

# *The Pontifical Decrees Against the Doctrine of The Earth's Movement and the Ultramontane Defence of Them*

*Rev. William W. Roberts (1885)*

## **Introductory commentary by a Catholic layman in 2002**

- 1543** Nicolaus Copernicus published *De Revolutionibus Orbium Caelestium* (On the Revolutions of Spheres).  
**1534-1549** Reign of Pope Paul III, who was quite aware of Fr. Copernicus' work. The two were actually friends.  
**1605-1621** Reign of Pope Paul V, who issued a **1616** decree condemning pro-heliocentricity work of Galileo Galilei.  
**1623-1644** Reign of Pope Urban VIII, who issued a 2nd decree [**1633**] condemning Copernicanism.  
**1655-1657** Reign of Pope Alexander VII, who issued a Bull [**1664**] reinforcing that Copernicanism was heretical.  
**1740-1758** Reign of Pope Benedict XIV, who removed the Copernican books from the Index in **1740**.  
**1846-1878** Reign of Pope Pius IX, who called Vatican Council [**1869-70**] wherein Papal Infallibility was defined.

In 1870 the Vatican Council promulgated the dogma of Papal Infallibility. Until then, the infallibility of the Catholic Church's teachings had never been defined explicitly although accepted by the Fathers throughout its history.

This definition brought criticism from those outside the Church and even from some within. There were at least three reasons for this: (1) It decreed that God Himself dictated the teachings of the Catholic Church, a notion that other religions were prone to deny; (2) some did not want to elevate the papacy to an infallible level, even when declaring matters of faith and morals; (3) some believed the Church had erred on previous occasions and that therefore the definition was erroneous.

It is the third reason with which this book of Fr Roberts concerns itself.

In the wake of the promulgation of the Papal Infallibility dogma, a spate of books by both Protestants & Catholics were published, the latter supposedly listing the occasions where this infallibility had proven to be null and void.

At the top of each list is the Galileo case, perhaps the most infamous of all the Church's supposed 'failures' wherein the Church explicitly condemned the acceptance of the movement of the earth as *formal heresy*. Those lists alleged that the Galileo decision turned out to be a blunder of unimaginable proportions.

From generation to generation this tale is told, much to the delight of anti-Catholics and much to the inconvenience of Catholics. The tale is told not, mind you, because anyone within the Church now actually denies that the earth does move, nor do they deny that Galileo was right all along or that the Church of 1616/1633 couldn't tell faith from science, but because Catholics want their infallibility and their fixed sun and moving earth. As one can see, the only way to have this cake and at the same time eat it is to deny that the anti-Copernican decrees of 1616-1633 had any real authority at all, that they were like a bad joke gone wrong.

Perhaps the most honest history ever written of the Galileo case – and the casuistry that followed the alleged ‘proofs’ that earth moves and was not placed by God at the centre of the world, and that the sun stood still – was *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom*, 1896, a book by Andrew Dickson White.

He records that the history of the denial of infallibility of the 1616-1633 anti-Copernican decree began even before Galileo died. At first they resorted to a denial that the Copernican theory was declared formal heresy and conjured up a load of excuses that sufficed for the world who had no other facts to judge the matter on, but who simply trusted Churchmen to feed them the truth as expected.

But as the archives were opened up and the records themselves were made public, it was soon seen the faithful had been led astray. And as each objection to infallibility was shown to be a contradiction of the facts, the apologists became even more desperate.

Andrew White tells us what happens next:

...This contention, then, was at last utterly given up by honest Catholics themselves. In 1870 a Roman Catholic clergyman in England, the Rev. Mr Roberts, evidently thinking that the time had come to tell the truth, published a book entitled ***The Pontifical Decrees against the Earth's Movement***, and in this exhibited the incontrovertible evidences that the papacy had committed itself and its infallibility fully against the movement of the earth...

...Various theologians attempted to evade the force of the argument. Some like Dr Ward and Bouix took refuge in verbal niceties; some, like Dr Jeremiah Murphy, comforted themselves with declamation. The only result was, that in 1885 came another edition of the Rev. Mr Roberts's work, even more cogent than the first; and, besides this, an essay by that eminent Catholic, St George Mivart, acknowledging the Rev. Mr Roberts's position to be impregnable,<sup>1</sup> and declaring virtually that the Almighty allowed Pope and Church to fall into complete error regarding the Copernican theory, in order to teach them that science lies outside their province, and that the true priesthood of scientific truth rests with scientific investigators alone.

In spite, then, of all casuistry and special pleading, this sturdy honesty ended the controversy among Catholics themselves, so far as fair-minded men are concerned.<sup>2</sup>

And how that pleased the anti-Catholic Mr White. Now the problem facing faithful Catholics who have read Fr Roberts' book is this: How can the Church

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<sup>1</sup> *The Nineteenth Century*, July 1885.

<sup>2</sup> White, *A History...*, pp.165-6.

have its infallible dogma on infallibility while at the same time conceding that Fr Roberts was correct in his seemingly flawless assessment of the decrees?

Well, there is only one answer to this, as any Catholic worthy of the name should know, but be warned, for it will test your faith as nothing else has ever done.

The fact is that any definition on a matter of faith by the Church is infallible, even if it arises from the ordinary magisterium, let alone an extraordinary definition. This being so, if our Catholic faith is worth anything, then this definition is the truth guaranteed by God. Thus if the Scriptures, Fathers and Church (1616) say that the sun moves and that the earth does not but rests at the centre of the world, then that is the truth.

‘But, but, but’, I hear you say, ‘we all know that the earth moves around a fixed sun, so the Scriptures, the Fathers and the Church of 1616 are wrong.’ Is that a fact now? Well read this:

**I have known too, for a long time that we have no argument for the Copernican system, but I shall never dare to be the first to attack it. Don't rush into the wasps' nest. You will bring upon yourself the scorn of the thoughtless multitude...to come forth as the first against opinions, which the world has become fond of – I don't feel the courage.** Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859)<sup>3</sup>

Now I'll bet this is the first time you ever heard that. But no doubt you could teach von Humboldt a thing or two, yes? You can **prove** the earth moves, can't you? Well, no you can't, for it is something that cannot be proven, demonstrated or verified. Were you to even try, anyone that has studied the matter could run rings around your pathetic ‘proofs.’

You see, at best, mankind has accepted Earthmoving (Pythagoreanism-Copernicanism-heliocentrism) as the ‘preferred’ system. Yes, I know we all, every last one of us – popes, cardinals, kings, emperors, lords, teachers, academicians, students, etc. etc. – were led to believe the earth moves, but that, as von Humboldt and others knew, was never shown, that it was merely an intellectual illusion to inhibit the true interpretation of the Scriptures, to deny the wisdom of the Fathers, to undermine the authority of the Church and popes, to destroy the Catholic faith itself of the people.

No, Jesus was not exaggerating when He told us just how good a liar Satan really is. And how successful the hoax was, for the visible Church is now in pieces, all coherence gone, with *Genesis* considered a book of myth and poetry; with heresy and schism everywhere, right up to the Chair of Peter itself; with no hope other than the direct intervention of Our Lady to remedy the ignorance of billions.

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<sup>3</sup> Quoted by C Schoepffer: *The Earth Stands Fast*, New York: Ludwig, 1900, p. 59.

But back to this book, for we first have to convince you that the decree stating the earth does not move, was from God Himself, for that is what infallibility means. Once we see we cannot deny the decree did invoke the full authority of Church teaching, only then will we even entertain the idea of investigating how they hoaxed the world. That story is told in another place.

Be aware, however, that in Fr Roberts' thesis he too was convinced that Newton, Bradley and others had established a moving earth. He will assert this nonsense throughout, trying to establish a proof when all he has is relative theories, and this will lead him to believe the Church was in error and to deny the dogma of infallibility. It was Fr Roberts' *faith* in 'science' that caused him to reject the 1870 dogma of Papal Infallibility, plunging him into yet another heresy, but this time *formal heresy*.

Boy, didn't Satan set a trap-and-a-half for those who prefer human reasoning to the 1616 declaration of the Church? And if we think this is frightening, consider from whom Fr Roberts took his cue, from where this heresy received its stamp of approval for Catholics. Why from none other than the papacy itself. You see it was Pope Benedict XIV in 1740 who first gave the nod to accepting alleged 'proof' that the earth moved, an endorsement that was given full and open approval in 1820 by Pope Pius VII and the Holy Office, even against the objection of one canonical expert.

## **SUMMARY**

The importance of Fr Roberts' book cannot be overstated. It alone, among the thousands and thousands of books, articles and debates of the past 350 years, gives us the full authority of the 1616, 1633 and 1664 decrees and Bull. Once this is admitted then there is only one option left for Catholics who have faith that the Holy Ghost did/does guide the Church, the Pope when deciding matters of faith.

Fr Roberts' book does not give us every detail of the affair that has destroyed the faith of billions, but they are recorded elsewhere.

We can only hope and pray that Fr Roberts died with something different in his heart and that the Copernican heresy did not take one more soul to damnation for all eternity. Yes, such were/are the consequences of the Galileo affair, for what we are dealing with are matters of supreme importance for the salvation of souls.

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**2002 A.D.**