

'Science vs. Religion' and Martyrs of Science

Any objective history of the Catholic Church will reveal no genuine conflict between faith and science. The reason we hear so much about Galileo is because there are so few other situations where any case can be made that the Catholic Church, as an institution, has opposed science. It has already been demonstrated that the Church actively promoted the interests of science from the 11th century to the present day, and even writers whose entire objective is demonstrating persecution of scientists, (see [here](#), and [here](#)) can find no cases other than Galileo where the Catholic Church can be said to have conflated scientific investigation with heresy.

Almost all the cases in the articles listed above refer to the persecution of scientists under Protestant Moslem, or local governments, rather than the Catholic church. The names of **Giordano Bruno** (1548-1600) and **Tommaso Campanella** (1568-1639) are sometimes raised, as scientists who were tried by the inquisition, but upon closer inspection, the charges brought against them were strictly related to heretical ideas that had nothing to do with their scientific activities.

In the 13th century, **Thomas Aquinas**, the Church's most esteemed theologian, wrote a treatise on the impossibility of any true conflict between faith and reason. He pointed out that faith and reason are two ways of arriving at one truth, and any apparent conflict is due to a failure of understanding or knowledge, rather than genuine opposition.

The 'Conflict Thesis' of Science vs. Religion

The idea that there is a conflict between Science and the Catholic Church is anti-historical, but was embraced in the last few centuries by secularists who wanted to reduce the influence of the Church in Academia. In the 18th century, French anti-clerical free-thinkers, led by **Diderot**, published an Encyclopedia that promoted science as a secular activity and portrayed the Church as backward and superstitious. This led to the transfer of control of many Catholic education institutions to state control during the Revolutionary period in France. **But** the great push for secular education in English speaking countries didn't come until after the Darwinian controversy in the late 19th century.

Most of the false notions of a 'Science vs. Religion' in Britain and America can be traced back to two 19th academics, John William Draper and **Andrew Dickson White**. Both were anti-Catholic and strong proponents of secular education. The Darwin controversy raised the serious issue of whether the theory of Evolution contradicted Christian teaching, so backers of evolution—who had no real scientific proofs of their theories—embraced an utterly false historical basis for promoting the idea that the Church was in eternal conflict with science.

In 1896 White published "[A History of the Warfare of Science and Theology](#)." In spite of its extremely dubious scholarship, it's overall thesis was cited extensively by persons who sought to promote secular education and wanted academic cover for their claims. In spite of the fact that the main claims of the book were debunked early by serious contemporary scholars, the book is still cited today by adherents of the "Conflict Thesis", who are invariably anti-Christian advocates of state-supported secular education. A representative example of a rant against the Catholic Church based on White's book can be found [here](#).

The following review of White's "Warfare of Science with Theology" was written by an eminent historian of Medicine in the early 1900's. (See [Wikipedia](#) for more details).

"The story of the supposed opposition of the Church . . . to science in any of its branches, is founded entirely on mistaken notions. Most of it is quite imaginary. Much of it is due to the exaggeration of the significance of the Galileo incident. Only those who know nothing about the

history of medicine and of science continue to harbor it. That Dr. White's book, contradicted as it is so directly by all serious histories of medicine and of science, should have been read by so many thousands in this country, and should have been taken seriously by educated men, physicians, teachers, and even professors of science who want to know the history of their own sciences, only shows how easily even supposedly educated men may be led to follow their prejudices rather than their mental faculties."

Who are the Real Martyrs of Science?

The great irony of the "Conflict Thesis" is that it is modern atheistic states, rather than Christian governments, that are the real oppressors of science. Hundreds of scientists have been imprisoned, exiled, or killed by secular, anti-Christian governments, simply because totalitarian states cannot abide by truth that contradicts the political interests of its rulers.

The first scientist killed by a secular totalitarian state was **Antoine Lavoisier** during the French Revolution. He was a world renowned scientist, the discoverer of Oxygen, and known as the "Father of Chemistry", but he was tried and executed for crimes against the state. Although the executions stopped shortly after the death of Lavoisier, the French Revolutionary government closed and/or secularized dozens of academies and Universities that had historically been governed by the Catholic Church. The process of secularizing Catholic research institutions impacted the livelihoods and academic freedom of French scholars and scientists for generations. Scientists and Scholars who refused to sign an oath of loyalty to the revolutionary government were exiled, while those who adopted a secular, rationalist agenda were honored and promoted.

The manner in which Atheistic secular governments corrupt science is two-fold. The first affects those who comply with government priorities, including those scientists who end up co-operating in utterly immoral enterprises. The second affects those who resist government control or speak truth in the face of tyranny. Such dissident scientists are often fired or blacklisted, exiled, imprisoned or even killed by totalitarian governments.

But besides harming individual scientists, the natural goods and purpose of science itself are also distorted by atheistic governments who refuse to acknowledge the natural moral law. Secular governments in both totalitarian and democratic nations often insist that scientists adopt a rationalist worldview that permits the pursuit of highly unethical, and anti-human scientific research. The 20th century has seen government support of science research in morally problematic areas such as eugenics, euthanasia, chemical weapons, cloning, weapons of mass destruction, and psychological warfare. The co-operation of scientists with the Nazi regime is well known, and in [this article](#) a reporter discusses the problem of 'apolitical' scientists who did little to resist cooperating with the Nazis.

By far the worst oppressor of dissident scientists in the 20th century was the Soviet Union. Both Nazi Germany and Communist China were appalling totalitarian governments, but the Nazis tended to corrupt rather than persecute scientists, and pre-Communist China lacked the western scientific tradition altogether. Soviet Union, however, purported to be 'pro-science' and referred to its government philosophy as "scientific socialism". But in reality absolute obedience to the political priorities of the state, and willingness to overlook uncomfortable scientific "truths" was required to work in peace.

The coercive oppression of scientists who did not entirely cooperate with the government's "Five year" plans began in the first decades of Soviet Rule. By the time Stalin consolidated power in the mid 20's a Secret Police organization (GPU) and forced labor camp system were in place. Soon after the systematic persecution of Russian Scientists, Scholars and Academics who were suspected of "wrecking" the Communist economy began in earnest.

Tchernavin and the 'Academic Case'

Vladimir Tchernavin was a Russian fishery scientist working in Murmansk when he was arrested on unspecified charges. After a year of imprisonment during which he was tortured in an effort to obtain a "confession", he was sent to a slave labor camp in the North. Using his knowledge of the area he escaped from the Labor camp, crossed to freedom by way of Finland, and wrote a book, **I speak for the Silent** recounting his experience. Tchernavin was the first educated person to escape for the Soviet slave camps, and his book, published in the early thirties, gave shocking insights into the way the Soviet Union oppressed scientists and intellectuals and used slave labor to fill government coffers.

Tchernavin's book, although entirely true, was considered "anti-Soviet propaganda" by much of the Western press, and mostly ignored by the secular academia. This is in spite of the fact that his final chapter, 'The Academic Case' gave details about the systematic persecution and imprisonment of Soviet scientists and intellectuals. Tchernavin's book was published before Stalin's Great Purge became known and many western intellectuals still wanted to believe the best about the Soviet government. In the 1930's, the Western academic establishment was actively jettisoning its Christian heritage in favor of a secular technocratic worldview, and Tchernavin's hair-raising stories of Soviet oppression of science did not fit the narrative.

Four years after "I Speak for the Silent" was published, Hitler invaded Poland and the allies sought to partner with the Soviet Union in their War against Hitler. Again there was a compelling reason to ignore human rights abuses and pretend Tchernavin's testimony against the Soviet Union did not exist. To this day, his book, although of great historical importance, remains almost unknown.

A report on the "Academic Case", detailing early Soviet oppression of Scientists and Scholars is included below:

The "Academic Case"

Final Chapter from *I Speak for the Silent* by Vladimir Tchernavin,
published 1934, two years after Tchernavin escaped from the Solovetsky Labor Camp.

The "Academic Case" [sometimes called the "Platonoff Case"—from the name of the academician S. F. Platonoff] was one of the biggest cases conducted by the GPU [Soviet Secret Police, forerunner of the KGB]. It was comparable to the "Mine Trial," the "case of the 48," the trial of the "Industrial Party," and others. In the life of the Russian intelligentsia it had a far greater importance than the "trial of the Mensheviki," which had been conducted with such pomp in the Spring of 1931 and reported in detail in the Soviet and foreign press. The circumstances of the "Academic Case" are little known, because the GPU never brought it to a public trial, but decided the fate of the most prominent scientists behind prison walls. The meagre details which seeped out, through persons directly connected with the case or their relatives, were disclosed with so much caution and were so disconnected that even the formal facts of the case—for example, the accusation itself—remained to a great extent obscure and contradictory.

The substance of the "Academic Case" was this: a group of persons composed of scientists-historians was supposed to have formed a "monarchist" plot directed against the Soviet Government. This group, it was alleged, not expecting to be able to effect the overthrow of the government by its own means, had secretly entered into an agreement with the government of Germany whereby the latter promised the assistance of its military forces. According to the GPU, the important positions in the future government, as planned by the would-be plotters, were to be held by academicians.

I can tell about this case only as I heard it from the lips of persons who happened to be with me in prison cells and in the Solovetzki camp. Furthermore I am hampered by the fact that I can relate only such parts of their story as will not lead the GPU to discover who my informers were.

The first peculiarity of the case is that it was a "failure" for the GPU. The "Mine Trial" and the trials of the "Industrial Party" and the "Mensheviki" had been carried out by the GPU to the very end, through all the stages of court procedure: the high-sounding announcements of the "disclosure of the plot," the beginning of the investigation, the opening of the court trial. It had been able to publish the "accusation act" and to stage the comedy of a trial in a most extravagant setting. In the presence of large crowds of spectators the accused men had been brought out onto the stage in the enormous hall of the former Building of the Nobility. They had publicly admitted their guilt, repeating by heart the parts prepared for them by the examining officers of the GPU. Citizen-Comrade Krilenko, in the lofty role of Prosecutor of the Republic had exercised all his wit and eloquence, assailing the bourgeoisie of the whole world which was plotting against the proletarian state, and hurling his tirades of defiance at microphones and foreign reporters. The spectators, the chorus in the play—tickets could be obtained only through local Soviets, professional unions and party organizations—had clamorously demanded the "highest degree of social defense" and had applauded the death sentence. Some of the accused men, who had strictly complied with the wishes of the GPU, had then been "pardoned" and the obedient public had with equal zest applauded the "pardon." At the same time the GPU had dealt with the chief group of persons arrested in connection with the case, whose number had remained unknown except to itself, and finished with them in its routine way.

Even in the case of the "48," there had been some semblance of formality—first an announcement of "the Plot," then published "confessions," and finally the sentence with a complete list of executed men.

In the "Academic Case," however, the GPU had been unable to carry out even this minimum of formality. Arrests had begun before the announcement of the case and had continued after it; the case dragged on for two years, but, except for a few libelous newspaper articles, nothing had been published regarding it, no incriminating materials, no "confessions" (although some of the accused men were world-famous), not even the sentence. The case itself had been "liquidated": some of the accused had been secretly killed, the majority deported to 10 years of convict labor, a few lucky ones had been exiled to distant provinces. Due to the fact that resolutions concerning the men involved in the case were passed at different times, absurd inconsistencies had arisen: the most important "criminals," i.e. those who had been cast in the role of "leaders," had received the lightest sentences while others, admitted even by the GPU to be of secondary importance, had been sent to their death or to convict labor for 10 years.

According to public knowledge, the case had developed in the following way: In the autumn of 1929, after the "weeding out" which had taken place at the Academy of Science—when about three-quarters of the working staff had been dismissed and the papers had led the coarsest attack against everything connected with the Academy—there began to be at first arrests of secondary persons who had been in contact with S. F. Platonoff. A rumor was spread that the text of the abdication of Nicholas II had been found in the manuscript department of the Academy of Science. It is hard to imagine what practical meaning this document could have had, but from it the GPU started a "monarchist plot." Almost all the employees of the manuscript department were arrested, its rooms sealed and the GPU began a search. Evidently nothing especially incriminating had been found there, but the blow fell upon Platonoff, as director of the library, and S. V. Rojdestvenski, his assistant.

Simultaneously the press was attacking the academician, S. F. Oldenburg, and the arrest of his secretary, B. N. Mollas, indicated that he might well become the central figure in the newly projected case. A. E. Fersman also of the Academy was in a similarly dangerous position. Many who were subsequently deported in connection with this case had been accused chiefly of being acquainted

with A. E. Fersman or of coming in contact with him at meetings. In spite of that fact, however, Oldenburg and Fersman, although they remained in disgrace for a long time, were not arrested.

The "Academic Case" had been the achievement of the Leningrad GPU and at first the arrests had occurred only in Leningrad, chiefly in the library of the Academy of Science, in the Poushkin Building where gradually all the workers had been arrested, and in various "departments" subordinated to the Academy, especially in the Yakut department where Vittenberg and most of its workers had been imprisoned. The public regarded these arrests as a final blow to the Academy of Science, as a decision of the Stalin government to crush the last remaining independent thought in this institution.

It had been expected that the "case" would be tried in Leningrad in the Spring of 1930. But spring passed and the "case" was postponed until fall. The number of men arrested was continually increasing and other institutions not only of academic but of a general educational character were being affected. Evidently the GPU had broader aims and was directing the blow against the Leningrad intelligentsia as a whole. The "Russian Technical Society," the "Bureau of Regional Research," the "Society of Natural Science Teachers," the "Religious-Philosophical Circle," separate workers of the Russian Museum, publishers, literary men, translators connected with the "World Literature,"—every person and organization which was carrying on an educational work—were being included in the "grandiose counter-revolutionary organization," whose "branches" were so varied that not only Platonoff, but the Academy of Science itself, had been relegated to the background.

In the beginning of August, 1930, everybody had been literally aghast at a new wave of arrests—this time in Moscow. The Moscow GPU was "concocting the case" of Moscow historians, arresting the academicians M. K. Lubovski, D. N. Egoroff, the Professors U. V. Gotie, S. V. Bakhroujhin and many others. As D. N. Egoroff had been practically at the head of the former Roumiantzeff (now Lenin) Public Library, many employees of this library as well as a number of Egoroff's former students at the Women's University had also been arrested. In the meantime in Leningrad the academician, E. V. Tarle, who enjoyed great popularity and was looked upon as an authority in governmental circles had also been arrested.

In this way the "case" had expanded beyond the limits of Leningrad and rumors had spread that it would be transferred to Moscow. But the Moscow GPU was evidently at that time too busy preparing other trials; it ceded the "Moscow historians" to the Leningrad GPU and sent them the prominent men. All the "small fry" were deported wholesale.

The last large group of persons had been arrested in November, 1930, that is, more than a year after the beginning of the case. The trial had been postponed to December or January, 1931, but actually it never took place.

The growth of the "Academic Case" had been, so to speak, a "natural" growth, which could have gone on indefinitely and could have also affected a number of foreign citizens. Such a growth is the necessary result of methods used by the GPU in conducting similar cases. In outline the method is this: first of all, the GPU arrests from ten to twenty persons who have something in common—for example, work in the same field or institution, membership in the same scientific society, attendance at the same church, patronage of the same tailor or barber or for that matter, a simple acquaintance. Next, they are strictly isolated from each other and all are accused of participating in a counter-revolutionary organization whose aim they are expected to reveal by confession. At cross-examination they are put through the usual GPU routine of investigation threats of execution and promises of leniency in case of confession of the crime. Probably two or three of these twenty men will weaken and sign "frank confessions," which under instructions from the examining officer will incriminate two or three others. With respect to those who persist in refusing to "confess," the GPU now arrests some of their relatives in order to exert pressure and also perhaps to obtain more incriminating information about other people. In this way would be started the second, larger circle of arrests which can be

followed by any number of more and still larger circles, as there exists no real case and therefore no limit which could stop its expansion.

In October, 1930, when I found myself in the Shpalernaya prison, men arrested in connection with the "Academic Case" were being held in all the common cells, and in many double and solitary cells. According to our estimate, which cannot be considered complete, their number amounted to 150 men. Besides these, many were in "Kresti" and "Nijegorodskaya" prisons. The list of names of these prisoners was quite impressive. Besides the five academicians, S. F. Platonoff, M. K. Lubovski, N. P. Likhatcheff, E. V. Tarle, D. N. Egoroff, many professors were among the prisoners. Since I am not a historian, I remember, incidentally, the names of only those men whom I chanced to meet or heard spoken of. Thus I remember Professor U. V. Gotie, S. V. Rojdestvenski, S. V. Bakhroujhin, Zaozerski, V. A. Boutenko, Priselkoff, Borodin (historian, professor of the Petersburg University), A. G. Wouffius, V. A. Baltz, the expert on the Far East, Meervart, teachers G. A. Petri, N. P. Antiziferoff, many workers of educational institutions of the Academy of Science, among them the librarian Pilkin, secretary B. N. Mollas, the curator of the Poushkin Building N. V. Izmailoff, Beliaeff, N. A. Pipin, G. Stern, Khordikainen, publishers Wolfson, Baranoff and so on. Explorers, numbering some thirty men, who had been arrested in the beginning of January, 1931, were also being accused in connection with the "Academic Case." Many did not know, until the sentence had been passed, what they were being accused of, and found out only later from the number assigned to their "case" that they also were a part of it.

No one could understand what was to be done with so large a group of people belonging to such a large variety of specialties and of such varied personal opinions. One could only watch with anguish the constant additions to their number.

Towards the end of 1930, when the Moscow GPU was brilliantly staging the trial of the "Industrial Party," it became clear to those of us familiar with the GPU methods that the "Academic Case" had failed and that it would not be brought to trial. In its public appearances, even the GPU had to maintain a certain standard of consistency and the "Academic Case" fabricated by the Leningrad GPU was not on a par with the "Industrial Party's Case" fabricated by the Moscow GPU. One of the two cases could have been staged, but not both. As I have already said, the substance of the "Academic Case" supposedly involved the government of Germany. In the case of the "Industrial Party" the GPU had fabricated a "democratic-republican" plot connecting it with the French government. The roles of some of the persons involved corresponded in the two cases in spite of their dissimilarity.

In 1929 when the GPU first conceived the idea of the "Academic Case," a challenge to Germany had been considered timely. In the autumn of 1930, however, friendly conversations with Germany were going on and it had been deemed more appropriate to turn the guns in the direction of France. Moreover, rumors were being circulated that energetic protests had been made by the German government against any mention of German names in connection with the "case" and Moscow had been obliged to fold up its plans.

And thus it was that the "Academic Case," so widely advertised at home and abroad, involving scientists with names of world-wide fame, had to be liquidated without noise—secretly. To release them as innocent would have brought undesirable publicity. It was, therefore, imperative to maintain an appearance of their guilt. So in February, 1931, the less conspicuous "participants" were sentenced to ten years in concentration camp, with confiscation of property. Since these people, although of honest names, were little known, and since the sentence had not been made public, the moaning which arose among the Russian intelligentsia had been heard by none. Engelhardt's wife, the sister of the writer Garshin, had in despair committed suicide by throwing herself down a stair well; the wife of Professor Boutenko hanged herself. The wife of one of the sentenced men had been unexpectedly seized as she was bringing her husband the last food parcel and had also been deported. The two daughters of S. F. Platonoff had been sentenced to ten years in a concentration camp and only somebody's intercession had stopped their deportation.

It is hard to describe the impression all this produced. It was known too well that no guilt whatever could be attached to these people.

In May, 1931, the next group, arbitrarily chosen, had received its sentence, which proved to be still more cruel; five men were shot, the remaining deported to concentration camps.

Everyone was waiting in dread and apprehension for the sentence of the "leaders." Would they really dare to shoot these Academicians, who had given so much of their intelligence and labor to the creation of Russian culture, many of whom were over seventy years old?

Suddenly, in the summer of 1931, the direction of the wind changed for a short period. The leaders of the GPU, who had conducted the terror of the winter of 1930-1931, had been somewhat demoted: Akouloff had replaced Yagoda; Stalin had pronounced some vague words to the effect that not all specialists were enemies; some kind of a commission had been formed with authority to revise the cases that had been disposed of with too much haste and too much cruelty. It was rumored that according to recommendations of this commission somebody had been granted a pardon and that some of the examining officers who had overexerted themselves in the case of the "48" had even been shot. This happy period was of short duration, but the "leaders" of the "Academic Case" had felt its effects and had unexpectedly received "light" sentences exile to distant cities, but not to concentration camps. At the same time the sentence of convict labor for the daughters of S. F. Platonoff was commuted to exile and they had been allowed as a special privilege to join their father in exile.

So the case ended in August, 1931. The press had not mentioned a word about the sentences. Both the government of the U.S.S.R. and the GPU itself had evidently considered this case so dark and shameful that they had preferred to remain silent. Nevertheless all the victims remained in camps and exile. Platonoff, Egoroff and Boutenko have already died, having been broken by the hardships of their experiences. How many have followed and still will follow them, without a chance of freedom, without a chance of dying at home, we shall never know.

When the time comes that it will be possible to present the case basing it on documents and testimony of people who were directly implicated, this case will take its place as a true obituary of Russian, and especially historical, science. It will be one of the most tragic pages in the story of the destruction of the Russian intelligentsia