A reply by Paula Haigh to the Catholic Answers tract on
“The Galileo Controversy”

Nowhere in this Tract does the word heresy occur, and yet it is precisely for heresy that Galileo was tried and found guilty.

From the earliest times, a sandstorm of irrelevancies has surrounded this event, especially from Catholics eager to prove that the Church “is not against Science”. Thus, the Catholic Answers [CA] Tract concentrates its entire argument on this favorable attitude towards Science that the popes of the Renaissance displayed and on the question of the non-infallibility of the decision. The Tract also makes totally unwarranted statements as to the “proofs” of certain scientific hypotheses posing as dogmas. But the Galileo trial was specifically about the heresy of denying the veracity and inerrancy of Holy Scripture, of the Word of God, of Divine Revelation.

Dominican Jerome Langford in his 1966 book, Galileo, Science and the Church, provides information that is necessary for a right understanding of the case -- information apparently quite unknown to the authors of the CA tract.

The Galileo case was turned over to the theologians of the Holy Office by Pope Paul V, and in 1616, these theologians issued their condemnation of two propositions which encapsulate the position of the Church. The position thus stated has never been abrogated, retracted or renounced in any way. Pope John Paul II’s apology for the Galileo affair never refers to the two propositions of the 1616 decree. Rather, the most relevant facts of the case have been discreetly swept under the rug of a gradual but relentlessly progressive accommodation to the world of modern science and culture.

Because these two propositions so clearly and unambiguously present us with the position of the Church, they deserve our careful consideration. They also clarify the fact that the Church’s position has to do with Science only insofar as the Sciences presume, directly, indirectly, or by contrary doctrines, to interpret or discount Holy Scripture. The most recent examples of this imposition of science upon Divine Revelation are evolution and the Big Bang theory.

The two condemned propositions are:

1. The sun is the center of the world and completely immovable by local motion.
2. The earth is not the center of the world, not immovable, but moves according to the whole of itself and also with a diurnal motion.
The first proposition was declared unanimously to be foolish and absurd in philosophy, and formally heretical inasmuch as it expressly contradicts the doctrine of Holy Scripture in many passages, both in their literal meaning and according to the unanimous interpretation of the Fathers and Doctors.

As to the second proposition, all were agreed that it merits the same censure in philosophy, and that, from a theological standpoint, it is at least erroneous in the Faith.

Fr. Langford, from whose book these propositions are taken, goes on to explain the precise theological import of the decree:

The theologian Antonio of Cordova, writing in 1604, explains the generic meaning of these censures. The formally heretical in the first censure means that this proposition was considered directly contrary to a doctrine of faith. This shows that the apparent affirmations of scripture and the Fathers, that the sun moves, was held by the Consultors to be a doctrine of faith. In other words, there is no room for apologetic excursions here. The Consultors tagged this proposition with the strongest possible censure, as being directly contrary to the truth of Sacred Scripture. In the second proposition, the motion of the earth was censured as erroneous in the faith. This meant that the Consultors considered it to be not directly contrary to Scripture, but opposed to a doctrine which pertained to the faith according to the common consensus of learned theologians. In other words, Scripture was not as definite in stating the immobility of the earth. But the Holy Writ did reveal, that the sun moved, and since human reason could conclude that the sun and the earth were not both moving around each other, the consultors felt the immobility of the earth was a matter which fell under the domain of faith indirectly, as a kind of theological conclusion.

According to this theologian, the Decree of 1616 was irreformable and therefore properly termed infallible, being descriptive of a doctrine of the Faith.

Because he had published a book on sunspots in 1613 wherein he praised the Copernican theory, Galileo was personally admonished on the basis of these condemned propositions by Cardinal St. Robert Bellarmine (who died in 1621).

However, in 1632, Galileo published his *Dialogue on the Two Great World Systems* in which he openly advocated the Copernican system and shamelessly ridiculed the traditional Aristotelian geocentric system in the person of then Pope Urban VIII. This brought about his trial in 1633 by the Roman Inquisition or Holy Office. Of Galileo’s condemnation, noted Church historian Ludwig von Pastor says:

Now if he had adhered internally to an opinion which competent authority assured him to be contrary to Holy Writ, a suspicion was bound to arise that he doubted the inerrancy of the Scriptures and since this was in itself a heresy, he became suspect of heresy.

And Galileo knew this very well. For this reason he went to such lengths in his “Letter to the Grand Duchess Christina” (1615) to prove that the Scriptures are not
to be interpreted literally when they speak of physical things but only when they teach on matters of faith and morals. Pope St. Pius X clarified this error when, in 1907, he condemned the proposition that “Divine Inspiration does not extend to all of Sacred Scripture so that it renders its parts, each and every one, free from error.” (*Lamentabili Sane*, #11) In other words, Divine Inspiration, and by extension, inerrancy, extends to all parts of Holy Scripture, and therefore, the distinction between things pertaining to faith and morals and those pertaining to the physical sciences is a false distinction. Pope Benedict XV reiterated and confirmed this teaching of St. Pius X in his encyclical *Spiritus Paraclitus* (1920).

In 1613, Galileo had written a defense of his position for a student of his, a young Benedictine monk, Fr. Benedetto Castelli. After reading this “Letter to Castelli” and a booklet by the Carmelite Friar Paolo Antonio Foscarini, Cardinal Bellarmine wrote his incomparable *Letter to Foscarini*, a model of supernatural wisdom and prudence. Most relevant to the present discussion, here is what the Saint said in defense of Tradition:

...as you know, the Council of Trent prohibits expounding the Scriptures contrary to the common agreement of the holy Fathers. And if your Reverence would read not only the Fathers but also the commentaries of modern writers on Genesis, Psalms, Ecclesiastes, and Josue, you would find that all agree in explaining literally that the sun is in the heavens and moves swiftly around the earth, and that the earth is far from the heavens and stands immobile in the center of the universe. Now consider whether the Church could encourage giving to Scripture a sense contrary to the holy Fathers and all the Latin and Greek commentators.

The question of the infallibility or non-infallibility of the Church’s position in the Galileo affair seems utterly academic in light of the two condemned propositions and the words just quoted of Cardinal Bellarmine.

For there is hardly a question on which the Fathers of the Church are in more obvious agreement than a geocentric cosmos. They differed on the details of the structure -- the number of the celestial spheres, the existence and/or constitution of the aether, and even the geological and climatic effects of the global Deluge of Noe’s time eluded them. But the structure itself of the geostatic and geocentric universe -- this was a given that no one, then or now, can deny without denying reason and Revelation together. For it is a given like the existence of God and the immortality of the soul. It is both a natural truth accessible to reason and a supernatural truth revealed, especially for these Last Days wherein God foresaw that the wicked unbelievers would attempt to turn His Universe upside down and inside out!

This writer is in process of collecting quotations from the Fathers on Creation and the geocentric-geostatic universe, so a few examples can be offered here as samples
of the common view.

St. Clement of Rome, (30-100), our fourth Pope, speaks of "The heavens revolving under His government, subject to Him in peace."

The Epistle to Diognetus (c. 130) speaks of “the Creator and Fashioner of all things … from Whom the sun received the measure of his daily course.”

St. Basil’s *Hexaemeron* is full of knowledge of the natural sciences:

... we see that the great wisdom of Him who governs all, makes the sun travel from one region to another, for fear that, if it remained always in the same place, its excessive heat would destroy the order of the universe. Now it passes into southern regions about the time of the winter solstice, now it returns to the sign of the equinox; from thence it betakes itself to northern regions during the summer solstice, and keeps up by this imperceptible passage a pleasant temperature throughout all the world. (Homily III, #7)

This is as perfect a scientific description of the seasonal movements of the sun as anyone could wish! And it is from observation! Furthermore, St. Basil finds no contradiction at all in the Sacred Author’s description of the light created on the First Day of Creation Week and the sun created on the Fourth Day, for “Then the actual nature of light was produced: now the sun’s body is constructed to be a vehicle for that original light.” (Homily VI, #2)

Today many scientists refer to this original light as the electro-magnetic spectrum.

St. Ambrose speaks with the philosophies of the Greeks in mind:

On the nature and position of the earth there should be no need to enter into discussion … It is sufficient for our information to state what the text of Holy Scripture establishes, namely, that “He hangeth the earth upon nothing.” (Job 26:7)

There are many, too, who have maintained that the earth, placed in the midst of the air, remains motionless there by its own weight, because it extends itself equally on all sides. As to this subject, let us reflect on what was said by the Lord to His servant Job. ... Does not God clearly show that all things are established by His majesty, not by number, weight, and measure? For the creature has not given the law, rather he accepts it or abides by that which has been accepted.

The earth is therefore not suspended in the middle of the universe like a balance hung in equilibrium, but the majesty of God holds it together by the law of His own will, so that what is steadfast should prevail over the void and unstable...

By the will of God, therefore, the earth remains immovable. “The earth standeth for ever,” according to Ecclesiastes (1:4) yet is moved and nods according to the Will of God. It does not therefore continue to exist because based on its own foundations. It does not stay stable because of its own props. The Lord established it by the support of His Will, because “in His hands are all the ends of the earth.” (Ps. 94:4) The simplicity of this faith is worth all the proffered proofs. (*Hexaemeron*. One)
St. Ambrose is not disputing the centrality and immobility of the earth in the midst of the cosmos but emphasizing that this is a great mystery not to be explained by mathematics. Sir Isaac Newton refused to recognize this fact and proceeded to explain the celestial motions with respect to the earth’s supposed rotation around the sun by means of his mathematical principles and his concept of gravity. But as Jewish science-journalist Amnon Goldberg points out,

Gravity is a complete mystery, science being unable to ascertain its nature, source, propagation, or even just what it is. Gravity alone cannot account for the constant centrifugal equilibrium and military precision of the celestial orbs, which by nature should quickly degenerate with awesome instability, were it not for the sustaining word of God. (*The Jewish Tribune*. London, 11 Jan 1990)

This mystery is so far above human reason and yet so evident to reason, that only the Will and Power of God can adequately account for the order and regularity of the heavenly bodies.

St. Peter Chrysologus (c. 450), after describing the work of God during the Six Days of Creation Week, concludes:

Hence it is that the sequence of day and night is so ordered that labour follows rest and rest comes after labour. Hence also the sun and moon each in turn encompasses the limits of the world (earth), so that the sun with its recurring light may give a greater brightness to the day and the moon with pale light may not leave the night in total darkness… (*Sunday Sermons of the Fathers*, Ed. Toal. Vol. IV, page 121)

Here we return to the simplicity of divine Faith which St. Ambrose advocates.

St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) can always be counted on to give a summary of the views of his predecessors:

The earth stands in relation to the heaven as the center of a circle to its circumference. But as one center may have many circumferences, so, though there be but one earth, there may be many heavens. (*ST*, I, Q 68, a 4 , ad 1)

He quotes St. John Chrysostom, that the lights of heaven are greater than the other stars “because they are ordained to serve the earth in a manner that the other stars are not.” (*ST*, I, Q 70)

And finally, in Objection 3 in Question 70, St. Thomas says:

The general division of time into day and night took place on the first day, as regards the diurnal movement, which is common to the whole heaven and may be understood to have begun on that first day.

Amnon Goldberg gives some modern evidences for the fact of geocentricity:

... the discovery that quasars (powerful radio sources) are distributed in vast concentric shells equally distributed about the earth, with the earth at dead center, confuting the atheistic Cosmological Principle (that any point in the universe is the
same as any other -- a-centrism) and that the earth does indeed reside at the center of a spherical universe, bounded by a shell of stars and galaxies -- the "stellatum" of the ancients, and surrounding them, the mysterious … border of this physical universe. (The Jewish Tribune, as in previous quote.)

It is sometimes objected that the Fathers were also unanimous on the question of spontaneous generation which science claims to have definitively disproven. I have two responses to this objection:

1) There is nothing in Holy Scripture that could give support to the old Greek and Aristotelian idea of the spontaneous generation of mice from dirty clothes and frogs from mud; so it is really irrelevant that the Fathers agree on it. The subject does not pertain to the Faith or to Divine Revelation except insofar as it might call in question creation *ex nihilo*. However, the Fathers all adhere to the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*.

2) It might then be asked, did the Fathers not see that a spontaneous generation would be against the Divine Revelation as given in Genesis? There is a type of what the ancients called “equivocal generation” (the terms also used by St. Thomas Aquinas) that simply means an ambiguous kind of generation or one that is unknown. And there is indeed such an “equivocal generation” in the “generation” of bacteria and viruses that arise from decay and are themselves a kind of degenerate material or mode of being. Be it noted well, however, that such “equivocal generation” is always downward into disease and disintegration and could never be imagined as a mechanism for evolution upwards. The same must be said for genetic mutations which never lead upward to superior or different kinds of creatures.

It has been suggested and indeed, very cogently argued that the so-called good bacteria in our bodies were good, as was everything else, in the newly created Adam and Eve. But at the Fall, all of nature became in some way vitiated and this is the real origin of harmful bacteria and viruses as it is, indeed, of all sickness and of death itself. (See From the Beginning, Vol. II)

Another objection sometimes brought in to ridicule the Fathers is that of the antipodes. The Fathers were unanimous on the theology of this question, but not on its geography. Lactantius (early 4th century) seems to have believed the earth to be flat and therefore, there would be no difficulty in fulfilling the command to go and preach to all nations and the Psalmist’s prophecy that their sound would go forth unto all the earth. (Divine Institutes, Bk.III., ch.24) But St. Augustine (d. 430) held to the earth’s sphericity and so, the prophecy of Psalm 18:5 presented some difficulty in terms of travel. (City of God, Bk. 16, ch. 9)

The Psalmist has affirmed: “… their sound hath gone forth unto all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.” And Romans 10:18 tells us that Faith comes by
hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ. That the Good News of Christ will be preached universally so that no one is left in ignorance of the way to salvation is the theological principle on which the Fathers were unanimous. Just how it would be accomplished geographically was a matter of difference. Today we can see this prophecy fulfilled in a most stunning way with the global communications network.

Unfortunately, for the authors of the CA Tract and for most people today who have imbibed modernism with mother’s milk, the so-called “proofs” for a non-geocentric universe are of far more weight than the truths of Faith and Divine Revelation. The CA Tract asserts:

It is a straw man argument to represent the Catholic Church as having infallibly defined a scientific theory that turned out to be false.

There are three big errors here:

1) Divine Revelation never constitutes “a straw man argument”; in fact, it is very serious business, indeed, to deny the truths of Divine Revelation, and the Church has always realized this;

2) The Church did not define “a scientific theory” but she did, in the person of the Inquisition/Holy Office, define it formal heresy to deny that the sun moves around the central stationary Earth since the words of Holy Scripture affirm that the sun revolves around the Earth;

3) Geocentricity has not “turned out to be false” and modern science has not disproved any truth of Divine Revelation, including this one. The late Walter van der Kamp\(^1\) addressed a letter to Pope John Paul II in an addendum to his 1988 book, *De Labore Solis: Airy’s Failure Reconsidered*. This was in 1983 when rumors of a rehabilitation of Galileo were just beginning to gain attention. Here are some of van der Kamp's statements most relevant to the unwarranted assertions of the CA Tract that heliocentrism and/or a-centrism have been proven:

…at bottom the Galilei case is not a physical but a philosophical dispute. For the proud and myopic scientific realism of the Newtonian period with its “Science has proven that...” is not only lingering on among laymen, but also among the learned cadres of today,....

You are undoubtedly aware that according to the prevailing Einseinian adage the pre-Copernican viewpoint, to quote Sir Fred Hoyle, is “as good as anyone else’s -- but no better”, all motion at the present held to be relative in a finite but unbounded universe

\(^1\) Mr van der Kamp [1913-1998] was a Canadian Protestant philosopher and founder of *The Tychonian Society* and its publication, *The Biblical Astronomer*. 
of which the circumference is nowhere and the centre everywhere. Inevitably, however, any discussion about motion assumes a shared preconception of rest. Or, as the late philosopher of knowledge Polanyi with admirable candor formulates it, "every object we perceive is set off by us instinctively against a background which is taken to be at rest."

Overlooking the obvious question whether astronomical statements procured on such a sub-logical basis should ever be seriously considered, Christians, surely, have no need to build their cosmology on an instinctive, unverifiable notion. They believe, and therefore know, that there exists a higher mode of being than the one in which they temporarily find themselves alive, and that only observed from that mode, from the Great White Throne of Almighty God, the last Word about absolute motion and absolute rest can be ex cathedra proclaimed. And has been proclaimed!

During the first sixteen centuries of the Ecclesia Christi she, on authority of Divine Revelation entrusted to her, held on to an unmoved Earth hung upon nothing in the centre of the observable Universe, the unaided senses of all men daily attesting to the veracity of this proposition. Be it since 1822 hushed up, officially this is still your Church’s position. And I submit that there is not the slightest need for her to change this traditional attitude. Empirical science has no voice in the matter, since, says the late atheist Bertrand Russell, it “ought not to contain a metaphysical assumption which can never be proved or disproved, by observation -- and no observations can distinguish the rotation of the earth from the revolution of the heavens.”

Allow me to end with Bellarmine: only if not — as still is the case -- by means of an invalid modus ponendo ponens, but experimentally it would be demonstrated that the Earth, moving through space, circles the Sun, “then it would be necessary to proceed with great caution in explaining the passages of Scripture, which seemed contrary, and we would rather have to say that we did not understand them than to say that something was false, which has been demonstrated.”

Until today that required hard-nosed and logically impeccable demonstration has not been given, and is according to the ruling theory impossible to give. Why then should the Bible have to buckle under the weight of an hypothesis about a motion that cannot be shown to be a motion?

With the prayer that He, Who created the Universe and Who is the only One for Whom this Universe is truly an object, may prevent you from judging the fallible word of man more trustworthy than His infallible Word, I remain,

With due respect,
W. van der Kamp

What more need be said?

But in addition to these warnings from a most competent scholar, it might be added that the illustrations adorning magazines like the National Geographic and most textbooks, are often made to look like photographs. They are the artists' extrapolations from the information gleaned from photographic telescopes. Scientists are not above this kind of deception to further their world view. I have
seen pictures of the Milky Way indicating a point on its periphery that is supposed to be the location of our "solar system." There is no way that such an illustration can in any sense be accurate because one could obtain such a view only by being stationed at a point outside the Milky Way or outside the Universe itself.

In the last analysis, the universe displayed by modern science is calculated to cause us to lose our sense of direction, our sense of reality. Solange Hertz, in her incomparable essay “What’s Up?” emphasizes this point so well:

Everything depends on a proper sense of direction... Because the spiritual life rests on a natural cosmology which underlies all created reality, a warped view of material creation inevitably distorts to some degree the perception of everything lying above and beyond it.

Precisely! The all-important truths of Divine Revelation teach us that Heaven is up above and Hell is down below, that Earth is the fixed point from which alone these vital spatial relations take their meaning; that the Earth is rendered unique and uniquely sacred by being the place of the Incarnation and Redemption, sanctified by Baptismal waters and the Precious Blood and tears of the God-Man; that the Second Person of the Most Blessed Trinity descended from Heaven to earth in order to be born of the ever-Virgin Immaculate Mary; that He always prayed to His and our Father in Heaven by lifting up His Eyes; that after His death on the Cross, He descended \textit{ad inferos}, to the “lower parts” and that He finally rose and ascended into Heaven to open its gates for us. And our Lady, assumed into Heaven, always comes down from there to Earth in her apparitions.

These are truths of Faith that lose their supernatural essence if they are deprived of their vital hierarchical relations to Earth and to us.

We are so created that we must have a fixed point of reference; both physically and spiritually, we must have a basis for stability. God has provided both. He has made the Earth firm beneath our feet -- and what is more terrifying for us, simply because it shakes this essential stability, than the earthquake? The spiritual significance of the earthquake is tremendous for this very reason: the Earth shakes, but it does not remove from its appointed place in space. Because the spiritual life is based on the geocentric-geostatic cosmology grasped by natural reason and taught by Divine Revelation, there could hardly be any error more devastating for our well-being in this life than a persistent denial of this divinely revealed arrangement.

Just beginning to be acknowledged are the devastating effects on the human body and mind of escaping from Earth into space. Tess Gerritsen in her novel \textit{Gravity} (1999) describes the consequences of microgravity or weightlessness:

He knew the toll now being exacted on his body: the steady seepage of calcium from his bones, the wasting of his muscles, the declining vigor of arteries and heart now
freed from the challenge of pumping against gravity. (p. 99)

Life in space took its toll on the human body. Astronauts’ faces were bloated, swollen by shifts in fluids. Their thigh and calf muscles shrank until they had “chicken legs,” poking out pale and scrawny from their bloomerlike shorts. Duties were exhausting, the irritations too numerous to count. And there was the emotional toll of being confined for months with crew-mates who were under stress, scarcely bathed, and wearing dirty clothes. (pp. 108-109)

After weeks of living in space, they would be weak as kittens, their muscles unable to support them. (p. 240)

Are not such exploits, so much against nature, tempting God? And for whose glory? It is the Tower of Babel all over again, only on a much greater scale. And so must the consequences be!

Lucifer is very skillful, because of his greater angelic knowledge, at constantly constructing false but plausible and alternate parallel worlds to seduce and deceive, if possible, even the elect (Matt. 24:24). He does this through the agency of modern mathematical physics and spin-offs into science fiction and other "fantasy" novels which foist these mental constructs upon children and the gullible adults who believe them to be realizable reality.

But Earth is not a planet. It does not wander in any orbit. It is the place of the Beginning and the End of history. It is the Center of all because here alone took place the central Act of history: the Incarnation and Redemption.

The real world will always find itself in conformity with the truths of Faith: the Blessed Trinity, Creation as narrated in Genesis, the Fall and the Promise of Redemption from which our Lady, the Woman of Genesis 3:15 and Apocalypse 12 can never be separated. God Himself came down to Earth from Heaven in and through her, and He wills to take us back up to Heaven in the same way -- if we will so consent.

Saturday  
January 13, 2001  
Octave Day of Epiphany
References


Nowhere in this report can I find any reference to the heresy of which Galileo was convicted nor to the two condemned propositions with their indictment of formal heresy and error in Faith. Cardinal Poupard only asserts that the 1633 sentence on Galileo was not irreformable, and therefore, Pope John Paul II was able to reform the sentence. But not the heretical nature of the propositions to which Galileo held. Furthermore, Cardinal Poupard mistakenly asserts that there are "optical and mechanical proofs for the motion of the Earth around the sun." There are no such proofs.


9. Paula Haigh, From the Beginning. Volumes I and II. 2000. Available as spiral bound photocopy or on CD-ROM, from author [address below].

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