

Tridentine Community News

October 4, 2026 – External Solemnity of Our Lady of the Rosary

The Catholic Church and the Rise of Modern Science

By James Murphy

“The heavens show forth the glory of God: and the firmament declareth the work of His hands.” – Psalm 18:2 (Douay-Rheims)

Modern culture often presents the Catholic Faith and science as enemies. History tells a far more interesting story. Catholics did not regard the study of nature as necessarily opposed to religion. Since God is the Author both of creation and of revealed truth, the orderly investigation of His creation can lead man to a greater appreciation of His wisdom.

The Experimental Sciences

During the Middle Ages, monasteries, cathedral schools, and the great Catholic universities helped preserve and develop learning in philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, and the natural sciences. Among the important medieval figures was the Franciscan friar Roger Bacon (c. 1214–1292). Bacon emphasized mathematics, observation, and *scientia experimentalis*, experimental science. The old Catholic Encyclopedia notes his extensive work in mathematics, optics, astronomy, and experimentation and even records his criticism of errors in the Julian calendar. Catholic institutions and Catholic scholars played an important part in cultivating the intellectual tradition from which modern experimental science emerged.

The Gregorian Calendar

One of the clearest examples of Catholic scientific achievement is hanging on almost every wall: the calendar. The old Julian calendar slightly miscalculated the length of the solar year. Over the centuries this caused the calendar to drift from the astronomical equinox, creating difficulties in determining the proper date of Easter.

After extensive astronomical and mathematical work, Pope Gregory XIII promulgated the reform through the papal bull *Inter gravissimas* in 1582. The project drew upon the work of Aloysius Lilius and a papal commission, with the Jesuit mathematician and astronomer Christopher Clavius becoming an important defender and expositor of the reform. Ten calendar dates were omitted to restore the proper relationship with the equinox, and the rules governing leap years were corrected. The result was the Gregorian

calendar, which eventually became the international civil calendar used throughout most of the world.

A Catholic Priest and the Big Bang

Perhaps the most striking modern example is Msgr. Georges Lemaître (1894–1966), a Belgian Catholic priest as well as a mathematician and physicist. Lemaître argued from Einstein’s general relativity and astronomical observations that the universe was expanding. He later proposed that the universe had developed from an extraordinarily compact initial state, which he called the “primeval atom.” His work became foundational to what is now called the Big Bang theory. He was also a member of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences and eventually became its president.



Importantly, Lemaître did not claim that physics had scientifically proved the supernatural act of Creation described by Catholic theology. He carefully distinguished the scientific question of the universe’s physical history from the theological doctrine that God is the Creator of all things.

Faith and Reason

These examples illustrate an authentically Catholic principle: faith and right reason cannot ultimately contradict one another because all truth has its origin in God. The Church’s history includes disagreements and controversies involving science, but it also includes universities, religious scientists, astronomical research, the Gregorian calendar, and men such as Roger Bacon and Georges Lemaître.

The Catholic need not fear the investigation of creation. Properly understood, science studies the order God placed within the created world, while theology directs man’s mind toward the Creator Himself.

“For the invisible things of Him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made.” – Romans 1:20 (Douay-Rheims)

Tridentine Masses This Coming Week

Tue. 10/06 7:00 PM: Low Mass at *St. Benedict/Holy Name of Mary, Windsor* (St. Bruno, Confessor)

Sun. 10/11: No Mass at *OCLMA/Orchard Lake Shrine Chapel* – Mass cancelled this Sunday as the school needs the chapel.