francisco Ayala (b. 1934), an evolutionary biologist and geneticist at the University of California, Irvine, is well known as both a Catholic cleric and defender of Darwinian evolution. He has derided the idea that the universe or life show evidence of intelligent design. He urges lay people to embrace Darwinism and has called design “blasphemous.” Despite ongoing



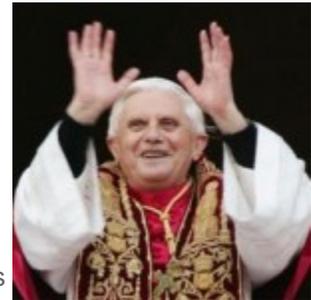
controversies over Darwinism, especially in the United States, he commented on 2009's bicentennial celebrations of Darwin as follows: "Charles Darwin would be ecstatic, overcome with joy and fulfillment. At age 200, he would be celebrating the greatest and happiest birthday of his life." Ayala has received many honors for his work, including the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion and the National Medal of Science.

**Reference Links:**

- [Faculty bio](#)
- [Interviews](#)

## 2. Benedict XVI (Joseph Ratzinger)

Joseph Ratzinger (b. 1927) was elected Pope Benedict XVI. As Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith before his election, he was responsible for maintaining the integrity of Roman Catholic doctrine. To this end, he organized a re-edit of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. He has been noted for prayer cards, widely distributed in Rome in many languages, saying that we are not exclusively a product of evolution. Not shy of controversy, he claimed, in his Regensburg Address, that Islam has a tendency to descend into violence. Though much derided for this address, he claimed it is firmly anchored in the Catholic teaching on natural justice.

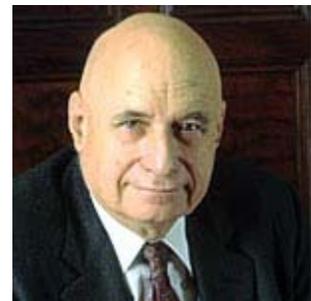


**Reference Links:**

- [Speech](#)
- [Interviews](#)

## 3. Peter Berger

Peter L. Berger (b. 1929) is a sociologist, who, starting in 1985, was director of the Institute for the Study of Economic Culture based at Boston University. He is best known for his sympathetic treatment of traditional religious beliefs that have guided humanity for thousands of years. Accounting for a worldwide resurgence of religion, he noted that there is an intractable conflict between the certainties by which people have lived for thousands of years and the secularity of an elite culture advancing rapidly to power in the Western world. His best known work is in social constructionism, a school of thought that focuses on uncovering the ways in which individuals and groups participate in the creation of their perceived reality.



**Reference Links:**

- [Faculty bio](#)
- [Interviews](#)

## 4. Gregory Boyd

Gregory Boyd (b. 1957) is a Yale-educated open theology advocate and senior pastor at the mega Woodland Hills Church in St. Paul, Minneapolis. An atheist who became a Christian in 1974, Boyd turned to open theism in response to the many unanswered questions and objections that he saw raised by traditional understandings of God. Explaining why God cannot know the future, he has said, "The primary reason I hold to the open view is that I simply can't with integrity make sense out of a wealth of Scripture unless I suppose that the future somewhat consists of possibilities." As founder of Christus Victor Ministries, he seeks to promote this understanding of God. Two of his most influential books are *God of the Possible* and *Satan and the Problem of Evil*.



**Reference Links:**

- [Letter](#)
- [Interviews](#) (Video, 13 parts)

## 5. Benjamin Carson

In 1987, neurosurgeon and Johns Hopkins professor Benjamin Carson (b. 1951) made medical history when he took the risk of operating on a pair of Siamese twins (the Binder twins) joined at the back of the head. These operations had usually failed, in previous medical experience, resulting in the death of either or both of the twins. The operation, led by Dr. Carson, lasted 22 hours. At the end, the twins were successfully separated and can now survive independently. The author of several popular books and the recipient of numerous awards and honorary doctorates, including the Presidential Medal of Freedom, Carson is a vigorous defender of religious values in the public square. A well known quote by him states, "To THINK BIG and to use our talents doesn't mean we won't have difficulties along the way. We will—we all do. If we choose to see the obstacles in our path as barriers, we stop trying."



**Reference Link:**

- [Interview](#)

## 6. Francis Collins

Francis Collins (b. 1950) is a geneticist recognized for completing, on behalf of the United States government, the map of the human genome (this project, more than a decade in the making, was completed in April 2003). He is best known in the popular literature for his book *The Language of God* (Free Press, 2006). In that book he argues for the compatibility of evangelical Christianity and Darwinian evolution. His thinking is welcomed by many Christians who want science and faith to be fully compatible. He founded Biologos, a website dedicated to faith and science, whose main aim is to promote "theistic evolution." When President Barack Obama appointed him to head the National Institutes of Health in 2009, Collins resigned his position with Biologos (though he retains strong ties to its leadership).



**Reference Links:**

- [Genome.gov Bio](#)
- [Interviews](#)
- [Articles](#)

## 7. John Dominic Crossan

John Dominic Crossan (b. 1934) was co-chair of the Jesus Seminar from 1985 to 1996, which at semi-annual meetings debated the historicity of the life of Jesus as portrayed in the Gospels. Overwhelmingly, the Jesus Seminar has concluded that the vast majority of sayings usually ascribed to Jesus were never in fact uttered by him. Crossan has written twenty-five books on the historical Jesus and the historical Paul, five of which have been national religious bestsellers, including *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (1991). He has lectured worldwide to lay and scholarly audiences, and appeared in many key media venues. His basic message is that Jesus must be understood in historical context not as God per se but as a liberating figure who advanced the Kingdom of God.



**Reference Links:**

- [Crossan's Homepage](#)
- [Faculty bio](#)
- [Interview 1](#)
- [Interview 2](#)

## 8. Robert P. George

Robert P. George (b. 1955) is Professor of Jurisprudence and Director of the James Madison Program in American Ideals and Institutions at Princeton University. As a conservative Roman Catholic, he encourages students to confront contentious issues such as abortion, the death penalty, war, and affirmative action. Currently he serves on UNESCO's World Commission on the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology. He is the author of *In Defense of Natural Law*, *Making Men Moral: Civil Liberties and Public Morality*, and *The Clash of Orthodoxies: Law, Religion and Morality in Crisis*. He was the principal intellectual architect behind the highly controversial Manhattan Declaration, which advocates civil disobedience once the power of government infringes too directly on Christian ethical norms.



**Reference Links:**

- [Faculty bio](#)
- [Interviews](#)

## 9. John Hick

John Hick (b. 1922) began his career teaching Christian theology at Princeton Theological Seminary. Turning to a pluralistic conception of faith, he has since focused on bringing religious harmony to the global society. In his view, a deeper underlying unity underlies otherwise divergent ideas about God. He has spoken against attempts by politicized neuroscientists to “debunk” belief in God. Perry Schmidt-Leukel, Chair of World Religions for Peace at the University of Glasgow, has said, “John Hick’s search for universal truth and globally valid moral standards is, despite some of his unorthodox conclusions, far more in line with the intellectual thrust of the theological tradition than the post-modern defenders of neo-‘orthodoxy’.” Hick’s work stresses the need for dialogue across religious divides as well as the view that all human responses to God are culturally conditioned.



**Reference Links:**

- [Faculty bio](#)
- [Interviews](#)

## 10. Hans Küng

Hans Küng (b. 1928), a Swiss Catholic priest, is known as a severe critic of Catholic teachings on lifestyle, especially in the matter of sexual abuse charges involving Catholic clergy. He charges the current pope of merely “whining” about criticism and being “principally responsible for the worldwide cover-up” and believes that Catholic culture encourages abuse of minors. He is known for the millennial belief that “after two world wars, the collapse of fascism, Nazism, communism and colonialism and the end of the cold war, humanity has entered a new phase of its history.” For many years a professor at the University of Tübingen and a prolific author (notably of *On Being a Christian and Does God Exist?*), he is inclined to view all religions as equal.



**Reference Links:**

- [Article](#)
- [Quotes](#)
- [Interviews](#)

## 11. Robert J. Marks II

Robert J. Marks II (b. 1950), Baylor University’s leading research professor, has emerged as the public face of intelligent design. As the movement’s premier scientist, he has been dubbed “the Charles Darwin of intelligent design.” At one point, his research on intelligent design was removed by Baylor officials from the university’s website. Since then he has published seminal work on such themes as whether computers have minds and whether Darwinian processes can generate biological information. He is widely quoted as saying, “Computers are no more able to create information than iPods are capable of creating music.” His Law of Conservation of Information purports to demonstrate inherent limitations on natural selection, suggesting that the intricate information needed for life requires an intelligent source.



**Reference Link:**

- [Faculty Bio](#)

## 12. Michael W. McConnell

As director of the Stanford Constitutional Law Center, Michael W. McConnell (b. 1955) is a widely respected authority on the separation of powers between church and state, federalism, constitutional law, as well as originalism—the idea that the Founders’ words mean what they say, as opposed to later creative interpretations. He is well known for his work on freedom of religion—a critical area of constitutional law, currently much debated. He supports a constitutional amendment banning abortion. His center at Stanford was founded in 2006 to explore and improve public understanding of the most pressing constitutional issues. Before joining Stanford in 2009, McConnell served as a federal judge on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit.



**Reference Link:**

- [Interviews](#)

## 13. R. Albert Mohler

R. Albert Mohler (b. 1959) is professor of systematic theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, where he serves as its president. Mohler epitomizes the resurgence in conservative theology that is sweeping the evangelical Christian world. The history of 20th century Christianity showed a steady disintegration of traditional Christian belief in the face of creeping secularization and liberalism. Mohler’s Southern Baptist Convention was the first instance of a large Christian denomination that had been sliding into secularity radically moving to the right. Mohler, as leader of the Southern Baptist’s flagship seminary, is the most visible intellectual and public face of the New Evangelicalism.



**Reference Link**

- [Biography](#)

## 14. Wolfhart Pannenberg

A Lutheran, Wolfhart Pannenberg (b. 1928) learned wariness of all ideologies when pressed into service in the last days of the Nazi Third Reich. Rational reflection on the devastations the Nazis had wrought led him to become a serious Christian, especially through a high school literature teacher who was a member of the endangered Confessing Church (the element of the Christian church that remained faithful to the tenets of Christianity, often at ultimate cost). Pannenberg champions the idea that faith should be based on reason and evidence. His best known work is *Jesus: God and Man* in which he argues that



the Resurrection is “the ground of Jesus’ unity with God.”

**Reference Links:**

- [Papers](#)
- [Biography](#)
- [Interviews](#)

## 15. Alvin Plantinga

Alvin Plantinga (b. 1932), professor of philosophy at the University of Notre Dame, has led the way in the rational defense of Christian belief, turning Christian philosophy into a recognized area of academic scholarship. An expert in epistemology, metaphysics, and the philosophy of religion, he has authored many influential books, including *God and Other Minds*, *The Nature of Necessity*, and a trilogy on epistemology—*Warrant: The Current Debate*, *Warrant and Proper Function*, and *Warranted Christian Belief*. Coming from a Dutch reformed background, he is a proponent of Reformed epistemology. His evolutionary argument against naturalism has placed him at odds with atheistic Darwinists.



**Reference Links:**

- [Papers & Bio](#)
- [Interviews](#)

## 16. Marilynne Robinson

Marilynne Robinson (b. 1943) is both a fiction and non-fiction writer. She is author of the novel *Home*, which won the Orange Prize (2009) and the Los Angeles Times Book Award. Her *Gilead* (Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2004) won a Pulitzer Prize. She also wrote *Housekeeping* (FSG, 1980), as well as two books of nonfiction, *Mother Country* (FSG, 1989) and *The Death of Adam*. She teaches at the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop. An *Economist* review (February 5, 2009) pointed out that “Her work always evokes a reverence for the landscape, a grateful humility before nature.” She has always been quite clear on the divide between the Christian tradition and scientific reductionism.



**Reference Links:**

- [Essays](#)
- [Article](#)
- [Interviews](#)

## 17. Rosemary Radford Ruether

Among the most widely regarded and readable of feminist theologians, Rosemary Radford Ruether (b. 1936), a Roman Catholic, is the Carpenter Professor of Feminist Theology at the Pacific School of Theology. Her book



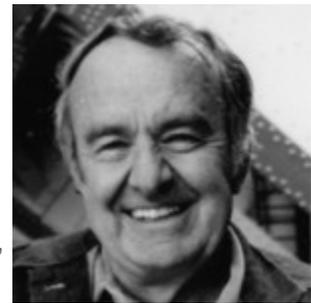
Sexism and God-Talk is considered a classic in the field of feminist theology and has been described as “the only systematic feminist treatment of the Christian symbols to date.” Situating herself on the Christian left, she has been controversial in supporting abortion rights and gay marriage. At the same time, she sees herself as conventionally Christian for embracing the “prophetic” rather than the “hierarchical” tradition of the Church.

**Reference Links:**

- [Articles](#)
- [Interviews](#)
- [Further info](#)

## 18. Allan Rex Sandage

Allan Rex Sandage (b. 1926), a student of Edwin Hubble, is considered the greatest living observational astronomer. He is credited with the discovery of quasars (high energy distant galaxies) and with empirically determining the age of the universe. After Hubble died in 1953, Sandage continued his work. In 1965, Sandage introduced a method of identifying quasars by using specific radio position. Sandage, who became a Christian at age 60, has argued that “science can answer only a fixed type of question. It is concerned with the what, when, and how. It does not, and indeed cannot, answer within its method (powerful as that method is) why.”



**Reference Links:**

- [Comments on religion](#)
- [Biographical Info](#)
- [Interview](#)

## 19. Charles Margrave Taylor

Charles Margrave Taylor (b. 1931), professor emeritus at McGill University in Montreal, has dedicated his career to advancing peaceful co-existence of diverse cultures. Peaceful co-existence has been a perennial concern in his native Canada, as with its threatened breakup in 1976 when a separatist party became the government of Quebec. As a philosopher and political theorist, Taylor’s scope is global. His best known book is Sources of Self, in which he traces the disintegration in western culture of theistically grounded morality. Taylor has received many honors and awards for his work, including the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion.



**Reference Links:**

- [Biography](#)
- [Interviews](#)

## 20. N. T. Wright

Nicholas Thomas Wright (b. 1948), widely known as “Tom” or “N.T.,” is the former Anglican bishop of Durham and presently a research professor at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland. He is a preeminent New Testament scholar, best known for his works defending orthodox Christian belief. His book *The Resurrection of the Son of God* was so influential that even Antony Flew, the late atheist scholar turned deist, praised it in his own book *There IS a God* (2007). Wright has defended his practice of writing “god” with a small “g” explaining that “in the first century, as well as the twenty-first, the question is not whether we believe in god ... but which out of many available candidates we might be talking about.”



#### Reference Links:

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