



The Varieties of Scientific Experience: A Personal View of the Search for God

By Carl Sagan

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Carl Sagan's prophetic vision of the tragic resurgence of fundamentalism and the hope-filled potential of the next great development in human spirituality

The late great astronomer and astrophysicist describes his personal search to understand the nature of the sacred in the vastness of the cosmos. Exhibiting a breadth of intellect nothing short of astounding, Sagan presents his views on a wide range of topics, including the likelihood of intelligent life on other planets, creationism and so-called intelligent design, and a new concept of science as "informed worship." Originally presented at the centennial celebration of the famous Gifford Lectures in Scotland in 1985 but never published, this book offers a unique encounter with one of the most remarkable minds of the twentieth century.

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Editorial Review

From Scientific American

Sagan, writing from beyond the grave (actually his new book, *The Varieties of Scientific Experience*, is an edited version of his 1985 Gifford Lectures), asks why, if God created the universe, he left the evidence so scant. He might have embedded Maxwell's equations in Egyptian hieroglyphs. The Ten Commandments might have been engraved on the moon. "Or why not a hundred-kilometer crucifix in Earth orbit?... Why should God be so clear in the Bible and so obscure in the world?" He laments what he calls a "retreat from Copernicus," a loss of nerve, an emotional regression to the idea that humanity must occupy center stage. Both Gingerich and Collins, along with most every reconciler of science and religion, invoke the anthropic principle: that the values of certain physical constants such as the charge of the electron appear to be "fine-tuned" to produce a universe hospitable to the rise of conscious, worshipful life. But the universe is not all that hospitable—try leaving Earth without a space suit. Life took billions of years to take root on this planet, and it is an open question whether it made it anywhere else. To us carboniferous creatures, the dials may seem miraculously tweaked, but different physical laws might have led to universes harboring equally awe-filled forms of energy, cooking up anthropic arguments of their own.

George Johnson is author of Fire in the Mind: Science, Faith, and the Search for Order and six other books. He resides on the Web at talaya.net

From [Booklist](#)

"The objectives of religion and science, I believe, are identical or very nearly so." So declares Carl Sagan in the first of the Gifford Lectures he delivered in 1985, published now to mark the tenth anniversary of the astronomer's death. Because he finds that scientists share a deep sense of wonder, Sagan defines science as a type of "informed worship," a definition clarified by awe-inspiring astronomical photographs. However, many readers will conclude that Sagan fails to link science and religion as kindred pursuits of truth. For despite the titular nod to William James, another famous Gifford lecturer, Sagan wants no variety of religious experience that will not fit within an empirical paradigm. In the transcendent visions of scripture, he sees only the effects of biochemicals that confer reproductive advantage. Still, Sagan recognizes in Christian admonitions to love one's enemy a much-needed moral guide in a world threatened by the weapons science has made possible. And even readers who turn elsewhere for a fuller understanding of religion will appreciate Sagan's passion for a science that teaches us to look up. *Bryce Christensen*

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Review

"Ann Druyan has unearthed a treasure. It is a treasure of reason, compassion, and scientific awe. It should be the next book you read."

-Sam Harris, author of *The End of Faith*

"A stunningly valuable legacy left to all of us by a great human being. I miss him so."

-Kurt Vonnegut

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Beverly McGahey:

The Varieties of Scientific Experience: A Personal View of the Search for God can be one of your basic books that are good idea. All of us recommend that straight away because this guide has good vocabulary that will increase your knowledge in language, easy to understand, bit entertaining but still delivering the information. The writer giving his/her effort to put every word into delight arrangement in writing The Varieties of Scientific Experience: A Personal View of the Search for God however doesn't forget the main position, giving the reader the hottest and based confirm resource facts that maybe you can be among it. This great information may drawn you into brand new stage of crucial pondering.

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