

# WHY GEOCENTRISM IS BACK, AND WHY IT MATTERS

A RESPONSE TO DAVID PALM

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While going over [David Palm's most recent attempt to plug the freshly-sprung holes in his case](#) against Dr. Robert Sungenis' ultra-controversial scientific and historical treatment of geocentrism ("[Galileo Was Wrong](#)"), the thought occurs that this might be an excellent and opportune time to simply take a moment.

A deep breath, as it were.

A pause to refresh.....

There.

That's better.

Now what in the world is all this ruckus *about* again, anyway?

It seems that it can be boiled down to several foundational questions:

First, has the Catholic Church taught geocentrism as a doctrine of the Faith?

I answer here [in the affirmative](#). I believe the case to be conclusive.

Second, has the Catholic Church ever *formally reversed* that teaching?

I answer here in the negative, and again believe this case to be conclusive (while Mr. Palm attempts to advance a revision of the Index as if this could serve in place of a formal reversal of a papal sentence **officially defining and condemning an heresy**, this attempt falls short in a spectacular way- exceeded, perhaps, only by Mr. Palm's exegetical blunder concerning the inspired text of the Book of Joshua, memorably demolished [here](#), by Dr. Sungenis, in his "[Response #1 to David Palm](#)").

Third, is the modern Catholic conscience therefore still bound to accept geocentrism?

I will answer here- perhaps to the surprise of some- in the negative. This answer will provide, in turn, a key to understanding the nature of the crisis facing the Church in our time, of the battles raging here and now over this and other ancient and apostolic doctrines of the Church, doctrines now embroiled in early or advanced stages of similar attacks as were launched in the aftermath of "l'affaire Galileo".

Lurking behind these questions is yet one more, and it is this fourth question which I ask you, the fair-minded reader, to keep firmly in mind:

Is there any scientific disproof of geocentrism, or any scientific proof against the specific condemnations in the 1633 papal sentence against Galileo?

Indeed, this question applies to other doctrines now under attack. Is there any scientific proof against the descent of the whole human race from Adam and Eve? Any scientific proof against the literal, six-day Creation of Genesis which constitutes the interpretation of an overwhelming consensus of the Fathers? Against the inerrancy of Scripture itself?

While I will not delve deeply into these other matters here, I can assure you, on the basis of intimate firsthand knowledge, that scientific claims against these doctrines are now being forcefully advanced **even by priests and bishops within the Catholic Church.**

These *scientific* claims ought to be refuted on *scientific* grounds, since we know that science can never contradict a doctrine of the Faith.

It is precisely on this basis that the modern resurgence of interest in geocentrism, and its magisterial treatment in "l'affaire Galileo", is premised.

I ask the reader's patience, since I am aware of the great desire on the part of many good and faithful Catholics to avoid the "scandalous" (to them) revisiting of the Galileo affair. I understand this view. It is based upon an opinion so widely held that it has become accepted as a fact: that the Church was wrong in its condemnation of Galileo and that geocentrism has been scientifically disproven.

It is imperative that this view be understood for what it is: an erroneous, if widely held, opinion. It is **not** a scientific fact. To the contrary, all claims of an experimental disproof of geocentrism have themselves been falsified- and by the very same experimental scientific methods which most Catholics assume- **wrongly**- settled the matter back in the 19th century!

As shocking as this may seem to the layman, this truth must be clearly grasped: **there exists no scientific proof against either of the specific findings of the 1633 papal sentence condemning Galileo.**

*There is no experimental scientific demonstration that the Earth is in motion, either around the sun or on its own axis.*

All earlier-advanced such "proofs" were of necessity **abandoned** in the face of the adoption of the Theory of Relativity, at the beginning of the 20th century.

This truth is so shocking that it literally causes some to descend to furious, carpet-chewing paroxysms of sparks-coming-out-of-the-ears, foaming-at-the-mouth hate, rage and *ad hominem* vituperation.

But it is, nonetheless, a truth.

It is not an opinion.

It is a fact, freely admitted by leading scientists.

I first establish this, in the words of a fellow who probably knows a thing or two about these matters, Dr. Albert Einstein himself:

***"The struggle, so violent in the early days of science, between the views of Ptolemy and Copernicus would then be quite meaningless. Either CS [coordinate system] could be used with equal justification. The two sentences, 'the sun is at rest and the earth moves', or 'the sun moves and the earth is at rest', would simply mean two different conventions concerning two different CS [coordinate systems]."***---"The Evolution of Physics: From Early Concepts to Relativity and Quanta, Albert Einstein and Leopold Infeld, New York, Simon and Schuster 1938, 1966 p.212

Please remember this, and keep it handy to show the next person who insists that science has proven the Catholic Church to have been wrong in Her condemnation of Galileo.

There are dozens of similarly forthright admissions from many other leading scientists on this score, many of them reproduced in ["Galileo Was Wrong"](#).

So.

Since we now know that science, *by its own forthright admission*, is unable to establish *by experimental demonstration* whether the Earth or the Sun are at rest with respect to the other or with respect to the rest of the heavenly bodies, we must ask ourselves- on what basis can we continue to dismiss, ignore, or even, in some cases, vituperate with withering scorn what has [certainly been taught and enforced as a unanimous consensus of the Fathers?](#)

I maintain that we Catholics are morally entitled- indeed, in some cases, are morally required- to faithfully but persistently beg of the Church clarification concerning the means by which we are to appropriate for ourselves and for our children ["the objective possibility of professing the true faith without error"](#) (CCC #890)- the objective possibility of forming our consciences, and the consciences of those for whom we are directly responsible, in accordance with the True Faith, especially concerning anomalous cases where secular science has claimed to disprove an ancient, apostolic teaching of our Faith. Even if many non-authoritative, non-magisterial evidences of abandonment or

uncertainty concerning such doctrines might be pointed to, if no clear reversal of a magisterially-taught doctrine by a subsequent act at a similar (or higher) level of magisterial authority exists, the question remains-what is a faithful Catholic to do in such cases in order to profess the True Faith, as we all must undertake to do with every unstinting effort of our will and intellect?

I propose that an authentically Catholic approach, is to cling resolutely to that which has been taught officially, with full force and authority, by the magisterium under its heaven-protected charism, even should there exist many contrary evidences which do not enjoy that same heaven-protected charism. Alongside this, we ought to beg the Church to employ Her heaven-protected charism to clarify those questions which have become the object of confusion, uncertainty, and even discord in our day- just as She has done in the recent case, well known to faithful readers of this blog, of [a very troubling- and subsequently withdrawn- statement in the US National Bishops' Catechism](#).

Are we perhaps faced here with a situation where the Church has abandoned- *but not reversed*- a doctrine of the ordinary magisterium? Perhaps as either a tactical or prudential decision in the face of an overwhelming consensus of the **scientific** "magisterium"?

And what now? Now that science has freely admitted it has no proof against the Church's original teaching on this matter?

These are difficult questions, and they deserve a serious examination.

To business!

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*David Palm:*

*"One thing I have noticed in reading neo-geocentrist material is that so far, to a man, they materially exaggerate the nature and authority of the magisterial documents generated in the Galileo incident and, as a corollary, consistently downplay the nature and authority of the documents that have emanated from the Holy See since that time."*

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Ironically, it is Mr. Palm who *downplays* the authority of the Church's official condemnation of heliocentrism in the Galileo case, and who fails to confront a very simple truth, one which any honest investigator can establish with certainty:

Has the Church in fact *taught and enforced geocentrism as a doctrine of the Faith?*

There is no doubt at all that [the answer to this question is "yes"](#).

The above link is definitive and conclusive on this score.

This condemnation has never been reversed by any subsequent official binding act of the magisterium.

There are very good reasons that would explain why it hasn't been, and it is upon this point that Mr. Palm's and similar arguments will continue to founder until the Church chooses in Her wisdom to clarify this highly anomalous episode.

Any formal reversal of the papal sentence of 1633 *would necessitate a formal repudiation, setting aside, or derogation of what is explicitly enforced therein as a unanimous consensus of the Fathers.*

No Pope, no Council, and no Congregation has ever done this.

Isn't that interesting?

It certainly appears that the doctrine has in fact been abandoned in practice, and even Popes have spoken out as if they personally believed the entire affair to have been a "[misunderstanding](#)".

But does abandonment or lack of emphasis, or *even non-magisterial allocutions on the part of a Pope*, suffice to reverse a binding act of the magisterium defining a given teaching as heretical, and publicly enforcing that definition throughout Christendom?

To suggest that it does involves, I submit, terrible dangers.

Such a subjective, ambiguous, and "ad hoc" approach would risk contributing to circumstances wherein Catholics might no longer be certain whether a given doctrine were "still true" (!), once it had begun to be attacked on scientific grounds, and once the scientific claims had achieved some (undefined) degree of support within the hierarchy or even, God help us, merely from within that so-called "magisterium of the theologians".

Hmmmmmm.....sorta like what we have now, with regard to [the doctrine of Scriptural inerrancy](#), or what is now gaining real traction via the International Theological Commission's attack on the doctrine of [the descent of the whole human race from Adam and Eve](#), (see especially the ITC's paragraph #63, with its claimed "*origin of the human species in Africa about 150,000 years ago in a humanoid population of common genetic lineage*"- fair warning!) or [what we had until recently](#), concerning the previously mentioned, astonishing (and now retracted) claim, advanced in a national bishops'

catechism, that “the covenant God made with the Jews through Moses remains eternally valid for them” (!)

It is true that “l’affaire Galileo”, and its condemnation of heliocentrism, presents us with a particularly challenging case since it seems to be the very first case of a doctrine being first called into question, and then abandoned, *specifically on grounds of alleged scientific disproof.*

In this light, it becomes even more interesting to note the lack of an official magisterial reversal, even when the (subsequently abandoned) scientific “proof” became widely accepted (even within the hierarchy).

It is certainly arguable that [this doctrine in fact constitutes just what St. Bellarmine says it does](#)- a unanimous (and hence irreformable) consensus of the Fathers concerning the true interpretation of Sacred Scripture:

*“I say that, as you know, the Council<sup>A.2</sup> 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 (ad litteram) 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 in all prudence the Church could encourage giving to Scripture a sense contrary to the holy Fathers and all the Latin and Greek commentators. Nor may it be answered that this is not a matter of faith, for if it is not a matter of faith from the point of view of the subject matter, it is on the part of the ones who have spoken. It would be just as heretical to deny that Abraham had two sons and Jacob twelve, as it would be to deny the virgin birth of Christ, for both are declared by the Holy Ghost through the mouths of the prophets and apostles.**” --(emphasis added)-- Letter of Cardinal Bellarmine to Foscarini, April 12, 1615*

If St. Bellarmine is correct, then the Holy Spirit Himself is the Guarantor of this teaching, and no power on Earth will ever be able to employ the authority of the magisterium to reverse it.

Others, like [Cardinal Poupard](#), take the opposite view, and claim that this teaching is “not irreformable”.

But, interestingly, this latter position is advanced not as a magisterial teaching (which must always be addressed explicitly to the faithful, as an exercise of the sacred magisterium), but instead *as an initiative of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences,*

suggesting that, far from a reversal of Catholic teaching, this is instead designed to address and improve relations between the Church and the scientific community- almost a type of “diplomatic” outreach!

What we can say for sure on this point, is that despite the essentially complete triumph of the (false) opinion that science had conclusively proved heliocentrism to be true by the 19th century, and despite numerous non-magisterial statements, [including the famous allocution of His Holiness Pope John Paul to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences on October 31, 1992](#), no subsequent act of the magisterium has ever in fact reversed the finding of [the papal condemnation](#)- that Galileo’s propositions concerning the motionlessness and centrality of the Sun, and the motion of the Earth about the Sun and upon its own axis, *are expressly contrary to the authentic interpretation of Scripture.*

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David Palm:

*"Fr. Brian Harrison, O.S. presents a good summary that supports what I have already laid out elsewhere:*

*In the case of Rome's 17th-century insistence on geocentrism, we have a teaching which: (a) was promulgated only in disciplinary documents, not in formally doctrinal ones; (b) was never promulgated directly and personally by any Pope, only indirectly, through the instrumentality of the Vatican Congregations of the Index and the Holy Office; (c) was endorsed by the papacy for only 141 years (1616-1757); (d) was never greeted with the emphatic and morally unanimous endorsement of the world's Bishops, only a respectful acquiescence; and (e) never in any case affected the concrete lives and destinies of any more than a handful of professional scientists such as Galileo. (Roma Locuta Est - Causa Finita Est)"*

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I thank Mr.Palm (as well as Father Harrison) for acknowledging that geocentrism was in fact insisted upon by the Holy See, was in fact enforced in disciplinary documents issued *with universal effect by the explicit command of Popes*, and was in fact considered a unanimous consensus of the Fathers, not only for the 16 centuries prior to its challenge by Galileo, but for well over a century *after* the challenge was officially declared heretical and enforced as such by papal sentence. It has never been reversed, and of course the mere abandonment in practice of reiteration or enforcement of a given teaching does nothing to formally reverse it. It is clear that Mr. Palm, as well as Father Harrison, are confronted with a doctrine that has been taught *and enforced* as part of

the ordinary magisterium of the Church. It is taught in catechisms, is unanimously held by the Fathers, and has been enforced by the Holy Office itself, in a sentence issued and enforced at the command of a Pope.

We have addressed the highly anomalous nature of this case, in terms of the subsequent abandonment in practice of reiteration of this teaching, and this allows us to conclude that Catholics today enjoy great latitude in considering these matters, especially since the scientific aspects of the case are radically changing even here and now, in ways that are literally astounding to those who might have imagined that the Church's teaching in the Galileo case had been scientifically falsified.

Instead, we are witnessing a rapid proliferation of profoundly unexpected, contemporary evidences of [a geocentric orientation in the cosmos](#) even on its [incomprehensibly vast largest scales](#).

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*David Palm:*

*"Father makes some important points. I would emphasize with him that the documents with which we are dealing are uniformly disciplinary—he is correct that the Catholic Church has never issued any doctrinal decree affirming, geocentrism."*

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The disciplinary nature of the document does nothing to establish Mr. Palm's case, since what that disciplinary document is enforcing is a ***doctrine***. If the Holy Office condemns a theologian today for teaching aberrant theology, how absurd would it be for a dissenter to suggest that this condemnation was never an official teaching of the Church, since it was only found in "disciplinary documents"?

Yet this is precisely the gambit upon which Mr. Palm relies here.

Instead, we find that, as the following excerpt from "Galileo Was Wrong" recounts, geocentrism is taught repeatedly in the Tridentine Catechism of Pope Paul V:

*"Pius V and the 1566 Catechism  
of the Council of Trent*

*One of the clearest official and authoritative statements from the Catholic Church defending the doctrine of geocentrism comes from the catechism issued under a decree of Pope Pius V, known as The Catechism of the Council of Trent or more simply, The Roman Catechism. It states:*



*...He also gave to the sun its brilliancy, and to the moon and stars their beauty; and that they might be for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years. He so ordered the celestial bodies in a certain and uniform course, that nothing varies more than their continual revolution, while nothing is more fixed than their variety.[1]*

*Although this wording is somewhat brief, it correctly describes the Church's historical position. It states very clearly that the "sun...the moon and stars" are "celestial bodies" which move with a "certain and uniform course" and does not say that the Earth moves among them. Rather, to expel any doubt about what objects are revolving the catechism adds that the sun, moon and stars have a "continual revolution." Although the unspecified reference to "revolution" might cause a heliocentrist to infer that the sun's revolution does not necessarily mean it is revolving around the Earth, a few pages later the catechism disallows that inference by stating the following:*

*The earth also God commanded to stand in the midst of the world, rooted in its own foundation and made the mountains ascend, and the plains descend into the place which he had founded for them....[2]*

*The Roman Catechism then says the following toward the end of the book:*

*But though God is present in all places and in all things, without being bound by any limits, as has been already said, yet in Sacred Scripture it is frequently said that He has His dwelling in heaven. And the reason is because the heavens which we see above our heads are the noblest part of the world, remain ever Incorruptible, surpass all other bodies in power, grandeur and beauty, and are endowed with fixed and regular motion.[3]*

*A few pages later the Catechism confirms its cosmology and the God who designed it:*

*...all goods both natural and supernatural, must be recognised as gifts given by Him from whom, as the Church proclaims, proceed all blessings. If the sun by its light, if the stars by their motion and revolutions, are of any advantage to man; if the air with which we are surrounded serves to sustain us...nay, those very causes which philosophers call secondary, we should regard as so many hands of God, wonderfully fashioned and fitted for our use, by means of which He distributes His blessings and diffuses them everywhere in profusion.[4]*

One of the more significant facts regarding the Roman Catechism's dogmatic assertion of geocentrism is that it remained unchanged in all subsequent editions, including the last Roman Latin version in 1907 and the 1914 edition published in Turin, which, incidentally, was just three years before the Fatima visions of 1917 showing the sun moving in the sky. Obviously, no editor saw fit to remove the geocentric teaching from the catechetical regimen of Catholic doctrine. The introduction states:

*The original manuscript of the Catechism is not extant. But of the innumerable Latin editions that have appeared, the earliest are: The Manutian (Rome, 1566), so called because it was printed by Paulus Manutius by command of Pope Pius V....Among later Latin editions may be mentioned the following issued at Rome: The edition of 1761, which contains the Encyclical of Clement XIII on the excellence and use of the Roman Catechism; the Propaganda editions of 1858, 1871 and 1907.[5]*

Also highly significant is the fact that the Roman Catechism makes a point of not only reiterating the dogmatic decrees from the Council of Trent, but its purpose was also to "examine every statement in the Catechism from the viewpoint of doctrine,"[6] which requires us to conclude that among the statements subjected to the prescribed analysis were the four geocentric catechetical teachings noted above. This is a clear indication that Pius V understood geocentrism as Catholic doctrine.

[1] *The Roman Catechism, The Catechism of the Council of Trent, translated by John A. McHugh, O.P. and Charles J. Callan, O.P., Tan Publishing, 1982, p. 27. This particular translation has a Nihil Obstat and Imprimatur, issued January 1923. The 1829 version says the same: "[God] so ordered the celestial orbs in a certain and constant course, that nothing can be seen more variable than their continual revolution, nothing more certain than that variety" (Catechism of the Council of Trent, Article 16, Chapter 2, translated by Fr. O'Donovan, Dublin, James Duffy and Sons, n. d., p. 38).*

[2] *Ibid., p. 28. The 1829 version reads: "God also, by his word, commanded the earth to stand in the midst of the world, 'founded upon its own basis'" (Article 18, Chapter 1). NB: the word "world" is from the Latin mundus, which means "universe." The clause "founded upon its own basis" may refer to the fact that, if the Earth were the universe's center of mass, it would be independent of all inertial forces, remaining in the center while neither resting upon or suspended by any force or object. As Job 26:7 says: "He... hangs the earth upon nothing."*

[3] *Ibid., pp. 511-512.*

[4] *Ibid., p. 516.*

[5] *Ibid.*, p. xxvi. Even later, namely 1969, is the French version of Roman Catechism, *Catechisme du Concile de Trente* (Paris: Itinéraires, 1969, p. 30), stating: *Dieu affermit aussi la terre sur sa base, et par sa parole Il lui fixa sa place au milieu du monde* (“The earth also God commanded to stand in the midst of the world, rooted in its own foundation”).

[6] *Ibid.*, p. xxv.”

Another problem for Mr. Palm here is that there is most definitely another “non-disciplinary document” which teaches geocentrism, [according to the magisterium](#).

It is called “the Bible”.

A moment’s reflection will disclose that such contortions of Mr. Palm’s are necessary *only if we first assume what in fact Mr. Palm can not prove*- i.e., that geocentrism is false, and that scientific evidence has proven the Church to be in error in its condemnation of Galileo.

This is a crucial point, and [we must examine it carefully](#).

No objective observer can question that the Church, in Her official role as teacher and defender of the Faith, condemned heliocentrism officially, and enforced that decision, in 1616 and again in 1633.

The justification given by the Church at that time was that **geocentrism was taught by Scripture, and was a unanimous interpretation of Scripture on the part of the Fathers**. (Please read the previous sentence three times, very slowly.)

Now some claim that this is not an “irreformable teaching”.

OK.

For the sake of argument let us assume that is reformable.

In order to assume this we have, of course, granted as a matter of basic logic that *it is in fact an authentic teaching in the first place*.

This being granted, it can only have been reformed by another magisterial teaching of at least equal authority.

No such act of magisterial teaching exists.

It is truly an interesting conundrum, isn't it?

Now I grant that those convinced that the Church erred in its condemnation would desire to protect the Church's charism of infallibility, by doing everything in their power to suggest that this teaching was reversed.....alas for them, it has never been reversed.

It has instead been abandoned.

The difference is more than merely crucial- the difference is infinite.

A formal magisterial teaching enjoys the protection of heaven itself.

The Catholic Church cannot bind the faithful to error in matters of Faith or morals.

Heaven will not permit it.

An abandonment, or decision not to reiterate or enforce, a formal magisterial teaching does not enjoy that same degree of heavenly protection.

This latter is a prudential and pastoral decision, and can reflect tactical or other concerns entirely separate from doctrine.

However, *if a given teaching contradicts the Faith once delivered*, then it will be seen to have been condemned in disciplinary documents of the Holy Office (now called the Congregation for the Doctrine of the faith), should that teaching pertinaciously continue.

[This is precisely what occurred in the case of Galileo.](#)

The Papal sentence against Galileo of 1633 explicitly affirms that *these are questions of the Faith*, and the actions taken against Galileo are taken on the basis that *Galileo has contradicted the Faith*.

Therefore the burden of proof resides with Mr. Palm, to show that the Church erred in its two crucial teachings; first, that Scripture teaches that the Sun moves and the Earth is at rest, and second, that this interpretation is a unanimous consensus of the Fathers.

He will not be able to do this.

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*David Palm:*

*"And he is right that there is no document specifically on geocentrism "promulgated directly and personally by any Pope". But that is not how the matter is presented by the neo-geocentrists. They consistently exaggerate the authority of the relevant documents."*

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It is unimportant what Mr. Palm may or may not have encountered in commbox chats. The facts of the case are as related above. If Mr. Palm wishes to establish his case, it is there that he must undertake the task.

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*David Palm:*

*"I first noticed this when dialoguing with one "Cassini" (a pseudonym) on the Catholic Answers Forum. I noticed that he consistently referred to the 1616 decree from the Congregation of the Index and the 1633 decree from the Congregation of the Holy Office as "papal decrees". This is an error of fact, plain and simple. I said in my reply to him:*

*the 1616 and 1633 decrees concerning Galileo were not "papal decrees". Period. They were issued by Roman congregations. A papal decree and a decree from a Roman congregation are two different things. No amount of cajoling can make one into the other. In fact, the Catholic Encyclopedia states that the 1633 decree "did not receive the pope's signature".*

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Again, notice how Mr. Palm attempts to insinuate that the Popes knew nothing and had less to do with the condemnation of Galileo. This is simply ludicrous, as any student of the Galileo affair will discover. There is no teaching of the Church that requires a signature on a piece of paper to exist before a Pope can issue a command or a disciplinary finding. He can, does, and has issued such findings through the relevant curial dicasteries, in this case the Holy Office.

The 1633 decision against Galileo is in fact a [\\*papal sentence\\*](#). It was issued with the approval, knowledge, and authority of a sitting Pope. It was issued with His Authority, and distributed by His command throughout Europe.

This episode is thoroughly covered in "*Galileo Was Wrong*":

*“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...[1]*

*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.[2]*

*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.[3]*

*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.[4]*

*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 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.[5]*

*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.[6]*

*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.[7]*

*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 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 22<sup>nd</sup> 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 defend heliocentrism was limited exclusively to Galileo. Certainly on the 25<sup>th</sup> of February 1616 he was forbidden in a special way to treat the subject. But on the 5<sup>th</sup> 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.[8]*

*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.*

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

[2] *Retrying Galileo*, pp. 26-28.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 27.

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

[5] 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.

[6] Descartes, *ibid.*, p. 280f, Favaro, *ibid.*, vol. 16, p. 56.

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

[8] John S. Daly, "The Theological Status of Heliocentrism," October 1997, unpublished and privately circulated paper, p. 12."

Regardless of what Mr. Palm might think about it, the Successors of Peter, entrusted with the defense of the Faith, determined that Galileo's ideas constituted a direct contradiction of the Faith, as determined by Sacred Scripture and the unanimous interpretation of the Fathers.

No subsequent act of the magisterium has ever reversed the authoritative acts of these Successors of Peter.

The ambiguity which certainly does exist, results from the subsequent decision to cease enforcing these decisions.

That subsequent decision is most certainly NOT a matter of Faith, but is instead a prudential and disciplinary decision, and hence could very easily turn out to have been merely tactical or prudential, or even wrong.

But it is clear that the Church believed heliocentrism to be heretical in 1633, and the Pope acted forcefully to ensure that this finding was enforced and upheld throughout Christendom.

It is up to Mr. Palm to show us when this finding was reversed.

He will not be able to do so.

There is nothing really requiring refutation that I can see in the balance of Mr. Palm's piece, since it amounts to a series of quibbles as to whether such and so correctly ascribes just the right amount of significance to this or that Pope's statement concerning this or that updating of the Index.

None of this addresses the pre-eminent truth that the Catholic Church, in Her supreme and universal Inquisition, convened at the command and under the authority of a Successor of Peter, explicitly affirmed what Saint Robert Bellarmine had already reported many years earlier- Galileo's heliocentric doctrines contradicted a unanimous consensus of the Fathers, and were *on those grounds alone* certainly contrary to the Faith.

It is up to Mr. Palm to deal with this truth, especially in light of the failure of **all** of the alleged scientific "proofs" of heliocentrism- proofs which certainly were employed to influence subsequent *disciplinary* decisions of Popes, including decisions related to the Index, but which *never* have been able to persuade any Pope even to this present day to reverse *magisterial* teaching.

It is up to the modern defenders of geocentrism to acknowledge that the highly anomalous nature of this affair- [including the rapidly accumulating scientific evidences showing a geocentric orientation in the cosmos on its largest scales](#)- constitute excellent

grounds upon which to extend the greatest presumption of latitude in examining this question, since the Church might well be called to clarify it as modern cosmological observations continue to provide [absolutely stunning evidence](#) of a [geocentric cosmos](#). Perhaps the claim of modernity to have dispensed with geocentrism as a teaching of the Faith- of Sacred Scripture itself- will instead prove to have been an instructive case of science advancing supposed “proofs” (which later are retracted) against a doctrine of the Faith, which stands vindicated as received and taught by the ordinary magisterium.

In any case, Mr. Palm will be unable to provide two things, though he try ever so much:

He will be unable to provide an official act of the magisterium overturning or reversing the official condemnation of heliocentrism in the papal sentence of 1633;

He will be unable to provide a scientific proof of heliocentrism.

As a matter of interest, it is worth noting that the official condemnation of heliocentrism as “heretical”, back in 1633, prophetically anticipates discoveries of science which would only occur many decades later, when observations showed that the Sun itself was certainly rotating upon its own axis, and allegedly moving with respect to the galactic center.

Surely even Mr. Palm would agree that the ambiguity surrounding this case would not exist, were it not for the claim of science to have definitively proven the Church’s teaching erroneous.

Surely he would agree that, in the absence of such claims of “proof”, the Church would never have had any reason to revisit the question.

Surely Mr. Palm would rejoice, along with the rest of the Catholic world, should science, after all these centuries, rediscover that the Church has been correct in Her understanding from the beginning, and that in fact She has received from the Holy Spirit a direct Revelation concerning the place of the Earth in the cosmos- [just as She has told us!](#)

I certainly would rejoice at such news, and at the powerfully salutary impact it would certainly have on the mind of modern, secular man, a mind thoroughly indoctrinated with smug, dismissive notions that the Church has been shown to be quite capable of error in Her interpretation of Scripture, or even- God forbid!- that Scripture itself could contain error.

I would rejoice to see the awesome power of Sacred Scripture reaffirmed by the observations of modern science.

Wouldn't you?

Well, get ready.

***It is happening***, and happening beyond even our most extravagant expectations.....