

# Two to Avoid

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Several years ago, I received review copies of two new books from Greenleaf Press, *The Ocean of Truth: the Story of Sir Isaac Newton* and *A Piece of the Mountain: The Story of Blaise Pascal*, both by Joyce McPherson, a Christian children's writer. I was so appalled that I planned on writing a negative review of these books for *The Catholic Home Educator*, but I wanted to wait until I had some good resources for learning about these two important mathematicians to suggest instead. Somehow, I never got around to this, but now that we're on the subject of math, I had to make some time for Sir Isaac and Monsieur Pascal.

*The Ocean of Truth* was so poorly written and biased that I felt embarrassed for the publisher. The book had an odd focus on the Bible (perhaps if I read more Protestant material, I would have seen this before). It seemed that on every page, Newton was pondered some topic and "this reminded Isaac of the Bible, where it says..." All too often, Isaac would ponder something and it "reminded Isaac of how evil the Catholic Church is..."

To McPherson, Pascal was a Christian deep down inside somewhere, in spite of the Catholicism which so misguided him.

The sole benefit I received reading these unfortunate books was a

renewed appreciation of the Catholic intellectual tradition, which includes the ability to see truth many other places besides the Bible.

A much better tool for learning about Newton's life and work is *Isaac Newton* in Oxford University Press' Portraits in Science Series. If you want to add some Catholic perspective, focus on Newton's theological errors and the persecution of Catholics during the English Reformation. Other good titles include *Newton and Gravity* (Great Ideas Series) by Paul Strathern, *Isaac Newton: Organizing the Universe* by William Boerst and *Isaac Newton and Gravity* (Science Discoveries Series) by Steve Parker (grades 2-4).

While Isaac Newton is an important topic to delve into with children – his discoveries form the basis of modern science – Pascal's life and work are more appropriate for older teens (and I'm not just saying this because there are no children's books on Pascal). A unit on Pascal would have to include complicated math, philosophy and heresies of Reformation Europe (such as the Jansenists whom Pascal defended). A good place to start would be Peter Kreeft's edition of Pascal's *Pensees, Christianity for Modern Pagans* (order from Ignatius Press at 800-651-1531 or on-line at [www.ignatius.com](http://www.ignatius.com)). Other than that, try carefully selected internet articles and old *Catholic Encyclopedia* entries.

