

# The Catholic Church And Science



Catholic priests confronting Galileo

By J. J. Murphy

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It was written in the middle of the 20th century, but I believe the Vatican has not changed since then and continues to have the same attitude toward science and knowledge in general it has always held. If you don't think so, just look at the low academic standard of public high schools in the USA today. Without a doubt, the Jesuits were behind the dumbing down of America. How many Americans on the street if shown a world map can point to Japan or the Philippines when asked? Some can't even point to the USA. And what's the purpose of the dumbing down of a nation? It's far easier for the government to control an ignorant people than a well informed one.

The author, J.J. Murphy, shares in this article some very interesting history I never knew before!

SCIENCE and Roman Catholicism are essentially antagonistic. The former faces the untried future with experiment as its only tool and honesty to truth its only guide. Roman Catholicism fears the future, and is opposed to experiment and change as revolutionary and destructive of its fixed dogmas and religious practices.

Like Fascism and Nazism, Roman Catholicism will use science when, but only when, it suits its purposes. Just as its 'leadership principle' was the groundwork of Nazism – as Goering testified at the Nuremberg trials last March 14 – so too were its censorship and Inquisition methods, its book burnings and other means for the repression of individual thought and scientific progress. Hitler himself, in *Mein Kampf*, laid down the principle that, "The greatness of every powerful organization... is rooted in the religious fanaticism with which it intolerably enforces itself against everything else, fanatically convinced of its own right." Further on in the same book (p. 882) he says:

"Here too one can learn from the Catholic church. Although its structure of doctrines in many instances collides, quite unnecessarily, with exact science

and research, yet it is unwilling to sacrifice even one little syllable of its dogmas. It has rightly recognized that its irresistibility does not lie in a more or less great adjustment to the scientific results of the moment... but rather in a strict adherence to dogmas... Today therefore the Catholic church stands firmer than ever.”

Treatment of the Catholic church’s attitude to science in all its branches – chemistry, physics, astronomy, geology, etc. – would be impossible in one short article. Its entire strategy against science and the tactics of its warfare can best be surveyed from the viewpoint of one single science. Medical science, which relates directly to the welfare and everyday life of all of us, affords the best vantage point from which to view the whole attitude of the Catholic church to science.

## **Catholicism And Medical Science**

Back of the whole attitude of the Catholic church toward medicine are two primitive superstitions from Persia that crept into the Catholic world through the early Fathers. One of these is the teaching that all matter is evil and contemptible, from which it follows that freedom of the soul can be obtained only by neglect and abuse of the body. Sanctity and physical filthiness thus became synonyms, as in the case of Simon Stylites, and centuries later that of Saint Benedict Labre, whose claim to sainthood is that he lived his whole life in rags and covered with fleas. The second doctrine was that all diseases are caused by demons that are banished only by supernatural means. The priest therefore was the only doctor for the treatment of the ills of the body, mind and soul.

Thomas Aquinas, whose teachings are regarded today as the embodiment of the Catholic church’s ‘scientific’ outlook and achievement, was particularly responsible for the lack of scientific progress till modern times. Dr. Andrew Dickson White, distinguished, American historian and late president of Cornell University says:<sup>1</sup>

“It was Aquinas who finally made the great compromise which for ages subjected science entirely to theology... The first result of this great man’s compromise was to close for ages that path in science which above all others leads to discoveries of value – the experimental method – and to reopen the old path of mixed theology and science which, as Hallam declares, ‘after 300 or 400 years had not untied a single knot or added one unequivocal truth to the domain of philosophy’ – the path which, as all modern history proves, has ever led only to delusion and evil.”

Modern medicine has established the fact that dirt and disease go hand in hand. The Catholic church, on the other hand, by glorifying dirt and the abuse of the body by ascetical practices, opened the way to disease and pestilence. Professor C. E. Winslow of Yale University, in the *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences* (XII, 647), reminds us that:

“Medieval Europe, in reaction from the emphasis of classical civilization upon bodily well-being, glorified through the early church uncleanness and disease as disciplines preparing the soul for eternal mansions. **Greek hygiene**

**and Roman sanitation were condemned or ignored, and vast epidemics swept across the face of Europe."**

Jerome, early Doctor of the Church, established the principle that, "The purity of the body and its garments means the impurity of the soul." In the rules governing the religious orders of the Catholic church to this day, such as Benedictines, the Cistercians, and the Trappists, **baths are forbidden**. The Italian monastery of Monte Cassino (to save which during the war thousands of lives were sacrificed) has never had a single bathtub or shower. As Haverlock Ellis puts it: **"The Church killed the bath."**

Instead of medicines, the church built up a system of 'sacramentals' – relics, charms, and amulets – as the sole means of curing bodily ailments and dispelling devils. Every Catholic country today is full of these amulets and charms, which differ in no way from those used in pagan countries from the beginning of history. Even in the United States rice paper images of St. Joseph, the Virgin Mary, St. Anthony and other saints, are eaten by devout Catholic people as a cure for disease. Scapulars, the 'miraculous medal,' tiny metal images of St. Anthony, Agnus Dei's, and St. Christopher medals for automobiles, are worn or carried by Catholic people to ward off diseases and accidents.

## **Demon Origin Of Disease**

The glorification of dirt was not only a cause of disease, but led to the exclusion of medical cures on the ground that all disease resulted from the supernatural powers of evil. St. Augustine, whose opinions later became medieval dogmas, declared that "all diseases are to be ascribed to demons." Thus it was a natural and inevitable conclusion that these evil spirits could be overpowered and diseases cured only by the intervention of God's coworkers, the saints. Dr. George F. Fort, distinguished medical historian, says in his work, *Medical Economy during the Middle Ages* (p. 276):

"Inasmuch as diseases during this period were attributed to Satanic origin... the principal and in many cases the only remedies were drawn from relics or from objects which the departed saints had used in daily occupation. Flowers reposing upon the tomb of a saint, when steeped in water, were regarded as endowed with wonderful curing powers."

Whenever a grievous malady failed to yield under the ordinary invocation and magic of the church, the priestly authorities then proclaimed that the sufferer was possessed by the devil. So ingrained are these traditional superstitions that even in modern times refutation of such myths in no way jars the faith of the deluded Catholic people. Dr. White, in his above-quoted work (vol. II, p. 29), states that, "When Professor Buckland, the eminent osteologist and geologist, discovered that the relics of Saint Rosalia at Palermo, Italy, which had for ages cured diseases and warded off epidemics, were the bones of a goat, this fact earned not the slightest diminution of their miraculous power."

From these bones of goats and other relics, the Catholic church has always taken in countless millions of dollars by its monopoly of the curing

business. In this regard Dr. White says: "Enormous revenues flowed into various monasteries and churches in all parts of Europe from relics noted for their healing powers." More than \$50,000 worth of the medals, scapulars, rosary beads, etc., for instance, brought to Rome last February by Cardinal Spellman to be blessed by the Pope and to be laid on the tombs of Rome's many saints, were stolen from his hotel.

The science of medicine owes what little advance was made in medieval times to the Arabs and Jews who were outside the jurisdiction of the Catholic church and therefore less subject to its strictures against experimental research. A medical faculty was established at the school of Montpellier in the 12th century by Jews, themselves educated in Moorish schools in Spain and imbued with the intellectual independence of the (Mohammedan) Averroists. "Montpellier," says the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (XVIII, 47) "became distinguished for the practical and empirical spirit of its medicine, as contrasted with the dogmatic and Scholastic teaching of Paris and other universities." Also at Salerno, Italy; medicine was taught under Arabic influence during the medieval period as a separate branch of science in distinction to monastic medicine prevalent elsewhere.<sup>2</sup>

Some Catholic scholars made brave attempts to take up an experimental study of medicine, but in most cases were furiously repressed as sorcerers: Such was the fate of the medieval genius Roger Bacon, a Franciscan priest. **Because he insisted that all science was experimental, Bacon incurred the enmity of the church and was imprisoned.** Even his Catholic biographer, Dr. David Riesman, in his *Story of Medicine in the Middle Ages*, (p. 78) admits that because of his scientific principles Bacon spent altogether twenty-four years either in the prisons of his Order or under persecution. He was forced to write his notes in secret code. In the 17th century Paul Sarpi, the Venetian friar who was the first to discover the circulation of the blood and the iris of the eye, was obliged to dissect the bodies of birds and mice in the secrecy of his cell! He had to be protected against the Pope's assassins by a special guard when he walked through the city, but several times he was waylaid and left for dead.

## Medieval Surgery

Even more strict than the church's prohibitions against medical research in general was its opposition to surgery and dissection of the body, in life or death. As a result, the medical art of surgery, says Dr. Fort (p. 453), "was compared to the social degradation of barbers and bloodletters until the year 1406, when Wenceslaus, the emperor of Germany, by imperial rescript ordered that thenceforth this profession should be deemed honorable."

The reason for this unrelenting opposition to the art of surgery on part of the Catholic church was extraordinary teaching that there is in the human body an incorruptible and incombustible bone that will be the nucleus of the future resurrection the body. It was to keep this myth from being exposed that the vigorous prohibitions against all dissection of body was mainly due. These same restrictions protected other medieval myths as well, such as the lesser number of ribs in a man than in a woman. Pope Innocent III, in 1215, anathematized the practice of surgery, giving as excuse that "the Church

abhorred all cruel and bloody practices," and especially forbade priests to have anything to do with it. The absurdity of this excuse can be readily seen in the fact that at that very time the papal Inquisition was shedding blood all over Europe. The exclusion of priests from the study and practice of surgery by this papal decree was practically the same as forbidding it all together.

## **Church's Control Of Insanity**

The revival of the science of medicine that came after the Renaissance of learning threatened to take out of the hands of the church the profitable profession of treating disease of which she had long held the monopoly. Thereafter only one class of diseases remained exclusively hers – those which were still admitted to be due to the direct influence of Satan. Foremost among these was insanity. The cruel treatment of lunatics was simply the direct punishment of the devil, since insanity was held to be possession by the devil. Often the type of cure, such as the promotion of great religious processions, only aggravated and spread the disease. "Troops of men and women, crying, howling, imploring saints, and beating themselves with whips," says Dr. White, "visited various sacred shrines, images, and places in the hope of driving off the powers of evil. The only result was an increase in the numbers of the diseased."<sup>3</sup>

Exorcism was the main weapon of the church against insanity. By this means the 'indwelling Satan' was adjured in the most blasphemous and obscene language to depart from the afflicted person. The Jesuit Fathers in Vienna in 1583, according to Dr. White, "gloried in the fact that in such a contest of exorcism they had cast out 12,652 living devils." Every Roman Catholic priest today who performs the rite of baptism has to exorcise the devil who is believed to reside in the child as a result of birth. After putting salt into the child's mouth, rubbing spittle from his own mouth on the child's nose and ears, and blowing his breath in the child's face, the priest directly commands the devil as follows: "Depart, thou damned devil, out of this child!"

## **Catholicism And Modern Medicine**

Roman Catholic doctors and surgeons today in modern America are caught between the many restrictions of their church on medicine and surgery and the ethical rules of their profession. It is counted as murder, for instance, by the Catholic church to remove a fetus that is the result of an ectopic gestation, although a surgeon by law is bound to do so because it means certain death for the mother.

The writer once asked a prominent Catholic surgeon of New York City what he would do if he were operating on a woman for appendicitis and discovered an ectopic gestation. By the rule of his church he would have to leave it there and sew the woman up again; otherwise he would have to go to confession, accuse himself of committing murder and promise never to do it again. By way of answer he superstitiously knocked on the wood of his desk and said: "Thank God, I haven't yet come across such a case!" Craniotomy is also forbidden by the Catholic church unless the child can first be baptized in the mother's

womb. The general rule of the Catholic church in childbirth is that the mother life must be sacrificed to assure the baptism of the child.

In Catholic countries where the church of Rome dominates, the priest is a self-appointed doctor providing quack medicines and superstitious remedies for all diseases. This is especially the case in Ireland, parts of Italy, Spain, and elsewhere. But it is even more so in Latin-American countries where the Catholic church has lorded it over the people for four centuries. Health conditions there are what they would be everywhere if the matter were left in the hands of the Catholic church.

An article in *Harper's* magazine for July, 1942, points out that 50 of the 120 millions in Latin America are ill with everything "from sprue to leprosy," especially with diseases reduced to a minimum in the United States. The most authoritative book so far issued on economic and social conditions in Latin America, entitled *Latin America in the Future World* (p. 4) states that, "One half of the Latin-American population is suffering from infections or deficiency diseases."

The tuberculosis rate in New York is 52. In Santiago, Chile, it is 430; in Lima, Peru, 435; in Callao, Peru, 503; in Guayaquil, Ecuador, it is 693.

A person born and living in the United States has a life expectancy of 62 years and five months, as of 1940. If he were to live in Latin America, his life expectancy would range from a high of 47 years in the more fortunate' areas to a low of less than 32 in Peru. Thus in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, more than one half of the men who reach working age die before they are 29 years old. Any or all of these figures can be documented in the work just mentioned which has the approval of the respective governments of every Latin-American country.

Catholic propagandists would like to explain the dismal health conditions of Latin America in terms of climatic conditions. Such pretexts are not worthy of serious consideration, for similar conditions obtain in all Latin-Catholic countries despite the great variations in climate between one and another. Catholic Europe tells the same sad story.

Far from tropical Latin America, among the French-Canadians of frigid Quebec, a province completely controlled by the Catholic clergy, the same conditions of disease follow in the steps of the same poverty, ignorance, and superstition. Quebec City, the site of the much-frequented shrine of Saint Cine still has the highest diphtheria mortality rate in the world (41.7 per 100,000). The city of Three Rivers with an infant mortality rate of 297 per 1,000 live births is in this respect behind the backward cities of Bombay and Madras, India.

It is the rule in French cities of Quebec that their health records improve in direct proportion to the number of Protestants. A typical case of this is found in the contrast between Montreal and Verdun, two neighboring cities separated only by a narrow canal. The first of these twin cities is overwhelmingly French-Catholic, the other predominantly Protestant. In Montreal the mortality rate through infectious diseases, according to the

figures of a few years ago which we have on hand, is 68.8 in contrast to a figure of 26.6 for Verdun. Similarly in the tuberculosis mortality rate the figure for Monreal is 87.7, in contrast to 38.6 for Verdun.

Catholic reaction to medical progress still shows traces of its true colors even here in the United States at the present time. In 1944 the Catholic *Legion of Decency* forced the United States Public Health Service to withdraw its sponsorship of a restrained educational movie on venereal disease. The picture as a result was barred from the movie houses of the whole country. This in spite of the fact that the picture was made at public expense and endorsed by the "War Activities Committee" of the Federal Government as a necessary health measure, especially in war time.

Catholic teaching also opposes premarital physical examination to prevent venereally diseased persons from marrying. Father Francis J. Connell in an article in the *Catholic Mind* of January 22, 1939, justified this position, saying: "All the physical afflictions that can ensue from the marriage of a diseased person, both to the healthy consort and to the offspring, are an immeasurably lesser evil than one mortal sin which the marriage could avert."

Nor is Catholic obstruction in the field of medicine confined to giving the green light to venereal diseases, which it still likes to think of as a divine punishment for sin. It is also fighting social medicine. On February 28th, 1944, the National Catholic Welfare Conference, political sounding board of the Catholic hierarchy, declared its opposition to a bill with social medicine provisions, adding that "the mere fact that social legislation meets the social needs and responds to social demands is of itself not a strong enough reason to merit the support of a Catholic.

Back of the whole attitude of the Roman Catholic church to medical and scientific progress is its aim for totalitarian control of the bodies and souls of all men. It claims control over the body because it regards the body as merely the container for the soul, and over soul of all men the church of Rome is adamant in claiming absolute dictatorship. It is true that the Vatican today has its "Papal Academy of Sciences." But this is purely an informative body that keeps the church up to date in knowledge of scientific advances. From information thus obtained, the Pope issues decrees that assure the protection of the church's teachings against new discoveries and practices of science in all fields.

Like Fascism and Nazism, the Catholic church encourages scientific progress, but only in so far as it serves its purposes. Everything harmful to its interests is sacrificed, no matter what its benefits may be to humanity in other ways.

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1. History of the Warfare of Science with Theology, vol. I, p. 379.↵
  2. Cf. Mystery, Magic, and Medicine, by Dr. Howard W. Haggard of Yale, p. 43.↵
  3. Op. cit., vol. II, pp. 105-112.↵

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- [The Nature Of Roman Catholicism](#)
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- [The Catholic Church And Women](#)
- [The Catholic Church And Science](#)