

Response to Robert Lockwood in *This Rock* on the Galileo Issue

<http://www.catholic.com/thisrock/2009/0911ltrs.asp>

Is Heliocentrism Heretical?

A few remarks on Robert Lockwood's article on the Galileo affair ("The Anti-Catholic's Trump Card," July-August 2009). It was admirable to see him try to defend the Church, but it wasn't convincing. The questions he never answers are: How could the Church of the 17th century, guided by the Holy Spirit, be so deceived in the very magisterial ranks it reveres as the protector of truth? How could the Church be led to believe that the Earth's motion or non-motion was a matter of faith and morals if it wasn't so? Did the Holy Spirit decide to forsake the popes and cardinals of the 17th century? Lockwood provides no answers. Although he admits the Church convicted Galileo in 1633 of being "vehemently suspect of heresy," he fails to reveal why. The reason was that the same tribunal had earlier declared heliocentrism "formally heretical." Galileo was only "suspected" rather than "guilty" because the tribunal couldn't determine whether he really believed it. In any case, the tribunal's major task was denying the heliocentric cosmos, as we can see in its first of two declarations: "The proposition that the sun is the center of the world and does not move from its place is absurd and false philosophically and *formally heretical*, because it is expressly contrary to the Holy Scripture" (*Galileo e L'Inquisizione*, 143). How strong was this decision? When in 1775 astronomer Joseph LaLande inquired about exonerating Galileo, the Holy Office said that nothing could be done unless Galileo's trial was either reversed or annulled. Hence, the 1633 trial stands as the last legal declaration of the Catholic Church on the Galileo affair. Neither indexes of forbidden books, imprimaturs, nor papal speeches can change that canonical decision. Essentially, Lockwood only repeats what we've heard for years from Catholic apologists, namely, modern science has proven heliocentrism and thus we must find a palatable excuse for the Church's official declarations against it. He seems unaware that, to this very day, science has not proven heliocentrism. Scientists worth their academic salt have finally admitted that appeals to Newton's gravity, the Foucault pendulum, stellar parallax, etc. are worthless. As one put it: "The bulge of the Earth's equator may be attributed indifferently to the Earth's rotation or to the outward pull of the centrifugal force introduced when the Earth is regarded as non-rotating" (Eddington, *Space, Time and Gravitation*, 41). Just last year *New Scientist* admitted that astrophysicists now have two choices with the telescopic evidence they've discovered: (a) continue to believe that Dark Energy and Dark Matter (even though no one has ever found any) make up 95 percent of the universe (since neither Newton's nor Einstein's laws work without this convenient invention), or (b) believe in a geocentric universe (Nov. 12, 2008, 32-35). It is time for Catholic apologists to get up to speed with science and stop making excuses for our medieval popes and cardinals, and most of all, stop making the Holy Spirit a part-time God. For more information, read my book *Galileo Was Wrong: The Church Was Right*.

— Robert Sungenis

Robert P. Lockwood replies: *It is above my pay scale to get into an argument over heliocentrism and geocentrism. But I do know that while cardinals—particularly in the 17th century—might have masked their scientific opinions with canonical verbiage, the simple truth is that all the fulminations in the world cannot create a defined statement of infallibility guided by the Holy Spirit concerning questions of scientific fact. To expect such is like asking how far it is between London and Christmas.*

R. Sungenis: Although Mr. Lockwood's response is short, it is one of the more outrageous that I have ever had the unfortunate experience to read, and this from a prominent Catholic who once had a high position with *Our Sunday Visitor*. It seems that no matter how many documented facts you bring to the table, Catholics, by and large, so overwhelmed as they are by considering it a politically correct priority to make peace with the scientific *status quo*, just turn their nose up at anything contrary to their present views. Mr. Lockwood's dismissive apologetic is typical of the smugness we experience from Catholic apologists when discussions are prompted these days about the Galileo affair. His smugness would at least be tolerable if he gave some intelligent response, but Mr. Lockwood admits he doesn't know anything about the science behind the controversy and probably couldn't defend heliocentrism if he had to, yet the sad fact is, his belief, and the belief among most Catholic apologists, is that they invariably begin (and end) the discussion by accepting heliocentrism as a scientific fact; and it is this acceptance that is driving them to make all kinds of silly excuses about how the 17th century Church handled the Galileo affair. Mr. Lockwood's July 2009 article was full of them. Apparently, even now, regardless of his ignorance Mr. Lockwood has no intentions of investigating the science. He, being an obedient automaton for popular science, has adopted its claims as his infallible guide to truth, and from that platform he will make his judgment for or against the Church.

So what, essentially, does Mr. Lockwood bring to the table? Here is a gem if I ever saw one: "*all the fulminations in the world cannot create a defined statement of infallibility guided by the Holy Spirit concerning questions of scientific fact.*" Well, if that is the case, why did Mr. Lockwood bother writing a lengthy article on the Galileo affair looking for reasons why our prelatry made a mistake in condemning heliocentrism and Galileo? Why didn't he just write a one or two sentence statement in *This Rock* saying that it doesn't matter what happened back then because the Holy Spirit won't guide the Church into making an infallible statement on science? Here is the reason: a Catholic apologist who is he too inept or too lazy to investigate the science will invariably pull out the showstopper card of "infallibility" to answer all the naysayers, whether those naysayers come from the ranks of heliocentrists or geocentrists. In Mr. Lockwood's mind, all he needs to do is whoosh them all away with the "it wasn't declared infallible" wand, and he can settle back in his Rip van Winkle pose for another 400 years while modern science brainwashes his children that neither the Bible nor the Church (because they were both proven wrong in their assertions and thus discredited) is the final authority on any matter, much less science. In the end, what Mr. Lockwood believes he saves with one hand for the Church's credibility, he totally destroys with the other hand. A better design couldn't have been dreamt up by Satan himself.

Here is Mr. Lockwood's horse bet: putting his money on his belief that the scientific *status quo* is infallibly correct in holding to heliocentrism, it is better to place his wager on throwing the whole Tradition of the Church down the drain (which includes: all the Fathers of the Church who held to

geocentrism in consensus, and which fact Cardinal Bellarmine and Pope Paul V used as evidence against Galileo; all the medievals, including Thomas Aquinas; the Tridentine catechism of Pius V which in four places defends geocentric cosmology; all the popes from Paul V in 1616, Urban VIII in 1633, Alexander VII in 1664, Benedict XIV in 1741 and 1758; and no pope thereafter who formally and officially reversed the Church's decision of 1616 and 1633 condemning heliocentrism as a "formal heresy") and pretend that the matter is solved because the pope did not declare heliocentrism a formal heresy from his *extraordinary office* but only from his ordinary office. How many times have you seen that canard? Much too often, I'm sure.

But here is what Mr. Lockwood didn't consider. A little document in *Lumen Gentium* 12 of Vatican Council II states the following:

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).¹ The whole body of the faithful who have an anointing that comes from the holy one (*cf.* 1 Jn. 2:20 and 27)² cannot err in matters of belief. This characteristic is shown in the supernatural appreciation of the faith (*sensus fidei*)³ of the whole people, when, "from the bishops to the last of the faithful"⁴ they 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),⁵ the faith once for all delivered to the saints (*cf.* Jude

¹ "Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name."

² "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."

³ *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.)"

⁴ *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."

3).⁶ The people unfailingly adheres to this faith, penetrates it more deeply with right judgment, and applies it more fully in daily life.⁷

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 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. 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.

So, the popes of the 17th century didn’t need to teach the doctrine of geocentrism infallibly, since the Tradition prior to them was already infallible by the fact that the Holy Spirit led 1600 years of *sensus fidei* to believe in geocentrism. The 17th century popes had, by their own admission, no choice but to follow the infallible consensus of the Tradition, that is, if they were going to be led by the Holy Spirit’s *sensus fidei*.

This shouldn’t be a surprise to us. It is the same reason that Paul VI in 1968 wrote the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* but without declaring it formally infallible (which encyclical barred the use of artificial birth control); or the reason John Paul II in 1994 wrote the letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* but without declaring it formally infallible (which letter continued the restriction of women from the priesthood). Both popes stated that the Tradition of the Church “required” them to

⁵ “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.”

⁶ “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.”

⁷ *The Documents of Vatican II*, Austin Flannery, O.P., NY: Costello Publishing, 1975, p. 363.

write these clarifications of Church doctrine, but neither teaching was facilitated from the extraordinary magisterium following the definition of Vatican I for an infallible and irreformable papal teaching. According to *Lumen Gentium* 12, both teachings were already infallible by the mere fact that they were consistently and officially taught in the Tradition, without deviation or correction.

As for Mr. Lockwood's implication that a doctrine of geocentrism would be a doctrine in the realm of "scientific fact" and therefore not something that the Holy Spirit would want to guide the Church to believe infallibly, he is wrong again. Bellarmine told the same thing to Foscarini and Galileo, and it was approved by Paul V. Let's see what he says (underlining is my emphasis):

Firstly, I say that it appears to me that Your Reverence and Sig. Galileo have acted prudently in being satisfied with speaking in terms of assumptions and not absolutely, as I have always believed Copernicus also spoke.⁸ For to say that the assumption that the earth moves and the sun stands still saves all the appearances better than do eccentrics and epicycles is to speak well, and contains nothing dangerous. But to wish to assert that the sun is really located in the center of the world and revolves only on itself without moving from east to west, and that the earth is located in the third heaven and revolves with great speed around the sun, is a very dangerous thing, not only because it irritates all the philosophers and scholastic theologians, but also because it is damaging to the Holy Faith by making the Holy Scriptures false.⁹ Although Your Reverence has clearly exhibited the many ways of interpreting the Holy Scriptures, still you have not applied them to particular cases,¹⁰ and without doubt you would have encountered the very greatest difficulties if you had tried to interpret all the passages which you yourself have cited.

Second, I say that, as you know, the Council [of Trent] has prohibited interpretation of Scripture contrary to the common agreement of the Holy Fathers.¹¹ And if Your Reverence will read not only the Holy Fathers but also the modern commentaries on Genesis, the Psalms, Ecclesiastes, and Joshua, you will find that they all agree on the literal interpretation that the sun is in heaven and rotates around the earth with great speed, and that the earth is very far from the heavens and stands immobile in the center of the world.¹² Ask yourself then how could the Church, in its prudence, support an interpretation of Scripture which is contrary to all the Holy Fathers and to all the Greek and Latin commentators. Nor can one reply that this is not a matter of faith, because even if it is not a matter of faith because of the subject matter [ex parte objecti], it is still a

⁸ "...facciano prudentemente a contentarsi di parlare *ex suppositione* e non assolutamente, come io ho sempre creduto che habbi parlato il Copernico" (*Le Opere di Galileo Galilei*, vol. 12, p. 171).

⁹ "ma anco di nuocere alla Santa Fede con rendere false le Scritture Sante" (*ibid.*).

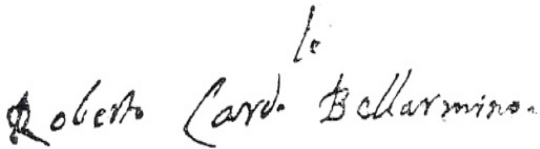
¹⁰ "molti modi di esporre le Sante Scritture, ma non li ha applicati in particolare" (*ibid.*).

¹¹ "...il Concilio prohibisce esporre le Scritture contra il commune consenso de'Santi Padri" (*ibid.*, p. 172).

¹² "...trovarà che tutti convengono in esporre ad literam ch'il sole è nel cielo e sta nel centro del mondo, iimmobile" (*ibid.*).

matter of faith because of the speaker [ex parte dicentis].¹³ Thus anyone who would say that Abraham did not have two sons and Jacob twelve would be just as much of a heretic as someone who would say that Christ was not born of a virgin, for the Holy Spirit has said both of these things through the mouths of the Prophets and the Apostles.

Thirdly I say that whenever a true demonstration would be produced¹⁴ that the sun stands in the center of the world and the earth in the third heaven, and that the sun does not rotate around the earth but the earth around the sun, then at that time it would be necessary to proceed with great caution in interpreting the Scriptures which seem to be contrary,¹⁵ and it would be better to say that we do not understand them than to say that what has been demonstrated is false. But I will not believe that there is such a demonstration, until it is shown to me.¹⁶ To demonstrate that the assumption that the sun is located in the center and the earth in the heavens saves the appearances is not the same thing as to demonstrate that in truth the sun is located in the center and the earth in the heavens. The first demonstration, I believe, can be given; but I have the greatest doubts about the second. And in case of doubt one should not abandon the Sacred Scriptures as interpreted by the Holy Fathers.¹⁷ Let me add that the words, 'The sun rises and sets, and returns to its place...' were written by Solomon, who not only spoke as inspired by God, but who also was a man more wise and learned than all others in the human sciences and in the knowledge of created things, and all this wisdom he had from God.¹⁸ Thus it is not likely that he would assert something which was contrary to demonstrated truth or to what could be demonstrated.¹⁹



Roberto Card. Bellarmino

¹³ “Nè si può rispondere che questa non sia material di fede, perchè se non è material di fede *ex parte obiecti*, è material di fede *ex parte decentis*” (*ibid.*).

¹⁴ “...quando ci fusse vera dimostrazione...” (*ibid.*).

¹⁵ “...alhora bisogneria andar con molta consideratione in esplicare le Scritture che paiono contrarie...” (*ibid.*).

¹⁶ “Ma io non crederò che ci sia tal dimostrazione, fin che non mi sia mostrata” (*ibid.*). We depart here from Blackwell’s translation: “But I do not believe that there is such a demonstration, for it has not been shown to me,” for two reasons: (1) the verb crederò is future and should be translated: “I will not believe” as opposed to “I do not believe,” and (2) “fin” should be translated “until,” not “for it has not.” Normally “fino” is chosen, as it is in modern Italian, but classical Italian often left off the final “o.” The correct translation of Bellarmine’s words, then, are: “But I will not believe that there is such a demonstration until (or, until such time as) it is shown to me,” which Fantoli adopts from Finocchiaro (*Galileo: For Copernicanism and for the Church*, pp. 184, 187).

¹⁷ “...et in caso di dubbio non si dee lasciare la Scrittura Santa, esposta da’ Santi Padri” (*ibid.*).

¹⁸ “fu Salomone, il quale non solo parlò ispirato da Dio, ma fu uomo sopra tutti gli altri sapientissimo e dottissimo nelle scienze humane e nella cognitione delle cose create, e tutta questa sapienza l’ebbe da Dio” (*ibid.*).

¹⁹ “...o che si potesse dimostrare.” (*ibid.*).

I rest my case.

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