

Intelligence² Catholic church debate: Transcript

The Intelligence² group [hosted a debate](#) in the Methodist Central Hall, Westminster, in October, considering whether the Catholic church is a force for good in the world. Speaking for the motion were Archbishop John Onaiyekan, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Abuja, Nigeria, and the Rt Hon Ann Widdecombe, Conservative MP and Catholic convert. Speaking against were Christopher Hitchens, writer, broadcaster and polemicist, author of the bestselling book “God is not Great”, and Stephen Fry, actor, comedian and television presenter. The debate was presented by Zeinab Badawi.

Since the new Intelligence² website appears to have done away with transcriptions, I’m publishing this one here. Please note that this is an entirely unofficial transcription, so any mistakes are my own. The full video can be found on the official site, as well as on [YouTube](#).

	Before	After	Change
For:	678	268	-410
Against:	1102	1876	+774
Undecided:	346	34	-312

Transcript:

Zeinab Badawi

Hello and welcome from central London. We’re just a stone’s throw away from the Houses of Parliament in Westminster, we’re here in Central Hall for this Intelligence Squared debate on the Catholic church is a force for good in the world. Well, that’s a subject that’s going to generate a lot of heat, I think, and some light too, I hope. I’m delighted to be chair of this debate. We have a panel which includes some of the most provocative, intelligent and stimulating commentators and practitioners on the subject. Arguing for the motion: the Archbishop of Abuja in Nigeria, John Onaiyekan; the British Conservative MP, Ann Widdecombe. Arguing against the motion: the actor, broadcaster and author, Stephen Fry, and the journalist and commentator, Christopher Hitchens. Well, our first speaker is John Onaiyekan, His Grace the Archbishop of Abuja, the capital of Nigeria, and His Grace is one of Africa’s best known, most respected commentators of the church, the Catholic church, so please make your way to the podium, speak at the microphone.

Archbishop John Onaiyekan

Friends, I must, I certainly must say I am grateful to be here, because for me this is more than a matter of debate, because that's what my life is all about. If I didn't believe that the Catholic church is a force for good, I would not devote my whole life to precisely working in that institution, hoping that I am involved in something that is good for the whole world. You see, for me to be a Catholic is a gift of God. Let me start with the word 'church', the Catholic 'church'. Obviously, it means many things to many people, but I think as an Archbishop I should be in the position to say what it does mean, especially to us Catholics. Yes, the Catholic church is an institution, and some people say it is perhaps the best organised institution in the world, but that's not really the essence of our church. We should go beyond institution. Now for us the church is first and foremost a community of believers. And this is a community of believers that is spread all over the world, made up of all kinds of people. And the institution itself, as well as those whom we normally consider church people—people dressed up like me, for example—we are there only because of that huge community of people who claim, who are Catholics. I'm stressing this, so that when you are asking yourself "is the Catholic church a force for good in the world?", don't look at me, don't look at Benedict XVI, look at the Catholics all over the world.

That the church is a force for good in the world seems obviously to me, is quite obvious, the question probably which you will ask is "what kind of force?" There was once an arrogant dictator who asked in disdain "how many battalions has the Pope?" Obviously, he completely missed the point. It is not about military force or physical force, but it is about force, it is about the force of the spiritual message. The force of values, which has stood the test of two thousand years. And not only two thousand years in time, but has spread its message all over the world among different kinds of people, different races. We must also not forget the sheer weight of the number of Catholics. I have checked the statistics and we have told you that now we have about 1.2 billion Catholics all over the world, out of a population of 6.6 billion, 17.3%, and these are young, these are made up of all categories of people—young and old, women and men, peasant farmers and high tech professionals, simple citizens and even heads of states and world leaders. This is the great army, that is a great force for good in the world, and whatever they are doing, we consider it as being done, largely also as a result of the spirit which guides them. Independent statistics have shown that the Catholic church is doing far more than its numbers and its population would probably suggest. The action of the church is most significant in communities that are reduced to poverty and misery by human neglect, and sometimes by hostile environments. Talking of statistics, I spoke recently with the

Director General of UNAIDS, which is the United Nations agency for HIV and AIDS, and he said that 26% of the health institutions in the world directly involved with the treatment of HIV and AIDS are run by the Catholic church. And please note, that it is a well-known policy of our church, whenever we are engaged in social welfare work, it is always given to all without any discrimination, whether you believe or not, irrespective of creed. Indeed, it is an integral part of our faith that our church is made up of saints and sinners. We are all struggling towards that perfection which Jesus asked us all to follow. Nor am I denying that the Catholic church has always and everywhere done excellent things, even sometimes in high levels, but this again only proves that we are in this world. Even the late Pope John-Paul II had no difficulty at all in admitting the mistakes that people who claim to be Catholics or to be working in the name of the church have done in the past. And he apologised, and suggestions of apology is very rare in our world today.

Let me conclude by drawing your attention to one particular aspect of my faith, which I admire greatly: we are very open to dealing, and moving, and collaborating with others. And I think this is very important for the world of ideas. We are talking of the world of today. We need more and more effects to link hands across all divides, so that we can manage to make our planet a better place. A world of peace and peace. Is there still anybody here who still doubts whether the Catholic church is a force for good in the world? Thank you very much.

Zeinab Badawi

Our next speaker is Christopher Hitchens, he's arguing against the motion. He is a writer, journalist and commentator, particularly well known for his trenchant views and very original thinking. So, Christopher Hitchens, let us hear what you have to say, your time starts now, please make your way to the podium.

Christopher Hitchens

Now I'm sorry to have to begin by disagreeing with His Grace. If you're going to be a serious grown-up person, and appear to defend the Catholic church in public in front of an educated and literate audience, you simply have to start by making a great number of heartfelt apologies and requests for contrition and forgiveness. Now you might ask *<applause>* You're fully entitled to ask, brothers and sisters, who am I to say that? Well, in the jubilee millennium year of 2000 the Vatican spokesman Bishop Piero Marini said, explaining a whole sermon of apology given by His Holiness the Pope, given the num-

ber of sins we've committed in the course of twenty centuries, reference to them must necessarily be rather summary. Well I think Bishop Marini had that just about right, I'll have to be summary, too. His Holiness on that occasion—it was March the 12th, 2000, if you wish to look it up—begged forgiveness for, among some other things, the crusades, the Inquisition, the persecution of the Jewish people, in justice towards women, that's half the human race right there, and the forced conversion of indigenous peoples, especially in South America, the African slave trade, the admission that Galileo was right, and for silence during Hitler's Final Solution or Shoah. And it doesn't end there, there are smaller but significant—equally significant—avowals of a very bad conscience. These have included regret for the rape and torture of orphans and other children in church-run schools in almost every country on Earth, from Ireland to Australia. These are very serious matters, and they're not to be laughed off by the references to the occasional work of Catholic charities. But I draw your attention not just to the apologies, ladies and gentlemen, but to the evasive and euphemistic form that they take. Joseph Ratzinger, the current Pope, considered by some, considered by Catholics to be the Vicar of Christ on Earth, in his comment, one of the few he's made on the institutionalisation of rape and torture and maltreatment of children in Catholic institutions, he said it's a very severe crisis which involves us, he said, in the following: in the need for applying to these victims the most loving, pastoral care. Well I'm sorry, they've already had that, and to say that this is the response to be laid upon you, by the horrific admission that you've already had to make is not accepting responsibility in any adult sense. The same euphemism comes, in the term some Christians allow themselves to be deceived in this way and to act against the gospel, well, anti-Semitism was preached as an official doctrine of the Church until 1964. Do you think that might have something to do with public opinion in Austria, and Bavaria, and Poland, and Lithuania? There'll come a time, when the church will issue apologies, and explanations, and half-baked appeals for forgiveness for things it's still doing. I think that there will be an apology for what happened in Rwanda, the most Catholic country in Africa, where priests and nuns and bishops are on trial, for inciting from their pulpits and on the Church's radio stations and newspapers, the massacre of their brothers and sisters. Staying in Africa, I think it will one day be admitted with shame that it might have been in error to say that AIDS is bad as a disease, very bad, but not quite as bad as condoms are bad, or not as immoral in the same way. I say it in the presence of His Grace, and I say it to his face, the teachings of his church are responsible for the death and suffering and misery of his brother and sister Africans, and he should apologise for it, he should show some shame. For condemning my friend Stephen Fry for his nature, for saying you couldn't be a member of our

church, you're born in sin. He's not being condemned for what he does, he's being condemned for what he is. You're a child made in the image of God – oh no, you're not, you're a faggot, and you can't join our church and you can't go to heaven. This is disgraceful, it's inhuman, it's obscene, and it comes from a clutch of hysterical, sinister virgins, who've already betrayed their charge in the children of their own church. For shame! For shame!

I don't wish any ill on any fellow primate or mammal of mine, so I don't at all look forward to the death of Joseph Ratzinger, I don't, or any other bloke, not really, except for one tiny reason which I ought to confess and share with you. When he dies, there's quite a long interval till the conclave can meet, and for that whole time, that whole interval—it is a delicious, lucid interlude—there isn't anyone on Earth who claims to be infallible. Isn't that nice? All I think, all I want to propose in closing is this: that if the human species is to rise to the full height that's demanded by its dignity, and by its intelligence, we must all of us move to a state of affairs, where that condition is permanent, and I think we should get on with it. Okay, thank you for having me.

Zeinab Badawi

Well Christopher, thank you very much for all of that. Our next speaker is going to have her work cut out, because she's speaking in favour of the motion that the Catholic church is a force for good: the Conservative MP and former government minister, Ann Widdecombe. She's as well-known for her religious views as for her politics. If you recall, she left the Church of England in 1992, in a blaze of publicity, when it allowed the ordination of women priests. The following year she converted to Catholicism, and has become one of the most vocal and staunchest defenders of the Catholic Church since then. Ann Widdecombe, the floor is yours.

Ann Widdecombe

If apologies are due tonight, they are due from Christopher Hitchens, who has just run through one of the longest series of misrepresentations of the Catholic Church that I have heard in a long time. He has said, with that certainty that characterises his utterances, that the Catholic Church has had a history of anti-Semitism. Let us just look at the record of the Catholic Church, when the Jewish community was under the most serious threat that it has faced in recent centuries, and just look at the role that the Catholic Church played in the last World War. Mr Hitchens ignores the thousands of Jews who were secreted and rescued in churches and monasteries throughout Europe. He ignores

the 3000 Jews, who in the course of that conflict, took refuge in the Pope's own summer palace. And coming nearer to our day, of course Christopher Hitchens is right, and who could possibly dispute with him, that the abuse of children, of innocent children, is one—in fact it is the—worst offence that anybody can commit. Of that, no doubt. But again he seems to think that the Catholic Church should have had some unique insight, which demonstrably was lacking in society as a whole, do not expect the Catholic Church somehow, when that was the state of knowledge at the time, to have acted in a unique and completely different way. In retrospect, yes, of course. In retrospect, yep. In retrospect, it should've done—so should the magistrates, so should the Samaritans, so should the National Council of Civil Liberties. But when we ask, whether the Catholic Church is a force for good, let's just try to imagine a world today without, for example, the billions of pounds that are poured into overseas aid by the Catholic Church, contributing year on year more than any single nation. Imagine the developing world had been left without the input of the medicine and the education that was brought to it by the missions. Imagine the absence of those collections, Sunday upon Sunday, for famine relief. Imagine the absence of the church in the local community. We play a vital role. And you don't need to be a Catholic to acknowledge that we play that role. What is the church? It is its members: it is the nuns and the monks and the priests and the layworkers and the congregations. It is not just the hierarchy of the Church. And I believe that the Church to which I belong is a massive, massive force for good. But, let us not just keep the debate at that level. I knew somehow that when we were here tonight, we would be discussing child abuse—and condoms, they came in the end, I almost thought we were going to get through an entire speech from Christopher Hitchens without condoms, but we got them at the end—but that isn't what the Catholic Church is about, it isn't only about the physical relief of the poor, it isn't only about the work it does on Earth, but it is the message that it preaches. And that message is one of hope, that message is one of salvation. And it is all very well for some people to say, in an intellectual arrogance, we can do without that, but actually billions of people across the world live by that message of hope and of salvation. They try to live by the commandments and also by the interpretation of those commandments by Christ. Yea, sometimes they fail, sometimes their leaders fail—human beings do fail—but overwhelmingly, I say to you tonight with no apology whatever, that a world without the Catholic Church would be poorer, would be more hopeless, and would be a worse place in which to live.

Zeinab Badawi

Well thank you very much indeed, Ann Widdecombe. And our final speaker is against

the motion: Stephen Fry, a bit of an all-rounder really, Stephen can turn his hand to many things. Stephen, let's hear your views.

Stephen Fry

I genuinely believe that the Catholic Church is not, to put it at its mildest, a force for good in the world, and therefore it is important for me to try and marshal my facts as well I can to explain why I think that. But I want first of all to say that I have no quarrel and no argument and I wish to express no contempt for individual devout and pious members of that church. It would be impertinent and wrong of me to express any antagonism towards any individual who wishes to find salvation in whatever form they wish to express it. That to me is sacrosanct as much as any article of faith is sacrosanct to anyone of any church or any faith in the world. It's very important. It's also very important to me, as it happens, that I have my own beliefs. They are a belief in the Enlightenment, a belief in the eternal adventure of trying to discover moral truth in the world, and there is nothing, sadly, that the Catholic Church and its hierarchs likes to do more than to attack the Enlightenment. It did so at the time: reference was made to Galileo and the fact that he was tortured, for trying to explain the Copernican theory of the Universe. Just imagine in this square mile how many people were burned for reading the Bible in English. And one of the principle burners and torturers of those who tried to read the Bible in English, here in London, was Thomas More. Now, that's a long time ago, it's not relevant, except that it was only last century that Thomas More was made a saint, and it was only in the year 2000, that the last pope, the Pole, he made Thomas More the Patron Saint of Politicians. This is a man who put people on the wrack for daring to own a Bible in English: he tortured them for owning a Bible in their own language. The idea that the Catholic Church exists to disseminate the word of the Lord is nonsense. It is the only owner of the Truth for the billions that it likes to boast about, because those billions are uneducated and poor, as again it likes to boast about. It's perhaps unfair of me, as a gay man, to moan at this enormous institution, which is the largest and most powerful church on Earth, has over a billion, as they like to tell us, members, each one of whom is under strict instructions to believe the dogmas of the church, but may wrestle with them personally of course. It's hard for me to be told that I'm evil, because I think of myself as someone who is filled with love, whose only purpose in life was to achieve love, and who feels love for so much of nature and the world and for everything else. We certainly don't need the stigmatisation, the victimisation, that leads to the playground bullying when people say you're a disordered, morally evil individual. That's not nice, it isn't nice. The kind of cruelty in Catholic education, the kind of child—let's not call it child

abuse, it was child rape—the kind of child rape that went on systematically for so long, let's imagine that we can overlook this and say that it is nothing whatever to do with the structure and nature of the Catholic Church, and the twisted and neurotic and hysterical way that its leaders are chosen, the celibacy, the nuns, the monks, the priesthood, this is not natural and normal, ladies and gentlemen, in 2009, it really isn't.

I have yet to approach one of the subjects dearest to my heart, I've made three documentary films on the subject of AIDS in Africa. My particular love is the country of Uganda, it is one of the countries I love most in the world. There was a period when Uganda had the worst incidence of HIV / AIDS in the world, but through an amazing initiative called ABC—Abstinence, Be faithful, Correct use of condoms—those three, I'm not denying that abstinence is a very good way of not getting AIDS, it really is, it works, so does being faithful, but so do condoms, and do not deny it! And this Pope, this Pope, not satisfied with saying “condoms are against our religion, please consider first abstinence, second being faithful to your partner,” he spreads the lie that condoms actually increase the incidence of AIDS, he actually makes sure that aid is conditional on saying no to condoms. I have been to the hospital in Bwindi in the west of Uganda, where I do quite a lot of work, it is unbelievable the pain and suffering you see. Now yes, yes it is true abstinence will stop it. It's the strange thing about this church, it is obsessed with sex, absolutely obsessed. Now, they will say we with our permissive society and our rude jokes, we are obsessed. No, we have a healthy attitude, we like it, it's fun, it's jolly, because it's a primary impulse it can be dangerous and dark and difficult, it's a bit like food in that respect only even more exciting. The only people who are obsessed with food are anorexics and the morbidly obese, and that in erotic terms is the Catholic Church in a nutshell.

Do you know who would be the last person ever to be accepted as a prince of the Church? The Galileean carpenter. That Jew. They would kick him out before he tried to cross the threshold. He would be so ill-at-ease in the Church. What would he think, what would he think of St. Peter's? What would he think of the wealth, and the power, and the self-justification, and the wheedling apologies? The Pope could decide that all this power, all this wealth, this hierarchy of princes and bishops and archbishops and priests and monks and nuns could be sent out in the world with money and art treasures, to put them back in the countries that they once raped and violated, they could give that money away, and they could concentrate on the apparent essence of their belief, and then, I would stand here and say the Catholic Church may well be a force for good in the world, but until that day, it is not. Thank you.

Zeinab Badawi

Well, Stephen Fry, thank you very much. So, you've heard all our four speakers. It's going to be your turn, the audience, next, and I'll give you a couple of minutes to think about what you want to ask our panellists, any questions or comments you may wish to make. Because I'm going to give you, now, the result of that vote that you all gave when you were coming in here to Central Hall. The motion is: the Catholic church is a force for good in the world. In favour of the motion were 678. Against the motion, that the Catholic church is a force for good, were 1102. Big difference. However, 346 of you were undecided, so Archbishop and Ann Widdecombe, you're not only going to have to win over the undecided, but actually convert some from the other side. Let's see if we can sway any opinions here amongst all of you by listening to some points that you wish to raise with the panel, and then we're going to ask you to vote again. Now, put your hand up if you want to speak, a question, the lady with the spectacles.

Question

I would like to ask Mr Hitchens if he is only against the Catholic church or against all religions.

Zeinab Badawi

Okay, go back there, the lady in the pink.

Question

Hi there, this is a question for Christopher Hitchens. Many people today feel that we're really living in some kind of moral crisis, and you can see that all around us. Now, if one thing that the Catholic church does do for good in my opinion, is give us the ten commandments, a very basic and obvious way of giving us some kind of moral guidance. Would you not agree with that?

Christopher Hitchens

The lady in front began by asking me do I reserve this condemnation only for the Holy Roman church and not for Catholics, for example Byzantine Catholics and Protestants and so on. I think they're all the same equivalent glimpses of the identical untruth. Now of the commandments, the first two or three are entirely about fearing the author of the audits, entirely about being terrified of someone you're enjoined to love. I don't know

about you, ladies and gentlemen, but the idea of compulsory love has always struck me as a bit shady, especially if you're ordered to love someone who you absolutely must fear. So, the first three are: look out for me, and keep at least one day of my way or you'll be terrified full-time.

Zeinab Badawi

Ann Widdecombe, Ten Commandments, bedrock of moral teaching?

Ann Widdecombe

I would have thought it quite obvious that the Ten Commandments set out a blueprint for a moral and successful society. Let us just look at some of them: honour thy father and thy mother—think of today's disrespect—thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not commit adultery, and thou shalt not covet – tell that to the bankers with their bonuses.

Zeinab Badawi

Okay, Archbishop, do you want to come in briefly on this?

Archbishop John Onaiyekan

The Ten Commandments are in the Bible, but my father know it before he became a Christian. All African religions recognised those basic norms of morality, everybody knows that.

Zeinab Badawi

Okay, let's take some more questions from the floor, okay.

Question

This is a very simple question for Ann Widdecombe. You might think it may be a naïve question, if so I'd be very happy to be educated, why is it wrong for a woman to become a priest, but perfectly acceptable for a woman, such as yourself, to become an MP?

Zeinab Badawi

Okay, thanks. I think we're going to go just across here next.

Question

Ann made a point about the billions that are poured into Africa. I respect your faith, I respect the message you give, but why to pass that message on do you need the finery you wear, do you need the palace of the Vatican?

Zeinab Badawi

Okay, point made. I think we're going to go, here.

Question

Archbishop, of which current Roman Catholic policy are you most ashamed?

Archbishop John Onaiyekan

I don't know whether you're serious in that question, or you just want to provoke, because all of our Catholic policies are not just dreamt overnight by the Pope or anybody. If it is a Catholic policy, it is reasonable, it is based on our traditions and scriptures, and there's none about which I am assumed.

Zeinab Badawi

Okay, and the other question about...

Archbishop John Onaiyekan

And I don't know what billions that he says the Vatican has. The billions of this world I think are not in the Vatican, we know where they are, and they are not coming to Africa, on the contrary, Africa is being sucked dry by those people, those multinationals, they are the ones who should be bringing our money back to us. I think we are targeting the wrong place. I come from Africa, and the funds that come from church agencies for us are very important.

Zeinab Badawi

Ann Widdecombe, one specific question to you, why not women priests in the Catholic church?

Ann Widdecombe

Well, no, the specific question was, why is it not alright for a woman to be a priest but it is for a woman to be an MP, that's the specific question. And I have to say to you, that really does betray a vast ignorance. A Member of Parliament, male or female, does not stand in persona Christi at the point of consecration. But I don't believe that it is any more possible for a woman to represent Christ at the point of consecration than for a man to be the Virgin Mary.

Zeinab Badawi

Okay, thanks. Lots of hands up and I really do want to go around everybody, so panel, if you could keep your responses to the point as much as you can. Up there, please.

Question

Question to Stephen Fry, I'm a Catholic, but I like you a lot, about ... I don't know that the Catholic church condemns homosexuality as such, only recommends chastity for everybody, and then, if I'm not married I should be chaste, whether I am homosexual or heterosexual.

Question

Hi, question for Ann Widdecombe actually. You accused Christopher Hitchens of judging the Catholic church by the standards of the time, but surely the truths in your doctrines are either eternal or they're not.

Zeinab Badawi

Okay, Stephen Fry, the question about the Catholic church apparently doesn't condemn homosexuality, that question asked.

Stephen Fry

Well, I'm afraid it simply does, it does condemn it, yes. It calls it, the official word is a disorder, but it was refined by the current Pontiff, Ratzinger, who called it a moral evil. But on the other hand we must remember, as the point that was made, is that the church is very loose on moral evils, because although they try to accuse people like me, who believe in empiricism and the Enlightenment, of somehow what they call moral relativism, as if it's some appalling sin, where what it actually means is thought, they for example thought that slavery was perfectly fine, absolutely okay, and then they didn't. And what

is the point of the Catholic church if it says 'oh, well we couldn't know better because nobody else did,' then what are you for?

Zeinab Badawi

Can you just clarify for us on this thing about homosexuality, the Catholic church condemns the act but not the individual. Did Jesus Christ himself actually say anything about homosexuality?

Archbishop John Onaiyekan

That is a wrong question in this subject... <interjection from Stephen Fry>...no, because we not aware about homosexuality, the morality of homosexuality, being a matter that drew the attention of Jesus. But Jesus certainly spoke about the Ten Commandments and adultery, and I do not think we should deny the church the right to propound its own doctrines, you are not obliged to take it.

Zeinab Badawi

Let's hear more from the floor, and then we'll come...yep, go on.

Question

Our life is based on the life of Jesus Christ, not on emotion or peace or the way the world is going. So, I think all the people who are listening, I think the message we are getting here will lead us to live a good life.

Zeinab Badawi

Okay, thanks, let's just get through some more comments. Okay, yep, briefly please, briefly.

Question

I spent 38 years of my life as a Catholic and then I saw the light, and my life now is going back and forth to Africa and next month I go to Uganda, and I'm working on trying to stop mothers dying in pregnancy and childbirth. What I'm saying is, please, please, reverse the ruling on condoms and family planning and contraception and save more lives, save the thousands and thousands of lives...

Zeinab Badawi

Let's keep this moving, briefly please.

Question

As a Catholic I'm actually very pleased to be here this evening to hear two sides of a very important argument, and the positive thing I take away is that the Catholic church can take the opportunity to reflect upon these comments and that we look for the future, and that it is by actually accepting these comments and by looking for a way forward that the church can actually grow and have a more important part in the world.

Zeinab Badawi

Thank you. We can't take any more questions from the floor, really, but panel, what I propose is this: you've heard the points that are raised, some of them were comments, some of them were questions, you're going to have a few minutes to make your closing statements, please incorporate these questions that you heard in your closing statements. Because audience, I want you to vote again. Now for those of you who are watching at home, if you'd like a briefing booklet on some of those issues that you've heard raised today, then please go to www.intelligencesquared.com and you can download that booklet, anybody can do it and it's absolutely free. Okay, so everybody's doing that, so while you're all doing that, it's going to take a little bit of time, we're going to hear the closing statements incorporating some of the points that you the audience raised, and we're going to do it in reverse order this time, and it's going to be Stephen Fry first.

Stephen Fry

Well it's been a really interesting debate, and I've loved some of the questions from the floor. I suppose I'm slightly disappointed that Ann Widdecombe in particular should say "oh, I knew they'd bring up condoms and child rape and homosexuality." It's a bit like a burglar in court saying "you would bring up that burglary and that manslaughter, you never mentioned the fact that I gave my father a birthday present." You know, yes, yes, are you getting the message? There is a reason we hammer home these issues: because they matter. It's such an opportunity, owning a billion souls at baptism. It's such an opportunity to do something remarkable, to make this planet better, and it's an opportunity that is constantly and arrogantly being avoided and I'm sorry for that.

Zeinab Badawi

Okay, thank you. Final statement from Conservative MP Ann Widdecombe for the motion that the Catholic church is a force for good in the world.

Ann Widdecombe

Right, we have had all the usual stuff, about how the Catholic church, being against condoms, has apparently caused untold misery. As I've said, our opponents always try to home in on sex, when the teachings of the church, which are after all only about the stability of family, the maintenance of fidelity, the virtue of chastity, when the church teaches that as one part of all its teaching, I do sometimes despair at the way that these debates always, always come back to that. So, I'm very pleased to have been here tonight, despite the fact that I think the incoming poll was slightly discouraging. I'm very pleased to have been here, to have been here with the Archbishop, and with the two gentlemen opposite, and thank you for the opportunity.

Zeinab Badawi

Against the motion, Christopher Hitchens.

Christopher Hitchens

Unanswered questions: amazing, no one, though they were asked repeatedly, would say whether they thought Stephen Fry, my friend, was in a state of mortal sin or not. They wouldn't tell you. Something about the question brought out their inner coward. Well, I say that homosexuality is not just a form of sex, it's a form of love, and it deserves our respect for that reason. That when my children were young, I'd have been proud to have Stephen as their babysitter, and I'd've told them they were lucky, and if anyone came to my door as a babysitter wearing holy orders, I'd call first a cab and then the police.

Zeinab Badawi

Final statement from our final speaker, Archbishop of Abuja, John Onaiyekan. You've gotta make your final pitch now, to the audience.

Archbishop John Onaiyekan

Thank you very much. I just want to draw the attention of the audience back to the topic, and the topic is quite clear, the Catholic church is a force for good in the world. It did not say it is the only source for good. It did not say it has always been a source for good, it's not in the past, it is in the present tense – is a source for good. I still cannot see how they have in any way shown the Catholic church is not a force for good in the world. I can say all kinds of things about other people, but I think it is fair enough that when it comes to “what does the Church say about condoms? what does it say about homosexuality? what does it say about women priests?” we have to take the trouble to find out exactly what it is saying. Not what the newspapers are saying that we are saying. We never said that the Catholic church is perfect, we continue to do our best, to be as close as we can to Jesus Christ and what he wants us to be, and to constantly be a force for good in the world, and I thank you.

Zeinab Badawi

Archbishop, thank you. Audience, you've all voted again. Now the moment of truth, panel. Let me remind everybody that before the debate, when everybody came in, this is how you voted: for the motion “that the Catholic church is a force for good in the world” 678, against the motion 1102, and the undecideds, the ‘don't know's were 346. This is how you voted subsequently: for the motion “that the Catholic church is a force for good” from 678 it's gone to 268. I'm sorry. Against the motion, it's now 1876. And you can see that doesn't leave very many ‘don't know's, it's 34 undecided. So commiserations Archbishop and Ann Widdecombe, congratulations Stephen Fry and Christopher Hitchens. Thank you all, from me Zeinab Badawi, good bye.

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