

1 The Church opposes Science

The ‘religion vs. science’ hypothesis – that the Church has opposed scientific progress through history – was debunked by historians of science long ago, but it remains a common misconception.

Catholic leaders, from ancient times to today, have overall been quite “pro-science”, oftentimes making important contributions to science themselves. Devout Catholic scientists include the fathers of genetics (Fr Mendel), modern chemistry (Lavoisier), bacteriology (Pasteur), aeronautics (Fr Lana), mineralogy (Agricola), embryology (Fabrizio), histology (Malpighi), mycology (Fr Micheli), analytic geometry (Descartes), and more. Fr Lemaitre first proposed the Big Bang Theory.

Some cite the 17th century trial of Galileo Galilei. Arguably, he was condemned less for his scientific views than for his mocking, disrespectful attitude. In any case, one example does not outweigh 2,000 years of solid Catholic support for science.

Further reading: *Science and Religion* (Fengren)

2 The Church is violent (Inquisition and Crusades)

Many see the Church as violently intolerant, supposedly killing millions of non-Christians during the Crusades and Inquisition. This prejudiced view is grossly overexaggerated.

“The Crusades were precipitated by Islamic provocations--by centuries of bloody attempts to colonize the West and by sudden new attacks on Christian pilgrims and holy places.”
– Historian Rodney Stark (*Bearing False Witness*)

Shortly after Islam was founded (610 AD), its armies forcibly conquered many Christian lands. Christians were persecuted as second-class citizens (c.f., the Pact of Umar, 637 AD). They were forced to pay a special tax and forbidden from praying out loud or rebuilding their churches. In the 11th century, violent massacres by the Seljuk Turks prompted the First Crusade. The crusaders saw themselves as pilgrims or penitents, fighting a “war

of defense” to open the Holy Land for pilgrim. Most of the crusaders lost money; none planned to force the conversion of Muslims.

The Spanish Inquisition (1478–1834) never brought non-Christians to trial. Prisoners greatly preferred Inquisition jails and courts to secular ones, as they were seen as fairer and more lenient. The total number executed was perhaps 3,000 over roughly 400 years (far fewer executions than performed by secular courts at the time; and fewer executions on average than the U.S. performs today)

Of course, the Crusades and Inquisition are not bright spots in Church history, and regrettable violence (e.g., against Jews) occurred. However, violence is not inherent to the Christian faith. Jesus taught his disciples to turn the other cheek (Mt 5:39) and sheath their swords (Mt 26:52). There were no Christian armies until the 4th century, when Roman emperors began to mix politics and religion. Overall, Christianity has tended to abate violence (e.g., by implementing the Truce of God) where it was adopted. By contrast, atheist dictators in the 20th century (e.g. Stalin, Pol Pot) killed millions. Today, Christianity is the **most persecuted religion in the world**, with roughly 10,000 Christians dying for their faith every year.

3 The Church condones pedophilia

Tragically, numerous priests—entrusted to protect and educate children—instead did the unthinkable to them. Just as despicably: some bishops covered up for these grave evils. However, sexual abuse of minors is hardly unique to Catholic priests.

“To assume that clerical abuse is more frequent with Catholic clergy compared to other clerics or other men who work with youth is simply not based on sound science or quality research data to date.” - Dr. Thomas Plante (Prof. Psychology)

Even at its peak, the percent of clerics guilty of abuse was lower than the percent of public school teachers guilty of student sexual abuse. Further, the vast majority of cases of clerical abuse occurred

in the 1960s-70s; cases have been quite rare since 2002, when the ‘Dallas Charter’ enacted extra training, background checks, and zero-tolerance policies. E.g., in 2009, 6 credible cases of abuse were reported in the entire U.S. Church, while “at least one child is sexually abused by a school employee every day in NYC schools.” (Montero, 2001).

4 The Church is misogynistic

Many think that the Church represses women, since only men can be ordained as priests and bishops. In this issue, the Church follows Christ himself, who only chose men as his apostles—although he gave unprecedented respect to women (e.g., as first witnesses of his resurrection).

In a study by *America* (2018), 90% of surveyed women said they had not experienced sexism in the Church. Women far outnumber men in parish ministry and religious education. The imbalance is longstanding: women flocked to the early Church, outnumbering men (see Stark, *Rise of Christianity*).

“Has any institution [in history] educated more women? Fed more women? Clothed more women? Rescued more female infants from death? Offered more assistance or medical care to mothers and their children?” – Prof. C. Kaczor (*7 Big Myths*)

5 The Church hates sex

Some think the Church is led by sexually suppressed priests and nuns wielding rulers to strike anyone who dares enjoy sex. In fact, the Church sees sex as a great good. The Church is not Puritanical; e.g., many nudes decorate the Sistine Chapel. The Bible uses nuptial imagery to symbolize the marriage of Christ to his Church.

The Church follows the view that is both biological and traditional: sex between mammals has two fundamental purposes: “babies and bonding” or procreation and unity (via oxytocin). Following Christ and countless saints, the Church sees sex as a unitive act between husband and wife, open to

children. This is an ideal for family flourishing. Studies show that children do better when raised in a stable marriage, and that couples who are religious or who keep sex within marriage report more sexual satisfaction. Promiscuity has health risks, and addictive pornography has negative effects on the brain, objectifies people, and is tied to sex trafficking.

The Church treats sex like a diamond to be shared exclusively with one’s spouse. The world treats sex like candy to be enjoyed with anyone (or alone). For Catholics, marital union is a sublime imitation of the divine, Trinitarian Love. For the world, sex is as humdrum as a ‘swipe right’ on a smartphone.

6 The Church forbids birth control

The Church forbids artificial contraception, though it permits responsible family planning through fertility awareness-based methods (FAM). FAM practiced properly (e.g., the Marquette Method) is similarly effective at avoiding pregnancy as oral contraceptive pills (OCPs), without medical side effects and with the added benefits of increased couple communication and bodily self-knowledge.

OCPs have side effects and risks (e.g., increased risk of blood clots and breast cancer). Instead of cooperating with a woman’s natural biology, OCPs blunt it, treating her healthy fertility like a disease. Some scholars have correlated OCPs to the rise in divorce rates and single motherhood (as pregnancy becomes all “her fault”) (see Eberstadt, *Adam and Eve after the Pill, Revisited*).

OCPs and intra-uterine devices (IUDs) both have a possible ‘contra-gestive’ mechanism of action. They thin or inflame the uterine lining and can prevent implantation of fertilized eggs (or blastocysts). The Church agrees with basic embryology: that a new human life begins at fertilization. Thus, Catholics



should avoid contra-gestion, which is analogous to an early abortion. The Church consistently defends innocent human life from intentional destruction.

The ‘skeleton key’ or trump card:

While the Church’s prohibition on contraception, abortion, women’s ordination, and homosexual acts is unpopular, these doctrines go back to Christ and the early Church (which Christ promised to abide with, Mt 28:20). **Catholics don’t presume to know better than Jesus and those who knew him best.** This is humble reverence, not arrogance.

7 The Church is homophobic

Tragically, many LGBT people have experienced verbal or physical abuse from people who say they are Christian. Although some religions permit such violence, Catholicism does not: “It is deplorable that homosexual persons have been and are the object of violent malice in speech or in action. Such treatment deserves condemnation...” (Ratzinger).

The Church teaches that we should imitate God, who loves each of us unconditionally as a beloved child. However, love means ‘to will the best for the other’, not to approve of every decision everyone makes. Following Christ, St Paul, and the Early Church, the Church teaches that sex is designed for husband and wife, for bonding + babies (#4 above). ‘Love is love’ sounds nice, but any biologist knows that male-female coitus is qualitatively different than homosexual acts. Only the former fulfills the purpose of our reproductive organs: to reproduce. The Church teaches that any sexual acts outside of husband-wife coitus (e.g., masturbation, fornication) are disordered or sinful. It does not single out homosexual acts as especially egregious.

We all have desires that are disordered or not good for us (e.g., addiction to sweets or pornography). The person is not disordered as a whole but has a particular inclination that “is not ordered toward the fulfillment of the natural ends of human sexuality. [...] They still retain] their intrinsic human dignity and value” (U.S. Bishops’ Conference).

Historically, even societies that condoned homosexuality (e.g., ancient Greece) did not enshrine it within marriage, which was intended to support a mother and father in raising children. If marriage is for any people who say they love each other, why not legalize polygamy or incest? The Catholic view is unpopular but has been consistent.

Jesus and many saints lived celibate lives, and many gay Catholics today (including clergy) live chastely.

“As a gay man, learning Theology of the Body was world-shattering for me. It’s a vastly different worldview than what the secular world offers. God created my body in His image for sacrificial love. He loves me and knows I will be happiest when I use my body as it is intended, and not simply to satisfy all my sexual impulses.” -Fernando Limbo

8 The Bible is full of contradictions

The Bible is God’s word (i.e., spiritual truth) delivered by flawed humans. It is not meant to be read literally as a modern science or history book; even St. Augustine (4th century) didn’t believe that God created the Earth in 6 days. The prophetic, poetic, and apocalyptic books of the Bible are meant to be read through those lenses; anything else is ignorant bias. The Biblical authors were less worried about specific historic details (e.g., did Jesus preach on a mountain or a plain?) than the spiritual truths conveyed. The Bible is not a history book, and Catholics are not Fundamentalists.

9 God permits suffering

Why does a loving, all-powerful God allow the innocent to suffer? Notably, the objection itself suggests God’s existence: we sense injustice because we have a conscience/sense of morality.

God did not create evil. Rather, He created us (and angels) with free will, which is a good. Love that is freely given is better than robotic or forced obedience. But free will allows for us to reject good, which leads to suffering and evil.

Why doesn’t God work frequent miracles to alleviate suffering? We cannot with our 3-pound brains understand the multi-dimensional game of chess that God oversees; just as a toddler cannot understand why a parent takes away his candy.



God can and does make good come from evil. Heroes and saints rise to challenges, becoming more virtuous. E.g., enduring illness can make you more sympathetic to others who are sick. Suffering and sacrifice have meaning and value. The saints found joy in suffering,

seeking to unite their sufferings to those of Christ (Col. 1:24). Jesus himself endured unjust torture and death, and thereby redeemed us for Him, for Love. In a mysterious way, a saint can prayerfully enter into Jesus’ saving work with their own suffering.

Ultimately, God will right all injustices at the end of time. Christ taught that Hell is real. The Church does not guess how many are there, but sees it as the logical conclusion of a life that has rejected God/Love. “The doors of Hell are locked on the inside,” wrote C.S. Lewis. At death, the souls of unrepentant, serious sinners remain forever in a state of their choosing: separated from God. God loves us dearly, and so He respects our choices and does not force us to love Him in return.

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Answers to the Top 9 Objections to Catholicism

Examining the Evidence