



Catechetical Series:

What Catholics Believe & Why

THE ENLIGHTENMENT: REASON WITHOUT FAITH

Behold The Truth

Discovering the What & Why of the Catholic Faith
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The Age of Enlightenment

- ❖ The Enlightenment was a philosophical and political movement begun by intellectuals in France and England in the 17th and 18th centuries, and founded on a belief in the power of the human intellect and reason to solve societal ills and improve the human condition.
- ❖ Many of today's scientific advancements, including electricity, immunization, food preservation, refrigeration, the battery, mechanized transport, and telecommunication, stem from the Enlightenment.



The Age of Enlightenment

- ❖ The Enlightenment thinkers, furthermore, wished to free the common man from the oppression of poverty and the ruling class.
- ❖ In the preceding era, the peasantry had little personal freedom and no power to speak for themselves, determine their own destiny, or accumulate wealth.



The Age of Enlightenment

- ❖ The Enlightenment thinkers passionately argued for the right to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”
- ❖ Consequently, many of the personal freedoms we enjoy today, such as the freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of assembly, and free enterprise, find their origin in the Enlightenment.



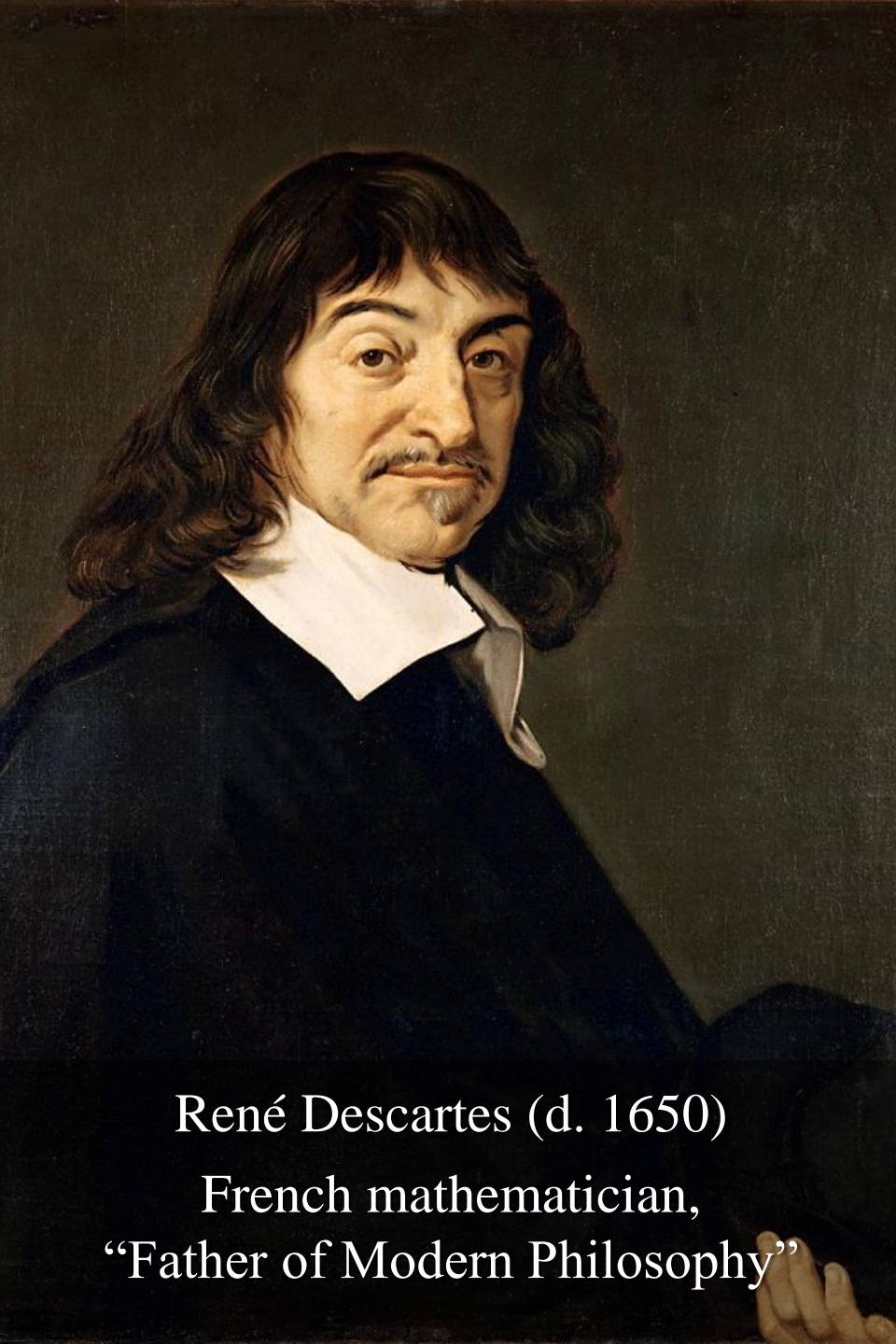
The Thirty Years War

- ❖ Citizens were not free to choose religion for themselves, but were compelled to adopt the religion of the emperor.
- ❖ In 17th-century Germany, the Protestant peasantry revolted when the Holy Roman Emperor, Ferdinand II, attempted to impose the Catholic faith on them.
- ❖ This led to the Thirty Years War (1618-1648), one of the bloodiest and most destructive conflicts in European history.
- ❖ This war had the general effect of souring hearts and minds to the notion of organized religion altogether.



Reason Alone

- ❖ The scandal of the Thirty Years War was the animus to the Enlightenment's overall disregard for religion.
- ❖ The Enlightenment thinkers disparaged religion as mere superstition.
- ❖ It was something to which the foolish, “unenlightened” mind clung for security.
- ❖ Only human reason could be trusted to discern the truth.

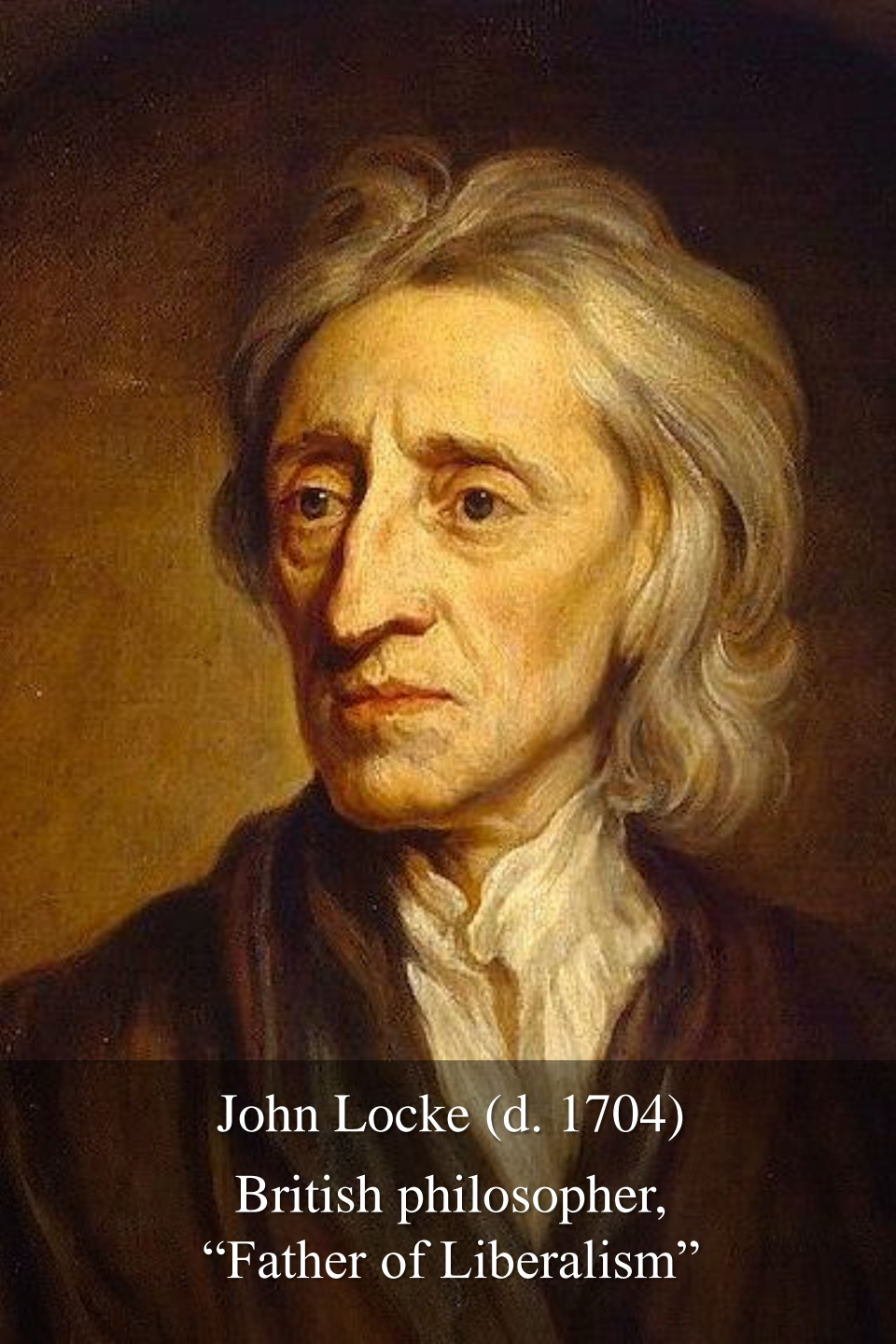


Reason Alone

- ❖ René Descartes sought to prove the existence of God through mathematics.
- ❖ He accepted the fact of his own existence based on his ability to think, famously declaring, “I think, therefore I am.” *Discourse on Method*
- ❖ He accepted the existence of God, too, since this perfect concept could not be the product of the imperfect human mind.
- ❖ Descartes found it impossible, though, to prove other doctrines of the faith through reason alone.

René Descartes (d. 1650)
French mathematician,
“Father of Modern Philosophy”

Reason Alone



John Locke (d. 1704)

British philosopher,
“Father of Liberalism”

- ❖ Similarly, John Locke did not deny the existence of God, but was a religious minimalist.
- ❖ He reduced the basic tenets of Christianity to only those things that could be proven rationally.
- ❖ This denial of the supernatural aspect of faith led to Deism, a belief system that acknowledged God as the Creator, but denied His involvement in human affairs.



Thomas Jefferson (d. 1826)
American Founding Father

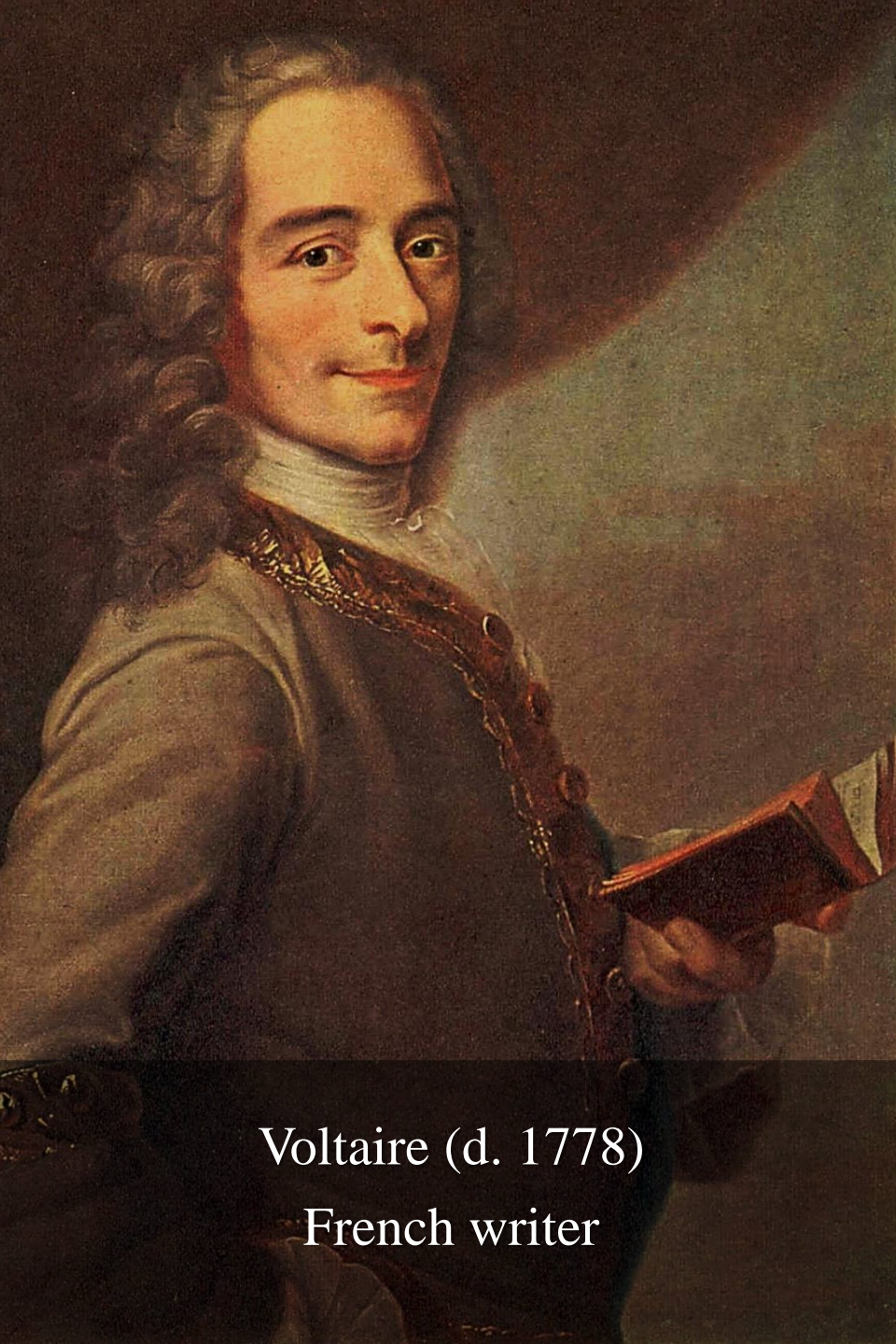
Reason Alone

- ❖ The Deists, who maintained a strict separation of the material world from the spiritual, had difficulty accepting the reality of the Incarnation, the act of God becoming man and entering into the world.
- ❖ “The day will come,” wrote Thomas Jefferson, “when the mystical generation of Jesus, by the supreme being as his father in the womb of a virgin will be classed with the fable of the generation of Minerva in the brain of Jupiter.” *Letter to Doctor Thomas Cooper, November 2, 1822*



Reason Alone

- ❖ Why, from the Deist perspective, would the remote God will to send His Son into the world to redeem it?
- ❖ Redeeming the world was rightly the work of those living in it—the work of men.
- ❖ The redemption, they believed, could be brought about through the self-determination of the human will, by liberating man from external constraints, freeing up the full potential of his indomitable spirit.



Voltaire (d. 1778)

French writer

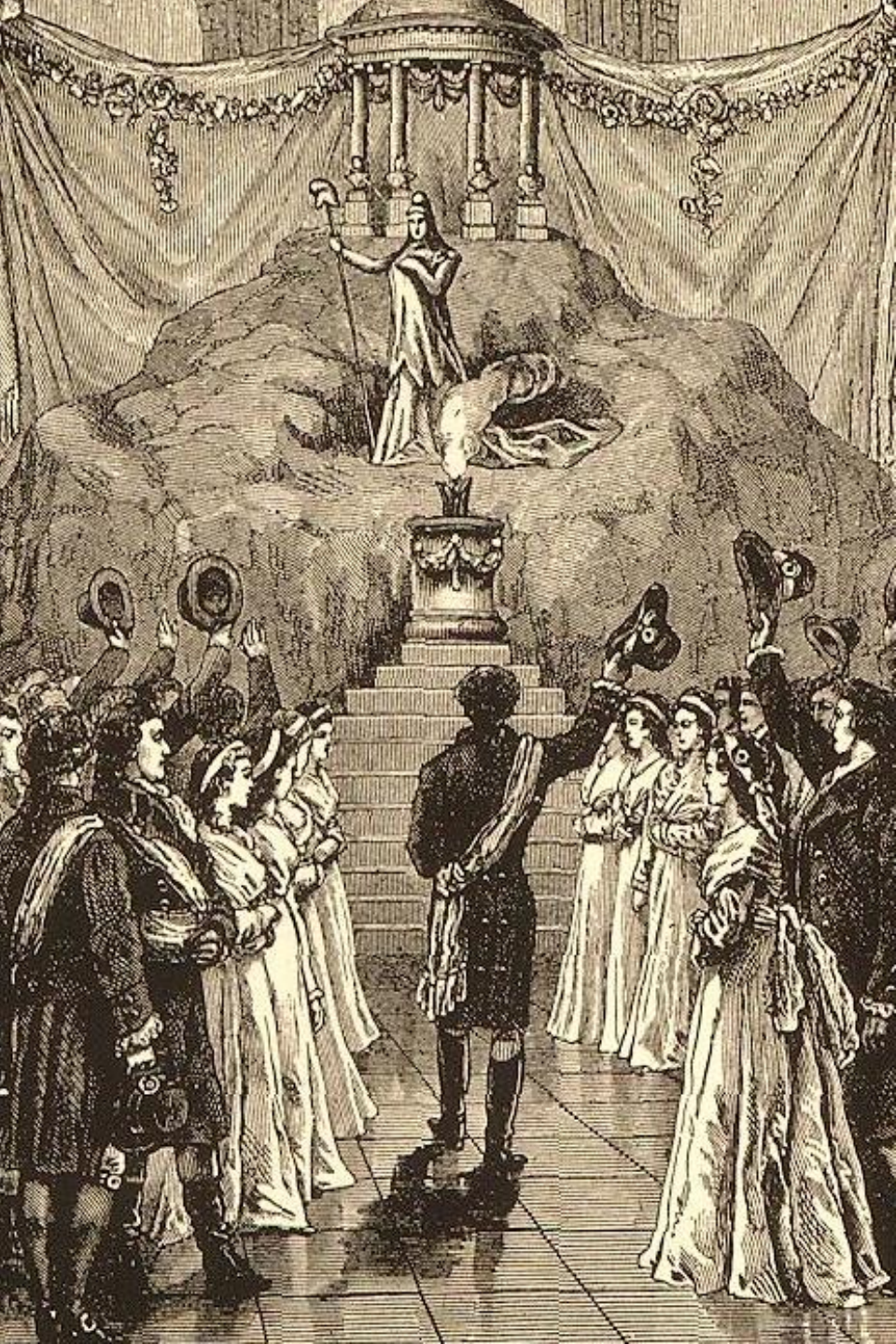
Reason Alone

- ❖ While he advocated for religious freedom, Voltaire was vehemently opposed to organized religion, and to Catholicism in particular.
- ❖ He was critical of the Church's dogma, which he saw as an affront to free thought, and of the Church's hierarchy, which he equated to the aristocracy.
- ❖ We can see in Voltaire's support for religious liberty and call for religious tolerance, while at the same time disparaging religious people, the great hypocrisy of Enlightenment thought.



The Reign of Terror

- ❖ The desire to eradicate religion from society altogether led to the French Revolution and the “Reign of Terror.”
- ❖ Catholicism was outlawed in France at this time; and Robespierre’s infamous Committee for Public Safety forced priests to swear an oath of fidelity to the state and renounce the authority of the pope.
- ❖ *Where was the freedom and tolerance for these priests?*



The Reign of Terror

- ❖ Church buildings were converted into secular temples and holy days were replaced by neo-pagan celebrations, such as the Feast of Reason, in which a prostitute was placed on the high altar at the Cathedral of Notre Dame and worshiped as the Goddess of Reason.



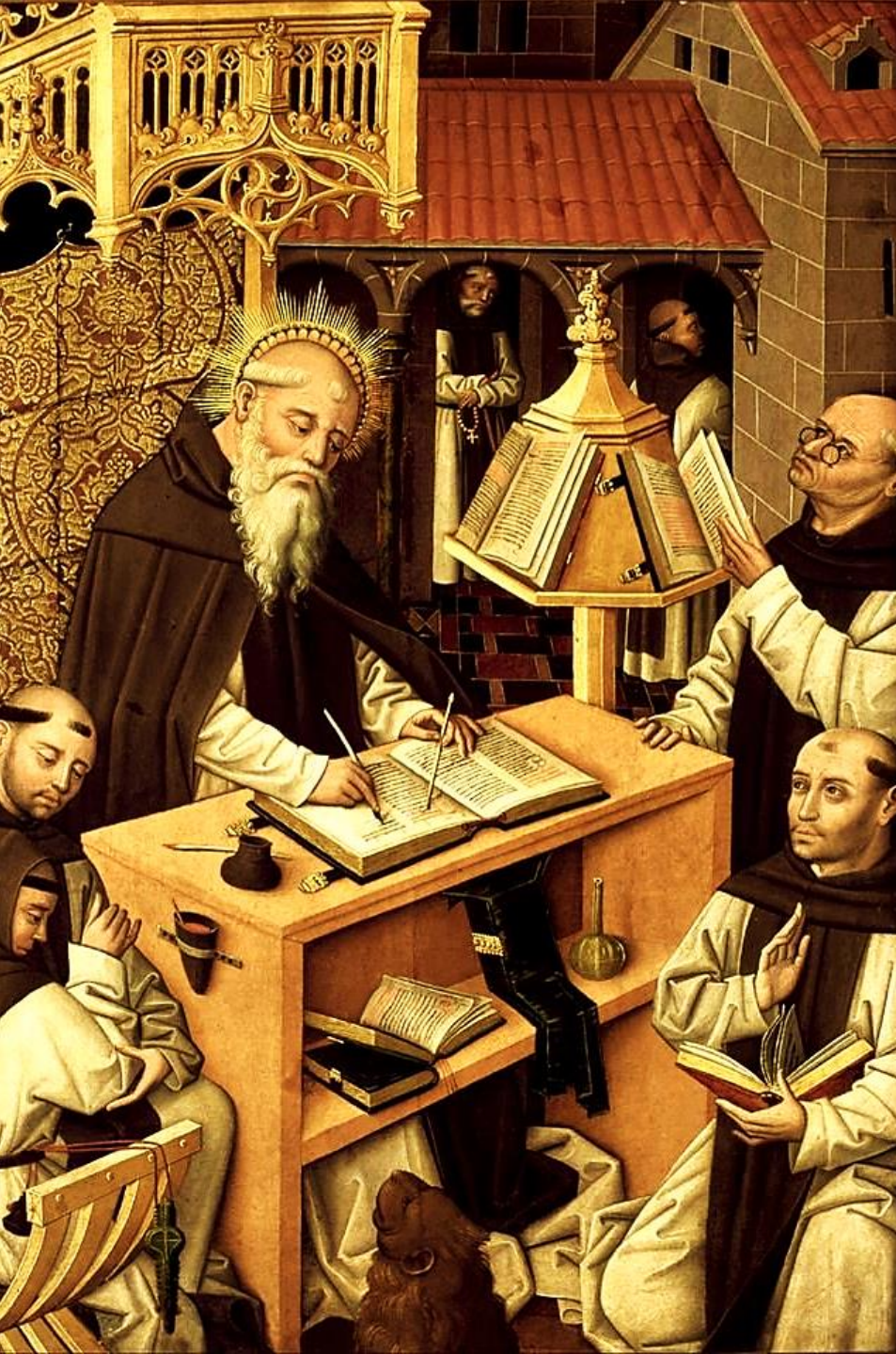
The Reign of Terror

- ❖ Hundreds of priests and nuns were publically executed.
- ❖ They were tied together in a particularly barbaric practice known as a “Republican Wedding” and drowned in rivers.



The Reign of Terror

- ❖ Entire convents, such as the Carmelite martyrs of Compiègne, were sent to the guillotine for their loyalty to the Church, which was looked upon as part of the “Old Regime.”



The Church and Science

- ❖ The Enlightenment's mischaracterization of the Catholic Church as anti-intellectual and anti-science—a stereotype that remains strong to this day—is ironic given that the concept of the university itself developed out of the Catholic monasteries, which served as centers of learning in Christendom.



Saint Hildegard of Bingen (d. 1179)
“Sibyl of the Rhine” & Doctor of the Church

The Church and Science

- ❖ There is a long tradition of support for scientific discovery in the Church’s history.
- ❖ For instance, the *Etymologies* produced by scholar and encyclopedist, Saint Isidore of Seville (d. 636), was renowned as the most popular compendium of knowledge in Medieval libraries.
- ❖ The mystic Saint Hildegard of Bingen (d. 1179) was a polymath, who wrote and composed poems and music, as well as theological, botanical, and medicinal texts, and is recognized as the founder of Scientific Natural History in Germany.



Saint Albertus Magnus (d. 1280)
“Albert the Great,” Doctor of the Church

The Church and Science

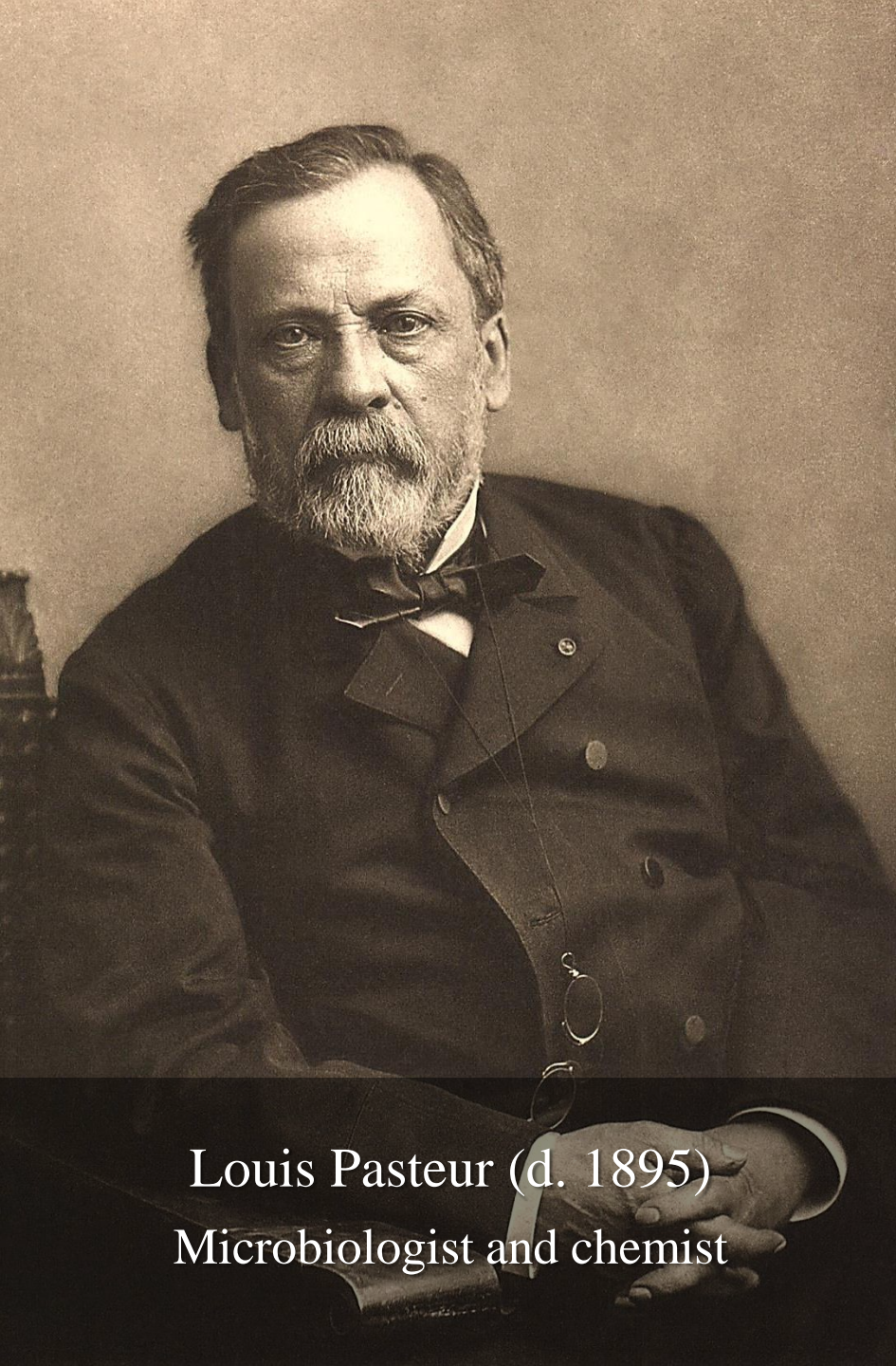
- ❖ Bishop and theologian, Robert Grosseteste (d. 1253) who studied optics, the action of light, and other natural phenomena, was the first person to fully record the process of a scientific experiment.
- ❖ Saint Albertus Magnus (d. 1280) was a pioneer in the natural sciences, who wrote extensively on a variety of subjects, including logic, rhetoric, mathematics, botany, astronomy, and metaphysics.
- ❖ The Franciscan friar and astronomer, Roger Bacon (d. 1294), is revered as the founder of the Scientific Method.

The Church and Science

- ❖ The Franciscan friar William Ockham (d.1374) is the founder of the methodological principle known as “Ockham’s Razor.”
- ❖ Blaise Pascal (d. 1662) was a physicist, mathematician, and philosopher, who invented Pascal’s triangle, probability theory, and the calculator.
- ❖ Bishop Nicolas Steno (d. 1686) is recognized as the founder of Geology.
- ❖ Physicist Laura Bassi (d. 1778) is the first woman to be offered a professorship at a European university.

A portrait of Blaise Pascal, a French mathematician, physicist, and philosopher. He is depicted from the chest up, wearing a dark, high-collared garment. He is holding a rolled-up document or scroll in his left hand. The background features a landscape with a town and a sun with rays in the sky.

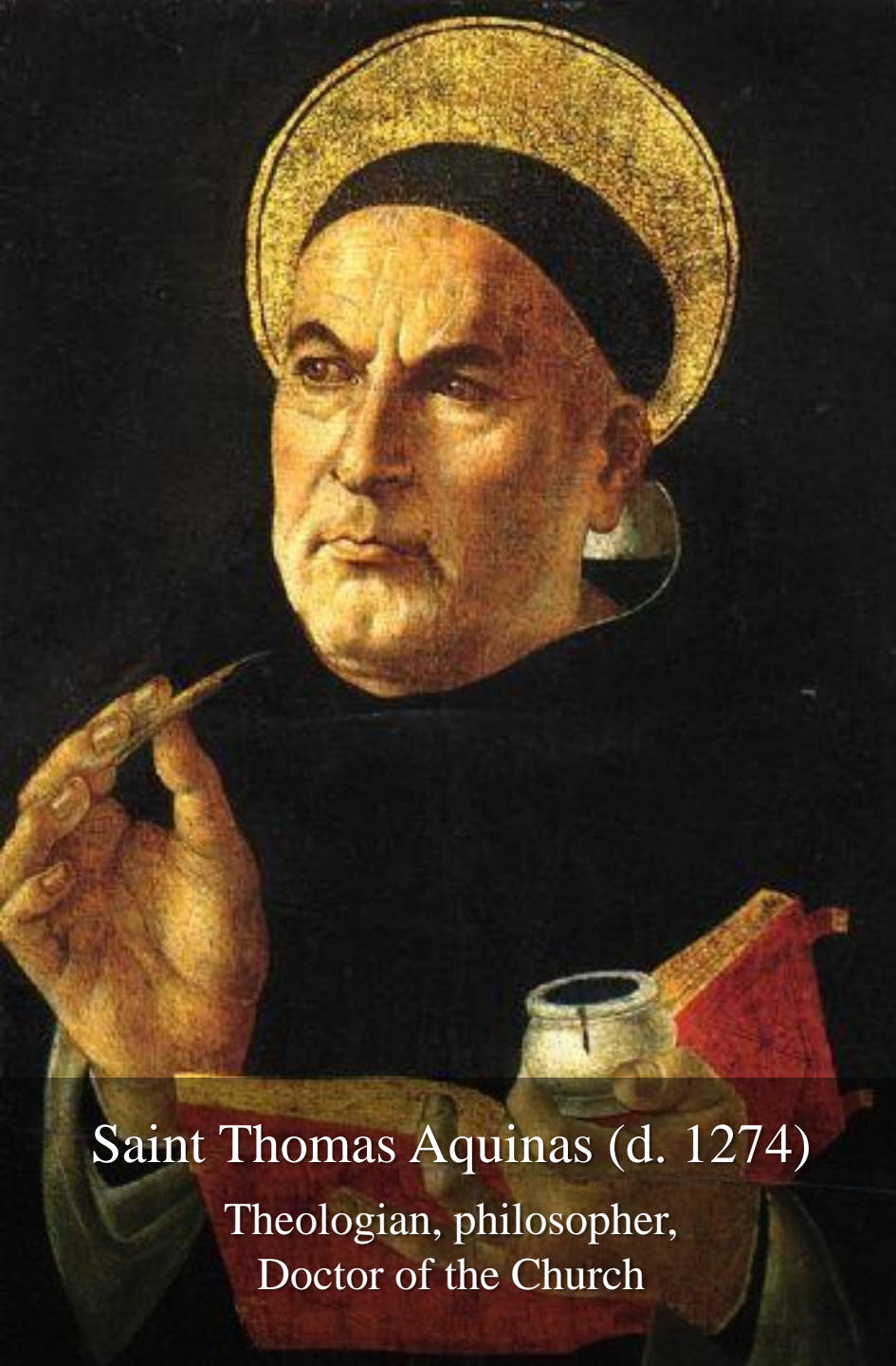
Blaise Pascal (d. 1662)
French mathematician



Louis Pasteur (d. 1895)
Microbiologist and chemist

The Church and Science

- ❖ The Augustinian friar Gregor Mendel (d. 1884) is the founder of Genetics.
- ❖ Louis Pasteur (d. 1895) is the founder of Immunology (or Pasteurization).
- ❖ Inventor and electrical engineer Guglielmo Marconi (d. 1937) is the inventor of radio transmission and winner of the Nobel Prize in Physics (1909).
- ❖ Priest and astronomer George Lemaître (d. 1966) is the founder of the “Big Bang Theory” or “Hypothesis of the Primeval Atom”.



Saint Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274)

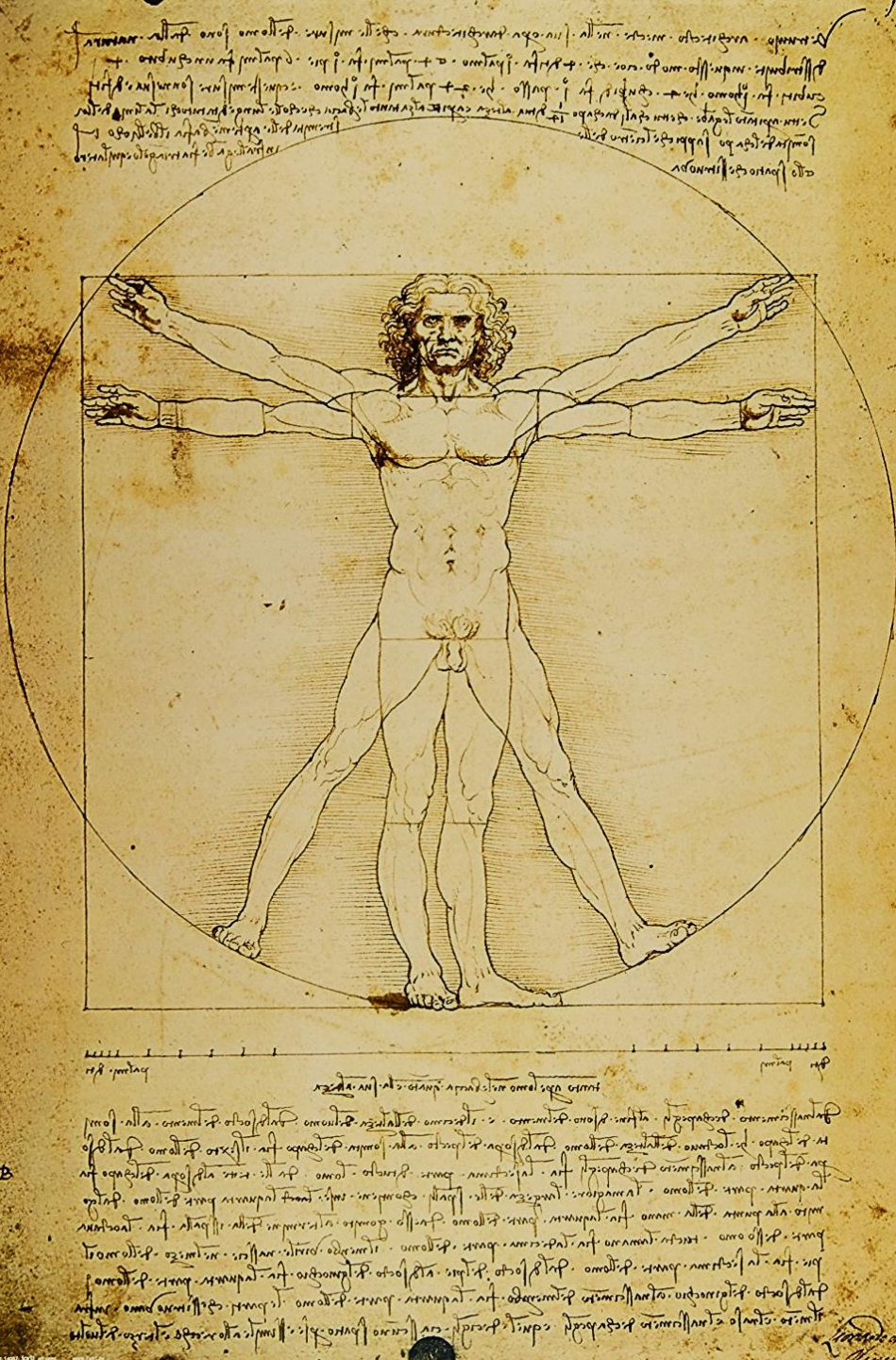
Theologian, philosopher,
Doctor of the Church

Faith and Reason

- ❖ Following in the tradition of Saint Thomas Aquinas, the Church has maintained a belief in the importance of both faith and reason.
- ❖ This stance is distinct from the Enlightenment's belief in *reason to the exclusion of faith*, or from Christian Fundamentalism's belief in *faith to the exclusion of reason*.

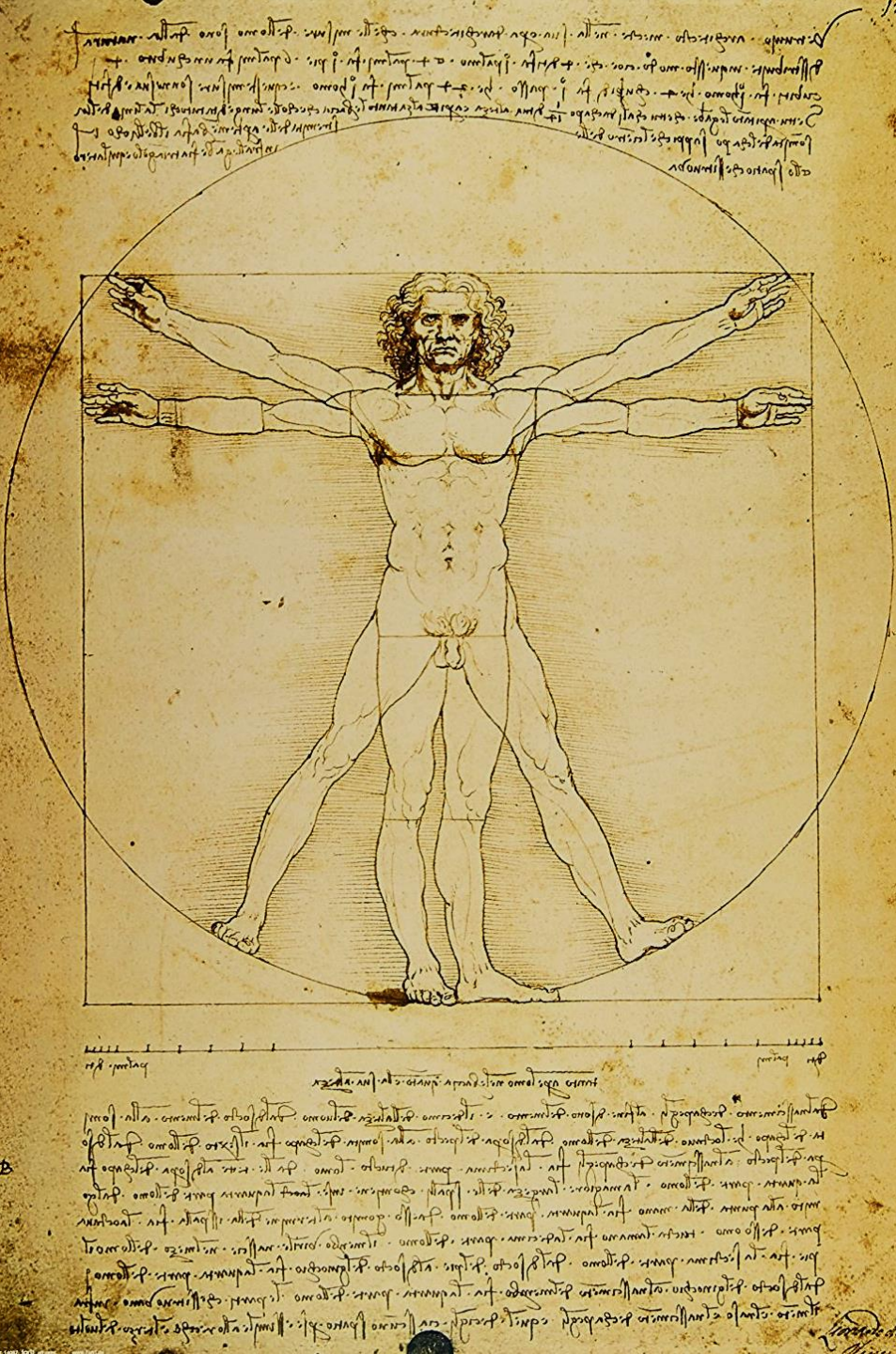
Faith and Reason

- ❖ Rationalism and Fundamentalism, respectively, exalt either man's earthly existence or his spiritual life to the exclusion of the other.
- ❖ Catholicism alone, understanding man to be both body and spirit, grasps the significance of both.



Faith and Reason

- ❖ The Church views the intellect as a gift from God, which was wounded in our fall from grace, but not totally corrupted.
- ❖ Therefore, we are able to know God partly through the use of reason.
- ❖ However, to understand Him more fully we must turn to divine revelation.
- ❖ This divine revelation was completed in the person and mission of the Lord Jesus Christ.



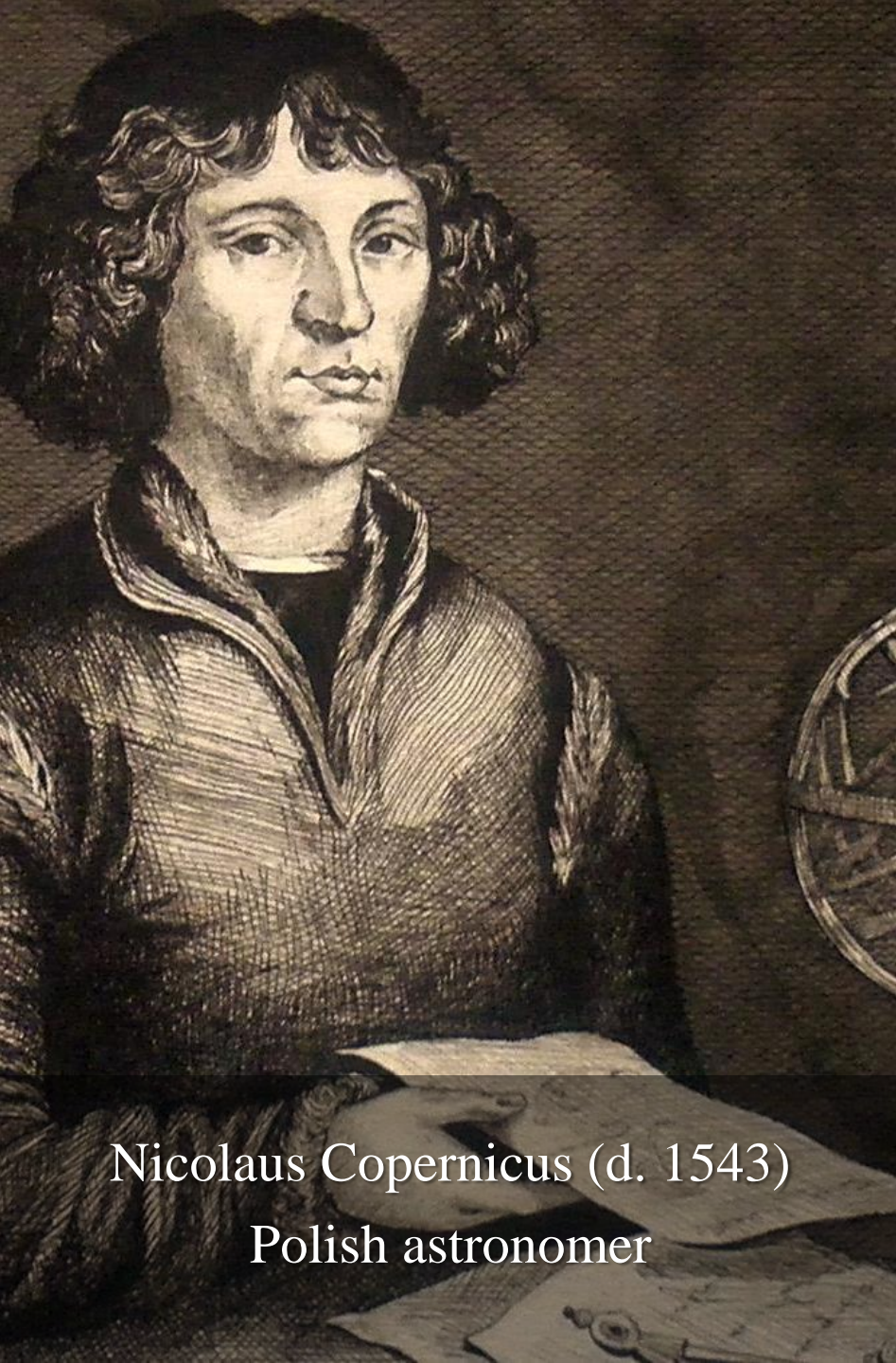


Galileo Galilei (d. 1642)

Italian astronomer

Faith and Reason

- ❖ The battle between faith and reason may be traced back to the trial of Galileo in 1633.
- ❖ The popular misconception is that the Church censored Galileo for teaching the sun is the center of the solar system (*heliocentrism*) because it feared science.



Nicolaus Copernicus (d. 1543)
Polish astronomer

Faith and Reason

- ❖ However, the fact is the theory of *heliocentrism* had been advanced a full century earlier by the astronomer, Nicolaus Copernicus, yet another Catholic luminary in the scientific realm.
- ❖ The Church fully supported Copernicus' research, and out of gratitude the astronomer dedicated his groundbreaking book, *On the Revolutions of the Celestial Spheres* (1543), to Pope Paul III.



Faith and Reason

- ❖ In contrast to Copernicus, Galileo erred in claiming scientific truths were more certain than those of faith.
- ❖ He was reprimanded by the Church, furthermore, for promoting his theory as fact, even though the empirical evidence for it was still lacking at the time.
- ❖ In being cautious about promoting a theory as fact when the evidence did not yet support it the Church was actually upholding the best scientific standards.



Faith and Reason

- ❖ Coincidentally, Galileo was neither killed, tortured, nor imprisoned, but sentenced to house arrest.
- ❖ He lived out the remainder of his days in the comfort of his Florentine villa.



The Enlightenment in Retrospect

- ❖ The Enlightenment thinkers were correct in identifying problems and corruption that existed among civil and religious authorities of the day.
- ❖ But their response to these problems was in many ways reactionary and unbalanced.
- ❖ This was especially true of their attempt to eradicate religion from society.



The Enlightenment in Retrospect

- ❖ They arrogantly believed the eradication of religion and reliance on human reason would lead to the creation of an earthly Utopia.
- ❖ In reality, though, the very things for which they blamed religion—inhumanity, social injustice, and war—have continued, and in many ways worsened, in the modern era.



The Enlightenment in Retrospect

- ❖ As much as the Enlightenment's scientific advancements have benefitted society, they have also made possible warfare of a far more destructive nature.
- ❖ It is estimated, for example, that 15 million lives were lost in the four-year span of World War I (1914-1918), the first mechanized war.
- ❖ By comparison, modern scholarship has estimated about 1,250 individuals were killed by the Spanish Inquisition (or 1% of the 125,000 people tried by Church tribunals).



The Enlightenment in Retrospect

- ❖ About 66 million people were killed in World War II (1939-1945), which culminated in the dropping of the first atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan, respectively.
- ❖ Nuclear weaponry is a product of that reckless mindset, born of the Enlightenment, which embarks on scientific endeavors without the moral guidance of the Church or respect for human limitations.



The Enlightenment in Retrospect

- ❖ It should also be pointed out that neither of the World Wars were fought over religion, but over secular ideology, greed, and politics.
- ❖ The 20th century witnessed unprecedented levels of violence, inhumanity, and bloodshed at the hands of atheistic totalitarian regimes, such as Hitler's Germany (11 million deaths), Stalin's Communist Russia (20 million deaths), and Mao's Communist China (40 million deaths).

The Enlightenment in Retrospect

- ❖ It is also true that more Christians were martyred in the 20th century (46 million or 65%) than in all other centuries combined (70 million).



Blessed Miguel Pro (d. 1927)

Catholic priest murdered by atheistic regime in Mexico, first Christian martyrdom to be photographed



The Enlightenment in Retrospect

- ❖ Indeed, the recognition of human dignity has been greatly diminished under the influence of secular atheistic thought, which values the needs of the state over the worth of the individual.
- ❖ This mentality has led to the modern day atrocity of abortion: the brutal murder of more than 60 million unborn babies in the U.S. alone.



The Enlightenment in Retrospect

- ❖ Despite Enlightenment dreams of a secular atheistic Utopia, post-modern Western culture has experienced the widespread disintegration of the family.
- ❖ Other social ills remain with us, too, such as hunger, starvation, poverty, racism, sex-trafficking, and pollution.



The Enlightenment in Retrospect

- ❖ Nor has death, mankind's overarching problem, gone away.
- ❖ No government program nor technological innovation can eliminate it.
- ❖ Yet, in a futile attempt to manufacture immortality for themselves, researchers are working to develop the technology to upload the human consciousness to a computer, enabling one to leave the body behind and live in a virtual reality.



Two World Views

- ❖ Ultimately, we are left with the stark contrast of two radically different worldviews: a world with God versus a world without Him.
- ❖ While the people of Christendom faced many hardships, they knew who God was, and they understood that they were His children and in the end He would care for them.



Two World Views

- ❖ In spite of the many freedoms and advancements we have gained in society today, it is possible we have lost something of far greater value.
- ❖ For we no longer know who God is; and consequently we have lost sight of who we are, where we came from, and where we are going.



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