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The 1835 Index of Pope Gregory XVI

The next significant event occurred in 1835 when, under the reign of Pope Gregory XVI, Copernicus, Galileo, *et al.* were removed from the *Index*. In this case also, however, there is much suspect activity. We noted earlier that the decision to remove their names was made under false pretenses. Two bogus scientific claims were used to influence Catholic authorities. The first was the fallacious claim that stellar parallax proved heliocentrism; and the second was that science had discovered a case of stellar parallax one hundred years earlier. In reality, stellar parallax had not been truly discovered until three years after the *Index* under Gregory XVI removed Copernicus and Galileo's names.¹

There is more detailed information regarding the 1835 *Index* that will help in understanding the subterfuge that was taking place. After Settele was granted his imprimatur, in October 1822 Olivieri published his reasons why Copernicus, Zúñiga, Foscarini, Kepler, and Galileo were kept on the *Index*. In November, the Inquisition asked him to answer various questions regarding his thesis. In December, the Inquisition discussed Olivieri's answers with the help of two other experts, B. Garofalo and Bartolomeo Capellari. Although there are no historical records with the results of that discussion, we can assume that Capellari carried them in his mind when he became pope in 1831 as Gregory XVI.² Two years after he was elected, on May 20, 1833, apparently on little more than Olivieri's dubious argumentation presented at the December 1822 meeting,³ Gregory XVI decided that the new *Index* would omit the books of Copernicus, Zúñiga, Foscarini, Kepler, and Galileo. This decision was made in the face of such incidents as astronomer Giuseppe

¹ See the earlier analysis in Volume 2 of *Galileo Was Wrong: The Church Was Right* of the 1992 papal speech of John Paul II to the Pontifical Academy of Science for information on the influence of the claims of stellar parallax on the *Index* of Gregory XVI.

² Prior to Gregory XVI were Leo XII (1823-1829) and Pius VIII (1829-1830), but they did not address any of the cosmological issues.

³ Finocchiaro notes that since Olivieri accepted the plea of Anfossi that the 1616 and 1633 decrees were "unrevisable" rather than "infallible," "it was dealing with a more manageable concept...it seemed to presuppose that there was a papal decree against the earth's motion, and so Olivieri's criterion for a papal decree seems less stringent than those prevailing today" (*Retrying Galileo*, p. 220).

Piazzi declaring in 1827 that “the Copernican system was not as certain and well demonstrated as commonly believed,”⁴ and Le Seur and Jacquier’s continuing *Declaratio* on Newton’s *Principia* in the Glasgow edition of 1833, which read “...But we profess obedience to the decrees made by the Supreme Pontiffs against the movement of the earth.”⁵

In analyzing more closely the situation under Gregory XVI, we discover that his permission to remove Copernicus, *et al.* from the Index was based on three irregular criteria: (a) unproven scientific claims; (b) an alteration of the historical record of 1616 and 1633; and (c) a removing of Galileo’s name without first rescinding the sentence of his 1633 trial.

First, regarding the unproven scientific claims, we have presented detailed evidence demonstrating that, although in Gregory XVI’s reign it was firmly believed that stellar aberration and stellar parallax proved the Earth was moving, it has since been discovered that neither phenomena present any proof at all. Both can be easily explained from a geocentric model. To put this in layman’s terms, we quote from a popular book on modern cosmology:

Schoolchildren learn that we live on a planet that revolves on its axis and orbits the Sun, that Nicolaus Copernicus introduced this controversial idea in the sixteenth century, and that some men were persecuted for believing it. But in the end...“all settled”...case closed....Yet our own contemporary science backs away and tells us that when it comes to proving what moves and what doesn’t, and whether or not there is an unmoving “center,” no one can make an airtight case that any answer is right or wrong. Pick what you will, the Moon, Mars, the Sun, the Earth, your great aunt’s dining table – the options are infinite – and it’s possible to come up with that as the unmoving center. In fact you are being parochial if you limit the exercise to our planetary system. It is possible to describe the entire universe using any chosen point as the unmoving center – the Earth will do very well – and no one can prove that choice is wrong....Scientists today [merely] prefer to picture everything in motion and nothing as being the center....[but] no one can prove that the Earth moves.⁶

⁴ As noted by Finocchiaro in *Retrying Galileo*, p. 198, as cited from Settele’s diary, op. cit., p. 421.

⁵ Original Latin: “DECLARATIO...Cæterum latis a summis Pontificibus contra Telluris motum Decretis nos obsequi profiteamur.” Above translation taken from Rev. William W. Roberts in *The Pontifical Decrees Against the Doctrine of the Earth’s Movement*, p. 53.

⁶ Kitty Ferguson, *Measuring the Universe*, pp. 34-35. Even as late as 1941, the president of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, Agostino Gemelli, gave a speech to the members stating: “...although Galileo did not provide a decisive demonstration of Copernicanism, neither did Newton, Bradley, or Foucault” (cited by Finocchiaro in *Retrying Galileo*, p. 278).

As the scientific philosopher Paul Feyerabend puts it:

...Galileo's utterances are indeed arguments in appearance only. For Galileo uses propaganda. He uses psychological tricks....This is the essence of Galileo's trickery! As a result, the clash between Copernicus and...ourselves...dissolves into thin air, and we finally realize "that all terrestrial events from which it is ordinarily held that the earth stands still and the sun and the fixed stars are moving would necessarily appear just the same to us if the earth moved and the other stood still."⁷

Second, regarding Olivieri's argument that Copernicus and Galileo were rejected merely because they presented flawed heliocentric models that did not include elliptical orbits of the planets, or that they understood the sun to be motionless, is simply a malicious distortion of the historical record. In no instance of the over 7000 documents of the Galileo affair from the seventeenth century is there any mention of such a criteria for condemning either Copernicus or Galileo. There existed only one basic issue in the trial of Galileo, namely, Galileo's insistence that the Earth revolved around the sun. The magisterium answered this in two parts. It condemned the assertion that the sun did not revolve around the Earth as "formally heretical," and it condemned the assertion that the Earth was not motionless in space as "erroneous in faith." It would have made no difference if Galileo had believed the Earth moved in an ellipse or a circle. All such motion was condemned because the Congregation of the Index declared, of the two bodies, the sun moved and the Earth did not. Hence, Olivieri's deliberate attempt to confuse the issue by inserting the red herring of elliptical orbits is one of the most deceptive pieces of propaganda ever foisted on the Catholic Church.

Third, there exists, however, an even more egregious commission of fault on the part of Gregory XVI's Index. Earlier we learned of the incident that occurred in 1765 when French astronomer Joseph Lalande sought to have Galileo's name removed from the Index. He was told by the head of the Congregation of the Index that no such removal was possible until the sentence given to Galileo at the trial of 1633 was formally and officially rescinded.⁸ The importance of this canonical

⁷ Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method*, pp. 65, 68, the quote coming from Galileo's *Dialogo*, p. 416. Later Feyerabend adds: "And [you] will perhaps see the merits of a different view which asserts that, while the pre-Copernican [Ptolemaic] astronomy was in trouble (was confronted by a series of refuting instances and implausibilities), the Copernican theory was in even greater trouble (was confronted by even more drastic refuting instances and implausibilities); but that being in harmony with still further inadequate theories it gained strength, and was retained, the refutations being made ineffective by *ad hoc* hypotheses and clever techniques of persuasion. This would seem to be a much more adequate description of the developments at the time of Galileo than is offered by almost all alternative accounts" (*Against Method*, p. 105).

⁸ As stated verbatim by Finocchiaro in *Retrying Galileo*, p. 154, with citation to Lalande's 1764 work, *Astronomie*, second edition, vol. 1, pp. 536-41, ¶¶ 1103-4.

protocol cannot be underestimated. If there is no legal exoneration of Galileo, then, according to the canonical protocol, Galileo and his heliocentric theory remain condemned to this very day, and thus, the removal of Galileo's name from the 1835 Index was both premature and inconsequential. Since the Church, to this very day, has not initiated any official, formal or legal rescission of either the condemnation against heliocentrism or against Galileo personally, both remain in force, regardless of whether his name was taken off the 1835 Index. An Index can revise an Index, but an Index cannot reverse or revise the results of a canonical trial. The only thing accomplished by removing Galileo's name from the Index while keeping the results of his trial in force is the creation of a glaring contradiction in ecclesiastical protocol.

In the end, since the 1633 trial both condemned the heliocentric theory as "formally heretical" and Galileo as being "vehemently suspect" of that formal heresy, it is not only Galileo who was condemned, but the heliocentric theory itself. It remains in force until legally abrogated by the Church. We can now understand why John Paul II's reinvestigation into the Galileo affair did not seek to overturn the decision of Galileo's trial or even rehabilitate Galileo, but to "rethink" what happened. Legally speaking, everything remains as it was in 1633.⁹ As Cardinal Casaroli, the Vatican Secretary of State, said, by orders of John Paul II, to the Galileo commission on July 3, 1981:

The aim of the various groups should be to rethink the whole Galileo question, with complete fidelity to historically documented facts and in conformity to the doctrine and culture of the time, and to recognize honestly, in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council and of the quoted speech of John Paul II, rights and wrongs from whatever side they come. This is not to be the review of a trial or a rehabilitation, but a serene and objectively founded reflection, in the context of today's historical-cultural epoch.¹⁰

Also cited in Karl Gebler's *Galileo and the Roman Curia*, 1879, p. 313, and Walter Brandmüller's *Galilei e la Chiesa, ossia il diritto di errare*, 1992, p. 162.

⁹ Recently, Pope Benedict XVI demonstrated the legal power that previous canonical decisions possess when he said this about the 1962 missal for the Mass: "As for the use of the 1962 missal as a *forma extraordinaria* of the liturgy of the Mass, I would like to draw attention to the fact that this missal was never juridically abrogated and, consequently, in principle, was always permitted. Article 1: ...It is, therefore, permissible to celebrate the Sacrifice of the Mass following the typical edition of the Roman Missal promulgated by Bl. John XXIII in 1962 and never abrogated, as an extraordinary form of the Liturgy of the Church" (Motu Proprio: *Summorum pontificum*, July 7, 2007).

¹⁰ Quoted from Casaroli, as translated by M. Segre in "Light on the Galileo Case?" in *Isis* 88, pp. 500-501, as cited in *Retrying Galileo*, p. 344.

1850: The Vatican Supports the 1633 Condemnation of Galileo

In 1850 Marino Marini, Prefect of the Vatican Secret Archives, was commissioned by the Vatican to write an updated apologetic work on the Galileo affair. The book's title was *Galileo e l'Inquisizione* ("Galileo and the Inquisition") and was published by the press of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in Rome. Marini's purpose was to demonstrate that the Catholic Church had saved Europe from heresy and that the Inquisition's punishment of Galileo, which most assuredly did not include torture, was mild compared to what Protestant churches and state courts were known to do against rebels. Marini concludes that the Inquisition handled the trial of Galileo in "justice, wisdom and moderation," and that "we must affirm that perhaps there has never been a judicial action as just and as wise as this one."¹¹ Marini paid special attention to the meetings that the Tuscan ambassador, Francesco Niccolini, had with Pope Urban VIII in 1632, in which the pope stressed the importance of silencing Galileo, and which papal resolve was reported to Duke Cosimo II and from which Urban VIII implored his help in curtailing Galileo's cosmological heresies.

The Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII

The encyclical to which Benedict XV referred, Leo XIII's *Providentissimus Deus* ("The Providence of God") contains the same polite gesture toward the claims of science, yet without any official or formal concession to its specific propositions. The encyclical is subtitled: "On the Study of Sacred Scripture." Here Pope Leo reiterated the principles of Catholic hermeneutics that had been in practice for more than a millennia and a half, yet he did not mention anything about Galileo or any other related issue concerning the cosmological controversies of the 16th and 17th centuries. In fact, although Leo XIII's encyclical is often cited to support the heliocentric position, *Providentissimus Deus* is actually one of the Church's strongest statements on the literal interpretation of Scripture and the cautions that need to be exercised against the claims of modern science. We will quote and analyze these portions of his encyclical below. The more significant statements have been underlined for emphasis:

17.There has arisen, to the great detriment of religion, an inept method, dignified by the name of the "higher criticism," which pretends to judge of the origin, integrity and authority of each Book from internal indications alone. It is clear, on the other hand, that in historical questions, such as the origin and the handing down of writings, the witness of history is of primary importance, and that historical investigation should be

¹¹ *Galileo e l'Inquisizione*, p. 141, as cited in *Retrying Galileo*, p. 230.

made with the utmost care; and that in this matter internal evidence is seldom of great value, except as confirmation. To look upon it in any other light will be to open the door to many evil consequences. It will make the enemies of religion much more bold and confident in attacking and mangling the Sacred Books; and this vaunted “higher criticism” will resolve itself into the reflection of the bias and the prejudice of the critics. It will not throw on the Scripture the light which is sought, or prove of any advantage to doctrine; it will only give rise to disagreement and dissension, those sure notes of error, which the critics in question so plentifully exhibit in their own persons; and seeing that most of them are tainted with false philosophy and rationalism, it must lead to the elimination from the sacred writings of all prophecy and miracle, and of everything else that is outside the natural order.

18. In the second place, we have to contend against those who, making an evil use of physical science, minutely scrutinize the Sacred Book in order to detect the writers in a mistake, and to take occasion to vilify its contents. Attacks of this kind, bearing as they do on matters of sensible experience, are peculiarly dangerous to the masses, and also to the young who are beginning their literary studies; for the young, if they lose their reverence for the Holy Scripture on one or more points, are easily led to give up believing in it altogether. It need not be pointed out how the nature of science, just as it is so admirably adapted to show forth the glory of the Great Creator, provided it be taught as it should be, so if it be perversely imparted to the youthful intelligence, it may prove most fatal in destroying the principles of true philosophy and in the corruption of morality. Hence to the Professor of Sacred Scripture a knowledge of natural science will be of very great assistance in detecting such attacks on the Sacred Books, and in refuting them. There can never, indeed, be any real discrepancy between the theologian and the physicist, as long as each confines himself within his own lines, and both are careful, as St. Augustine warns us, “not to make rash assertions, or to assert what is not known as known.” If dissension should arise between them, here is the rule also laid down by St. Augustine, for the theologian: “Whatever they can really demonstrate to be true of physical nature, we must show to be capable of reconciliation with our Scriptures; and whatever they assert in their treatises which is contrary to these Scriptures of ours, that is to Catholic faith, we must either prove it as well as we can to be entirely false, or at all events we must, without the smallest hesitation, believe it to be so.”

Analysis: In the next few sentences, Leo XIII speaks about the language of Scripture. This is the section to which those advocating a heliocentric model of the universe often appeal, but we will see that the pope says nothing about cosmology or the application of his hermeneutical

principles to the specific question of how we are to understand the revolutions of the celestial bodies. As we noted earlier in our rebuttal of Galileo's claim for figurative interpretation, such instances are naturally applied to the anthropomorphic or anthropopathic passages in Scripture (*i.e.*, those that give human body parts or human emotions to God), or to various figures of speech that are commonly used in all cultures, both ancient and modern. The pope states:

To understand how just is the rule here formulated we must remember, first, that the sacred writers, or to speak more accurately, the Holy Ghost "Who spoke by them, did not intend to teach men these things (that is to say, the essential nature of the things of the visible universe), things in no way profitable unto salvation." Hence they did not seek to penetrate the secrets of nature, but rather described and dealt with things in more or less figurative language, or in terms which were commonly used at the time and which in many instances are in daily use at this day, even by the most eminent men of science. Ordinary speech primarily and properly describes what comes under the senses; and somewhat in the same way the sacred writers – as the Angelic Doctor also reminds us – "went by what sensibly appeared," or put down what God, speaking to men, signified, in the way men could understand and were accustomed to.

19. The unshrinking defense of the Holy Scripture, however, does not require that we should equally uphold all the opinions which each of the Fathers or the more recent interpreters have put forth in explaining it; for it may be that, in commenting on passages where physical matters occur, they have sometimes expressed the ideas of their own times, and thus made statements which in these days have been abandoned as incorrect. Hence, in their interpretations, we must carefully note what they lay down as belonging to faith, or as intimately connected with faith – what they are unanimous in. For "in those things which do not come under the obligation of faith, the Saints were at liberty to hold divergent opinions, just as we ourselves are," according to the saying of St. Thomas. And in another place he says most admirably: "When philosophers are agreed upon a point, and it is not contrary to our faith, it is safer, in my opinion, neither to lay down such a point as a dogma of faith, even though it is perhaps so presented by the philosophers, nor to reject it as against faith, lest we thus give to the wise of this world an occasion of despising our faith." The Catholic interpreter, although he should show that those facts of natural science which investigators affirm to be now quite certain are not contrary to the Scripture rightly explained, must nevertheless always bear in mind, that much which has been held and proved as certain has afterwards been called in question and rejected. And if writers on physics travel outside the boundaries of their own branch, and carry their erroneous

teaching into the domain of philosophy, let them be handed over to philosophers for refutation.

Analysis: Although it is said that the Fathers sometimes expressed things in the ideas of their own times, Leo XIII does not give any specific examples, and thus there is no direct support for interpreting Earth-sun passages in a non-literal fashion. In fact, it goes without saying that the Fathers would speak from their own culture and use their idiomatic vocabulary since none of them would have known the culture or the idioms of the future. In addition, Leo's remarks about "things belonging to the faith...what they are unanimous in," would technically discount the heliocentric/geocentric debate from the discussion. First, we noted earlier, Cardinal Bellarmine argued that the Earth's centrality and immobility were a "matter of faith," if not so much in the explicit sense, then simply because of the fact that God is the author of Scripture, as even Leo states later in this encyclical (*e.g.*, ¶21: "and that God, speaking by the sacred writers, could not set down anything but what was true"). Second, it is a fact that the Fathers were unanimous in their belief in geocentrism. There was not one dissenting voice. It is perhaps the strongest unanimity the Fathers ever held on a particular topic. Hence, on both counts, faith and patristic unanimity, history shows that geocentrism is not to be included in Leo XIII's category of things to be "figuratively" interpreted or things that the Fathers expressed only "in the ideas of their times."

Also significant in the above paragraph is Leo XIII's comment about the mistakes in science and the overturning of scientific ideas, especially that of physics. He states:

The Catholic interpreter... must nevertheless always bear in mind, that much which has been held and proved as certain *has afterwards been called in question and rejected. And if writers on physics travel outside the boundaries of their own branch, and carry their erroneous teaching into the domain of philosophy, let them be handed over to philosophers for refutation.*

This statement has, more or less, been the clarion call of our book, *Galileo Was Wrong: The Church Was Right*. If there is anything of which Catholic theologians and scientists should avail themselves, it is the scientific evidence showing that heliocentrism is at best an unproven theory. These same theologians and scientists should avail themselves to an honest study into the history of science, which starkly reveals that almost every scientific theory proposed as true has been replaced by another theory that falsifies it; and that theory awaits to be replaced by yet another. In light of the new scientific evidence available, we can easily see that heliocentrism is one of those canons of physics that "has been held and proved as certain has afterwards been called in question and rejected."

In the next paragraphs, Leo XIII makes some of the Church's strongest statements upholding the full plenary inerrancy and inspiration

of Holy Writ ever recorded. The words of Robert Bellarmine to Galileo meet their strongest echo in the solemn declarations of Leo XIII:

20. The principles here laid down will apply to cognate sciences, and especially to History. It is a lamentable fact that there are many who with great labor carry out and publish investigations on the monuments of antiquity, the manners and institutions of nations and other illustrative subjects, and whose chief purpose in all this is too often to find mistakes in the sacred writings and so to shake and weaken their authority. Some of these writers display not only extreme hostility, but the greatest unfairness; in their eyes a profane book or ancient document is accepted without hesitation, whilst the Scripture, if they only find in it a suspicion of error, is set down with the slightest possible discussion as quite untrustworthy. It is true, no doubt, that copyists have made mistakes in the text of the Bible; this question, when it arises, should be carefully considered on its merits, and the fact not too easily admitted, but only in those passages where the proof is clear. It may also happen that the sense of a passage remains ambiguous, and in this case good hermeneutical methods will greatly assist in clearing up the obscurity. But it is absolutely wrong and forbidden, either to narrow inspiration to certain parts only of Holy Scripture, or to admit that the sacred writer has erred. For the system of those who, in order to rid themselves of these difficulties, do not hesitate to concede that divine inspiration regards the things of faith and morals, and nothing beyond, because (as they wrongly think) in a question of the truth or falsehood of a passage, we should consider not so much what God has said as the reason and purpose which He had in mind in saying it – this system cannot be tolerated. For all the books which the Church receives as sacred and canonical, are written wholly and entirely, with all their parts, at the dictation of the Holy Ghost; and so far is it from being possible that any error can co-exist with inspiration, that inspiration not only is essentially incompatible with error, but excludes and rejects it as absolutely and necessarily as it is impossible that God Himself, the supreme Truth, can utter that which is not true. This is the ancient and unchanging faith of the Church, solemnly defined in the Councils of Florence and of Trent, and finally confirmed and more expressly formulated by the Council of the Vatican. These are the words of the last: “The Books of the Old and New Testament, whole and entire, with all their parts, as enumerated in the decree of the same Council (Trent) and in the ancient Latin Vulgate, are to be received as sacred and canonical. And the Church holds them as sacred and canonical, not because, having been composed by human industry, they were afterwards approved by her authority; nor only because they contain revelation without error; but because, having been written under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, they have God for their author.” Hence, because the

Holy Ghost employed men as His instruments, we cannot therefore say that it was these inspired instruments who, perchance, have fallen into error, and not the primary author. For, by supernatural power, He so moved and impelled them to write – He was so present to them – that the things which He ordered, and those only, they, first, rightly understood, then willed faithfully to write down, and finally expressed in apt words and with infallible truth. Otherwise, it could not be said that He was the Author of the entire Scripture. Such has always been the persuasion of the Fathers. “Therefore,” says St. Augustine, “since they wrote the things which He showed and uttered to them, it cannot be pretended that He is not the writer; for His members executed what their Head dictated.” And St. Gregory the Great thus pronounces: “Most superfluous it is to inquire who wrote these things – we loyally believe the Holy Ghost to be the Author of the book. He wrote it Who dictated it for writing; He wrote it Who inspired its execution.”

21. It follows that those who maintain that an error is possible in any genuine passage of the sacred writings, either pervert the Catholic notion of inspiration, or make God the author of such error. And so emphatically were all the Fathers and Doctors agreed that the divine writings, as left by the hagiographers, are free from all error, that they labored earnestly, with no less skill than reverence, to reconcile with each other those numerous passages which seem at variance – the very passages which in great measure have been taken up by the “higher criticism;” for they were unanimous in laying it down, that those writings, in their entirety and in all their parts were equally from the afflatus of Almighty God, and that God, speaking by the sacred writers, could not set down anything but what was true. The words of St. Augustine to St. Jerome may sum up what they taught: “On my part I confess to your charity that it is only to those Books of Scripture which are now called canonical that I have learned to pay such honor and reverence as to believe most firmly that none of their writers has fallen into any error. And if in these Books I meet anything which seems contrary to truth, I shall not hesitate to conclude either that the text is faulty, or that the translator has not expressed the meaning of the passage, or that I myself do not understand.”

22. But to undertake fully and perfectly, and with all the weapons of the best science, the defense of the Holy Bible is far more than can be looked for from the exertions of commentators and theologians alone. It is an enterprise in which we have a right to expect the co-operation of all those Catholics who have acquired reputation in any branch of learning whatever. As in the past, so at the present time, the Church is never without the graceful support of her accomplished children; may their services to the Faith grow and increase! For there is nothing which We believe to be more

needful than that truth should find defenders more powerful and more numerous than the enemies it has to face; nor is there anything which is better calculated to impress the masses with respect for truth than to see it boldly proclaimed by learned and distinguished men. Moreover, the bitter tongues of objectors will be silenced, or at least they will not dare to insist so shamelessly that faith is the enemy of science, when they see that scientific men of eminence in their profession show towards faith the most marked honor and respect. Seeing, then, that those can do so much for the advantage of religion on whom the goodness of Almighty God has bestowed, together with the grace of the faith, great natural talent, let such men, in this bitter conflict of which the Holy Scripture is the object, select each of them the branch of study most suitable to his circumstances, and endeavor to excel therein, and thus be prepared to repulse with credit and distinction the assaults on the Word of God.

1921: Pope Benedict XV's Encyclical:
In Praeclara Summorum

On April 30, 1921, Pope Benedict XV promulgated the encyclical titled: *In Praeclara Summorum*, commemorating the memory of the poet Dante (1265-1321). In it the pope makes mention of the various antiquated ideas held by Dante and his contemporaries, but through it all Dante was a faithful son of the Church and believed in the basic idea that God created the world and governs it. In the midst of this memorial, the pope says that the Earth “may not be the center of the universe.” He writes:

...It is thus that, according to the Divine Revelation, in this poem shines out the majesty of God One and Three, the Redemption of the human race operated by the Word of God made Man, the supreme loving-kindness and charity of Mary, Virgin and Mother, Queen of Heaven, and lastly the glory on high of Angels, Saints and men; then the terrible contrast to this, the pains of the impious in Hell; then the middle world, so to speak, between Heaven and Hell, Purgatory, the Ladder of souls destined after expiation to supreme beatitude. It is indeed marvelous how he was able to weave into all three poems these three dogmas with truly wrought design. If the progress of science showed later that that conception of the world rested on no sure foundation, that the spheres imagined by our ancestors did not exist, that nature, the number and course of the planets and stars, are not indeed as they were then thought to be, still the fundamental principle remained that the universe, whatever be the order that sustains it in its parts, is the work of the creating and preserving sign of Omnipotent God, who moves and governs all, and whose glory *risplende in una parte piu e meno altrove*; and though this earth on which we live may not

be the center of the universe as at one time was thought, it was the scene of the original happiness of our first ancestors, witness of their unhappy fall, as too of the Redemption of mankind through the Passion and Death of Jesus Christ. Therefore the divine poet depicted the triple life of souls as he imagined it in a such way as to illuminate with the light of the true doctrine of the faith the condemnation of the impious, the purgation of the good spirits and the eternal happiness of the blessed before the final judgment.

Little if anything can be extracted from this encyclical for the cause of heliocentrism, however. First, the encyclical is not purporting to be a treatise on either cosmology or cosmogony, and it is the understanding of the Church that no dogmatic teachings are to be gleaned from an ecclesiastical document unless said document specifically addresses and defines the issue at hand. In this case, the encyclical is merely an exoneration of Dante and his works, not a teaching on whether the Earth is the center of the universe. Popes may often gather popular sentiments or ideas from the surrounding culture in order to enhance the basic message they wish to teach, but they have no dogmatic standing whatsoever.

Second, the pope himself is aware of the conditional and speculative nature of his reference to cosmology since he carefully couches his appeal with the subjective word “may” in the sentence: “and though this earth on which we live *may* not be the center of the universe as at one time was thought.” To say that the Earth *may not* be the center is as equally indicative as saying that it *may* be the center. In actuality, the fact that the pope did not confirm the scientific consensus, which by this time (1921) firmly believed in heliocentrism, means that he was not allowing himself to be pressured by the scientific community into adopting a non-central Earth as an indisputable fact. Although the pope may have known about the decrees of 1616 through 1664, he was probably under the impression, as many are today, that those decrees had been relaxed somewhat in 1822 and 1835 (yet it is safe to say that he was not aware of the subterfuge behind those two latter events that we have documented above). Since he put no particular study into the question, it is only reasonable that he might have a hesitancy regarding the Church’s official position on the matter. This is to be expected since it is common for most Catholics to have inadvertently but speciously relied on the 1822 and 1835 decisions to exonerate heliocentrism to a status of scientific fact that it should not have.

Technically speaking, discussions regarding whether the Earth is the center of the universe must take into account the difference between the geometric center and the center of mass. In the Aristotelian model from which Dante is working, little was known about the center of mass. Barring Ptolemy’s use of the equant and deferent, which, giving the illusion of an off-center pivot point which, in turn, affected the speed of the revolving body in relation to the Earth, the Aristotelian universe comprehended the Earth as it would the center of a circle. Modern physics understands the center in two ways, however: one as the center of a circle, the other as the central point of all the mass in the system.

The center of mass is what causes a tennis racket to wobble if it is thrown into the air. The reason for this erratic gyration is that the center of mass for the tennis racket is not in the geometric center but more toward the heavier end of the racket. All the mass of the racket will rotate proportionately around the center of mass, not the geometric center, regardless of how the racket is shaped. In the same way, the Earth may be the center of mass of the universe but not the geometric center. Hence Benedict XV's reference to the Earth perhaps not being "the center of the universe" could possibly be true from the geometric perspective employed by Aristotle, Ptolemy, and even Tycho Brahe, but not true from a center of mass perspective. If that is the case, Benedict's statement makes perfect sense, even in its conditional form.

Lastly, we cannot leave the teachings of Benedict XV without remarking on his warning regarding the interpretation of Scripture. Whereas Galileo and his followers were wont to interject a figurative interpretation on any scriptural passage that did not fit their scientific views, Benedict XV decried such a methodology. He writes:

By the doctrine of Jerome those statements are well confirmed and illustrated by which Our predecessor, Leo XIII, solemnly declared the ancient and constant faith of the Church in the absolute immunity of Scriptures from any errors... And, introducing the definitions of the Councils of Florence and Trent, confirmed in the Vatican Synod, he has the following: "Therefore, nothing at all matters... otherwise He Himself were not the Author of all Sacred Scripture."

Although these words of Our predecessors leave no place for ambiguity or evasion, We must grieve, Venerable Brothers, that not only were there not lacking some among those outside the Church, but even among the sons of the Catholic Church, moreover – which wounds Our soul more severely – among the clergy itself and the teachers of the sacred disciplines, who relying proudly on their own judgment, either openly reject the magisterium of the Church on this subject or secretly oppose it. Indeed, We approve the plan of those who, to extricate themselves and others from the difficulties of the Sacred Codex, in order to eliminate these difficulties, rely on all the aids of scholarship and literary criticism, and investigate new avenues and methods of research; but they will wander pitifully from their purpose, if they disregard the precepts of Our predecessor and pass beyond certain limits and bounds which the Fathers have set [Prov. 22:28]. Yet by these precepts and limits the opinion of the more recent critics is not restrained, who, after introducing a distinction between the primary or religious element of Scripture, and the secondary or profane, wish, indeed, that inspiration itself pertain to all the ideas, rather even to the individual words of the Bible, but that its effects and especially immunity from error and absolute truth be contracted and narrowed down to the primary or religious element. For their belief is that that only which concerns

religion is intended and is taught by God in the Scriptures; but that the rest, which pertains to the profane disciplines and serves revealed doctrine as a kind of external cloak of divine truth, is only permitted and is left to the feebleness of the writer. It is not surprising, then, if in physical, historical, and other similar affairs a great many things occur in the Bible, which cannot at all be reconciled with the progress of the fine arts of this age. **There are those who contend that these fabrications of opinions are not in opposition to the prescriptions of Our predecessor, since he declared that the sacred writer in matters of nature speaks according to external appearance, surely fallacious. But how rashly, how falsely this is affirmed, is plainly evident from the very words of the Pontiff.**

And no less do they dissent from the doctrine of the Church who think that the historical parts of Scriptures depend not on the absolute truth of facts, but only on what they call the relative and harmonious opinion of the multitude; and they do not hesitate to infer this from the very words of Pope Leo, because he said that the principles established regarding the things of nature can be transferred to the historical disciplines. And so they contend that the sacred writers, just as in physical matters they spoke according to what was apparent, so they related events unwittingly, inasmuch as these seemed to be established according to the common opinion of the multitude or the false testimonies of others; and that they did not indicate the sources of their knowledge, and did not make the narrations of others their own. Why shall we refute at length a matter plainly injurious to Our predecessor, and false and full of error? For what is the similarity of the things of nature and history, when the physical are concerned with what “appears to the senses,” and so should agree with phenomena; while on the other hand the law of history is chiefly this, that what is written must be in agreement with the things accomplished, according as they were accomplished in fact? If the opinion of these men is once accepted, how will that truth of sacred story stand safe, immune from every falsehood, which Our predecessor declares must be retained in the entire text of its literature? But if he affirms that the same principles that have a place in physics can to advantage be transferred to history and related disciplines, he certainly does not establish this on a universal basis, but is only professing that we use the same methods to refute the fallacies of adversaries as we use to protect the historical faith of Sacred Scripture against their attacks....

Nor is Sacred Scripture lacking other detractors; We recognize those who, if they are restrained within certain limits, so abuse right principles indeed that they cause the foundations of the truth of the Bible to totter, and undermine the Catholic doctrine handed down by the Fathers in common. Among these Fathers

Jerome, if he were still alive, would surely hurl the sharpest weapons of his speech, because, neglecting the sense and judgment of the Church, they very smoothly take refuge in citations which they call implicit, or in accounts historical in appearance; or, they contend that certain kinds of literature are found in the sacred books, with which the whole and perfect truth of the divine word cannot be reconciled; or, they have such an opinion on the origin of the Bible that its authority collapses and utterly perishes. Now, what must be thought of those who in expounding the Gospels themselves diminish the human faith due them and overturn divine faith? For what our Lord Jesus Christ said, and what He did they are of the opinion did not come down to us entire and unchanged, although they are witnesses of all those who wrote down religiously what they themselves had seen and heard; but that – especially with reference to the fourth Gospel – part came down from the evangelists who themselves planned and added much, and part was brought together from the account of the faithful of another age.

Now, Venerable Brethren, with the passing of the fifteenth generation after the death of the greatest Doctor, We have communicated with you not to delay to bring these words to the clergy and your people, that all, under the patronage and leadership of Jerome, may not only retain and guard the Catholic doctrine of the divine inspiration of the Scriptures, but may also cling most zealously to the principles which are prescribed in the Encyclical Letter, “Providentissimus Deus,” and in this Our own...¹²

1941: Pio Paschini’s Book on Galileo

The next ecclesiastical juncture dealing with the Galileo aftermath, and the last one before the convoking of the Galileo commission under John Paul II, was in 1941. Once again, however, we have evidence of how powerful and far-reaching were the 1616 and 1633 decrees against Galileo. The Pontifical Academy of Science commissioned Pio Paschini, a priest and professor of ecclesiastical history in Rome, to write a biography of Galileo for the third centenary of his death, 1942. After completing the work three years later, Paschini submitted it to the Pontifical Academy of Science but it was rejected by both the Academy and the Holy Office, mainly because it was judged to be too favorable to Galileo. The manuscript sat on the shelves of the Academy for the next twenty-two years until it was given to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith under Paul VI. Paschini had since died, but it was decided that as long as the manuscript was revised it could be published, which it eventually was.

¹² *Spiritus Paraclitus*, September 15, 1920, Denzinger ¶ 2186-2188.

One interesting statement from Paschini in his letter to Deputy Secretary Montini (who would later be elected Paul VI in 1963) reveals that his opponents at the Vatican were voicing with one accord the same historical facts that the president of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, Agostino Gemelli, had stated in 1941, namely, "...although Galileo did not provide a decisive demonstration of Copernicanism, neither did Newton, Bradley, or Foucault."¹³ Paschini concurred with: "They oppose me with the already superseded difficulty that Galileo had not advanced conclusive proof for his heliocentric system."¹⁴

1616-1664: Are the Papal Decrees Infallible?

Ultimately, the question of the canonical status of the decrees against heliocentrism rests solely with the magisterium of the Catholic Church, and heretofore she has not made any formal and official declaration that the 1616-1664 decrees were infallible. The closest the Church has come to remarking on the status of the decrees is the comment made by John Paul II in his 1992 speech stating: "Cardinal Poupard has also reminded us that the sentence of 1633 was not irreformable." The reference to "irreformable" is another way of saying that the decrees were not infallible, since doctrines that are infallible, even in the words chosen to declare the doctrine, cannot be reformed at any time by any person. They are sealed until the end of time. If by his repeating of Cardinal Poupard's opinion John Paul II was affirming that the 1633 decrees were, in fact, reformable, then this stands as the most public statement on their status. However, the fact that John Paul II's 1992 address to the Pontifical Academy of Science is not considered a formal declaration of Church doctrine, both the address and what it contains cannot be considered the official or definitive word on the issue.

Still, although it may be canonically proper to say that the 1633 decree against heliocentrism as being "formally heretical" was not technically infallible, it is quite a different matter to claim that the 1633 decree was, in actuality, erroneous, as many Catholics have done who have been influenced by the atheistic sectors of modern science. Fr. William Roberts, one of the leading critics of the Catholic Church's handling of the aftermath of the Galileo affair, has the following words to say about the faulty logic that is often employed by Catholic apologists who seek to exonerate the Church from any inconsistency. He writes:

When the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception was defined, all the conditions of an *ex cathedra* Act were so abundantly and clearly fulfilled that no Roman Catholic theologian would be permitted to raise doubt on the subject. I do not for a moment pretend that heliocentrism was condemned by any judgment of which the same may be said; neither have I attempted to

¹³ The words of Finocchiaro in *Retrying Galileo*, p. 278.

¹⁴ *Retrying Galileo*, p. 322.

prove that it was. My contention was a very different one; and I will try to explain and vindicate it.

I have found it laid down by such distinguished representatives of the Ultramontane school as Cardenas, La Croix, Zaccaria, and Bouix, that Congregational decrees, confirmed by the Pope and published by his express order, emanate from the Pontiff in his capacity of Head of the Church, and are *ex cathedra* in such sense as to make it infallibly certain that doctrines so propounded as true, are true.

Moreover, it seemed to me...that this opinion was powerfully supported by certain utterances and Acts of the Holy See itself. Take for instance, the language I quoted in my pamphlet, used by Pius IX in the Brief *Eximiam tuam*, in reference to the original decree prohibiting Günther's works. That decree was a simple edict of the Index, having the usual notice that the Pope had ratified the decision and ordered its publication. Yet the Pope speaks of it as having been approved "by his supreme authority," and remarks that, "sanctioned by our authority and published by our order, it plainly ought to have sufficed that the whole question should be judged finally decided – *penitus dirempta*, and that all who boast of the Catholic profession should clearly and distinctly understand... that the doctrine contained in Günther's books could not be considered sound (*sinceram haberi non posse doctrinam Güntherianis libris contentam*)." Roberts asks: "How, in the name of common sense, could a decree possibly erroneous have made it clear to all Catholics that the doctrine of the books thereby prohibited could not be sound? And how could such a decree have plainly sufficed to determine the whole question at issue?"¹⁵

Roberts then adds many more examples of such instances in recent Catholic history. As his convincing repertoire of incidents closes, no Catholic apologist can remain cavalier about the decrees of 1616-1664. The solemnity of those decrees, Roberts reminds us, even if not technically infallible, are still an open wound on the veracity of the Catholic Church if, indeed, the Catholic apologist believes heliocentrism is a scientific fact and the popes who condemned it were wrong.

A word of caution is due at this point, however. Although Roberts, being an Anglican and an avowed heliocentrist,¹⁶ has as his main purpose for pointing out these ecclesiastical anomalies the undermining of the Catholic Church, that is not our purpose here, of course. Roberts will go on to insist that since there is no real difference between "infallibility" and "not being in error," then the 1616-1664 decrees were, for all intents

¹⁵ *The Pontifical Decrees Against the Doctrine of the Earth's Movement and the Ultramontane Defence of Them*, Rev. William W. Roberts, London, Parker and Co., 1885, pp. 4-5.

¹⁶ As noted on pages 34, 47, 48, 97, 106 of his book.

and purposes, “infallible,” and thus the Catholic Church is exposed as a bogus institution for having deemed infallible a cosmological theory (geocentrism) that the world now regards as erroneous. On the one hand, our position, obviously, is that Roberts’ view of cosmology is itself erroneous and therefore the Church did not err in condemning heliocentrism. On the other hand, Roberts’ analysis of the situation should give pause to faithful Catholics to consider that, even though a particular doctrine may not be couched in the technical formula of infallible language, it is, for all intents and purposes, infallible in the practical sense, since such decrees were understood to be true and abiding statements, binding on the Christian faithful.¹⁷ Papal decrees of this sort, especially when the action is not merely disciplinary but involves the determination on a matter of faith (stipulated in the 1633 decree against heliocentrism as: “that which has already been declared and defined to be contrary of the divine Scripture,” or as Bellarmine called it: *ex parte dicentis*), can never be erroneous regarding the very issue it condemned. It is generally safe to posit that God will not permit the pope to use his supreme authority to impose on the mind of the Christian faithful doctrines that are false. Surely we would not want to say that God ignores the pope and allows him to require, under pain of excommunication, the Christian faithful to assent to heretical, erroneous, or rash propositions of the faith, even *ex parte dicentis*, whether we deem those doctrines infallible or merely authoritative.

Until the Catholic Church and her apologists come to the stark realization that their attempts to save the doctrine of infallibility has inadvertently put them in a position of sullyng, perhaps beyond repair, the canonically lesser but still authoritative and binding decrees of the popes, they will continue to be the object of criticism from those outside the Church (like Roberts) who wonder if, indeed, this is the honest and forthright institution established by Jesus Christ that it claims to be. In the mid-1800s a publication from the *Dublin Review* raised this very question in the midst of the debates occurring just prior to Pius IX’s 1870 declaration on papal infallibility. The author writes:

¹⁷ Roberts argues that well known Catholic canonists, such as Bouix in his book *Tractatus de Curia Romana* (part 3, ch. 7, p. 471), teaches that congregational decrees may be infallible if they are specifically confirmed by the pope. Roberts writes: “On turning to M. Bouix’s *Tractatus*...we learn that there are three kinds of Congregational decrees: 1. Those which the pope puts forth in his own name after consulting a Congregation. 2. Those which a Congregation puts forth in its own name with the pope’s confirmation, or express order to publish... 3. Those which a Congregation with the pope’s sanction puts forth in its own name, but without the pope’s confirmation or express order to publish. Decrees of the first and second class, we are told, are certainly *ex cathedra*, and to be received with unqualified assent under pain of mortal sin. According to Zaccaria – a very great authority – even decrees of the last class are not fallible, in the sense that they can ever condemn as erroneous a doctrine which is not so” (*The Pontifical Decrees Against the Doctrine of the Earth’s Movement*, p. 60).

We are inclined, however, to think, that the Pope does give a general test, whereby we may certainly know that some letter, addressed to an individual bishop, is intended as an instruction to the whole Church *ex cathedra*. We speak here with diffidence, as we are not aware of any theologian who has treated the question; but we observe that in the recent Encyclical Pius IX unites all the apostolic letters from which the Syllabus is compiled, under the common category of “having been published by him.”¹⁸ If the Pope writes to a bishop for his individual instruction, of course there is no secret in the matter, and the letter becomes universally known; yet its publication takes place by the mere force of circumstances. But if the Pope himself *commands* its publication and promulgation, but this very fact he seems to indicate, that the letter is not intended for the bishop alone, but as a public act affecting the whole Church....

We have just seen that the Pope’s letter to an individual bishop, is often, in fact, a doctrinal instruction addressed to the whole Church. May it not similarly happen, that what is in form the doctrinal decree of a Congregation, is in fact a doctrinal decree promulgated by the Pope as universal teacher? We must maintain that under particular conditions this is the fact.¹⁹

Along these lines of argumentation, it is a fact that Urban VIII promulgated: (a) the 1633 decision that heliocentrism was “formally heretical” and “erroneous in faith,” and (b) Galileo’s detailed abjuration admitting to the same, to all the Catholic leaders of Europe. Obviously, this was by no means a private affair. As Dorothy Stimson notes:

Pope Urban had no intention of concealing Galileo’s abjuration and sentence. Instead, he ordered copies of both to be sent to all inquisitors and papal nuncios that they might notify all their clergy and especially all the professors of mathematics and philosophy within their districts...²⁰

¹⁸ “Pluribus in vulgus editis Encyclicis...errors damnavimus.”

¹⁹ *Dublin Review*, Vol. V. New Series, July—October, MDCCCLXV, Dublin: James Duffy & W. B. Kelly, 1865, pp. 385-386. The author adds a quote from Catholic theologian Zaccaria, stating: “...it is Zaccaria’s doctrine, that decrees of a Pontifical Congregation, which are published and promulgated by the Pope’s express command, are, in fact, his instructions *ex cathedra* and infallible. This doctrine, it seems to us, has received very great support from Pius IX’s language in speaking of Günther’s condemnation. ‘Which decree’ (of the Index), he says, ‘sanctioned by our authority, and published by our command, ought plainly to suffice, in order, that the whole question be judged as finally decided (penitus dirempta); and that all who boast of the Catholic profession should clearly and distinctly understand that complete obedience must be paid to it, and that the doctrine contained in Günther’s books may not be considered sound (sinceram haberi non posse)’” (*ibid.*, p. 387).

Finocchiaro confirms this situation:

In the summer of 1633 all papal nuncios in Europe and all local inquisitors in Italy received from the Roman Inquisition copies of the sentence against Galileo and his abjuration, together with orders to publicize them. Such publicity was unprecedented in the annals of the Inquisition and never repeated. As a result, many manuscript copies of Galileo's sentence and abjuration have survived in European archives. By contrast, no copies of the full text of the Inquisition's sentence against Giordano Bruno survive, even though his crime...and his penalty...were much more serious....From the replies of the nuncios and inquisitors, there is concrete evidence that the sentence circulated in the manner intended. Letters of reply have survived from the nuncios to Naples, Florence, Venice, Vienna, Paris, Brussels, Cologne, Vilnius, Lucerne and Madrid, and from the inquisitors of Florence, Padua, Bologna, Vicenza, Venice, Ceneda, Brescia, Ferrara, Aquileia, Perugia, Como, Pavia, Siena, Faenza, Milan Crema, Cremona, Reggio Emilia, Mantua, Gubbio, Pisa, Novara, Piacenza, and Tortona. The most common reply was a brief acknowledgment of receipt and a promise that the orders would be carried out. However, in this case the standard response was not sufficient for the Inquisition. It expected to be notified that the orders had in fact been carried out. Those who did not send such a follow-up letter were soon reprimanded and had to write back to Cardinal Barberini to explain the oversight of the delay....The quickest promulgation occurred in university circles.²¹

Finocchiaro adds:

We know today that such a promulgation of Galileo's condemnation had been decided at the Inquisition meeting of 16 June 1633, presided over by Pope Urban VIII; this was the same meeting at which Galileo's trial was discussed and the pope reached a decision on its conclusion, the verdict, and the penalty. Thus the promulgation was not an afterthought but part of a well-considered plan. In fact, the plan was reaffirmed at the meeting of June 30, when the pope was again presiding over the Inquisition meeting and was a little more explicit about its details. Cardinal [Antonio] Barberini's letter followed immediately thereafter.²²

²⁰ Dorothy Stimson, *The Gradual Acceptance of the Copernican Theory of the Universe*, pp. 67-68.

²¹ *Retrying Galileo*, pp. 26-28.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 27.

The letter from Antonio Barberini (brother to Pope Urban VIII) stated the following:

The Congregation of the Index had suspended Nicolaus Copernicus's treatise *On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres* because that book maintains that the earth moves, and not the sun, which is the center of the world, an opinion contrary to Sacred Scripture; and several years ago this Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office had prohibited Galileo Galilei of Florence from holding, defending, or teaching in any way whatever, orally or in writing, the said opinion. Nevertheless, the same Galileo has dared to write a book titled [*Dialogo di Galileo Galilei Linceo*], without revealing the said prohibition, he has extorted the permission to print it and has had it printed; claiming at the beginning, within the body, and at the end of that book to want to treat hypothetically of the said opinion of Copernicus (although he could not treat of it in an manner), he has however treated of it in such a way that he became vehemently suspected of having held such an opinion. Thus, he was tried and detained in this Holy Office, and the sentence of these Most Eminent Lords condemned him to abjure the said opinion, to stay under formal arrest subject to the wishes of their Eminences, and to do other salutary penances. Your Reverence can see all that in the attached copy of the sentence and abjuration; this document is sent to you so that you can transmit it to your vicars and it can be known by them and by all professors of philosophy and of mathematics; for, knowing how the said Galileo has been treated, they can understand the seriousness of the error he committed and avoid it together with the punishment they would receive if they were to fall into it. By way of ending, may God the Lord preserve you.²³

During this time, there were indications from popular philosophers and scientists that the Church had made its desired impression, which then prompted these academicians to seek some measure of safe haven by questioning the precise level of authority the magisterium's decree held. Immediately after Galileo's 1633 trial, René Descartes, who had already written the draft of a book which included his advocacy for heliocentrism, sent a letter to a friend in Paris, stating:

....But I will tell you that recently I made inquiries in Leiden and Amsterdam about whether Galileo's *System of the World* was available...I was told that indeed it had been printed, but that all copies had been simultaneously burned in Rome and he had been condemned to some penalty. This has shocked me so much that I have almost decided to burn all my papers, or at least not to let anyone see them. For I surmise that he, who is

²³ *Le Opere di Galileo Galilei*, Antonio Favaro, Vol. 15, p. 169, as translated by Finocchiaro, *Retrying Galileo*, p. 27.

Italian and as I understand well liked by the pope, was convicted for no other reason than that he undoubtedly wanted to establish the earth's motion...and I confess that if it [heliocentrism] is false, so are also all the foundations of my philosophy; it is easily demonstrated from them, and it is so connected with all parts of my treatise that I would not know how to detach it without rendering the rest flawed. However, just as I would not want for anything in the world to produce an essay containing the least word that was disapproved by the Church, so I would rather suppress it than publish it maimed.²⁴

In a second letter in February 1634, Descartes reiterates his resolve but wonders whether the decree is a binding article of faith:

...I have decided to entirely suppress the treatise I had written and lose almost all my work of four years in order to render full obedience to the Church, insofar as it has prohibited the opinion of the earth's motion. However, because I have not yet seen that either the pope or a Council has ratified this prohibition that was issued by the Congregation of Cardinals in charge of book censorship, I would be very pleased to learn what one thinks about it in France nowadays, and if their authority is sufficient to make it an article of faith.²⁵

In a third letter, the same thinking persists. Although Descartes, independently of Galileo, believes he has demonstrated the movement of the Earth, his only recourse is to create a gap between the Sacred Congregation and a dogmatic Council:

Undoubtedly you know that a short time ago Galileo was reproved by the Inquisitors of the Faith and that his opinion on the earth's motion was condemned as heretical. Now, I will tell you that all things I explain in my treatise, including also this opinion of the earth's motion, depend so much on one another that it is sufficient to know that one of them is false to realize that all the reasons I employ have no force at all; and although I think they are based on demonstrations that are very certain and very evident, nevertheless I would not want for anything in the world to maintain them against the authority of the Church. I know well that one could say that nothing decided by the Inquisitors of Rome is thereby automatically rendered an article of faith, and that it is necessary that it first be approved by a Council.²⁶

²⁴ René Descartes, *Oeuvres*, 1897-1913, eds. C. Adam and P. Tannery, Paris, vol. 1, p 270. Also in Favaro's *Le Opere di Galileo Galilei*, vol. 15, p. 340, as cited by Finocchiaro in *Retrying Galileo*, pp. 43-44.

²⁵ Descartes, *ibid.*, p. 280f, Favaro, *ibid*, vol. 16, p. 56.

²⁶ Descartes, *ibid.*, p. 284f, Favaro, *ibid*, vol. 16, pp. 88-89. Descartes' "demonstrations" of the earth's movement could not have been much better,

Hence, Descartes decides to forge a safe haven by recourse to an anachronistic lacuna between the Sacred Congregation and a hypothetical Council, leaving aside the fact that: (a) the pope was the supreme authority behind the condemnation of Galileo, and (b) that even if there were a such a Council, its decision must be approved by the reigning pope, otherwise it is null and void, a situation that has occurred more than once in Catholic history. Since from Pius V in 1616, to Urban VIII in 1633, to Alexander VII in 1664 and beyond, the pontiffs were in one accord on condemning any cosmology that required the Earth to move, no Council that affirmed heliocentrism would have been approved by the pope. The pope would have had the final say on the outcome of a Council just as he had the final say on the outcome of his Sacred Congregation. As Catholic apologist, John Daly, notes:

...no single act of the Sacred Congregations took place without the fullest authorization of the then reigning popes who, in fact, supervised and directed every step of the entire procedure; moreover the pope is himself the *ex officio* prefect of the Holy Office; so just as all of the Sacred Congregations are in fact no more than the instruments through which the pope governs the Church by delegating certain of his powers, the Holy Office is that which has the least possibility of acting independently of the pope. Moreover it is certain that it was the pope who ordered the sentence of the Holy Office condemning Galileo on the 22nd of June 1633 to be promulgated and circulated throughout the Church, and in 1664 and 1665 it was unquestionably the pope acting *motu proprio* who promulgated anew the decrees condemning all works in favor of heliocentrism in the two editions of the Alexandrine Index of Forbidden Books.

No single detail in any of the official acts of the Holy See...can be construed as showing the slightest hesitation in rejecting heliocentrism as absolutely and unconditionally false owing to its conflict with Divine revelation as contained in the Bible. Nor is there any basis for pretending that the prohibition to

since he believed Galileo's "reasons proving the earth's motion are very good; but it seems to me that he does not present them as one must in order to be persuasive" (*Le Opere di Galileo Galilei*, vol. 15, p. 125). As most scientists have admitted, Galileo's proofs for a moving earth were entirely fallacious. Finocchiaro adds: "A few years after the *Discourse*, Descartes even felt comfortable enough to discuss the condemned geokinetic thesis. In 1644, he published in Latin the *Principles of Philosophy*....He devised his own system, which was a modification of the Copernican one....Of course, to comply with the ecclesiastical censures, Descartes wanted to engage merely in a hypothetical discussion and not appear to hold or defend the geokinetic thesis. He thought he could accomplish this aim in two ways. First, Descartes devised a version of the doctrine of the relativity of motion and applied it to the earth's motion in such a way as to be able to say that the earth is both stationary and in motion!" (*Retrying Galileo*, p. 50).

defend heliocentrism was limited exclusively to Galileo. Certainly on the 25th of February 1616 he was forbidden in a special way to treat the subject. But on the 5th of March 1616 *all* writings in favor of heliocentrism were condemned, no matter by whom they were written, and the minutes of the proceedings of the Holy Office in 1633 show that the reason why the pope ordered wide circulation to be given to the decree condemning Galileo was in order that it might serve as an indication to others of the position of the Holy See on the subject and thereby prevent other writers from falling into the same aberrations as Galileo himself. And in 1664 and 1665 the prohibition became even more general, if possible, when Pope Alexander VII extended it specifically so as to include not only books but even periodical articles, manuscripts and other writings – whatever could be used to promote heliocentrism.²⁷

As we can see, the condemnation of Galileo was no private affair. Every person with authority (nuncios, inquisitors, bishops, priests) and academic influence (professors, mathematicians, scientists) knew of the decree and thus their unmitigated cooperation was demanded. As noted, there had never been such a thorough and systematic dissemination of a decision by a pope and his Sacred Congregation. The magisterium's actions were unprecedented. From this evidence one could argue that such pervasive and regimented procedures were at least reasonably close to the criteria required for a binding and irreformable teaching.

Unfortunately, the question concerning the infallibility of a given doctrine of the Catholic Church has always been a minefield of debate and dissent. Debates over everything from whether the decree was disseminated to the universal church or if an Index qualifies as universal, to whether it was said *in forma specifica*, to whether the decree was directly as opposed to indirectly pronounced, to altering the definitions of “declare and define,” to whether the pope can use any medium he wishes as long as he makes clear his intentions, continue to rage today. As good as the doctrine of infallibility is, nevertheless, because of its self-imposed restricted domain as to when it is applicable, it invariably creates a whole new set of problems, one chief problem being how we determine whether a specific Church teaching is infallible. Often the Church does not explicitly and unequivocally state that a given doctrine is infallible. Odd as it may seem, the words “infallible” or “irreformable” are not used in dogmatic proclamations. Even the four criteria for papal infallibility established in the decree of Pius IX in 1870 do not make it foolproof for the cleric or the layman to determine when, precisely, a given papal teaching is infallible, since the doctrine in question, ironically, is never preceded by the explicit words: “This teaching is an infallible and irreformable declaration of the Catholic Church for it fulfills all four criteria of the doctrine of papal infallibility.” Adding to the debate, the 1983 Code of Canon Law states that if the Church does

²⁷ John S. Daly, “The Theological Status of Heliocentrism,” October 1997, unpublished and privately circulated paper, p. 12.

not explicitly declare a doctrine infallible, then it is not to be considered infallible.²⁸ The whole process can easily become a quagmire of distinctions and counter-distinctions that turn that which was at first intended to be a simple help to the difficulties of life into tedious, hair-splitting legalese that often confuses more than it clarifies.

The four criteria for papal infallibility are delineated in prose form in the following paragraph of Vatican I (numerals in brackets are added): "...the Roman Pontiff, when he speaks *ex cathedra*, that is, [1] when carrying out the duty of the pastor and teacher of all Christians [2] in accord with his supreme apostolic authority [3] he explains a doctrine of faith or morals [4] to be held by the universal Church..."²⁹ As noted, questions of when and where these four criteria are applicable continue to raise problems. For example, the recent teaching against artificial contraception given by Pope Paul VI in 1969 in the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, and the teaching against women's ordination given by John Paul II in 1994 in the letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, have raised continued questions whether those two teachings are formally infallible. If they are infallible, the documents themselves do not explicitly say so. Although at least the latter uses language that some may interpret as the formula of words often associated with an infallible declaration, still, there remain doubts due to the fact that the pope who issued them never declared them explicitly infallible (see Code of Canon Law, ¶ 749.3).³⁰ If they are not formally infallible, then they are technically "reformable," just as Cardinal Poupard said about the decrees against Galileo.

At this point, advocates for the infallibility of the above documents (*Humanae Vitae* and *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*) will sometimes retreat from depending on *papal* infallibility and make an appeal to the *inherent* infallibility of the "ordinary magisterium" or the "constant teaching of the Church" as the authoritative basis for declaring these two doctrines infallible. Although legitimate, this appeal, however, has its own set of problems, since it is open to the subjective judgment of clerics or laymen on a much lower level of authority than the pope, and thus, it invariably creates diverse opinions as to which specific traditional Church teachings are infallible and which are not infallible. If it is not infallible, but merely authoritative, many feel that, although they could give "assent" to the

²⁸ 1983 Code of Canon Law states: "No doctrine is understood as defined infallibly unless this is manifestly evident" (Canon 749.3). The 1917 Code of Canon Law put it this way: "Nothing is understood to be dogmatically declared or defined unless this shall be manifestly certain" (Canon 1323).

²⁹ Denz. ¶ 1839.

³⁰ In fact, a few months after the issuance of *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger was approached by various bishops questioning whether the document was infallible. Ratzinger affirmed that it *was* infallible. This, however, creates two problems: (1) it shows that the document did not contain explicit and unequivocal language declaring its infallibility, and (2) the affirmation of its infallibility came from the head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, not the pope who wrote the document, thus making the affirmation of the document's status dependent on a fallible, although respected, opinion.

teaching, they are not bound to obey it if, for the sake of conscience, they find it morally unacceptable.

At this point, their adversaries will appeal to other papal statements (Pius XII's *Humani Generis*),³¹ the Code of Canon Law,³² or conciliar statements (e.g., Vatican II's *Lumen Gentium* 25) and insist that they are obligated to obey. For example, the latter document states:

This loyal submission of the will and intellect must be given, in a special way, to the authentic teaching authority of the Roman Pontiff, even when he does not speak *ex cathedra* in such wise, indeed, that his supreme teaching authority be acknowledged with respect, and sincere assent be given to decisions made by him, conformably with his manifest mind and intention, which is made known principally either by the character of the documents in question, or by the frequency with which a certain doctrine is proposed, or by the manner in which the doctrine is formulated.”

But in respect of the Church's geocentric teachings and its corollary condemnations of heliocentrism over the past two thousand years, *Lumen Gentium* 25 brings us back to square one, as it were, in authenticating the authority of the 1616-1664 decrees and the level of commitment and obedience Catholics must give to them. In effect, Cardinal Poupard's and John Paul II's appeal to the decrees against heliocentrism as not being “irreformable” becomes moot or superfluous since, as is true with many teachings of the Catholic Church, the mere “ordinary” or “traditional” authority of the decrees plays a larger part, according to *Lumen Gentium* 25, in commanding submission from the Catholic parishioner. In fact, the Church's historic teaching on geocentrism and her condemnation of heliocentrism fulfills all the criteria of *Lumen Gentium* 25:

- “that his supreme teaching authority be acknowledged with respect”:

³¹ *Humani Generis* states: “Nor must it be thought that the things contained in Encyclical Letters do not of themselves require assent on the plea that in them the Pontiffs do not exercise the supreme power of their Magisterium. For these things are taught with the ordinary Magisterium, about which it is also true to say, ‘He who hears you, hears me.’ [Lk 10. 16]...If the Supreme Pontiffs, in their acts expressly pass judgment on a matter debated until then, it is obvious to all that the matter, according to the mind and will of the same Pontiffs, cannot be considered any longer a question open for discussion among theologians.”

³² Canon 752: “Although not an assent of faith, a religious submission of the intellect and will must be given to a doctrine which the Supreme Pontiff or the college of bishops declares concerning faith or morals when they exercise the authentic magisterium, even if they do not intend to proclaim it by definitive act; therefore, the Christian faithful are to take care to avoid those things which do not agree with it.”

It was certainly the case that popes Paul V, Urban VIII and Alexander VII understood themselves and their decrees against heliocentrism as coming from their “supreme teaching authority” and commanded that it be “acknowledged with respect.” Urban VIII, for example, approved his Holy Office’s conclusion that heliocentrism was “formally heretical” and “erroneous in faith,” and demanded that Galileo sign an abjuration to that effect. Obviously, Pope Urban VIII also considered his predecessor’s decree, Paul V’s, as authoritative, binding, and demanding respect, since the 1633 decree was based on the condemnations of the 1616 decree.

- “and sincere assent be given to decisions made by him”:

It was certainly the case that the decrees against Copernicanism required the “assent” of Galileo, Foscarini, and all the other theologians who were venturing into the area of biblical cosmology. Urban VIII sent letters of the decree against Copernicanism and Galileo’s abjuration to all the papal nuncios and universities of Europe showing the seriousness of the issue and his desire to have it widely disseminated so that the Christian faithful would be obedient to it. Alexander VII devoted a signed papal bull to the subject of banning books that threaten the faith and welfare of the Christian faithful, stating: “We command each and every one of our venerable brethren, the patriarchs, archbishops, bishops and other Ordinaries of places, as well as those beloved sons who are their vicars and officials, the inquisitors of heretical depravity, the superiors of every kind of religious Order, congregation, society, or institute, and all others...” to obey his words.

- “conformably with his manifest mind and intention”:

Few can read the documents surrounding the Galileo affair and come away without the conviction that the popes, cardinals and the Holy Offices were as resolute in their condemnation of Copernicanism as they have been about most major doctrines of the Church. The popes used and approved very solemn and foreboding language and made sure that the decrees were enforced throughout Europe.

- “which is made known principally either by the character of the documents in question”

The decrees against heliocentrism were put in place for the express purpose of protecting Scripture from false interpretations and protecting the Christian faithful from harmful teachings. Although the decrees may not reach the level of being declared formally infallible, they are, nevertheless, on the same level of “ordinary” or “traditional” authority as most other doctrines that the Church has taught.

- “or by the frequency with which a certain doctrine is proposed”

The formal and official condemnations of Copernicanism spanned a period of fifty years (1615-1665) and were delineated by three different

popes. The number of ecclesiastical documents and other personal correspondences written about the Galileo affair over the course of three decades (1615-1633) exceed 7,000. Obviously the Church considered this a grave matter. She incessantly appealed to the 1500 years of tradition on the teaching of geocentrism as her greatest bulwark against the new ideas of Copernicus and Galileo.

- “or by the manner in which the doctrine is formulated”:

During the condemnations against heliocentrism the Church issued some of the most detailed and comprehensive decrees ever written. Every wrinkle of the issue was investigated, arguments were presented and rebutted, witnesses were put under oath, experts were called in for testimony, the most severe and condemnatory language was formulated in the final decree, that is, that heliocentrism was “formally heretical” and “erroneous in faith.” If geocentric doctrine does not qualify under the rubrics of *Lumen Gentium* 25, what does?

1870: Vatican I, the Ordinary Magisterium and Modern Science

Vatican I also had some important things to say regarding the authority of the ordinary magisterium and the claims of modern science. They are as follows:

Vatican I: Further, by divine and Catholic faith, all those things must be believed which are contained in the written word of God and in tradition, and those which are proposed by the Church, either in a solemn pronouncement or in her ordinary and universal teaching power, to be believed as divinely revealed.³³

Analysis: In regard to “those things proposed by the Church,” Vatican I makes no distinction between a “solemn pronouncement” (an infallible, *ex cathedra*, definition) and the ordinary magisterium, insofar as it concerns the truth of a doctrine. Both sources are to be considered as “divinely revealed.” Hence, if the condemnations of heliocentrism, which were “declared and defined” as being “formally heretical” and “erroneous in faith” were not “solemn pronouncements,” it follows that they were then authoritative decisions from the “ordinary magisterium,” and are likewise to be understood as “divinely revealed.” Vatican I adds:

Vatican I: By enduring agreement the Catholic Church has held and holds that there is a twofold order of knowledge, distinct not only in principle but also in object: (1) in principle, indeed, because we know in one way by natural reason, in another by divine faith; (2) in object, however, because, in addition to things to which natural reason can attain, mysteries

³³ Denzinger ¶1792.

hidden in God are proposed to us for belief which, had they not been divinely revealed, could not become known.³⁴

Analysis: In this case, the matter of geocentrism, which, on one level, the Church proposed as a “matter of faith,” it is a fact that modern science, especially the relativistic forms, admits that it cannot determine whether the Earth moves or is stationary. In effect, the immobility of the Earth is something that can only be revealed by “divine faith.”

Vatican I: But, although faith is above reason, nevertheless, between faith and reason no true dissension can ever exist, since the same God, who reveals mysteries and infuses faith, has bestowed on the human soul the light of reason; moreover, God cannot deny Himself, nor ever contradict truth with truth. But, a vain appearance of such a contradiction arises chiefly from this, that either the dogmas of faith have not been understood and interpreted according to the mind of the Church, or deceitful opinions are considered as the determinations of reason. Therefore, “every assertion contrary to the truth illuminated by faith, we define to be altogether false.”³⁵

Analysis: In regards to the issue of geocentrism, both of the above warnings come into play: (a) Cardinal Bellarmine informed Galileo that geocentrism was a “matter of faith” and that the Church, based on the consensus of the Fathers, could not interpret Scripture in opposition to the same literal interpretation that had been passed down to it through the preceding centuries. In essence, Galileo was accused of not interpreting Scripture “according to the mind of the Church”; (b) since false claims of scientific proof for heliocentrism were consistently being advanced (*e.g.*, Foscarini, Galileo, Kepler, Bradley, Settele, Boscovich, Newton, Bessel), and from which many people became convinced that heliocentrism was correct, these would have to be classed as “deceitful opinions [that] are considered as the determinations of reason.”

Vatican I: Further, the Church which, together with the apostolic duty of teaching, has received the command to guard the deposit of faith, has also, from divine Providence, the right and duty of proscribing “knowledge falsely so called” [1Tm 6:20], “lest anyone be cheated by philosophy and vain deceit” [Cl 2:8]. Wherefore, all faithful Christians not only are forbidden to defend opinions of this sort, which are known to be contrary to the teaching of faith, especially if they have been condemned by the Church, as the legitimate conclusions of

³⁴ Denzinger ¶1795.

³⁵ Denzinger ¶1797.

science, but they shall be altogether bound to hold them rather as errors, which present a false appearance of truth.³⁶

Analysis: Obviously, Galileo was “forbidden to defend opinions” of “knowledge falsely so called,” concerning the claims of science that asserted the Earth revolved around the sun.³⁷ Galileo was reminded in 1633 that heliocentrism, as early as 1616, had already been “declared and defined as opposed to Scripture,” and was now declared to be “formally heretical” and “erroneous in faith” in 1633. Hence, the Church made it known that heliocentrism was, in the language of Vatican I, “known to be contrary to the teaching of faith,” since it had clearly “been condemned by the Church,” even though it was commonly believed to be a “legitimate conclusion of science.” These “legitimate conclusions,” the Church warned, could “present a false appearance of truth,” which is certainly the case for heliocentrism since geocentrism can be demonstrated to work just as well on a geometric basis. It is quite clear that the ordinary magisterium can, without invoking infallibility, declare these theoretical beliefs of science as propping up a “false appearance,” and are thus “formally heretical” and “erroneous.” It is clear that this was done in 1616, 1633 and 1664, and these teachings against heliocentrism were never officially and formally rescinded or reformed.

Vatican I: And, not only can faith and reason never be at variance with one another, but they also bring mutual help to each other, since right reasoning demonstrates the basis of faith and, illumined by its light, perfects the knowledge of divine things, while faith frees and protects reason from errors and provides it with manifold knowledge. Wherefore, the Church is so far from objecting to the culture of the human arts and sciences, that it aids and promotes this cultivation in many ways. For, it is not ignorant of, nor does it despise the advantages flowing therefrom into human life; nay, it confesses that, just as they have come forth from "God, the Lord of knowledge" [1 Samuel 2:3], so, if rightly handled, they lead to God by the aid of His grace. And it (the Church) does not forbid disciplines of this kind, each in its own sphere, to use its own principles and its own method; but, although recognizing this freedom, it continually warns them not to fall into errors by opposition to divine doctrine, nor, having transgressed their own proper limits, to be busy with and to disturb those matters which belong to faith.³⁸

³⁶ Denzinger ¶1798.

³⁷ Some Bibles during this precise time in history (1611-1633) translate 1 Timothy 6:20 as “science falsely so called” (KJV), which shows a common understanding in the early 1600s that “science” was often equated with “knowledge.”

³⁸ Denzinger ¶1799.

Analysis: If, for example, “right reasoning” was employed in 1887 when the Michelson-Morley experiment was performed, it would have shown that a slight impedance of light’s velocity would be due to the rotation of space around a stationary Earth and not because matter shrank when it moved or that time slowed down. In that case “reason” would have worked very well with “faith.” But Einstein, being an atheist, had no faith. He ridiculed Christianity. Therefore, he would consider the rotation of space around a stationary Earth as “unthinkable,” and his colleague Edwin Hubble, a like-minded atheist, even though he saw through his telescope evidence that the Earth was in the center of the universe, rejected it as a “horrible” conclusion and something that must be “avoided at all costs.” Faith in Scripture could have provided the necessary boundaries for the crucial interpretations of the scientific experiments of the late 1800s and 1900s. Science would have been spared the wild goose chase it was forced to run as it began inventing a world in which twins age at different rates, clocks slow down at will, matter shrinks upon movement, where one is forced to say that up may be down and left may be right in order to have at least some answer to the crucial experiments. As Thomas Aquinas put it:

The knowledge proper to this science of theology comes through divine revelation and not through natural reason. Therefore, it has no concern to prove the principles of other sciences, but only to judge them. Whatever is found in other sciences contrary to any truth of this science of theology, must be condemned as false.³⁹

John Daly adds:

It is perfectly true that the Church’s authority does not extend to the order of natural science and that therefore the Church cannot pronounce on whatever belongs exclusively to that order, or on anything insofar as it belongs to that order. The Church could not define the number of chemical elements, canonize the value of π or forbid scientists to attempt to effect cold fusion, but she is entirely free to teach or legislate on any topic coming within her sacred field of competence even if that topic simultaneously belongs to the natural order.⁴⁰

Vatican I concludes:

For, the doctrine of faith which God revealed has not been handed down as a philosophic invention to the human mind to be perfected, but has been entrusted as a divine deposit to the Spouse of Christ, to be faithfully guarded and infallibly

³⁹ *Summa Theologica*, I, Ques. 1, Art. 6, ad. 2.

⁴⁰ John S. Daly, “The Theological Status of Heliocentrism,” October 1997, unpublished, privately circulated paper, p. 14.

interpreted. Hence, also, that understanding of its sacred dogmas must be perpetually retained, which Holy Mother Church has once declared; and there must never be recession from that meaning under the specious name of a deeper understanding. "Therefore...let the understanding, the knowledge, and wisdom of individuals as of all, of one man as of the whole Church, grow and progress strongly with the passage of the ages and the centuries; but let it be solely in its own genus, namely in the same dogma, with the same sense and the same understanding."⁴¹

1965: Vatican Council II and Modern Science

As noted earlier, Vatican Council II did not address the Galileo issue directly; rather, it made some general comments about the relationship between science and religion, but with a slight twist. The comments were limited to one paragraph of *Gaudium et spes*, which is miniscule compared to the volume of documents produced at Vatican II, especially in light of the burgeoning claims of science that had been forthcoming for the prior fifty years. Paragraph 36 of *Gaudium et spes* states:

Now many of our contemporaries seem to fear that a closer bond between human activity and religion will work against the independence of men, of societies, or of the sciences.

If by the autonomy of earthly affairs we mean that created things and societies themselves enjoy their own laws and values which must be gradually deciphered, put to use, and regulated by men, then it is entirely right to demand that autonomy. Such is not merely required by modern man, but harmonizes also with the will of the Creator. For by the very circumstance of their having been created, all things are endowed with their own stability, truth, goodness, proper laws and order. Man must respect these as he isolates them by the appropriate methods of the individual sciences or arts. Therefore if methodical investigation within every branch of learning is carried out in a genuinely scientific manner and in accord with moral norms, it never truly conflicts with faith, for earthly matters and the concerns of faith derive from the same God.(6) Indeed whoever labors to penetrate the secrets of reality with a humble and steady mind, even though he is unaware of the fact, is nevertheless being led by the hand of God, who holds all things in existence, and gives them their identity. Consequently, we cannot but deplore certain habits of mind, which are sometimes found too among Christians, which

⁴¹ Denzinger ¶1800.

do not sufficiently attend to the rightful independence of science and which, from the arguments and controversies they spark, lead many minds to conclude that faith and science are mutually opposed.(7)

But if the expression, the independence of temporal affairs, is taken to mean that created things do not depend on God, and that man can use them without any reference to their Creator, anyone who acknowledges God will see how false such a meaning is. For without the Creator the creature would disappear. For their part, however, all believers of whatever religion always hear His revealing voice in the discourse of creatures. When God is forgotten, however, the creature itself grows unintelligible.

We can see from a fair reading of the two underlined paragraphs that no specific concessions are made to Galileo and no specific endorsements are given to heliocentrism. Although the “rightful independence of science” is acknowledged, this is not an independence that allows science to go outside the boundaries of the faith or say things that contradict the faith. In both of the above paragraphs the message that shines through is that science and faith must work together and must never oppose one another. The reason, of course, is that they have God as both their author and designer.

The resolve of Vatican II not to give any direct concessions to Galileo was made clear when, as Fantoli describes it,

During the preparatory phase of the document the proposal was put forth for a frank recognition of the errors committed by the Church with respect to Galileo, and it became partially accepted by the “joint commission” which dedicated a new paragraph (No. 40) to the question of the autonomy of culture, where a brief mention was made of the error of the condemnation of Galileo.”⁴²

This event, of course, never happened, since the proposed paragraph #40 contains no mention of Galileo and no error made by the Church. Monsignor Pietro Parente, co-president of the commission, saw to it that the reference to Galileo was eliminated, stating: “[It is] not appropriate to speak of it in this document – so as not to ask the Church to say: I have been wrong.”⁴³ Whatever Parente’s motivations were, even if saving face for the Church that he personally thought had erred, is really of no consequence in the final tally, since, as those who understand Catholic protocol know, ecumenical councils are guided by the Holy Spirit. As such, it would have been erroneous to say that the Church made an error in her condemnation of Galileo and heliocentrism. If heliocentrism was

⁴² Annibale Fantoli, *Galileo: For Copernicanism and for the Church*, p. 505.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

correct, this was the perfect opportunity for the Holy Spirit, through the Church, to clear the air, as it were. The fact that it never happened shows once again that the efforts of the three popes of the 17th century to eliminate the “formally heretical” view of heliocentrism from Catholic doctrine still reverberate today, although in much more subtle tones.

The only allusion to the Galileo affair that appeared in the Vatican II discourse is a footnote added to paragraph 36 citing Paschini’s work.⁴⁴ But even then, as Fantoli admits, the citation of Paschini’s work on Galileo

had been made possible only by means of the changes already mentioned [to Paschini’s original 1944 publication], especially those more important and drastic ones which concerned the original judgment of Paschini on the behavior of the Church in 1616 and 1633.⁴⁵

Unfortunately, some of the more liberal sectors of Catholicism have been prone to eisegete these paragraphs from *Gaudium et spes* to reach the agenda-driven conclusion that the Church has given science full reign to propose any theory it desires, and that the Church has little or no say in what is distilled from those theories. In actuality, *Gaudium et spes* not only refuses to acknowledge any error on the part of the Church in the Galileo affair, it says nothing different than what was previously stated in the Church’s tradition, for all the Church’s authorities, from Bellarmine, the Council of Trent, Pius IX to Leo XIII, taught that faith and science can never conflict. Indeed, that has been the whole theme of our book, *Galileo Was Wrong: The Church Was Right*, since, if studied carefully and without the atheistic agenda common in the sciences today, modern science has demonstrated quite handily that the faith of our fathers who held fast to geocentrism was not in vain.

2003: Catholic Apologetics & Geocentrism

Obviously, questions concerning the infallibility of the 1616, 1633 and 1664 decrees against heliocentrism invariably surface because society has assumed that heliocentrism is a proven scientific fact, which then leads to the conclusion that the ecclesiastical decrees condemning it were in error. Additionally, since the Church has admitted that it is theoretically possible for her to make errors in her “non-infallible” teachings, Catholics of the past one hundred years have concluded that the proper apologetic concerning the Galileo affair is to communicate to the world that the popes and cardinals of the 17th century, although faithful to their calling as pastors, were, to put it politely, a little overbearing and misdirected in their dedication to Scripture and Catholic tradition. Added to this apologetic is the rationale that such errors are

⁴⁴ The *Gaudium et spes* footnote at #7 above reads: “See Pio Paschini, *Vita e Opere di Galileo Galilei*, 2 vol., Pont. Academia Scientiarum, Vatican City State, 1964.”

⁴⁵ *Galileo: For Copernicanism and for the Church*, p. 506.

permissible within the confines of Catholic protocol because only when the pope speaks *ex cathedra* and fulfills the four criteria stipulated at Vatican Council I is his teaching infallible. Such is the tack taken, for example, by one of the more popular Catholic traditionalist magazines:

Firstly, in terms of apologetics, if the Church indeed pronounced solemnly that the earth does not revolve around the sun, then she almost certainly would have erred. Naturally, this situation would have eliminated her claim of infallibility, which would in turn destroy her claim of Divine institution.⁴⁶

Later Winschel writes: “And yet, the earth moves!” and “Galileo was right about heliocentrism,” and “Galileo seems to have won out both on theological as well as scientific grounds.”⁴⁷ Here we have the typical child of the Enlightenment; one who has accepted the *status quo* of modern science without reservation and is willing to put it all on the line, as it were, believing that everything can be answered on that basis. The absolute fact he employs to make his conclusions is that science has proven the Earth revolves around the sun; yet, ironically, he provides no such proof in his article. Although it might appear that he gives himself at least some escape clause in the words: “then she *almost certainly would have erred*,” he is not so equivocal toward the end of his article:

Had the Inquisition made a mistake in declaring heliocentrism heretical? Yes. Did the Church err? Absolutely not. In fact, where the Holy Ghost played a role was in seeing to it precisely that the Church did not at this time make the error of stamping the decision of the Holy Office with her infallible approval.⁴⁸

Here we see, perhaps, an additional apologetic. The goal is not merely to protect the doctrine of papal infallibility but to minimize the role of the popes and make it appear as if they had little to do with the whole affair. The same type of evasion was employed in the 1992 papal speech prepared mainly by Cardinal Poupard. It spoke of the “error of the theologians” but laid no blame on the popes and cardinals who, everyone knows, played a much larger role than what the speech admitted. We can understand the dilemma of these apologists. Since they

⁴⁶ Jason Winschel, “Galileo, Victim or Villain,” *The Angelus*, October 2003, p. 10. A few months after the article was published, we approached the editor of *The Angelus* and asked if he would allow us to write a rebuttal for the sake of fairness. He declined, even after an appeal. A milder treatment of the Galileo affair is written by Thomas E. Woods, Jr. in *How the Catholic Church Built Western Civilization* (2005), although Woods gives no consideration to the idea that Galileo could have been wrong. Fr. Victor P. Warkulwiz, in *The Doctrines of Genesis 1-11: A Compendium and Defense of Traditional Catholic Theology on Origins* (2007) is highly favorable to geocentrism.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 36, 38.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

are convinced that a gross “error” occurred in the years 1616 to 1664, there is little choice but to deflect as much blame from off the hierarchy as possible, for image is just as important as substance in such cases. Even though these authors know that the historical record shows quite clearly that over the course of fifty years Paul V, Urban VIII and Alexander VII facilitated, interrogated, presided, endorsed, commanded, demanded abjurations, sent signed notices to papal nuncios, and signed papal bulls endorsing the condemnation of heliocentrism, respectively, the whole burden of the supposed mishap is placed on the shoulders of the “Inquisition,” perhaps because that infamous institution has always been the favorite boogeyman employed to epitomize the primitive and uneducated medievals of yesteryear who were just a bit too zealous for their Christian faith and who are thus caricatured as having not the slightest wit about things scientific. The title of the apologist’s article could just as well be worded: *The Popes: Victims or Villains?* and probably get his point across much better. As such, it would be his contention that the popes involved in the Galileo affair are not to be considered “villains” who besmirched the Church’s reputation by promoting error; rather, they are “victims” of an Inquisition gone awry, a runaway train that the pontiffs were helpless to stop. This is the type of murky quicksand that Catholic apologists are forced to adopt once they elevate the premise of heliocentrism to an established scientific fact. They find themselves inadvertently implying that the Church at large could be: (a) led wholesale down the primrose path of error; (b) be virtually ignored by the Holy Spirit because He apparently doesn’t deal in things stated “non-infallibly”; (c) led to maintain a specious allegiance to the consensus of the Church Fathers; (d) led to erroneously uphold the traditional belief in inerrancy and literal interpretation of Scripture, and (e) forever embarrassed in front of a gapping world of critics, all for the sole purpose of “saving the doctrine of papal infallibility” a doctrine which, ironically, was neither employed nor defined until the late nineteenth century.

On the other hand, this type of apologetic forces the bearer to speculate in the negative about the motivations of the popes. Toward the end of his article, Winschel, driven by his belief that “Galileo was right about heliocentrism,” finally faces the pope and, as we would expect him to do, puts the blame on the pontiff instead of Galileo:

In Galileo’s defense, one could argue that certain Churchman acted disreputably during this affair. Motivated by wounded pride, Pope Urban VIII certainly exaggerated when he referred to the whole thing as the worst scandal in the History of the Church. This in the midst of the Thirty Years’ War and hot on the heels of the Protestant Revolution, the Western Schism and the abuses of the Renaissance Era?!⁴⁹

The first thing Winschel’s approach verifies for us is the very reason that *Galileo Was Wrong: The Church Was Right* was written as it is –

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p 38.

with strong emphasis on the scientific side of the debate. Being a product of his intellectual culture (*e.g.*, the Enlightenment, modern science, historical criticism, *etc.*), a whole generation of Catholics have been reared and educated in the school of heliocentric hegemony. One such example is the school of Teilhardianism, the teachings of the wayward Catholic theologian from France, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, whose corrupting influence began in the early 1900s and found its way into many of the minds of the prelates who sat at Vatican II. Earlier we cited his strange “omega-searching” evolutionary ideas, but Teilhard was also pushing for the connection between the demise of geocentrism and the rise of evolutionary thought, as well as his desire to rid the world of the traditional notion of Original Sin. In the book published in 1969 (fourteen years after his death), *Christianity and Evolution*, he writes:

It is not only, in fact, a few palaeontological discoveries which are forcing the Church to lose no time in modifying her ideas about the historical evidence of human origins. The whole new physiognomy of the universe, as disclosed to us for some centuries now, is introducing an intrinsic imbalance into the very core of the dogma; and we cannot escape from this except through an extensive metamorphosis of the notion of original sin.



As a result of the collapse of geocentrism, which she has come to accept, the Church is now caught between her historico-dogmatic representation of the world’s origin, on the one hand, and the requirements of one of her most fundamental dogmas on the other – so that she cannot retain the former without to some degree sacrificing the latter.

In earlier times, until Galileo, there was perfect compatibility between historical representations of the Fall and dogma of universal redemption – and all the more easily, too, in that each was modeled on the other. So long as people believed as St. Paul himself did, in one week of creation and a past of 4000 years – so long as people thought the stars were satellites of the

earth, and that animals were there to serve man – there was no difficulty in believing that a single man could have ruined everything, and that another man had saved everything. Today we know, with absolute physical certainty, that the stellar universe is not centered on the earth, and that terrestrial life is not centered on mankind.... With the end of geocentrism, what was emerging was the evolutionist point of view. All that Galileo’s judges could distinctly see as menaced was the miracle of Joshua. The fact was that in consequence the seeds of decomposition had been introduced into the whole of the Genesis theory of the fall; and we are only today beginning to appreciate the depth of the changes which at that time were already potentially completed [in Galileo’s day].⁵⁰

The “collapse of geocentrism” was leading many Catholics, who were already predisposed to liberal theology and liberal hermeneutics, down the primrose path of accepting evolution as a fact. Another example is George Mivart, a convert to Catholicism in the late 1800s. As Finocchiaro describes it:

Mivart...argued for the compatibility of Christianity and evolution....that Galileo’s trial showed that the Church was fallible in scientific matters, and so modern Catholics had complete freedom in scientific inquiry; but he argued that the Church’s error on Copernicanism was a providential one...⁵¹

Suffice it to say, there is no proof for Mivart’s accusation that “the Church was fallible in scientific matters” or Teilhard’s wish that we possess “absolute physical certainty that the stellar universe is not centered on the earth.” Yet Winschel and many other 20th century Catholics grew up with Mivart’s and Teilhard’s self-satisfied assurance about science. Winschel is the typical example of the modern Catholic who comes to the theological debate having already been primed and molded by the biased scientific education he received from childhood. Having been reared with the idea in either public, private or parochial schools that the Earth revolves around the sun at such an impressionable age, it is unfathomable for most of them, now adults, to contemplate that the *status quo* of modern science could possibly have gotten it wrong. So ingrained has the notion of heliocentrism been wired into the consciousness of this generation that otherwise good Catholics think nothing of impugning ulterior motives onto the very popes that God gave to protect them from the false ideas and irreligious prejudices of the world. In short, once the true pontiffs are eliminated from the discussion because they didn’t speak “infallibly,” a new and different ecclesiastical leader arrives on the landscape, yet his fallibility is not even questioned.

⁵⁰ Teilhard de Chardin, “Fall, Redemption and Geocentrism,” *Christianity and Evolution*, 1969, 1971, William Collins Co., Harcourt, pp. 37-38.

⁵¹ *Retrying Galileo*, pp. 260-261.

His name is Galileo, pope of the church of Scientism, who, being so powerful, even speaks from the grave, as his ideas on scriptural interpretation, Winschel pleads, are even enshrined in “several papal encyclicals”:

...Galileo was right about heliocentrism. Moreover, some of his theological wanderings eventually found themselves mirrored in several papal encyclicals of the last two centuries. *Providentissimus Deus* by Leo XIII and *Humani Generis* by Pius XII, for instance, both have pieces that could have been extracted from Galileo’s *Letter to the Grand Duchess*.⁵²

As much as he appeals to the encyclicals for support for heliocentrism, unfortunately Winschel has already demoted their authoritative value since his article inadvertently consigns all non-infallible papal statements to the ambiguous category of “it could be true, but then again, it could be false,” due to his hasty and scientifically biased conclusion about Pope Urban VIII and his “wounded pride.” As we saw in Pope Urban’s dialogue with the ambassador to Archduke Cosimo Medici, Francesco Niccolini, the only “pride” Urban had was for the word of God, the very word he consistently accused Galileo of violating. Contrary to Winschel’s claim, there is not a shred of evidence that Urban’s personal pride was at stake. Moreover, as we have already noted, the encyclicals of Leo XIII and Pius XII say nothing supporting heliocentrism. They are merely exhortations on the proper interpretation of Scripture that the tradition of the Church had been preaching and practicing since the time of the Church Fathers, and which can be applied to a number of literary situations in Scripture (personifications, irony, metaphors, hyperbole, anthropomorphisms, *etc.*) without once involving the 17th century cosmological controversies. It is only modern Catholics who consistently eisegete these encyclicals into supporting their previously made-up minds about the merits of heliocentrism and the demerits of the 17th century Church.

As much as Winschel bases his apologetic on the “disreputable” acts, “wounded pride,” and “exaggerations” of Urban VIII,⁵³ perhaps he did not investigate to any satisfactory depth the personal life of Galileo before he wrote his article. As we noted in Chapter 11, Galileo was the epitome of a selfish, immoral and prideful man who trampled over anyone and anything to get what he wanted. This was par for the course for the world’s pioneering heliocentrists (*e.g.*, Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler, Newton, Einstein). As we also noted in Chapter 11, their personal lives are a sordid tale of malfeasance and deception. But Urban VIII, Robert Bellarmine, and the whole employ under Paul V and Alexander VII led exemplary lives that were far and away superior to the scurrilous life of Galileo and his contemporaries. As it stands, Urban

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ An accusation against Urban VIII that, as we cited earlier in Finocchiaro’s analysis, is most likely a myth since there is no credible documentation.

VIII was precisely on target in calling Galileo's onslaught "the worst scandal in the history of the Church." The troubles stemming from Winschel's "Western Schism," the "Protestant Revolution," the "Thirty Years War" and the "Renaissance Era" were based on one main issue: the Church's sole and lofty role as the final authority on the interpretation of Scripture, the authority contested by each of the aforementioned epochs of history. The "filioque" issue that divided East from West was based on the interpretation of Scripture.⁵⁴ The Protestant Revolution was based on the interpretation of Scripture.⁵⁵ The Thirty Years War was between Catholics and Protestants and stemmed directly from religious disputes about Scripture, even though later it digressed into the desire to wrest control from the Hapsburg dynasty. The Galileo affair is the key to understanding each of these historical controversies, since the main contention between the Church and Galileo was not whether there was proof of heliocentrism, for everyone knew that none existed, but over who had the final say on the interpretation of Holy Scripture.

As we can see, Winschel's apologetic has a severe set of problems. Instead of viewing papal infallibility as merely the highest expression of a given truth, this Catholic apologist has created an unbridgeable chasm between doctrines that are infallible over against those that are authoritative, but which, as far as he sees it, contain the ticking time bomb of damnable error. As such, this defeatist apologetic invariably leads the Catholic faithful to doubt the truth and veracity of magisterial statements that are not disseminated infallibly. If the people are taught that previous popes were in error simply because they did not couch their teachings in infallible terminology, what would stop the Catholic faithful from becoming just as wary about the possibility of papal error coming from all other venues of Catholic teaching?

It is certainly true that these questions may be somewhat diffused by appeal to: (1) the tradition of the Church, (2) the analogy of faith, (3) the consensus of the Fathers, (4) previous magisterial statements that set an authoritative precedent, (5) the teachings of Scripture, and which often give the needed authoritative backing to non-infallible teachings. But the main problem for those seeking to eliminate the Church's condemnations of heliocentrism from the category of the infallible is that each of the five above authoritative sources unequivocally supports geocentric doctrine. It is an undeniable fact of Catholic history that Scripture, Tradition and the Magisterium have all given their undivided endorsement of geocentric cosmology. Hence, denials of the infallibility of geocentric teachings that then reduce those same teachings to the Church's non-infallible level of authority provide no escape for those advocating

⁵⁴ "Filioque" concerned whether the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father only or from the Father and the Son. The East sided with the former, the West, under the Roman Pontiff, sided with the latter. The issue of contention was the interpretation of Jn 15:26: "But when the Paraclete cometh, whom I will send you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceedeth from the Father, he shall give testimony of me," as opposed to Rm 8:4: "the Spirit of Christ."

⁵⁵ Romans 3:28, James 2:24; 5:14; Matthew 16:18-19; 19:9; John 3:5; John 20:23; 2 Timothy 3:16 and many more.

heliocentric cosmology. In fact, there is no Scripture, no Tradition and no Magisterial statement in all of the past two thousand years that either denies geocentric cosmology or promotes heliocentric cosmology.

As we have seen, at no time has the Church ever formally and officially reversed the 17th century decrees against heliocentrism. Although it is perhaps true from a procedural standpoint that the removal of Copernicus and Galileo from the 1835 *Index* of Gregory XIV may give a polite pass to the two scientists even though the removal was made under false pretenses, the fact remains that the 1633 *doctrinal decision* that heliocentrism was “formally heretical” and “erroneous in faith” has never been rescinded. It was under the aegis of a canonical trial, a trial that, according to the Congregation of the Index’s answer to Joseph LaLande in 1765, must be officially rescinded before any lifting of the condemnation against either heliocentrism or Galileo could possibly occur. Moreover, since the doctrinal decision was determined and came *prior to* what actually appears in the *Index* itself, which is proven by the fact that Urban VIII had these words read to Galileo:

Invoking, then, the most holy Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that of His most glorious Mother Mary ever Virgin, by this our definitive sentence we say, pronounce, judge, and declare, that you, the said Galileo.... having believed and held a doctrine which is false and contrary to the sacred and divine Scriptures – to wit, that the sun is in the center of the world, and that it does not move from east to west, and that the earth moves, and is not the center of the universe; and that an opinion can be held and defended as probable **after** it has been declared and defined to be contrary to Holy Scripture.⁵⁶

This means that the Catholic Church is left with official papal teachings and/or approvals classifying heliocentrism as “formally heretical” and “erroneous in faith” that cannot be dismissed by a mere maneuvering of the 1835 *Index*. Indices can revise Indices but they cannot reverse or revise canonical trials. Additionally, if it is claimed that the 1633 decision was erroneous, it can also be asserted that the 1835 *Index* was erroneous. There simply is no escape from this logic.

Much more favorable to geocentric cosmology among Catholic writers is Dr. Wolfgang Smith, Professor emeritus from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (whom we have already cited at length), and Fr. Victor P. Warkulwiz, who has a Ph.D. in Physics, and writes:

...We have that revelation in Genesis. To accept the big bang theory is to repudiate Genesis.... Militant atheists espouse the cosmological principle because it removes earth from the center of creation. They see this as a step toward dethroning

⁵⁶ The sentence of 1633 against Galileo, approved by Pope Urban VIII, and sent out to all the papal nuncios and their underlings in Europe.

man as the masterpiece and master of creation, the standpoint of Genesis....The centrality of man was expressed geometrically in the Christian medieval cosmos by having the earth at rest, with the sun and the heavens moving around it....Einstein maintained that he succeeded in eliminating the notion of absolute motion in his theory of general relativity, making the notion “at rest in space” open to definition. But God had already made that definition. Scripture informs us that God established the earth as a standard of rest....The earth is at the center of the universe because it is a place in the universe with special properties, just as geometric centers and centers of mass are places with special properties. God created the earth first, built the rest of the universe around it, defined it as the standard of rest, and made it the home of man...⁵⁷

Lumen Gentium 12: “The Whole Body...Cannot Err”

Perhaps the most significant reason why the doctrine of geocentrism should be considered infallible comes, quite surprisingly, from one of the more modern declarations concerning the teachings of the Church. Earlier we quoted from *Lumen Gentium* 25 to show that Catholics are required to give obedience to both infallible and non-infallible teachings of the Church. Yet *Lumen Gentium* contains an even more significant requirement for obedience in regards to geocentric doctrine, and it certainly seems to make the doctrine infallible. It is stated in Paragraph 12:

The holy People of God shares also in Christ’s prophetic office: it spreads abroad a living witness to him, especially by a life of faith and love and by offering to God a sacrifice of praise, the fruit of lips praising his name (*cf.* Heb. 13:15).⁵⁸ The whole body of the faithful who have an anointing that comes from the holy one (*cf.* 1 Jn. 2:20 and 27)⁵⁹ cannot err in matters of belief. This characteristic is shown in the supernatural appreciation of the faith (*sensus fidei*)⁶⁰ of the whole people, when, “from the bishops to the last of the faithful”⁶¹ they

⁵⁷ Victor P. Warkulwiz, *The Doctrines of Genesis 1-11*, 2007, pp. 66-68.

⁵⁸ “Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.”

⁵⁹ “But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all know....but the anointing which you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that any one should teach you; as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie, just as it has taught you, abide in him.”

⁶⁰ *Lumen Gentium* 12 adds this footnote: “(The *sensus fidei* refers to the instinctive sensitivity and discrimination which the members of the Church possess in matters of faith. – Translator.)”

manifest a universal consent in matters of faith and morals. By this appreciation of the faith, aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth, the People of God, guided by the sacred teaching authority (*magisterium*), and obeying it, receives not the mere word of men, but truly the word of God (*cf.* 1 Th 2:13),⁶² the faith once for all delivered to the saints (*cf.* Jude 3).⁶³ The people unfailingly adheres to this faith, penetrates it more deeply with right judgment, and applies it more fully in daily life.⁶⁴

Since it is a fact that the “People of God,” which includes “the bishops to the last of the faithful,” have believed unanimously, firmly and without equivocation in the doctrine of geocentrism from the beginning of the Catholic Church and throughout two millennia, and who were “guided by the sacred teaching authority” to do so, this belief necessarily fulfills the criteria of *Lumen Gentium 12* that these same People of God “cannot err.” It is an undeniable fact that all the Fathers, all the medievals, all the bishops, priests, saints, doctors, theologians and the remaining Christian faithful of every nation believed in the doctrine of geocentrism. Additionally, three popes and their Holy Offices officially confirmed this absolute consensus in the 17th century against a few men who, because of their own misguided convictions, sought to

⁶¹ *Lumen Gentium 12* adds this footnote: “See St. Augustine, *De Praed. Sanct.* 14, 27: *PL* 44, 980.” This refers to Augustine’s work *Predestination of the Saints*, Book II, Chapter 14: This grace He placed “in Him in whom we have obtained a lot, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things.” And thus as He worketh that we come to Him, so He worketh that we do not depart. Wherefore it was said to Him by the mouth of the prophet, “Let Thy hand be upon the man of Thy right hand, and upon the Son of man whom Thou madest strong for Thyself, and we will not depart from Thee.” This certainly is not the first Adam, in whom we departed from Him, but the second Adam, upon whom His hand is placed, so that we do not depart from Him. For Christ altogether with His members is--for the Church’s sake, which is His body – the fulness of Him. When, therefore, God’s hand is upon Him, that we depart not from God, assuredly God’s work reaches to us (for this is God’s hand); by which work of God we are caused to be abiding in Christ with God – not, as in Adam, departing from God. For “in Christ we have obtained a lot, being predestinated according to His purpose who worketh all things.” This, therefore, is God’s hand, not ours, that we depart not from God. That, I say, is His hand who said, “I will put my fear in their hearts, that they depart not from me.”

⁶² “And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.”

⁶³ “Beloved, being very eager to write to you of our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.”

⁶⁴ *The Documents of Vatican II*, Austin Flannery, O.P., NY: Costello Publishing, 1975, p. 363.

depart from that consensus, making the attempt in the wake of unproven scientific claims with the express purpose of reinstating a novel and subjective interpretation of Holy Writ.

As we have seen, even many years after modern science began to treat heliocentrism as a scientific fact, the Catholic faithful still maintained their vigilance for geocentric doctrine. It has only been in the last one hundred years or so that this consensus has waned.

Because of the waning consensus, some objectors might themselves appeal to the principle of *Lumen Gentium 12* and posit that the Holy Spirit is now teaching the “People of God” that heliocentrism has been correct all along. But that notion, of course, is impossible, since the “People of God” could not have been “aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth” into believing that geocentrism was correct for 1900 years and then have the Spirit suddenly change His mind to teach them the opposite. It would make the Holy Spirit a liar, which is certainly impossible. The reality is, if the “People of God” were led to believe that geocentrism was the truth, and which was, according to the stipulations of *Lumen Gentium 12*, “guided by the magisterium” to confirm their consensus, then there is simply no possibility that a change in their belief could be understood as a movement of the Holy Spirit.

The Signs of Apostasy

The above facts, sadly enough, leave open only one other possibility for the shift in thinking against geocentrism, yet a shift that is taught and confirmed by Scripture, Tradition and the Magisterium. Quite simply, for the present people of the world to depart from the previous consensus of the “People of God” means that the former have been led astray by false teachings. Is such deception possible on a mass scale? According to Scripture and Tradition, it is not only possible, it is predicted to happen some time before the return of Christ. A worldwide apostasy from the faith predicted by St. Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-12⁶⁵ may be the only possible reason why the masses could depart from almost two millennia of consistent personal belief and magisterial decrees, not only concerning the doctrine of geocentrism, but every doctrine that is affected by the

⁶⁵ ³Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of perdition, ⁴who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. ⁵Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you this? ⁶And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. ⁷For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. ⁸And then the lawless one will be revealed, and the Lord Jesus will slay him with the breath of his mouth and destroy him by his appearing and his coming. ⁹The coming of the lawless one by the activity of Satan will be with all power and with pretended signs and wonders, ¹⁰and with all wicked deception for those who are to perish, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. ¹¹Therefore God sends upon them a strong delusion, to make them believe what is false, ¹²so that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

same non-literal and “historically critical” hermeneutic foisted on the Church in the last hundred years. As we noted earlier, the new hermeneutic, spawned as it was by insisting that Scripture could be interpreted figuratively where it was once interpreted literally, coupled with the idea that Scripture could err when it addressed non-salvation topics, has totally undermined man’s docile belief in Holy Writ in the modern age.

Another possibility is that the current rejection of the Church’s original teaching on both cosmogony and cosmology is following the pattern of blindness to which Jesus alerted us in the Gospels. For example, in Jesus’ conversation with the Pharisees about divorce, we learn that the practice was common in Israel, so much so that almost all the populace believed that it was one’s God-given right to divorce one’s spouse. For a long time, the illusion of the freedom to divorce seemed to be a positive societal development permitted by God, even as heliocentrism and evolution presently enjoy the same apparent freedom today. So confident were the people in their lifestyle of divorce that they brought the issue to Jesus even though they already knew He had condemned divorce. They reasoned that they could catch Him denying both the Mosaic law and ultimately God’s law which inspired Moses to allow divorce. Jesus, as He always managed to do when He was being tested by hypocrites, turned the tables on them. Little did the divorce advocates realize, until Jesus opened their eyes to the stark reality, that their belief in divorce, which opposed the original decree of God, was given to them not because God discovered a better way for them to manage marital conflicts, but for nothing more than the “hardness of their hearts.” In other words, Moses, under God’s direction, allowed them to divorce because the people were spiritually destitute. It is a divine principle that is often displayed in Scripture – God turns the rebel over to his own desires as a punishment for his rebellion.⁶⁶ Similarly, many today are enjoying the illusion that they have permission to believe and practice many things that were once condemned, claiming that modern science has enlightened them to a new way of life (*e.g.*, contraception, artificial insemination, embryonic stem cell research, cloning, eugenics, abortion, same-sex marriage and child adoption). They believe that society has been enlightened as never before to wonderful inventions and increased knowledge for the benefit of the human race. But in reality, nothing has changed in Scripture, Tradition or the Catholic Magisterium.⁶⁷ The inventions and knowledge only make them sin faster

⁶⁶ *Cf.*, Nm 11:1-35; Ez 20:25; Rm 1:20-24; 2Th 2:11

⁶⁷ Matthew 19:1-8: ³And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, “Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause?” ⁴He answered, “Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, ⁵and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?’ ⁶So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder.” ⁷They said to him, “Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?” ⁸He said to them, “For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.”

than they ever did before. They believe in false notions and engage in immoral practices because they have been deceived by the hardness of their own hearts.

These examples, however, are not to say that those who do not believe in geocentrism are either no longer individually faithful to the Catholic Church or that they are an integral part of the apostasy. The masses cannot be blamed for what they have been taught by their authorities. It only means to say that one of the signs of the general apostasy predicted by Holy Scripture will be a general and pervasive turning away from the previously accepted truths of Scripture and Tradition. The mass rejection of geocentrism is just one sign of that eventuality.

In closing, we will quote the words of Catholic scientist, author, and former professor of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Wolfgang Smith:

Today, four centuries later, what lay concealed in that beginning has become clearly manifest, for all to see; as Arthur Koestler has said, it is “as if a new race had arisen on this planet.” Could this be the reason why St. Malachy, in his famous prophecies, has characterized the reign of Pope Paul V (1605-1628) by alluding to the birth of “a perverse race”? One needs to recall that what is sometimes termed the first Galileo trial took place in the year 1616. What, then, could be the “perverse race” to which the saintly prophet refers? Given that Galileo is indeed “the father of modern science,” one is compelled to answer that it is none other than the race of modern scientists, and by extension, the community of individuals imbued with the modern scientific outlook....

As everyone knows, Galileo was formally tried in 1633 and forced to recant his Copernican convictions. The proposition that the Sun constitutes the immobile center of the universe was declared to be “formally heretical, because it is expressly contrary to the Holy Scriptures.” And so the matter stood until 1822, when, under the reign of Pius VII, the Church commenced to soften its stand with regard to what it termed “the general opinion of modern astronomers.” Thus began a process of accommodation with “the new race” which came to a head in 1979, when Pope John Paul II charged the Pontifical Academy of Sciences to re-open the Galileo case, and if need be, to reverse the verdict of 1633. Given the mentality which came to the fore in the wake of Vatican II, the outcome of that inquiry was never in doubt: Galileo was exonerated – some would say, “canonized” – following which Pope John Paul II in effect apologized to the world for wrongs committed by the Church. Could this be the reason, perhaps, why St. Malachy alludes to this Pope in the enigmatic words “*De Labore Solis*”? To be sure, the phrase, which traditionally refers to the movement of the Sun, does relate to Galileo, the man who denied that the Sun does move. Could it be, then, that St.

Malachy, having previously signaled the birth of a “perverse race,” is now alluding to the fact that some four hundred years later the Church has reversed its stand and relinquished its opposition to that “race,” which is to say, to that new philosophy? Certainly St. Malachy’s allusion can be interpreted in other ways as well; for example, “De Labore Solis” might be taken as a reference to the fact that this Pope, who has traveled far more extensively than any of his predecessors, has so many times “circled the globe” in his papal airliner (named, interestingly enough, “Galileo”).

But be that as it may, the fact remains that the Church has now joined the rest of Western society in adopting a scientific worldview; during the reign of Pope John Paul II, and with his sanction, a Copernican Revolution has finally taken place within the Church itself. Yet, to be precise, it is not the Church as such that has undergone change – that has “evolved,” as the expression goes – but what has changed is simply the orientation of its human representatives: it is Rome, let us say, that has reversed its position. Humanly speaking, the ecclesiastic establishment may have opted for the only viable course: given the sophistication and prowess of contemporary science – given the “great signs and wonders” that could deceive even the elect – it may not indeed be feasible to stem the mounting tide of scientific belief. Nonetheless one must insist, in light of our preceding analysis, that the contemporary cosmology, in any of its forms, is not in fact compatible with Christian doctrine. To the extent, therefore, that Rome has embraced a scientific outlook, it has compromised the true teaching of the Church: this is the crux of the matter. Call it human failing, call it “political correctness,” call it apostasy – the fact is that Rome has become “a house divided against itself.”⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Wolfgang Smith, *The Wisdom of Ancient Cosmology: Contemporary Science in Light of Tradition*, Oakton, VA: Foundation for Traditional Studies, 2003, pp. 180-181. Dr. Smith’s other works include: *Cosmos and Transcendence* (1984), *Teilhardism and the New Religion* (1988), and *The Quantum Enigma* (1995).