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When people say that, they often mention the case of Galileo. This 17th century astronomer argued that the Earth revolved around the Sun. As this went against church teachings in his day he was forced to renounce his findings.

The church has now said sorry for this in public. The Pope has even agreed that a statue of Galileo should stand in the Vatican.

A great strength of Christianity is its readiness to seek and face the truth even the truth of its own mistakes.

We haven't *always* got it right in history, that's for sure.

But we *have* got it right. The passion for truth has always been burning away in Christianity.

Christian monks and nuns kept the torch of learning and civilisation alight through the centuries we call the "dark ages". What a debt education and healthcare in Europe and across the world owes to this!

Where would the people of England be without Bede of Jarrow's great history? This monk who wrote 1300 years ago as Viking invasions brought ruin to our land is a servant of civilisation to this day.

Without writers like the Venerable Bede, whose tomb lies in Durham Cathedral, our society would be rootless and ignorant of its origins.

Where would healthcare be in this country without the vision of people like the monk Rahere who founded St. Bartholomew's Hospital, Smithfield in 1137 after an answer to prayer on pilgrimage?

From the earliest days Christians gained a reputation for care of the sick. They were fearless of disease because of their trust in Christ. In St. Benedict's Rule for monks we read that: 'The care of the sick is to be placed above and before every other duty, as if Christ were being directly served by waiting on them.'

So much progress in healthcare has Christian origins. The 18th century Methodist founder John Wesley's medical guide has the famous wisdom 'cleanliness is next to Godliness.'

St. Joseph's Hospice in London was founded in the last century by a committed Christian 'for pain control and the last comforts of the dying'. The hospice movement is a challenge to those whose view of progress excludes care for the dying as being not worth the price.

If Christians have been backward looking at times it should be put on record that many of the world's greatest scientists have been Christians.

Take Isaac Newton, buried in Westminster Abbey, whose life spanned the late 17th and early 18th centuries. He was so famous for his discovery of gravity that Alexander Pope wrote this verse of him: *Nature, and Nature's Laws, lay hid in Night. God said, "Let Newton be!" and All was Light.*

Newton is known to have spent more time researching the bible than science.

One of the most popular misunderstandings is that scientists are always against Christianity.

The present debate about whether it is right to create animal-human embryos, saviour siblings or families without a father has fuelled this misunderstanding.

Many scientists are concerned to do research in ways that honour the unique dignity of human beings made in God's image. This contrasts with the scientific lobby that uses mass media to promote and gain funding for unethical research. Such science that makes human life a means to an end is a threat to civilisation.

Is Christianity against progress? Concern for the sanctity of human life places Christians in a difficult position. The church has to speak out against actions that deny human dignity.

Societies with a Christian tradition compare very favourably with those that haven't when it comes to democracy and human rights.

We have to admit that the church has at times failed in her witness to truth and justice. All the same equality under the law in our own society can be traced right back to the influence and teaching of Jesus.

If you seek truth that should not take you away from Jesus 'the way, the truth and the life' (John 14:6) who came 'to bring life to the full' (John 10:10).

Through Jesus God has invested in the human condition to bring it 'life to the full'. That's where the promise of real progress for the world lies!

Total 750 words - just over 4.5 minutes to read

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