

Response to Todd Charles Wood

By Robert Sungenis

R. Sungenis: Mr. Wood attended our Galileo Was Wrong conference held in South Bend, Indiana on Nov 6, 2010. He had some rather critical remarks of each of the speakers, and each in turn will be responding to Mr. Wood and which will be posted on our website (www.galileowaswrong.com). I will take the opportunity here to respond to Mr. Wood on the critique he gave of my lectures. My response was sent to Mr. Wood about a month ago but he has not responded further.

Mr. Wood: The other historical talk was the penultimate talk of the day by Robert Sungenis (also with a Wikipedia page), the mastermind behind the entire conference and author of the immense books Galileo was Wrong the Church was Right volumes 1 & 2 (totaling 1100 pages). He presented "Galileo & the Church: What Really Happened?" Knowing his bias, I didn't expect much from his talk, but I was interested to see what his perspective would be. Naively, I was actually surprised by how blatantly anti-Galileo it was. Not just in the way he presented, but in the way Sungenis sort of brushed by the facts of the situation.

R. Sungenis: I wonder who has the "bias" here? Mr. Wood admits that before he came into the room he "didn't expect much from the talk." So Wood enters this building with his arms folded yet he obviously hasn't read our "1100 page" book to bring himself up to speed.

As for me being "anti-Galileo," what else was Mr. Wood expecting, since the very title of our book is "Galileo Was Wrong"? Obviously, what Mr. Wood means is that I didn't give any credence to his preconceived ideas about what he thinks should be taught about Galileo. But "blatantly anti-Galileo"?? The only example Mr. Wood affords us below of why he insists on the slanderous adjective is my treatment of Galileo's letter to Christina. But as you will see, his treatment falls very short of proving his point. In actuality it shows that Mr. Wood is ignorant of the finer points of Galileo's history. Consequently, his mind is clouded by his bias for Galileo.

Mr. Wood: For example, he described the Letter to the Grand Duchess Christina as "Galileo goes on and on about why heliocentrism does not contradict the Scripture." That's not exactly correct. Galileo was proposing a hermeneutic in the Letter, a way of interpreting scripture that made it possible to be a heliocentrist. His argument was far bigger than just "why heliocentrism does not contradict the Scripture."

R. Sungenis: Besides the fact that Mr. Wood is attempting to make a grand conclusion of my views of Galileo from some cursory remark I made in a Power Point display, in actuality, Mr. Wood is making a distinction without a difference, and then using this phantom to make it appear as if I don't know what I'm talking about. This psychological ploy is typical of my opponents, but I won't get into that issue right now. Suffice it to say, there is no significant difference between: (a) "Galileo was proposing a hermeneutic... a way of interpreting

scripture that made it possible to be a heliocentrist" and (b) the reasons "why heliocentrism does not contradict the Scripture." In order to accomplish (a) you must first accomplish (b).

I suggest Mr. Wood go back and read Bellarmine's critique of Galileo's letter to Christina, as well as his critique of the letter to Castelli. It's all about Galileo trying to tell Bellarmine that he was not contradicting Scripture, mainly because, as Galileo insisted, Scripture was to be taken figuratively when it spoke about cosmology (except, of course, when Galileo came to Joshua 10:10-14, which he tried to interpret literally by saying that the earth stopped rotating instead of the sun stopped moving, and got himself into quicksand from which he never recovered).

Mr. Wood: After describing the Church's 1616 formal condemnation of copernicanism, Sungenis said, "Galileo ignored the injunction against copernicanism" and began writing his Dialogue, giving the distinct impression that Galileo went out immediately and began writing his next book advocating heliocentrism.

R. Sungenis: So Mr. Wood, without knowing my real intention, is making a grandiose conclusion based only on "impressions" he received? All he need to do was ask me, since I made myself available the entire 10 hours of the conference. But Mr. Wood failed to introduce himself, much less ask for any clarifications.

Mr. Wood: The truth is that he had already written a draft of what became the Dialogue prior to the condemnation of copernicanism and that he didn't start revising it for publication until September of 1624. Basically, he let the manuscript sit for nine years, and when he began to revise it, he made it a Dialogue discussing both copernicanism and the geocentric perspective.

R. Sungenis: So, then, Mr. Wood admits that Galileo picked up his draft of the *Dialogo* and began working on it again when he was specifically told by Pope Paul V never to write, speak or teach on the subject again. Apparently Mr. Wood believes that disobeying the injunction nine years later is better than disobeying it only one year later.

Additionally, Mr. Wood's choice of 1624 is not precise. If he had bothered to read Galileo Was Wrong on this very subject he would have come across these two paragraphs on page 212 of the second volume.

Sentence: Therefore by our order you were cited before this Holy Office, where, being examined upon your oath, you acknowledged the book to be written and published by you. You confessed that you began to write the said book about ten or twelve years ago [1621-1623], after the command had been imposed upon you as above; that you requested license to print it without, however, intimating to those who granted you this license that you had been commanded not to hold, defend, or teach the doctrine in question in any way whatever.

Analysis: This means that Galileo, in his typical temerity, began writing the *Dialogo* just five to seven years after the injunction had been given to him in 1616. In fact, parts of the *Dialogo* were written as far back as 1610.

Be that as it may, here is a description of the injunction from the official document:

His Holiness ordered the Most Illustrious Cardinal Bellarmine to call Galileo before himself and warn him to abandon these opinions; and if he should refuse to obey, the Father Commissary, in the presence of notary and witnesses, is to issue him an injunction to abstain completely from teaching or defending that doctrine and opinion or from discussing it; and further, if he should not acquiesce, he is to be imprisoned. (*Le Opere di Galileo Galilei*, vol. 19, p. 321, translated by Fantoli).

And despite this clear wording, Mr. Wood claims that it was permissible for Galileo to revise his *Dialogo* since Galileo was “discussing both Copernicanism and the geocentric perspective.” But that’s not what the injunction said. The injunction didn’t care what Galileo’s intentions were. It simply stated that he was to stay away from the subject altogether. Mr. Wood doesn’t like that particular fact of history and thus he bends the story to suit his tastes and then tries to give the impression that I was bending it.

Mr. Wood: This was ostensibly permissible under the injunction against copernicanism,

R. Sungenis: “Ostensibly permissible”? Is Mr. Wood now the judge and jury of what the injunction meant? Seems so. If so, his judgment contradicts what Pope Paul V actually required, which, as noted above, was for Galileo “to abstain completely from teaching or defending that doctrine and opinion or from discussing it; and further, if he should not acquiesce, he is to be imprisoned.”

Mr. Wood: but the problem was that the text made it quite clear that Galileo's sympathies were with the Copernican system.

R. Sungenis: That was the second reason, not the first. The first was that Galileo entered into the topic of cosmology when he was told not to do so. Mr. Wood needs to read the injunction for what it actually says and not give us his biased opinion.

Mr. Wood: Sungenis made it sound like Galileo just marched right out defiantly against the Church and began writing his next argument for heliocentrism, but that's not what happened at all.

R. Sungenis: This, unfortunately, is what Mr. Wood extracts from a quick Power Point presentation and an “impression.” Be that as it may, in actuality, it doesn’t matter how soon Galileo decided to defy the Church. The point is, he defied her and he knew what he was doing. In fact, he waited until 1621-1623 to do his revising since he thought that Cardinal Barberini who had befriended him by that time would support his *Dialogo*. Apparently, enough time had passed to tempt Galileo to think that no one would remember or make a big deal about the injunction that Paul V gave him in 1616. Barberini supported Galileo for a while, but when Barberini became Pope Urban VIII and found out that Galileo was not only presenting Copernicanism as a thesis but also obtained an imprimatur for the *Dialogo* through a bit of subterfuge by getting the best of Cardinal Riccardi through the help of Cosimo Medici, well, that’s when Galileo’s house of cards fell. And when confronted by Urban VIII’s inquisition, Galileo feigned a memory loss that he had received the injunction in

1616, at least until the Commissar helped him remember by showing Galileo's signature on the injunction. Galileo was devious from start to finish. It only took him five to seven years to put together his wily plan to circumvent the Church. I suggest Mr. Wood read the history before he comments on it. It's all in my book, all 1100 pages.

Mr. Wood: The bulk of Sungenis's talk was spent on what happened after Galileo, in which he emphasized that it was the infallible Magisterium of the church that condemned Galileo and therefore the condemnation could not be rescinded without admitting that the Magisterium had made a mistake.

R. Sungenis: Apparently Mr. Wood wasn't listening very well, or perhaps he is once again relying on "impressions" instead of facts. I said nothing about an "infallible Magisterium...condemned Galileo." I specifically stated that since the condemnation wasn't issued in a formally infallible venue, it then depended on the Ordinary Magisterium. I then said that because the condemnation of Galileo came under the auspices of a canonical trial from a tribunal of the Church, it then became a legal matter, and since legal matters can only be overturned by the pope or another tribunal, then the legal decision against Galileo and heliocentrism continues since no one has ever legally rescinded it. I then said that, if the Church were to rescind the canonical decision against Galileo and heliocentrism, it would only be putting itself in jeopardy, since in saying an Ordinary Magisterium of the past made a mistake then forces us to ask whether an Ordinary Magisterium from the present can also make a mistake, but, of course, that specific issue is hypothetical.

Mr. Wood: I found this section very interesting, but given Sungenis's mistreatment of Galileo, I have to say I'm dubious of some of his claims here.

R. Sungenis: Well, since I have backed up my treatment of Galileo with the historical facts, I hope that Mr. Wood will retract his mistakes. It is Mr. Wood who does not know the history and yet makes judgments based on that ignorance. Better yet, Mr. Wood should read the historical section in Volume 2 of *Galileo Was Wrong*, for there he will find that all the facts I have used to rebut his analysis are documented.