**Faith *or* Science?**

**By Jordan Haddad, Ph.D. (can.d)**

* 72% of Roman Catholic emerging adults believe in an “inherent warfare” model of science and religion,
* 62% of Roman Catholic emerging adults said that their own views about religion have *not* been strengthened by the discoveries of science, and
* 78% of Roman Catholic emerging adults who have stopped practicing their faith cited the “conflict” of science and religion as one of the reasons why they no longer practice their faith.[[1]](#footnote-0)

**Myth #1: The Christian Faith and Modern Science Are Polar Opposites (Or, The More Science Advances, the Less Reasonable Is Belief in God)**

* Dr. Lawrence Principe, Johns Hopkins University -- “The idea that scientific and religious camps have historically been separate and antagonistic is rejected by *all* modern historians of science.”

**Three Historical Factors**

* Professionalization of the Sciences
  + The wild success of the modern sciences in the late-17th and early 18th-centuries led to a heavy bias in their favor over other disciplines
* The Rise of Anti-Catholic Bias
  + Dr. Christopher Baglow, University of Notre Dame -- “While this phenomenon had nothing to do with the change in perceptions about science, it did create an intellectual environment in which bigotry and prejudice against Catholics were ripe to be exploited for social and political change. The majority of Catholic immigrants were poor and illiterate, which gave their religion an air of ignorance and superstition to non-Catholics.”
* Suspicion of Christian Doctrines other than Moral Teachings
  + Albert Einstein -- “But what is light really? Is it a wave or a shower of photons?... It seems as though we must use sometimes the one theory and sometimes the other, while at times we may use either. We are faced with a new kind of difficulty. We have two contradictory pictures of reality; separately neither of them fully explains the phenomena of light, but together they do.”
  + Dr. Baglow -- “Light cannot be fully imagined; it presents us with a natural paradox. But this is because the nature of light is richer than our minds can handle. The same is true of the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Eucharist, and many other articles of faith.”
* St. Augustine -- “One does not read in the Gospel that the Lord said: ‘I will send you the Paraclete [the Holy Spirit] who will teach you about the course of the sun and the moon.’ For he willed to make them *Christians*, not *mathematicians*.”

**Myth #2: The Galileo Affair Is a Paradigmatic Example of the Church’s Antagonistic Attitude Towards Science**

* The vast majority of scientists/philosophers of nature in Galileo’s day believed that the Earth was at the center of the universe.
  + They believed they had good scientific reasons for thinking this.
  + St. Robert Bellarmine believed that *if conclusive* *arguments could be advanced by Galileo and his disciples*, then the Church and her theologians would have to very carefully re-consider how it interprets those biblical passages that seem to advocate for a Earth-centered cosmos.
* Ecclesial politics and personal vendetta played a significant role in how the “Galileo Affair” was handled.
* The Galileo Affair was a singular event in the history of the Catholic faith-modern science relationship with no counterpart, it is by no means a paradigmatic event displaying the ignorance and violence of the Church against science in every age.

**Myth #3: You Can’t Be a Good Catholic and a Good Scientist**

* Nicolaus Copernicus -- the Polish astronomer whose heliocentric theory helped set in motion the Scientific Revolution from which modern science was born)
* Galileo Galilei -- “Father of Modern Science”
* Pierre Gassendi -- the major proponent of “atomism” [the idea that matter is composed of small indivisible constituents of varying properties]
* Fr. Francesco Grimaldi -- a Jesuit priest, physicist, and astronomer, made one of the most significant discoveries in the history of physics, namely the phenomenon of diffraction of light, which shows that light does not travel in straight lines
* Bl. Nicholas Steno -- a Danish Catholic bishop who made fundamental contributions to anatomy, paleontology, geology, and crystallography
* Fr. Gregor Mendel -- an Augustinian friar who is credited with founding the science of genetics
* Fr. Angelo Secchi -- a Jesuit priest who is consider one of the fathers of modern astrophysics
* Jerome Lejeune -- a French geneticist and pediatrician most famous for discovering in 1958, in collaboration with Raymond Turpin and Marthe Gautier, that Down Syndrome is caused by an extra copy of chromosome 21
* Sr. Miriam Michael Stimson -- a Dominican nun who played a significant role in our present-day understanding of DNA
* Fr. George Lematire -- a Belgian priest, theoretical physicist and mathematician who proposed the Big Bang theory[[2]](#footnote-1)

**Principle #1: Faith and Science Can Never Truly Contradict One Another**

* Pope St. John Paul II -- “Science can purify religion from error and superstition; religion can purify science from idolatry and false absolutes. Each can draw the other into a wider world, a world in which both can flourish.”
* Rabbi Jonathan Sacks -- “Science takes things apart to see how they work. Religion puts things together to see what they mean.”
* St. John Henry Newman -- “If [we] have one maxim in our philosophy [or faith], it is, that truth cannot be contrary to truth; if we have a second, it is, that truth often seems contrary to truth; and, if a third, it is the practical conclusion, that we must be patient with such appearances, and not be hasty to pronounce them to be really of a more formidable character.”
* Questions to consider when faced with a seeming contradiction or difficulty between faith and science:
  + (1) “Is this really what the science says?”
  + (2) “Is this a novel idea only recently put forward or has this gained acceptance in the wider scientific community?”
  + (3) “Does this truth claim fall within the realm of scientific investigation or is it a different type of question that it is incapable of answering?
  + (4) “Is this really what we believe as Catholics, or is it simply a pious opinion?”
  + (5) “Has the Magisterium or respectable theologians commented on this issue at all and clarified the matter?”

**Principle #2: Science Helps Us to Better Know the Wisdom of God**

* “Book of Nature” and “Book of Revelation”
* Psalm 19:1 -- “The heavens are telling the glory of God.”
* Romans 1:19-20 -- “For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made.”
* Wisdom 11:20 -- “But thou hast arranged all things by measure and number and weight.”
* In physics, chemistry, and biology, there is a deep order that explains why and how things occur, which just goes to show that even though the development of the universe can seem unpredictable and chaotic because there are an unimaginable number of contingencies and unforeseen events, there is nonetheless a divine Reason, a divine Mind, that stands behind it and thinks it into existence, as it were, which explains why science -- as the reasoned investigation of the physical universe -- is possible in the first place.
* Albert Einstein -- "The most incomprehensible thing about the universe is that it is comprehensible.”
* John 1:1-3 -- “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.”
* John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, “Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth; and God has placed in the human heart a desire to know the truth—in a word, to know himself—so that, by knowing and loving God, men and women may also come to the fullness of truth about themselves.”

1. 2014 study from the Center for the Study of Religion and Society and the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR); 2016 by CARA. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. See https://www.catholicscientists.org/catholic-scientists-of-the-past [↑](#footnote-ref-1)