

The Theological Status of Heliocentrism

Chapter 1

Background

It is a matter of common knowledge that in the early seventeenth century the authorities of the Catholic Church condemned the mathematician and scientist Galileo Galilei for advancing the doctrine of heliocentrism: that the sun is stationary and that the earth, with the other planets, revolves around it. This doctrine had been taught among the ancients by Pythagoras and renewed at the dawn of the Renaissance (two generations before Galileo) by Copernicus, but had never been *widely* accepted. After the so-called Reformation Copernicanism was renewed on the part of some scientists, led by Galileo in the Catholic world and Kepler in the Protestant world, no less to the dismay of the religious authorities of the Catholics than of the Protestants. Notwithstanding its rejection as incompatible with Holy Scripture, heliocentric scientists continued to amass arguments in favour of their scheme and to interpret the many astronomical discoveries consequent upon the invention and development of the telescope in terms of heliocentrism until with the popularisation of Newton's discoveries and theories in the years around 1700 it became evident that heliocentrism commanded the vast mass of scientific approval while geocentrism was heavily on the defensive. The theological and scientific debate continued to wrangle for many years afterwards, but geocentrists were fighting a rear-guard action, though it was probably not until about 1850 that there remained no serious scientific minds attached to geocentrism.

The rising tide of heliocentrism obviously embarrassed the authorities of the Catholic Church which had condemned Galileo, especially as remaining geocentric scientists were unable to provide a defence of the Church's position sufficiently satisfying to avoid placing great strain on the conscience of any Catholic familiar with the scientific debate and considering himself obliged by the Church's decisions to reject heliocentrism.

From the early nineteenth century onwards it has been more or less universally admitted among Catholic scholars that Catholics are free to espouse heliocentric doctrine and in practice almost all have done so. While this relieved the pressure of requiring Catholic scientists to reject heliocentrism despite its being commonly accepted as an established scientific truth, it created the new embarrassment of explaining how the Church had changed her mind and authorised her faithful to believe what they had previously been forbidden to believe on the grounds that it was incompatible with the Divine revelation contained in Holy Scripture committed to the authoritative interpretation of the Church.

The debate on this topic has raged ever since and shows no sign of dying down: Protestants and atheists have used it as an argument to refute the Church's claim to inerrancy; Gallicans and anti-infallibilist Catholics prior to 1870 and the schismatic "Old Catholics" subsequent to 1870¹ used it to argue against the personal infallibility of the Roman Pontiff, and theologians attempting to defend the Church by arguing that the condemnation of Galileo did not engage the Church's authority or impose an obligation in conscience on the faithful to hold geocentrism as true have of course laid themselves open to the argument of liberal

¹ The year in which papal infallibility was solemnly defined to be a dogma by the Vatican Council.

Catholics or would-be Catholics that they are therefore free to reject other decrees of the Holy See on any topic from scriptural interpretation to the immorality of contraception.

In recent years the situation has been complicated by a new element in the scientific state of the debate. A geocentrist counter-attack has been lodged against the seemingly unshakeable ascendant held for more than two centuries by heliocentrism and the scientifically uneducated are waking up in increasing numbers to the discovery that hardly any serious scientist continues to hold that heliocentrism has been established by certain proof; that most establishment scientists now consider the debate between heliocentrism and geocentrism to be, in terms of available scientific evidence, arbitrary and subjective, depending merely on which point of view one wishes to take,² and that the only strictly valid experimental evidence so far obtained has been in favour of geocentrism.

Against this background N. M. Gwynne of Britons Catholic Library published his detailed study entitled *Galileo versus the Geocentric Theory of the Universe* in around 1980. This study was, to the best of our knowledge, literally epoch-making in that it brought the new scientific evidence to the attention of Catholic-minded scholars and directly or indirectly gave rise to the now increasing body of those who hold, with N. M. Gwynne, that the Church was quite right to condemn Galileo as his thesis was not only blatantly contrary to Holy Writ, but is now also demonstrably false in terms of natural science. In November 1986 a supplement to this study was produced by Britons Catholic Library entitled *Galileo's Theory is Heretical*. This was circulated as a supplement to Britons Catholic Library *Letter No. 4*, volume 4 part 3. It does not discuss the scientific evidence, which had already been covered in N. M. Gwynne's earlier paper, but attempts to evaluate the theological status of heliocentrism from the viewpoint of the Church's teaching, concluding that the Church has condemned heliocentrism as heretical by a decree which, though not infallible, is nonetheless obligatory in conscience and implying that this decree remains in force.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s the scientific debate has progressed: several learned books and many learned articles have been written defending geocentrism and demonstrating its compatibility with all known evidence, while also developing different explanations of some difficult-to-understand phenomena, making N. M. Gwynne's original study rather out-dated, though still of immense value.

Of late it is the question of the theological status of heliocentrism which has begun to be debated anew among faithful Catholics, particularly as a result of the circulation (*not* by Britons Catholic Library) among them of a booklet published first in 1870 and then, in much expanded form, in 1885, entitled *The Pontifical Decrees Against the Doctrine of the Earth's Movement and the Ultramontane Defence of Them* by Father W. W. Roberts. In brief Father Roberts seems to have been a Catholic priest who had difficulty in admitting the dogma of papal infallibility, or at least wished to understand the Church's doctrinal authority in the most minimising sense possible. A convinced heliocentrist (and who was not in the 1870s and 1880s?), he studies the Church's decrees against heliocentrism and the various arguments advanced by Catholic theologians who showed that they did not truly engage the Church's authority and he has no difficulty in demonstrating that papal doctrinal authority was most

² The exact position taken by the ecclesiastical censors who corrected Copernicus' celebrated *De Revolutionibus Orbium Caelestium* when it was republished after the condemnation of heliocentrism.

heavily engaged in the condemnation and that any attempts to pretend otherwise must lead to the conclusion that Catholics are free to reject numerous decrees of the Holy See which the Holy See itself has clearly and repeatedly insisted that they are gravely bound in conscience to accept.

It is natural that those who hold, as we do, that heliocentrism is for practical purposes now scientifically a dead duck and has, in any event, always been irreconcilable with the Scriptures, should have taken pleasure in reading Father Roberts' booklet and concluding that he was perfectly right in his evaluation of the status of the Church's doctrinal condemnations of heliocentrism and wrong only in the conclusions he drew from this fact, supposing it to be a disproof of the Divine protection of the popes from error whereas for any orthodox Catholic the recognition of an irresolvable conflict between authoritative doctrinal decrees of the Church and a scientific theory (however well established it may seem to be) ought to lead only to the conclusion that the scientific theory is false – a fact which in the case of heliocentrism is now well established. Instead of discomfiting the Church, therefore, Father Roberts has caused a glow of pride in many traditional Catholics in the 1990s reflecting on the thought that just where the Church had been thought by the world to have been most blatantly wrong, she has now been most triumphantly vindicated.

Since Father Roberts goes substantially further than we ourselves went in our paper *Galileo's Theory is Heretical* (he argues that the condemnation of heliocentrism was *ex cathedra* and infallible, requiring all Catholics to believe geocentrism by an act of Divine and Catholic faith) it is not surprising that we have received a number of requests for our opinion of his study. And in fact it suits us well to return to this topic because Father Roberts' study, despite its many correct elements, has more clearly brought home to us the necessity of reviewing our own position on this topic with a view to answering a crucial question which hitherto seems to have escaped the attention of Catholic neo-geocentrists. The question we are referring to is this: if heliocentrism was infallibly, or at least authoritatively, condemned by the Holy See, how is it that the Church has subsequently tolerated the espousal of heliocentrism by Catholics? And whatever answer may be given to this question, does this not inevitably diminish the pride which geocentrist Catholics must take in the Church's stance to find that after her initially vehement opposition to heliocentrism, she seems subsequently to have been so lax in its regard?

We have therefore decided to embark on a new and much fuller appraisal of the evidence relative to the theological status of heliocentrism at every stage in the evolution of the question. We shall undertake this first by stating without commentary the relevant data in chronological order, before moving on to the question of how they have been evaluated by theologians over the years and the evaluation which seems to us to impose itself.

Chapter 2

Documents and Facts Bearing Upon the Church's Attitude to Heliocentrism

24th May 1543: Nicolas Copernicus' *De Revolutionibus Orbium Caelestium* is published with ecclesiastical approval on the day of its author's death. The study argues in favour of heliocentrism in several places but is prefixed by a preface explaining that heliocentrism is advanced only hypothetically. This preface was commonly assumed for some years to have been written by Copernicus himself, though it is now established that its true author was Osiander.

18th February 1564: Galileo Galilei is born at Pisa.

1600: Giordano Bruno is tried for heresy. During his trial the Consultors of the Inquisition listed among the unorthodox propositions taught in his writings several in favour of heliocentrism, based on Copernicus. Pope Clement VIII deleted these from the list of propositions he was to abjure. Bruno was burned at the stake.

1613: Galileo publishes *Letter to Padre Castelli* in which he discusses the scriptural and theological arguments being advanced against the heliocentric system which was then gaining ground but remained a minority view, rejected both on scientific and religious grounds by the majority. Cardinal Sfondrato submitted this letter to the theological Consultors of the Holy Office: their report was mild.

End of March, 1615: Father Caccini, O.P. formally denounces Galileo to the Holy Office.

12th April 1615: Cardinal Bellarmine (later St. Robert) writes to Father Paolo Foscarini, a Carmelite who had presented him with a copy of his recently published study favourable to heliocentrism. Bellarmine, writing in his private capacity as theological adviser, but with intimate knowledge of the reflections of the Consultors of the Holy See and the pope behind the scenes and his own studies, provoked by the recent heliocentric movement, implicitly criticises Foscarini for not restricting himself to a hypothetical presentation. He says that there is no objection to the presentation of scientific arguments claiming to show that the heliocentric hypothesis better "saved the appearances"³ than the existing Ptolemaic geocentric system. He says that to advance heliocentrism *as true* is injurious to the Catholic Faith because it contradicts the Scriptures and he refers to various passages of the Scriptures which are difficult to reconcile with heliocentrism. He refutes Foscarini's argument that Scriptural statements in favour of geocentrism are not a matter of faith because scientific rather than theological in nature, pointing out that the fact of revelation by Almighty God automatically gives a theological aspect to any fact however un-theological it may

³ An astronomical hypothesis has been declared from antiquity to "save the appearances" insofar as it is strictly compatible with all observed phenomena. Until comparatively recent times it was generally admitted that neither geocentrism nor heliocentrism could be proved in absolute terms and that the case for each could be evaluated only according to its capacity to "save the appearances" more or less successfully and more or less simply. The Danish astronomer Tycho Brahe (1546-1601) established a geocentric astronomical hypothesis intended to save the appearances better than the traditional Ptolemaic system without accepting heliocentrism. Most twentieth century geocentrists hold some variation of the Tychonian system.

appear in itself. He acknowledges that if there were real proof in favour of heliocentrism it would be necessary to “proceed with great circumspection in explaining passages of Scripture which appear to teach the contrary”, but refuses to believe that any such proofs exist or could be found.

2nd May 1615: Galileo’s friend Monsignor Dini understands from St. Robert Bellarmine’s letter which had been circulated that “one point has been made clear: one can write as a mathematician and under the form of an hypothesis⁴ as it is said that Copernicus did; one can write freely provided one does not enter into the sacristy.”

Summer 1615: Galileo writes an expanded version of his public letter to Father Castelli, addressed to the Grand Duchess Christina of Lorraine. He continues to hold forth on the theological aspect of the controversy instead of restricting himself to scientific evidence and an hypothetical presentation as he had been advised.

25th November 1615: Galileo’s study *Delle Machie Solari* is published at Rome.

7th December 1615: Galileo arrives at Rome himself with his newly-perfected telescope and attracts great interest on the part of all learned men of the city. He is received with respect and friendship by many cardinals including St. Robert Bellarmine, and by the Pope. Many friends advise him to keep his treatment of heliocentrism hypothetical and to claim only that heliocentrism is the best means of saving the appearances: one of those who advised him thus is Cardinal Barberini who became a particular friend of his but was later, as Pope Urban VIII, to condemn him in 1633.

16th February 1616: Galileo is aware that heliocentrism is the subject of a theological evaluation by the Holy Office and writes to his friend Monsignor Dini a long letter in which he wonders how it is possible to think of condemning the theory of Copernicus in view of the good reception it had received under Pope Paul III and expresses the hope that his friends will prevent the Holy Office from such an act, while nevertheless expressing perfectly Catholic dispositions of submission to any condemnation which might be forthcoming: “I am in the intimate disposition of plucking out my eye in order not to be scandalised rather than resisting my superiors and injuring my soul by maintaining in their despite that which at present seems to me evident – that which I believe I am touching with my hand.”

⁴ Already it seems that heliocentrists may have been clutching at the ambiguity contained in the concept of a scientific hypothesis. A scientific proposition may be advanced as a hypothesis in two different senses: it may be admittedly unproved but presented as potentially provable and possibly or even probably true, or it may be put forward with no pretence at truth or conformity to reality but merely as helpful in making calculations or predictions. What Bellarmine authorised was clearly the latter sort of hypothesis which is equivalent to the hypothetical way in which even believers in heliocentrism today sometimes use the geocentric hypothesis for practical purposes. (“We therefore teach navigators that the stars are fixed to the Celestial Sphere, which is centred on a fixed Earth, and around which it rotates in accordance with laws clearly deducible from common sense observation. The Sun and Moon move across the inner surface of this sphere, and hence perforce go around the Earth.” – Letter from Darcy Reddyhoff instructor in aeronautical navigation at the Royal Air Force Academy, Cranwell, England; *New Scientist*, 16 August 1979, p.543.) For confirmation that the Church’s permission to present heliocentrism as a hypothesis referred only to its presentation as a hypothesis *known to be untrue* used to facilitate calculations, see Fr. Roberts, *op.cit.*, p. 110; Melchior Inchofer: *Tractatus Syllepticus*, pp.48-50; Palaccus: *Anticopernicus Catholicus*, ix, p.5.

20th February 1616: To another friend Galileo writes in less edifying terms: “I shall succeed in unmasking their frauds; I shall oppose them and I shall prevent any declaration which could give rise to a scandal for the Church.”

24th February 1616: The eleven theologian-qualifiers of the Holy Office meet to consider the theological qualifications proper to be attached to the following propositions:

(i) The sun is the centre of the universe (“mundi”) and absolutely immobile in local motion.

(ii) The earth is not the centre of the universe (“mundi”); it is not immobile but turns on itself with a diurnal movement.

All unanimously censure the first proposition as “foolish, absurd in philosophy [i.e. scientifically untenable] and formally heretical on the grounds of expressly contradicting the statements of Holy Scripture in many places according to the proper meaning of the words, the common exposition and the understanding of the Holy Fathers and learned theologians”; the second proposition they unanimously censured as likewise “absurd in philosophy” and theologically “at least erroneous in faith”.

25th February 1616: Pope Paul V is officially apprised of this theological qualification and confirms it, ordering Cardinal Bellarmine to summon Galileo and (i) warn him to abandon the said opinions; should he refuse to obey, (ii) order him to abstain from teaching, defending or treating of this doctrine and opinion in any way; and, should he not acquiesce even in this, (iii) to imprison him.

26th February 1616: Cardinal Bellarmine summons Galileo to his home and before witnesses transmits the Pope’s orders, commanding him in the name of the Pope and of the whole Congregation of the Holy Office to abandon⁵ the position in question and no more to hold, teach or defend it on pain of being proceeded against by the Holy Office. Galileo promises to obey.

3rd March 1616: Bellarmine reports Galileo’s submission to the Pope.

4th March 1616: Pietro Guicciardini, Tuscan Ambassador to the Holy See, reports to the Grand Duke that Pope Paul V and Bellarmine consider Galileo’s opinion to be erroneous and heretical and intend to hold a Congregation to declare it so.

5th March 1616: The Congregation of the Index publishes a decree on the order of Pope Paul

⁵ It must be clearly understood that Galileo himself was in no way condemned, none of his writings were censured and his orthodoxy and docility to the authority of the Church were in no way called into question. This was because until the Holy Office had denounced heliocentrism as unorthodox it was possible to hold its tenets in perfectly good faith, believing them to be compatible with Catholicism, as indeed a number of prominent ecclesiastics did as well as Galileo. It would thus not have been possible to condemn Galileo personally for errors which were presumed to be merely material. His writings on this subject could have been specifically condemned, but out of respect for his high esteem and contribution to scientific progress and perhaps the need to maintain cordial relations with the Duke of Tuscany who had patronised his subject Galileo, it was preferred to make no specific mention of Galileo’s writings in the condemnation which followed.

V condemning absolutely the study of Father Foscarini referred to above and prohibiting circulation of the writings of Copernicus and Zunica until they had been corrected; it also forbids in general all books teaching the doctrine of the immobility of the sun. It makes no specific mention of Galileo or his writings. The decree explains that the reason for the condemnation is that the doctrine of the immobility of the sun is “false and in absolute contradiction with the Holy Scripture”, but it does not use the word “heretical”. These edicts were published by the Master of the Apostolic Palace on the orders of the Pope.

9th or 11th March 1616: Pope Paul V receives Galileo in honourable audience.

26th May 1616: Bellarmine furnishes Galileo with a testimonial whereby to refute allegations of his adversaries that he had been obliged by the Holy Office to recant and abjure his doctrines. Bellarmine’s certificate declared that Galileo had made no abjuration and incurred no penance but that “the declaration made by the Holy Father and published by the Sacred Congregation of the Index was intimated to him, wherein it is declared that the doctrine attributed to Copernicus that the earth moves around the sun and that the sun is in the centre of the universe and does not move from east to west is contrary to the Holy Scriptures, and therefore cannot be defended or held.”

1620: The *De Revolutionibus Orbium Caelestium* of Copernicus is reprinted at Rome with ecclesiastical permission and containing a *monitum* addressed to the reader and certain corrections to the text in order that its expressions favourable to heliocentrism should be understood only as a hypothesis proposed on account of its potential practical utility. One amendment to the text specifically observes that geocentrism and heliocentrism are equally capable of “saving the appearances”—a position accepted as correct by many scientists in the 20th century.

1620-21: The Sacred Congregation of the Index condemns Kepler’s *Epitome Astronomiae Copernicanae*, the edict being signed by Bellarmine.

17th September 1621: Bellarmine dies.

1623: Galileo’s devoted friend Cardinal Barberini is elected Pope, taking the name Urban VIII. He accepts the dedication of Galileo’s work *Il Saggiatore*. A curious and not necessarily reliable letter of Galileo to a friend alleges that Urban, though disfavoured heliocentrism, had told Galileo that it had *not* been condemned as heretical and that he himself would never so condemn it. [Since Urban VIII subsequently *did* so condemn it, the entire allegation may be considered as very doubtful and we are not therefore entitled to list Pope Urban VIII among those who doubted whether the 1616 condemnation had branded heliocentrism as heretical.]

1624: Galileo starts writing a work in dialogue-form in which the three fictional participants discuss the controversy between heliocentrism and geocentrism and in which heliocentrism clearly emerges triumphant, though with some lip service still being paid to the question’s not having been *definitively* decided.

February 1632: The above study entitled *Dialogue of Galileo Galilei Concerning the Two Great Systems of the Universe, the Ptolemaic and the Copernican...* is published. The

work bears the ecclesiastical approval of Florence (where Galileo lived) and that of Rome. In practice the Roman *imprimatur* had been given by the new Master of the Sacred Apostolic Palace (responsible for representing the Pope in giving the *imprimatur* for books published in the diocese of Rome) who had not been informed that its author had been forbidden to defend heliocentrism or even to write on it in any way. Even so the approbation was granted only on condition that certain changes be made and these conditions had not been fulfilled. Pope Urban VIII appointed a Commission of theologians to examine the work and report on it.

September 1632: The theological Commission makes a highly unfavourable report. The Pope refers the case to the Inquisition and Galileo is summoned to Rome for trial. He prevaricates on grounds of health despite repeated summonses.

30th December 1632: Pope Urban, clearly unconvinced by Galileo's excuses [he had a reputation for trickiness] orders Galileo to be sent to Rome in chains if he will not come voluntarily and is able to travel at all.

February 1633: Galileo arrives in Rome voluntarily and apparently in good health.

April 1633: The trial begins. Its objects were to establish the objective meaning of the *Dialogue*, Galileo's beliefs on the subject of heliocentrism, and his intention in writing the *Dialogue*.

12th and 30th April and 10th May 1633: Galileo is examined and claims to have meant to discuss the subject hypothetically, putting the arguments for and against each system. He claims to have forgotten that in 1616 he had been forbidden to write on the subject of heliocentrism at all, alleging [correctly] that this had not been stated in Bellarmine's testimonial of 26th May 1616. Galileo admits that some parts of the *Dialogue* appear excessively favourable to heliocentrism but claims that this was no more than an act of foolish vanity by which he enjoyed trying to find credible arguments in favour of a system which was so difficult to defend. He declares that he himself did not believe in heliocentrism and had not believed it to be true since 1616 when he was apprised that it was condemned by the Church.

By this stage it was clear to all that Galileo's *Dialogue* was an illegal work by virtue of its clear and far from hypothetical favour for the heliocentric system, all works in favour of that theory having been forbidden by the Sacred Congregation of the Index on 5th March 1616. It was also clear that Galileo himself was triply culpable since he had (i) written a work clearly falling into a category condemned by the Sacred Congregation of the Index by a decree he was well aware of; (ii) by his own admission propounded heliocentrism in this work as being at least probable and defensible whereas even Bellarmine's testimonial which he advanced in his favour made it clear that the doctrine in question was condemned and could therefore not be considered in any way probable, and (iii) he had disobeyed the personal injunction he was under of never again writing on the topic of heliocentrism. What remained far from clear, however, was the issue which the tribunal considered graver yet: had he in fact *believed* the condemned doctrine to be true after it had been declared false? Though a number of writers have seriously maintained Galileo's sincerity in his claim that he had never believed heliocentrism to be *true* since 1616, the majority consider the opposite quite evident, maintaining that Galileo was obviously lying in his defence and that the *Dialogue* is

manifestly the work of a convinced heliocentrist. This was more or less the view taken by the judges, and its gravity consisted in the fact that if he had *believed* heliocentrism subsequent to 1616 he would have been condemned as a heretic. It was thought that the evidence contained in the *Dialogue* sufficed to create a very strong suspicion of heresy but not absolute proof and for this reason every effort was made to obtain a confession from the accused of his guilt on this point. Realising what was at stake, and no doubt advised by his many ecclesiastical friends, Galileo did not oblige.

16th June 1633: Pope Urban VIII orders a new interrogation of Galileo concerning his belief since 1616, requiring Galileo to be threatened with torture if he refused to admit the obvious truth that he *had* been a heliocentrist during this period. Probably unbeknown to Galileo the Pope had also ordered that torture was not in fact to be used and that if Galileo continued to maintain his innocence he was to be condemned not as an heretic but as vehemently suspect of heresy. In either case he would be required to abjure heliocentrism according to the customary formula used by those vehemently suspected of heresy in abjuring the errors of which they were thought to be guilty.

21st June 1633: Galileo continues to maintain his innocence on this point.

22nd June 1633: Galileo is sentenced as vehemently suspect of heresy and required to abjure heliocentrism and be absolved of the censures and penalties he was deemed to have incurred. Galileo made the abjuration in question and was accordingly absolved. He was sentenced to perpetual imprisonment of the Inquisition, a sentence commuted on the same day so that he was allowed to reside as a private gentleman for the rest of his life though limited in his movements and communications. The text of Galileo's condemnation and abjuration is lengthy but its careful perusal is necessary to understand the issues involved in establishing the mind of the Holy See in 1633 concerning the theological status of heliocentrism and the reader is requested at this point to refer to the full text included in Appendix I.

30th June 1633: The Pope orders a copy of the decree including the condemnation and abjuration of Galileo to be sent to all Nuncios and all Inquisitors, to be drawn especially to the attention of mathematicians of the area for which each of them was responsible and most especially in Galileo's city of Florence. This order was carried out and the recipients in turn acknowledged reception.

8th January 1642: Galileo dies, still in receipt of a regular pension awarded him by the Holy See before his fall from grace. Pope Urban VIII rejects the proposal to erect a monument to him in the Basilica of the Holy Cross at Florence.

March 1664: Pope Alexander VII promulgates his *Index Librorum Prohibitorum Alexandri VII Pontificis Maximi jussu editus* prefaced by a papal bull in which he directs the entire Index to be deemed part of the bull itself and sharing its directly papal authority. This Index includes all previous condemnations of geocentric books in general and in particular and is confirmed and approved with apostolic authority.

1665: Pope Alexander VII publishes a new Index in which are forbidden "all books and any booklets, periodicals, compositions, consultations, letters, glosses, opuscula, speeches, replies, treatises, whether printed or in manuscript, containing and treating the

following subjects or about the following subjects...the mobility of the earth and the immobility of the sun.”

14th June 1734: The Holy Office under Pope Clement XII finally authorises the erection of the monument to Galileo at Florence.

1742: Catholic mathematicians, Fathers le Seur and Jacquier of the Franciscan Minims publish with ecclesiastical approbation a text of Newton’s *Principia* with annotated explanations, prefaced by the following note:

“Newton in this third book assumes the hypothesis of the earth’s movement. The author’s propositions could not be explained except on the same hypothesis. Hence we have been obliged to put on a character not our own. But we profess obedience to the decrees, made by the Supreme Pontiff against the movement of the earth.”

16th April 1757: The scholar-pope Benedict XIV in recognition of the new status held by heliocentrism in the scholarly world since the writings of Isaac Newton suspends the decrees of the Congregation of the Index against heliocentric works.

1820: A Canon Settele applies for the Roman *Imprimatur* from Mgr. Anfossi to authorise publication of his openly heliocentric *Elements d’Astronomie*. Anfossi refuses this, but Settele appeals to Pope Pius VII who upholds the appeal and allows publication.

11th September 1822: The Sacred Congregation of the Inquisition decides that the printing of books teaching the movement of the earth would thenceforth be permitted at Rome.

Chapter 3

Different Interpretations of the Implications of the Foregoing Data

There have been numerous attempts to explain, or more often explain *away*, the acts and decrees of the Holy See mentioned above relating to heliocentrism. A good many of them were put forward by writers of little scholarly competence anxious to bury what seemed to them an ignominious episode in the Church's history either by pretending that the decrees did not mean what they appeared to mean or that they lacked the authority they appeared to have. As often as not we are obliged, to avoid attributing deliberate dishonesty to these writers, to assume that they were ignorant of the most elementary facts already mentioned above. We begin by mentioning those theories most blatantly incompatible with the truth because it is as well to have them dismissed from the start so that we shall be unencumbered in devoting fuller attention to those explanations more worthy of serious attention.

First, it has been claimed that the two Sacred Congregations who acted in this affair, namely the Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office and the Sacred Congregation of the Index acted in their private capacity and without papal approval. Authors alleging this⁶ have concluded generally that the anti-heliocentric decrees did not, therefore, engage the Church's teaching authority, and in more extreme cases it has even been alleged that the decrees were invalid because *ultra vires*. This position is untenable because, as we have seen, no single act of the Sacred Congregations involved took place without the fullest authorisation 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 22nd 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 favour of heliocentrism in the two editions of the Alexandrine *Index of Forbidden Books*.

Writers such as Canon Fabri, S.J., Amort and W. G. Ward of the *Dublin Review* claimed that the Roman decrees we have listed above left Catholic scientists free to find evidence in support of heliocentrism which had not been condemned as false but merely forbidden as dangerous pending the discovery of further evidence in favour of it.⁷ This notion is perfectly impossible to reconcile with the facts: the 1633 condemnation of Galileo rebuked him especially for having (on his own admission) dared to defend heliocentrism as a *probable* opinion notwithstanding his having been apprised of its official theological qualification as heretical because contrary to Holy Scripture – a qualification which he knew had been

⁶ The best-known of the school being Henri de l'Epinois.

⁷ It is only fair to acknowledge that this misunderstanding was current from the time of Galileo's condemnation onwards, having deceived several learned men who ought to have known better. Examples are given by Cardinal Franzelin: *De Divina Traditione...*, (1875), p. 156, ft. 1). But error remains error no matter how good its pedigree: no theologian, much less the Holy Office, has even condemned a proposition as *heretical* merely because sufficient evidence in its favour has not yet been forthcoming and while recognising that it may eventually prove correct.

declared by the Pope himself. The theologian-qualifiers of the Holy Office censured heliocentrism as heretical on 24th February 1616; this qualification was confirmed by the Pope and communicated on his orders to Galileo the following day with orders therefore to refrain from holding that opinion in any way. On 5th March in the same year the Sacred Congregation of the Index condemned all heliocentric writings on the grounds of their being contrary to Holy Scripture. The sentence and condemnation of Galileo on 22nd June 1633 by the Holy Office includes a clear statement, as the grounds of the condemnation, that heliocentrism is heretical. No single detail in any of the official acts of the Holy See listed above 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 25th February 1616 he was forbidden in a special way to treat of the subject. But on 5th March 1616 *all* writings in favour 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 II 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.

Ward also argued that the grounds upon which heliocentrism was banned were the want of sufficient evidence in the scientific order at that time for rejecting the natural sense of Holy Scripture and that the prohibition was therefore no more than provisional. This is impossible to accept because (i) the decrees repeatedly mention the motive of condemnation as being that heliocentrism is false, heretical or *absolutely* contrary to Holy Scripture, and (ii) they specifically forbid the publication of any such studies as might permit astronomers to make known any further discoveries they might make or arguments they might adduce in favour of heliocentrism whereby the Holy See might have been induced to reverse its original decision if it had considered that decision to be merely provisional and based on evidence which might ultimately prove insufficient.

The canonist Father Bouix argued with much appearance of learning that the decrees were not strictly obligatory except in the sense that they required external obedience and respect to be paid to them, because although, as a matter of historical fact, the Pope had approved every step of every procedure, this fact was not indicated in the decrees which came before the Church merely in the name of the Sacred Congregations which promulgated them. In his study *The Pontifical Decrees Against the Doctrine of the Earth's Movement and the Ultramontane Defence of Them*, Father W. W. Roberts shows that it was *not* normal procedure in the early seventeenth century to make special mention of papal approval of Congregational decrees, distinguishing between those which had been specifically approved and those which had received only general approbation as subsequently became normal, and that correct understanding of Roman procedure required at that time the presumption that all such decrees were *specifically* approved by the Pope. But in any event it is quite certain that the Indexes of Forbidden Books published by Alexander VII in 1664 and 1665 were personal papal documents in which the Pope made his own the previous decrees condemning heliocentric writings as being incompatible with Catholic doctrine.

Not only W. G. Ward, but also writers such as Addis and Arnold in their celebrated *Catholic Dictionary*, argue that the condemnation of heliocentrism applied only to writings representing it as true, but not to those which presented it as merely probable or as a tenable hypothesis. But we have already seen that Galileo's argument that he had represented heliocentrism as no more than a probable or tenable opinion in his *Dialogue* was regarded not as a defence but an aggravation of his case in 1633 on the grounds that the Holy See had already unequivocally rejected the doctrine as incompatible with Holy Writ and that it could therefore no longer retain the slightest probability, the duty of every Catholic being to reject it without hesitation. Ward quoted St. Robert Bellarmine's letter to Father Foscarini in defence of this opinion, as the saint therein says that it is unobjectionable to write of heliocentrism as an hypothesis. But this fact is of no help to the argument because (i) it is quite plain from the context and the rest of what we know of Bellarmine's thinking on the subject that he was referring only to a *per impossibile* hypothesis, useful, perhaps, as a basis for making practical calculations, but in no way recognising heliocentrism as being even *possibly* true,⁸ and (ii) this letter was not written in 1624 as Ward alleged in his first article in the *Dublin Review* on this subject (the saintly author having been already three years dead by that time), nor in 1620 as he alleged in his second article, but in 1615, *before* the Holy See had pronounced definitively on the topic; and no statement of Bellarmine's can be traced subsequent to the 1616 decrees which could appear by any stretch of the imagination to attribute even hypothetical possibility to the heliocentric system.

And while we are on the subject of St. Robert Bellarmine and his letter to Father Foscarini let us invoke the saint's authority to dispose of one remaining untenable argument – namely that the Church's decrees condemning heliocentrism were invalid and created no obligation upon anyone on the grounds that the Church has no authority in the order of natural science. It is perfectly true that the Church's authority does not extend to the order of natural science and that therefore the Church cannot pronounce on whatever belongs *exclusively* to that order, or on anything *in so far as* it belongs to that order. The Church could not define the number of chemical elements, canonise the value of *pi* or forbid scientists to attempt to effect cold fusion, but she is entirely free to teach or legislate on any topic coming within her sacred field of competence even if that topic *simultaneously* belongs to the natural order. The Church could define that the Holy Land was formerly inhabited by lions even though no remains of lions in the Holy Land have been discovered, because the Bible repeatedly declares that lions once lived there. The Church could condemn immoral genetic experimentation, and could even forbid Catholic scientists to engage in a genetic experimentation which was not *intrinsically* immoral if she judged that it promoted an atmosphere likely to encourage immoral experimentation on the part of others. And in the case before us, while the original qualifiers of the Holy Office mentioned the manifest falsity of heliocentrism in the order of natural science, the basis of its ecclesiastical condemnation was the censure of heresy owing to its opposition to Holy Scripture. This is what Bellarmine peremptorily explained to Fr. Foscarini in the following words:

“It will not do to say that this is not a matter of faith, because though it may not be a matter of faith *ex parte objecti* or as regards the subject treated, yet it is a matter of faith *ex parte dicentis*, or as regards Him who announces it. Thus he who should deny that Abraham had two sons and Jacob twelve would be just as much a heretic as

⁸ See footnote 4.

a man who should deny the Virgin Birth of Christ, because it is the Holy Spirit who makes known both truths by the mouth of the Prophets and Apostles.”

Putting aside such inadmissible attempts to escape from facts, let us summarise what clearly emerges from the data we have rehearsed in the last section.

24th February 1616: The theological qualifiers of the Holy Office censure heliocentrism as heretical. This qualification is not in its own right an ecclesiastical condemnation, but serves as the basis for the authoritative acts which follow.

25th February 1616: Galileo is notified that the Holy See has censured heliocentrism as heretical (showing that the Pope had confirmed the censure in question) and ordered to desist from teaching it or holding it.

5th March 1616: The Sacred Congregation of the Index condemns all heliocentric writings on the grounds of their being contrary to Holy Scripture.

22nd June 1633: Galileo is condemned as vehemently suspect of heresy – *namely* of holding heliocentrism, and required to abjure it. The Pope orders the text of his condemnation and abjuration to be widely circulated in order to prevent others from falling into the same error.

1664 and 1665: Pope Alexander VII renews with full papal authority the condemnation of all works favouring heliocentrism.

These are the *ecclesiastical* and *authoritative* acts among those listed in Chapter 2.

Anyone who considers them objectively and studies them must conclude that heliocentrism was condemned in *globo*, together with all works in its favour, on the grounds of its opposition to Holy Scripture, by several decrees of the Sacred Congregation of the Index, all approved *in specie* by the Pope. The fact that the decrees were approved *in specie* by the Pope is made known to the Church at least *post factum* by Pope Alexander VII, though it was in fact always evident. These decrees, however, do not specifically use the word “heretical” of heliocentrism though in referring to its conflict with Holy Scripture they imply this censure. Furthermore, the Holy Office condemned Galileo for holding and defending heliocentrism (or at least for being vehemently suspect of having done so) and explicitly stated as the grounds of this condemnation the heretical status of heliocentrism. This decree refers to the authority of the Pope in condemning heliocentrism and is itself promulgated and circulated by papal mandate specifically to arrest the progress of heliocentrism in the minds of the faithful throughout the world.

Anyone who wishes to deny those facts is not *interpreting* the known data but denying them. We must therefore now devote our attention to the conflicting interpretations of these data which have been propounded by more serious authorities in full awareness of the facts. These authorities can be divided into three fundamental categories, notwithstanding disagreement on certain peripheral points among authors whom we shall place in the same category. The three broad categories of interpretation are as follows:

1. Heliocentrism was condemned as heretical by decrees at least one of which possessed *ex cathedra* or infallible status.

2. Heliocentrism was condemned as heretical by decrees which were only disciplinary or, if doctrinal, belonged only to the Ordinary Magisterium and were not protected by infallibility or irreversible.

3. Heliocentrism was condemned as heretical in a special sense of the word “heretical”, different from the definition given by standard Catholic theological authorities, and has never been recognised as heretical in the strict sense even by merely disciplinary decrees of the Holy See.

The third of these theses was, we may say, invented by Father Leon Garzend and is expounded by him in his five-hundred-and-forty-page study *L’Inquisition et l’Hérésie: Distinction de l’Hérésie Théologique et de l’Hérésie Inquisitoriale: A Propos del’Affaire Galilée* (Paris, Desclé, 1912), a work commonly considered more learned than judicious and as few have followed him in his theory we prefer to put it aside for separate consideration later and for the time being to address the crucial disagreement between the two mainstream interpretations, i.e., whether or not the condemnation of heliocentrism was protected by infallibility.

Chapter 4

The Principal Arguments in Favour of the Infallibility of the Condemnation of Heliocentrism

It must be clearly understood that those theologians who hold that heliocentrism was condemned *ex cathedra* do not mean by this to affirm that geocentrism is a defined dogma in the sense that the Immaculate Conception of our Blessed Lady is: for the definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception made into a dogma that which was not one before. They argue that the condemnation of heliocentrism constituted a solemn and authoritative declaration on the part of the Church's teaching authority that heliocentrism is incompatible with Divine revelation of which the Church is the custodian and which is contained in sacred tradition and in Sacred Scripture. In the case of the Immaculate Conception, the Church relies upon sacred tradition for her certitude in defining the dogma, while in the condemnation of heliocentrism she relied upon Sacred Scripture, committed to her authoritative interpretation, which she solemnly decreed to teach the opposite – geocentrism.

1. The word *heresy* was repeatedly used by the Church's authorities in their condemnation of heliocentrism and when it was not used it was clearly implied. Since a heresy is a proposition which contradicts a truth revealed by God and infallibly proposed by the Church as such for the belief of the faithful, it is impossible that the word heresy could have been used without implying the infallible or *ex cathedra* proposal of the Church. The theologian-qualifiers of the Holy Office determined heliocentrism to be 'heretical' in 1616 and the Pope ordered this information to be communicated to Galileo as authoritative. In 1620 the Sacred Congregation of the Index referred to heliocentrism as 'repugnant to the true and Catholic interpretation of Scripture' and in 1633 Galileo was condemned as vehemently suspect of *heresy* because of the strong evidence that he had returned to the doctrine of heliocentrism after its condemnation. The condemnation stated that heliocentrism had been "declared and defined to be contrary to Holy Scripture". The Pope ordered the text of the condemnation of Galileo and his abjuration in which heliocentrism is referred to as heretical to be widely circulated to avoid the spread of this error."

Value of this argument. This argument is of considerable weight. To impugn it one must perforce opt for one or other of the three following propositions: (i) in a number of official and public decrees the Church authorities deliberately applied the word "heretical" to a proposition which was not in fact so; (ii) heliocentrism was non-infallibly condemned with a censure which ordinarily implies an infallible intervention on the part of the Church's teaching authority; or (iii) the word "heretical" had a special meaning quite different from its ordinary theological definition in the Church's decrees.

2. "Galileo was required by a solemn decree approved and published by the Pope to abjure heliocentrism as a heresy condemned as such by the Church. 'The Pope never exacts absolute and unreserved assent to any doctrine from individual Catholics except when he exacts such assent from the whole body of Christians, otherwise he would himself destroy that unity of the faith which it is his office to maintain.' (W. G. Ward: Infallibility and the Council, *Dublin Review*, January 1870, p.200) It is as clear as daylight that if all Catholics had embraced this doctrine with unreserved assent...all Catholics would have held it to be of faith that heliocentrism is false, and thus the whole Church would so far have been in error in

its faith. But for the whole Church to be in error in any point it holds to be of faith is plainly irreconcilable with the passive infallibility claimed for it by theologians, or even with its claims to be infallible in its Ordinary Magisterium, for what it believes it will surely teach...” (Father W. W. Roberts: *The Pontifical Decrees Against the Doctrine of the Earth’s Movement*, p.16) This impossibility is clearly taught by standard Catholic theologians: “The Church cannot err, that is, what all the faithful hold to be of faith is necessarily true and of faith and similarly what all the bishops teach as belonging to the faith is necessarily true and of faith.” (St. Robert Bellarmine: *De Ecclesia*, book 3, chapter 14, article 3) “The Church cannot err in what she believes with certain faith, *even by invincible ignorance*; that also seems to be of faith, because if by invincible ignorance she could err, her entire faith would be doubtful and on individual points one might doubt whether or not she erred by ignorance, which could not be said of a Church which is ‘the pillar and ground of truth’ (*1 Tim. 3:15*), and to which the infallible assistance of the spirit of truth was promised by Christ her head and spouse: ‘When the Paraclete shall come He will teach you all truth.’ (*John 16:13*)” (Suarez: *De Fide*, disp. v, sec. 6)

Value of this argument. This argument is also of considerable weight, though less than the preceding one because it is based on an hypothesis which was not in practice realised: notwithstanding the efforts of the Holy See to exterminate all belief in heliocentrism, numerous Catholics including bishops undoubtedly did continue to believe it during this period, almost certainly including Bishop Piccolomini with whom Galileo lodged after his condemnation; and even if this had not been so it was perfectly possible for Catholics to reject heliocentrism without rejecting it as an infallibly condemned heresy. In fact those who rejected heliocentrism, as we shall shortly see, were divided into two groups, those who considered its condemnation to be infallible and irreversible and those who thought it to have less authority than this. Even so it is hard to escape from the view that it would be quite scandalous and difficult to reconcile with the respect Christ’s faithful must have for the Church’s authority to admit that it even *endeavoured* to bring about a universal consent in the Church regarding heliocentrism as contrary to Divine revelation and heretical if it was not so, whether or not the consensus in fact came about.

3. “Numerous theologians of the greatest weight have clearly held that the condemnation of heliocentrism *was ex cathedra*.”

(i) “If anyone today were to assert that the earth is mobile and the sun the centre of the universe and immobile, *he would be a heretic*, since this would be in contradiction to what was defined by the Sacred Congregation of the Most Holy Inquisition on 22nd June 1633 according to Caferr., in his *Synatagmata Vetustatis* for the day 22nd June.” (Ursaya (a highly respected theologian): *Criminal Institutions*, book 1, section 6)

(ii) “Very properly was the opinion of Copernicus, Pythagoras, Galileo and their followers concerning the movement of the earth and the stillness of the sun proscribed under Urban VIII in the year 1633 as contrary to Sacred Scripture, temerarious and heretical, as is recorded by Riccioli (in book 9 of his *Almagest*) and by Fortunato of Brescia (in *Mechanical Philosophy*, volume 2, treatise 1, dissertation 2, proposition 3...” Ferraris, Father Lucius: *Prompta Bibliotheca Canonica, Juridica, Moralis, Theologica, necnon Ascetica, Polemica, Rubricistica, Historica*, article “Mundus” new edition revised by abbé Migne under the patronage of Cardinal

Lambruschini later to become Pope Gregory XVI and published by the press of the Holy See)

(iii) In his work *Il Processo Originale Di Galileo Galilei*, pages xci-xciii, Professor Berti analyses an unpublished Latin treatise written by the Jesuit Father Melchior Inchofer entitled “Vindication of the Authority of the Sacred Tribunal of the Apostolic See Against the Neo-Pythagorean Movers of the Earth and Arresters of the Sun”. Father Inchofer, remarks Berti, “goes to as much pains to show that the sentence was put forth by the Pope *ex cathedra* as others today give themselves to demonstrate the opposite.” This is of particular interest since Father Inchofer was one of the Consultors of the Holy Office on whose opinions were based the ultimate condemnation of Galileo in 1633.

Value of this argument. This argument establishes as credible from the point of view of mainstream theologians the school of thought which regards heliocentrism as having been condemned *ex cathedra*. But it does no more than this, for there were certainly other theologians of equal or greater weight and number who specifically discountenanced the *ex cathedra* theory right from the beginning. Its weight is further diminished by the assurance of Pierre de Vregille in the *Dictionnaire Apologétique de la Foi Catholique* that Berti’s allegation that Father Inchofer held this position is unfounded. The testimony of Ursaya and Ferraris does not explicitly say that the condemnation was *ex cathedra* though it implies this, unless one is prepared to consider that a proposition can be heretical and those who embrace it heretics on the basis of a non-infallible judgement of the Church declaring it so.

4. “The Copernican system, since it is manifestly contrary to Sacred Scripture, even prescinding from other reasons, is to be rejected as totally heretical; for it is expressly stated in many places in Sacred Scripture that the sun moves.” (Ferraris, *loc.cit.*) In other words, heliocentrism may be considered as an infallibly condemned heresy irrespective of the status of the decrees of 1616, 1633, etc., condemning it, because it is contrary to Holy Scripture and the Church infallibly declares that the whole of the contents of Holy Scripture are true. Standard theologians hold that anyone who consciously rejects a proposition unambiguously taught in the Bible is a heretic, for all such propositions belong to the Church’s infallible teaching: “That person is a formal heretic who knowingly and willingly adheres to any error against the truth of the Catholic Faith after he has recognised this truth as having been sufficiently proposed to him and is aware that it is held by the rest of the universal Church as revealed. Such a Catholic truth would be whatever is openly contained in the Sacred Scriptures or evidently deduced from them,...” (Fr. J. Reuter: *Neo-Confessarius*, n. 198, ed. Fr. A. Lehmkuhl) This one quotation could be multiplied indefinitely and the authority of de Lugo (*De Virtute Divinae Fidei*, disp. xx., sect. ii, nn.58-9) is powerful in its favour.

Value of this argument. There are strong reasons for thinking that this was the basis of the 1616 evaluation by the theologian-qualifiers of the Holy Office of heliocentrism as heretical for a doctrine is properly termed heretical only when it contradicts a proposition which the Church infallibly teaches to be divinely revealed. Prior to 1616 the Church does not seem to have taught this in any way which could be described as infallible except by her general and infallible presentation of the whole of the contents of Holy Scripture as being the inerrant Word of God and therefore true in all respects, even historical and scientific as well as theological. Despite the many theologians who can be invoked in favour of this proposition it is no longer commonly held and therefore of little weight in favour of the conclusion that

heliocentrism is of itself heretical irrespective of any specific condemnation by the Church, though it seems to be of much greater weight in favour of taxing heliocentrism with some lesser theological censure. The position held by most recent theologians and acted on in practice by the Church's teaching authority in recent times is that truths contained manifestly in Holy Scripture but not *specifically* proposed as dogmas by the teaching authority of the Church are to be believed with Divine Faith but not with what is properly called "Divine *and Catholic* Faith". The consequence of this is that one who denied such a truth would be as guilty *in conscience* of denying God's veracity as if he were a heretic, but would not be technically guilty of the crime of heresy in the eyes of the Church until such time as the Church herself confirmed by her infallible Magisterium that the truth in question is indeed explicitly taught in Scripture. (See Cartechini: *De Valore Notarum Theologicarum...*, p.18; Garzend: *op.cit.*, Appendix III.)

As to the factual question of whether Holy Scripture does indeed unequivocally teach the geocentric system, we consider any attempt to deny the fact to share the same absurdity of those who would reconcile *Genesis* with evolution. In *Josue 10:12,13* is recounted the miracle by which, in order to prolong the day for the Israelites to defeat the five kings who attacked Gabaon, God arrested the movement of the sun and the moon: "And the sun and the moon stood still...the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down the space of one day."

A similar miracle is recounted at *4 Kings 20:1* when the prophet Isaias actually caused the sun to move *backwards* as a sign to Achaz. It is true that the text refers only to the retrograde motion of the shadow on the sundial which, on the heliocentric hypothesis, could equally have been produced by reversing the diurnal motion of the earth, but this interpretation is ruled out by *Isaias 38:8* which recounts the same event in objective terms: "And the sun returned ten lines by the degrees by which it was gone down."

While some of the other texts which naturally suppose a geocentric system (*Matthew 45:45* and *Ephesians 4:26*, for instance) could, at a stretch, be understood to refer to appearances and to employ common parlance without vouching for its scientific accuracy, this clearly does not apply to the foregoing or to *Psalms 103:5*: "Who hast founded the earth upon its own bases: it shall not be moved for ever and ever."

5. "I found it laid down by such distinguished representatives of the Ultramontane school as Cardenas, La Croix, Zaccaria, and Bouix, that Congregational decrees, confirmed by the Pope and published by his express order, emanate from the Pontiff in his capacity as Head of the Church and are *ex cathedra* in such sense as to make it infallibly certain that doctrines so propounded as true, are true. This, according to D. Bouix, is the opinion to be held. The contrary, though not condemned is, he says, '*futilis et certo falsa.*'" (Roberts: *op.cit.*, p.4) Father Roberts quotes at length from Bouix: *Tractatus de Curia Romana*, part 3, chapter 7, p.471, in confirmation of his claim that this reputable canonist indeed teaches that even congregational decrees may be infallible if specifically confirmed by the Pope (*loc.cit.*, pp.60-64) and, though we have not checked them, we suppose that the other theologians he names do indeed say the same thing.

Value of this argument. Catholic theologians certainly teach that the Pope may exercise his infallible Extraordinary Magisterium in any way he pleases and is limited to no precise form in doing so. What is essential is that he should make clear to the entire Church

that he is exercising the fullness of his pontifical teaching authority in definitively settling a point of doctrine and it is perfectly possible that he should do this by means of the decree of a Roman Congregation provided that he confirms it and orders its publication *informa specifica* rather than just with the general approbation papally given to most Congregational decisions.

But what is *possible* is not necessarily what happened in a specific case. The Pope may confirm *in forma specifica* a Congregational decree pronouncing on doctrine or touching on a doctrinal topic without manifesting to the Church the intention to teach it infallibly. To confirm that the condemnation of heliocentrism falls into the category in question it is necessary to exclude convincingly all other possibilities. Father Roberts has gone a long way towards showing that papal condemnation of the 1616 and 1633 decrees was indeed given *in forma specifica* and that, though this is not specifically mentioned therein, no one could reasonably have failed to realise that it was so; but a great weakness of this argument is found in the fact that none of the decrees in question was directly addressed to the universal Church except those emanating from the Inquisition which did not *directly* pronounce on doctrine, merely forbidding the *publication* of certain doctrines. Also the decrees condemning Galileo, in addition to their not being addressed to the universal Church, refer to the heretical status of heliocentrism as background information rather than as their direct object, a fact which would make them incapable of being doctrinal definitions of the point in question even if they *had* fulfilled the *other* conditions of infallibility (Cf. Cartechini, *op.cit.*, cap.3).

It may be worth noting that the decree promulgated in 1616 did not include the word “heretical”, although the 1633 judgement condemning Galileo did include it.

6. When the Holy See has condemned the erroneous teachings of named individuals in much the same way as it condemned Galileo and his doctrine of heliocentrism, it has *always*, even in recent years, spoken and acted both in the condemnation and in subsequent clarifications and decisions bearing on it, as though the condemnations were infallible and to be treated as such by all the faithful. Father Roberts supports this claim with detailed documentation referring to the condemnation of the works and opinions of Anthon Günther and of Professor Ubaghs of Louvain under Popes Gregory XVI and Pius IX. The facts may be briefly summarised as follows. The writings of Günther were condemned by an ordinary decree of the Sacred Congregation of the Index. This decree stated, in the usual formula, that the decision it contained had been ratified by the Pope and its publication ordered by him. Later on it became necessary for the Pope himself to address a brief to the Cardinal Archbishop of Cologne protesting at the failure of some Catholics to abandon the doctrines contained in those of Günther’s writings which had been condemned. In this brief, *Eximiam Tuam* of 15th June 1857 (Denzinger 1655-58), the Pope twice refers to the fact that the Decree of the Sacred Congregation of the Index had been approved “by his supreme authority” and “published by our order” and insists that “it plainly ought to have sufficed that the whole question should be judged finally decided [*penitus dirempta*’], and that all who boast of the Catholic profession should clearly and distinctly understand...that the doctrine contained in Günther’s books could not be considered sound.”

On the basis of the obvious analogy, Father Roberts and those who agree with his position on the Galileo controversy hold that the condemnation of Galileo and his heliocentric writings “plainly ought to have sufficed that the whole question should be judged finally decided...and that all who boast of the Catholic profession should clearly and distinctly understand...that the doctrine contained in Galileo’s books [i.e. heliocentrism] could not be

considered sound.”

Even more striking is the analogy of the condemnation of the doctrines of Professor Ubaghs of Louvain. In this case the Sacred Congregations of the Inquisition and of the Index were involved in condemnation of certain writings and erroneous doctrines of Professor Ubaghs, their decisions being ratified and confirmed in the ordinary way by Pope Pius IX. Some of the Louvain school then presented a similar objection to that which the Jansenists had used two centuries previously, arguing that Professor Ubaghs and they themselves did not hold the condemned doctrines and thus they were not to be found in Professor Ubaghs’ writings. This elicited further interventions of the Sacred Congregation pronouncing that the doctrines *were* contained in the writings of Professor Ubaghs and that editions of his writings subsequent to the editions condemned had not satisfactorily corrected the errors in question. This is significant in relation to the Galileo decree because whereas the condemnation of Professor Ubaghs’ doctrines was *theological* in nature, the question of whether or not the doctrines appeared in this or that edition of his writings is purely a question of fact in the natural order, quite as much as the question of the relative movements of the heavenly bodies. But various attempts to evade the force of the condemnation or to weaken its obligatory force, all made by Catholic scholars of great erudition, were repeatedly squashed by formal declarations made by Cardinal Patrizi in the name of Pope Pius IX that the original decrees certainly created an obligation on every Catholic utterly to reject the condemned opinions, not even holding them privately or remaining silent about the subject, nor implying that the subject was one upon which, with the passage of time, the Holy See might revise its judgement. (For a fuller account of this enlightening episode see Appendix II.)

Value of this argument. We think that Father Roberts establishes beyond the slightest cavil the strict analogy between the condemnation of Galileo and heliocentrism on the one hand and of Günther and Ubaghs and their doctrines on the other. It follows from this that if Pope Pius IX correctly stated that the latter two condemnations created a strict obligation in conscience for all Catholics to desist altogether from holding the opinions of the individuals condemned and to regard the matter as having been definitively settled by the Church’s judgement, the same moral duty binding all Catholics was created by the condemnation of Galileo and heliocentrism. This argument in our view makes it absolutely necessary for any Catholics holding that it was lawful to continue to believe in heliocentrism, at least privately, after the decrees of 1616 and 1633, to maintain that Pope Pius IX, when called upon to evaluate the obligation in conscience created by the decisions of his own Sacred Congregations on his behalf, gravely exaggerated it. This is naturally difficult to credit.

Father Roberts also maintains that a decree which claims to create a strict and universal obligation in conscience for all Catholics to reject a certain doctrine as false is thereby representing itself as infallible. “How, in the name of common sense, could a decree possibly erroneous have made it clear to all Catholics that the doctrine or the book prohibited could not be sound? And how could such a decree have plainly sufficed to determine the whole question at issue?” (*op.cit.*, p.5) While we think the question a very fair one, we do not consider this part of Father Roberts’ argument to be as conclusive as the first part, for Catholic theologians of the highest renown have long held more or less unanimously that it is possible for a non-fallible decree to create a conscientious obligation of assent to the doctrine taught therein. How and why this can be so is a subject we shall have occasion to discuss later and which for the time being we put to one side. We believe that we have stated as fairly as

possible the arguments in favour of the infallibility of the Church's condemnations of heliocentrism and we must now try to do equal justice to the case for the opposite view.

Chapter 5

The Principal Arguments Against the Infallibility of the Condemnation of Heliocentrism

1. Those who claim that heliocentrism is a condemned heresy must hold that one or more of the Church's pronouncements on this subject listed earlier constitute(s) an exercise of the papal Extraordinary Magisterium, in other words that it is an exercise of papal infallibility as this was defined by the 1870 Vatican Council.⁹ To evaluate whether this is so it is necessary to remind ourselves of the essential part of that definition:

We teach and define that it is a divinely revealed dogma that the Roman Pontiff, when he speaks *ex cathedra*, that is, when (i) exercising the office of shepherd and teacher (ii) of all Christians, (iii) by his supreme and apostolic authority (iv) he defines a doctrine (v) concerning faith or morals (vi) to be held by the whole Church, by the Divine assistance promised to him in the person of blessed Peter, enjoys that infallibility with which the Divine Redeemer wished His Church to be endowed in defining a doctrine concerning faith or morals; and that for this reason such definitions of the Roman Pontiff are irreformable in themselves and not by the consent of the Church.”

We have indicated by Roman numerals in the above quotation the six specific criteria¹⁰ which must be united in order for a statement to be unquestionably an infallible papal definition and those who deny the infallibility of the condemnation of heliocentrism argue that these factors are not found united in any of the Church's documents relative to the Galileo controversy. Here is a brief evaluation of each:

(a) The attachment of the censure “heretical” to heliocentrism by the theologian-qualifiers of the Holy Office on 24th February 1616. This was a private act of theologians employed by the Holy Office but not competent to define in its name and on its behalf. So none of the six conditions applies to it except the fact that it concerned faith and morals. This qualification was approved, immediately afterwards, by the Pope, and this papal approbation of the Holy Office's qualification must be what the 1633 Commission was referring to when it said that heliocentrism had been “declared and defined to be contrary to the Holy Scripture”. However, the word “define” need not always imply an infallible pronouncement (Cartechini: *op.cit.*, p.24) and in this case no public pronouncement was made at all, and no document was ever drafted to give formal expression to the Pope's oral approbation. Since the Pope did not, directly or indirectly, address the whole Church on this point, conditions (ii) and (vi) are lacking. For want of any formal document condition (iii) seems lacking also and the whole event becomes too historically doubtful to establish doctrinal truth with infallible certitude.

⁹ For though it is perfectly possible that *lesser* acts of the Holy See and the Sacred Congregations are also protected from error by the Holy Ghost, it is not a dogma that this is so and Catholics are free to doubt whether it is and therefore to consider as not necessarily infallible any specific act of the Holy See which does not manifest the conditions defined by the First Vatican Council for papal infallibility.

¹⁰ Cf. Cartechini, Sixtus S.J.: *De Valore Notarum Theologicarum...* , cap.III; Choupin, Lucien: *Valeur des Decisions Doctrinales et Disciplinaires du Saint-Siege*, chap. I, n. III.

(b) The instructions given to Galileo the following day (25th February 1616) to desist from holding or teaching heliocentrism were certainly not an infallible definition for several reasons: condition (vi) is not fulfilled because the orders were personal to Galileo, not addressed to the whole Church; it is very doubtful whether condition (iv) was verified since he was given an order or instruction rather than a definition; condition (ii) that the Pope should be acting as shepherd and teacher not only of individuals but of *all* Christians seemed not to have been fulfilled, and whether he used “supreme and apostolic authority” [condition (iii)] is also questionable to say the least, for although the Pope personally supervised all that took place and confirmed it in every detail, he did not confirm this role in writing and indeed the proceedings were not directly promulgated in any form whether in the Pope’s name or otherwise.

(c) The condemnation of heliocentric writings on 5th March 1616 by the Sacred Congregation of the Index was certainly not a doctrinal definition [condition (iv)] because its object was not to teach a certain doctrine but to forbid the circulation of certain books. Its reference to heliocentrism as being contrary to Holy Scripture was not its *direct* object and though its book prohibitions were to be *obeyed* by the whole Church, it did not require any doctrine to be *held* by the whole Church [condition (vi)]. No doubt in approving the decree of the Sacred Congregation of the Index the Pope exercised “the office of shepherd and teacher of all Christians” [conditions (i) and (ii)], but we do not think that Father Roberts establishes with *certainty* that a pope can be said to act “by his supreme and apostolic authority” [condition (iii)] when he is merely approving a congregational *order* which does not directly teach doctrine. In any event, this decree does not expressly refer to heliocentrism as *heretical*.

(d) The condemnation of Galileo by the Holy Office on 22nd June 1633 *does* include as the grounds of the condemnation the statement that heliocentrism is heretical. However, it does not seem to have constituted a doctrinal definition [condition (iv)] since it was personally addressed to Galileo alone and since its direct object was the condemnation and absolution of a single individual – a factor which is also incompatible with conditions (ii) and (vi), namely that the Pope should be acting as shepherd and teacher of *all* Christians and ordering his doctrine to be held by the *whole* Church. It is also doubtful whether his *supreme* and *apostolic* authority was explicitly engaged since his involvement was nowhere explicitly indicated. It is *true* that the Pope ordered the terms of the condemnation to be circulated among the Inquisitors in many cities and communicated to other prominent ecclesiastics throughout the world with a specific view to their being read to mathematicians, astronomers and scientists and to prevent the continued currency of heliocentrism by the clear implicit indication that all were bound to respect the same doctrinal norm which had been imposed on Galileo. But by the very fact that the circulation of the text of the condemnation was ordered to be communicated to scientific specialists rather than to all the faithful, it remains certain that conditions (ii) and (vi) were never fulfilled.

(e) The Index of forbidden books published by Pope Alexander VII in 1664 and 1665 surely come the nearest to fulfilling the conditions required by the First

Vatican Council since the Pope chose to preface them by a solemn papal bull directing that the entire contents of the Index should be considered as comprised in the bull itself and therefore coming directly and explicitly from his supreme papal authority. We are thus faced for the first time with a document in which condition (iii) (“supreme and apostolic authority”) is certainly fulfilled as are also conditions (i), (ii) and (vi). But whereas the grounds for the condemnation of heliocentric material in these indexes is their opposition to faith and morals [condition (iv)] which condition may well also be therefore fulfilled, it is quite certain that the prohibition of literature does *not* constitute a doctrinal *definition* [condition (iv)]. Moreover the Index nowhere characterises the heliocentric writings which it forbids as heretical and therefore leaves Catholics free to hold heliocentrism to be merely erroneous, temerarious or dangerous rather than actually heretical, provided that they refrain from publishing or reading any writings in favour of it.

Value of this argument. Perhaps some readers may consider that we have been excessively demanding and may wish to argue that some of the conditions we think unfulfilled were in fact fulfilled, but we doubt that anyone would wish to maintain it as *certain* that all of the conditions required by the First Vatican Council were verified in any particular case. The importance of this lack of certainty will become clearer when we reach the sixth argument of those who oppose the infallibility of the condemnations of heliocentrism.

2. Even those who believe that heliocentrism is strictly heretical, having been infallibly condemned by the Church, recognise that the opposing system of geocentrism has never been firmly defined as a dogma. The documents of the Holy See referred to above which condemn heliocentrism do not purport to *render* it heretical but to declare that it already is intrinsically heretical irrespective of those decrees. But, this being the case, the heretical status of heliocentrism can be due only to its opposition to clear texts of Holy Scripture, for an heretical proposition is by definition one which is opposed to Divine revelation, and in the absence of any solemn teaching of the Church on this point prior to 1616, the Scriptural texts are the only basis upon which it can be affirmed that heliocentrism is contrary to Divine revelation. However, as shown above,, this basis is not a sufficient one. It was widely maintained by many theologians and clearly believed by most Roman theologians at the time of the condemnation of Galileo, that any proposition evidently incompatible with Holy Scripture was heretical. But this opinion is now abandoned, or at best no more than one probable opinion among others, and therefore it is no longer possible to declare as theologically certain that a doctrine is *heretical* because it is directly opposed to an evident teaching of Holy Scripture unless that teaching has been explicitly proposed as divinely revealed by the Church not in the *general* way that she proposes the divine revelation of the whole of the Bible, but in a particular and direct way. Assuredly no theologian suggests that it is lawful or anything short of a grave sin against the virtue of faith to deny what the Bible clearly affirms to be true, but that is not the same thing as to call it *heretical*.

Value of this argument. Several official decrees emanating from the Holy See in the seventeenth century stated (in some cases) and implied (in others), whether infallibly or not, that heliocentrism is heretical; it is indeed quite plain that those responsible for these declarations believed that this theological qualification of heliocentrism was based on pre-existing facts and not a direct result of the declarations themselves. It is historically certain

that the reason they thought it to be heretical was its conflict with the evident contrary teaching of Holy Scripture, and to the extent that it is now recognised by theologians that this is not in itself sufficient to condemn a doctrine as *heretical*, strictly speaking, without some specific declaration by the Church, this argument is a strong one. To impugn it one must, it seems, either return to the antiquated opinion that proposal by the Church is not needed where the teaching of Scripture is clear, and even that would be insufficient unless one maintained this to be not only *probable* but certain theological doctrine which we think to be not seriously tenable.¹¹

The only alternative is to maintain that necessary intervention on the part of the Church had already taken place. That could only be claimed, in our opinion, by arguing that the unanimous interpretation of the Fathers of the Church was in favour of a geocentric interpretation of the relevant passages of Holy Scripture but, on the one hand, it is not sufficiently shown that the Fathers regarded that interpretation as part of Catholic tradition rather than merely the *scientific* tradition of their day which they believed to be true without necessarily having any theological motive for this, and on the other hand it is very doubtful, in any event, whether this proposal would be sufficient. It is true that the unanimous consensus of the Fathers of the Church concerning the interpretation of a Sacred text is deemed infallibly to attest Catholic doctrine when their interpretation is presented as a part of Catholic tradition rather than merely a matter of natural science or private opinion, but theologians doubt whether this proposal by the Fathers of the Church is ever the *sole* reason for the Church to recognise the truth in question as a dogma. (See Vacant: *Etudes Theologiques sur les Constitutions du Concile du Vatican*, t.II, pp.117-123)

3. Numerous theologians well placed to be aware of the facts and unsuspected of any favour for heliocentrism nevertheless did not believe the condemnations of heliocentrism to have been infallible.

(i) In 1626 Father Tanner, S.J. quoted the 1616 decree in his *Theologia Scholastica*, II, 6, 4, concluding from it simply that heliocentrism “cannot safely be defended.”

(ii) In 1631 Fromont, Professor of Theology at Louvain and ardent adversary of Galileo declared that he could not consider heliocentrism as having been definitively judged “unless I see something more precise emerging from the head of the Church himself.” (*Anti-Aristarchus*, Antwerp, 1631, p.17)

(iii) In 1651 the infallible character of the condemnations of heliocentrism published up to that date was clearly denied by the Church’s greatest anti-heliocentric champion, the Jesuit astronomer and theologian Riccioli who wrote in his *Almagestum Novum* (Bologna, 1651, t.I, p.52) that “as there has not been, on this matter, a definition of the sovereign pontiff, or of a council directed and approved by him, it is

¹¹ In his 1943 encyclical on biblical studies, Pope Pius XII declares that “among the many matters set forth in the legal, historical, sapiential and prophetic works of the Bible there are only a few where source has been declared by the authority of the Church, and...there are equally few concerning which the opinion of the Holy Father is unanimous.” (*Divino Afflante Spiritu*, cap.49) What would be the relevance of this if authoritative interpretation by the Church was unnecessary to oblige all Catholics under pain of heresy to accept the natural sense of the text in the enormous number of biblical passages where this is beyond reasonable dispute?

not *of faith* that the sun turns and that the earth is immovable, at least by virtue of the decree itself, but at most exclusively because of the authority of Holy Scripture, *for those who are morally certain that God has thus revealed it*. However, all we Catholics are obliged by the virtue of prudence and obedience to admit what has been decreed or at least not to teach the contrary in an absolute manner.” (Italics added.)

(iv) In 1660, Father Fabri, S.J. wrote: “The partisans of Galileo have often been asked if they can furnish a demonstration of the movement of the earth; they have never dared to reply in the affirmative. There is therefore no reason why the Church should not understand, and command [her children] to understand, in their proper sense the [relevant] passages of Scripture until the contrary opinion shall have been demonstrated. If you find this demonstration, something I find difficult to believe, then the Church will make no difficulty in recognising that these passages must be understood in a metaphorical and improper sense.” (*Brevis Annotatio in Systema Saturninum Chr. Hugonii*, Rome, 1660, p.32)

Other examples could be added to this list.

Value of this argument. It would be highly surprising that so many theologians aware of the facts and unsympathetic to heliocentrism should have failed to note that it had been infallibly condemned if it in fact had been. Modern theologians, being almost unanimously heliocentrists themselves and under the impression that heliocentrism has been more or less scientifically proved, may be suspected of stretching the evidence to fit that which they wish to believe, but those quoted had no such motive. Nevertheless some theologians, as shown above, can be quoted as seeming to tend more or less for the opposite view and so the argument is not decisive. What it *does* decisively show is that if heliocentrism has been infallibly condemned by the Holy See, there has never been any point in the history of the Church when this has been universally recognised to be the case and nearly four centuries have now passed during which hardly any Catholic has correctly realised the true theological status of heliocentrism.

4. Every act of the Holy See relative to the condemnation of heliocentrism between 1616 and 1665 is indirectly but unmistakably founded on the original unanimous judgement of the theologian-qualifiers of the Holy Office (24 February 1616) censuring heliocentrism as heretical. In so far as the Church condemned heliocentrism as heretical she did this by making her own the original, non-authoritative censure of the theologian-qualifiers. However, it is not at all apparent that the Holy See considered in 1616 that Galileo would have been a heretic even if he had obstinately continued to believe in heliocentrism after being ordered to reject it. For in fact St. Robert Bellarmine was told by the Pope to warn Galileo to abandon heliocentrism but, if he refused to obey this warning, to command him to abstain from teaching, defending or treating of heliocentrism, and only if he failed to acquiesce in this instruction also was he to be imprisoned. Now if Pope Paul V and St. Robert Bellarmine had considered the heretical status of heliocentrism to be infallibly certain, it would inevitably follow that by refusing to abandon it, Galileo would have made himself a pertinacious heretic. It seems inconceivable that in this case he would not have been promptly tried for heresy – it is unknown in the history of the Church that anyone refusing to believe a dogma which the authorities of the Church instruct him *is* a dogma, should be told that in view of his refusal to believe Catholic doctrine he should merely abstain from public discourse on the topic and keep his heretical views to himself, without any mention being made of the fact that he would

have incurred automatic excommunication irrespective of whether or not he delivered public lectures or wrote books and treatises in favour of his heresy. Even the penalty of imprisonment which was threatened in case he should continue not only to believe heliocentrism but publicly to defend it also, is not in conformity with the idea that he would have made himself by this act a heretic in the Church's eyes, for obstinate heretics, at that date and place, were not imprisoned but put to death.

Value of this argument. It is mysterious that Galileo should have been warned that heliocentrism was heretical but then told that if he continued to hold it he would not be treated as a heretic but merely ordered to keep silence. This anomaly (and it is not the only one in the proceedings of 1616 – see Brodrick, James, S.J.: *The Life and Work of Blessed Robert Francis Cardinal Bellarmine, S.J. 1542-1621*, Kenedy & Sons, New York, 1928, volume 2, p.368-370) doubtless presents a difficulty for those who hold heliocentrism to be infallibly condemned, but not, we think, an overwhelming one since there is every evidence that in 1633 Galileo was condemned as vehemently suspect of being a heretic for holding heliocentrism and escaped condemnation as a heretic *only* because of the tiny shred of doubt which remained as to whether he had interiorly consented to heliocentric doctrine between 1616 and 1633. The easiest solution to the anomaly seems to be the supposition that the orders given to Galileo in 1616 were carelessly formulated in respect of the consequences should he fail to acquiesce in the geocentric position he was instructed to embrace. This would be not surprising since at that time Galileo had shown no sign of insubordination to the Church's teaching authority and there was every reason to suppose that he would submit at once to Catholic doctrine when informed what the Holy See had declared it to be on this point. Indeed Galileo *himself*, in 1633, while claiming to have forgotten that he had been banned from teaching on the subject of heliocentrism, never attempted for a moment to argue that, if he *had* continued to hold heliocentrism after 1616, he would not therefore have been a heretic.

5. Subsequently to all the decrees which condemned heliocentrism, the Church came to authorise belief in the doctrine which it had previously condemned. This it did especially under Pope Benedict XIV in 1757 when heliocentric writings were deleted from the Index of Forbidden Books, in 1820 when Pope Pius VII granted the appeal of Canon Settele against the decision of Monsignor Anfossi, Master of the Sacred Apostolic Palace, refusing an *imprimatur* to his work *Elements d'Astronomie*, and in 1822 when the same Pope approved a decree of the Sacred Congregation of the Inquisition permitting books teaching that the earth moves be published even at Rome itself. It is, of course, quite impossible that the Church should authorise belief in an infallibly condemned heresy, awarding the Roman *Imprimatur* to a book teaching it and authorising other such books to be published at Rome itself with ecclesiastical approval.

Value of this argument. This consideration is unquestionably of great weight since its conclusion can be evaded only by supposing that Popes Benedict XIV and Pius VII (not to mention all subsequent popes, none of whom reversed the decisions of their predecessors on this point) were either unaware of the facts concerning the seventeenth century condemnation of heliocentrism or misevaluated them. There is surely an appearance of absurdity in attributing such ignorance and theological ineptitude to Pope Benedict XIV, the celebrated papal polymath whose name has become a byword for Catholic erudition, and in any event, if learned popes have thought that the condemnation of heliocentrism was *not* irreversible, Catholics who share their opinion can hardly be considered as having fallen into heresy until

the question shall have been cleared up by some future and more authoritative declaration of the Holy See on this topic when a pope is again able to judge the matter. This is especially the case in view of the principle to be enunciated in Argument number 6 which follows.

Even so, we think it only fair not to describe this point as completely decisive because the relevant acts of Pope Benedict XIV and Pope Pius VII were deliberately low-profile, non-infallible interventions and the authorisation to publish a book teaching heliocentrism was not necessarily intended to be equivalent to a declaration that heliocentrism was now orthodox doctrine. And in fact there *does* seem to be at least one historical example of a case in which the infallible character of a papal decree was for a lengthy period overlooked by subsequent popes, only being recognised anew after the passage of many centuries. We refer to the decree of Pope St. Damasus I and the Synod of Rome (Denzinger 84) in 382 A.D. defining which books comprised the canon of Sacred Scripture (being, of course, identical to the canon now found in every Catholic Bible) which, however, did not suffice to prevent his successor St. Gregory the Great from questioning the authenticity of the Book of Maccabees and numerous Fathers of the Church and later theologians right into the Middle Ages from hesitating over the canonicity over various books of Old or New Testament. The matter was eventually re-defined by the Council of Trent on 8th April 1546 (Denzinger 783) which finally put an end to all remaining controversy about the canon of the Bible.

6. “Nothing is understood to be dogmatically declared or defined unless this shall be manifestly certain.” (Canon 1323 of the 1917 *Code of Canon Law*, footnoted therein to the constitution *Inter Cunctas* of Pope Martin V, 22 February 1418, volume 1, n.43 of Cardinal Gasparri’s *Fontes* and volume 3, II, p.419-46 of the *Bullarium Romanum*.) This principle is unanimously taught by all Catholic theologians: any reasonable doubt about whether something has been infallibly declared or defined by the Church to be divinely revealed suffices to make the question one of legitimate opinion. Hence even if we were to incline strongly in favour of the conclusion that the condemnations of heliocentrism were infallible, we could not impose this on others without maintaining the contrary view to be wholly and manifestly unfounded. And in practice the five foregoing arguments against the infallibility of these condemnations are abundantly sufficient to show that it is at least *doubtful* whether any of them could be considered a dogmatic declaration or definition.

Value of this argument. Those who are determined to consider heliocentrism to be a heresy in the strict sense of that term and all those who hold it after having the Church’s decrees on this subject drawn to their attention to be heretics may be tempted to argue that this argument is a two-edged sword: they could observe that by condemning Galileo as vehemently suspect of heresy because of his apparent support for heliocentrism the Holy See in 1633 must have regarded it as “manifestly certain” that the matter had been dogmatically settled. But this serves only to divert attention from the crucial question of whether it is possible *today*, in the light of the facts mentioned above, to claim that it is “manifestly certain” that any of the relevant acts of the Church were in fact a dogmatic declaration or definition. We cannot see how it is.

Chapter 6

Interim Conclusion

On the basis of the evidence adduced hitherto we think it impossible to conclude otherwise than *against* the infallibility of the condemnations of heliocentrism, while nevertheless admitting that a number of the arguments *in favour* of their infallibility have not yet been satisfactorily answered by those who glibly claim that all the relevant decrees being merely disciplinary acts, there is no theological problem entailed in considering them to be potentially reversible and in explaining how Catholics subsequently came to be permitted to believe what previously they would have been forbidden to believe by the Holy See. That view leaves out of the picture that in the seventeenth century the Church not only *forbade* Catholics to hold heliocentrism but was prepared to condemn them as heretics for obstinately doing so.¹² It leaves out of the picture the fact that the Holy See unquestionably did its best (even if no dogmatic decree was involved) to ensure that all Catholics likely to have any interest in the question would consider heliocentrism to be heretical and it leaves utterly unexplained the fact that the Church clearly required of Galileo interior intellectual submission to the doctrine of geocentrism as in analogous decrees that also required not only exterior but interior submission, thereby inviting Father Roberts' plaintive inquiry: "How, in the name of common sense, could a decree possibly erroneous have made it clear to all Catholics that the doctrine...thereby prohibited could not be sound? And how could such a decree have plainly sufficed to determine the whole question at issue?" (*op.cit.*, p.5)

We may perhaps now anticipate what is to come, by saying that we think it possible to resolve these difficulties in a satisfactory manner while continuing to conclude *against* the infallibility of the condemnations of heliocentrism, whereas the conclusion that the condemnations *were* infallible leaves us with a web of difficulties which we, at least, are wholly unable to explain. Readers will recall that we have promised to discuss also a third attempt to resolve the difficulties associated with the condemnations of heliocentrism, namely the thesis of the abbé Garzend according to which heliocentrism was declared heretical in a special sense, not in the strict theological sense of this term. While we concur with the *Dictionnaire Apologétique de la Foi Catholique* that abbé Garzend's thesis does not constitute the essential explanation of the difficulties, we think that it sheds some light on them. Before propounding it, however, we think it necessary to ensure that all readers have clearly in mind exactly what the term *heresy* is taken to mean in Catholic theology. To this end we have reproduced as Appendix III a tabular presentation of all the theological notes or qualifications used by the Church, adapted from Father Sixtus Cartechini's invaluable study: *De Valore Notarum Theologicarum et de Criteriis ad Eas Dignoscendas*¹³ (Rome, 1951), a work which was drafted for use by auditors of the Roman Congregations. Here let it suffice to say that a heresy is a proposition which certainly conflicts with a dogma and that a dogma is a truth

¹² Galileo escaped this fate only because of the tenuous doubt that remained that he might *possibly* have been sincere in his claim that he had been carried away by his naturally combative spirit to write in favour of a position which in fact he believed to be false!

¹³ The English of this title, amply indicating the scope of the study, is *On the Value of Theological Notes and the Criteria for Discerning Them*.

revealed by God and infallibly proposed as such by the Church. A simple diagram may help to understand what is meant by a dogma of faith:

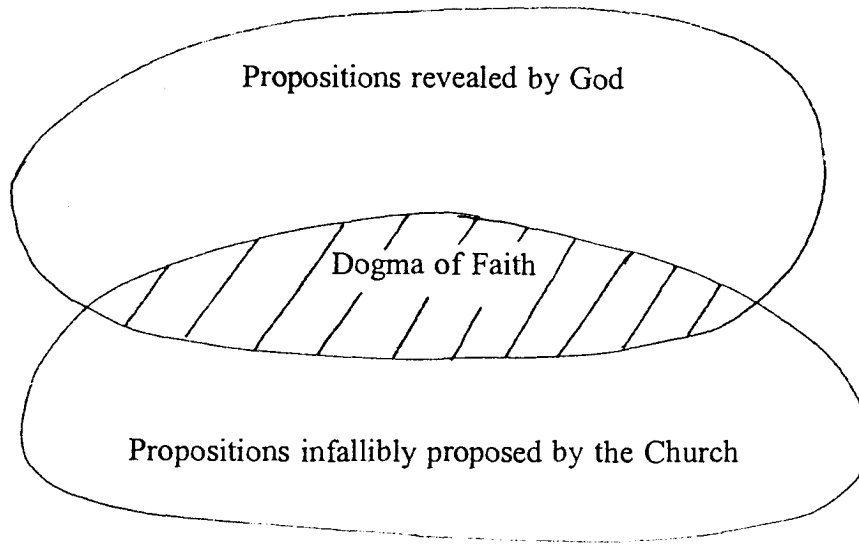


Figure 1

It can be seen from Figure 1 that only what falls into the shaded zone or overlap between the two larger categories constitutes a dogma of faith. Moreover there may be some truths which fall into this overlap but concerning which there is room for legitimate *doubt*, either as to whether the Church infallibly proposes them or to whether they were revealed by God. In this case they are not deemed to be dogmas until the position is clarified.

It can also be seen that God has revealed many truths which the Church does not infallibly propose for the belief of the faithful. These include a great part of Holy Scripture which the Church indeed tells us that God has revealed but does not, strictly speaking, categorise as dogmas. They also include those truths found in Holy Scripture or in Sacred Tradition which are subject to legitimate doubt as to their true meaning or the divine revelation of which can be demonstrated with certainty. They also include the lost Epistles of St. Paul and any other divinely-inspired Scriptures which do not form part of our present Bible.

On the other hand, the Church infallibly proposes for the belief of all Catholics many truths which she does not declare to have been directly revealed by God. This is because the Church's infallibility extends not only to the direct presentation of what God has revealed, but also to the safeguarding of divine revelation and its application to circumstances. Hence she can pronounce infallibly on matters which flow *indirectly* from God's revelation or indeed on any subject necessary to fulfill her divinely entrusted mission of teacher of Divine truth and overthrower of all theological error.

A dogmatic proposition (i.e. one which falls within the shaded overlap in the diagram) is said by theologians to be believed with *Divine and Catholic faith*. And only a proposition in certain conflict with it constitutes a heresy. But this does not mean that one may freely deny propositions which God has revealed provided that the Church has not proposed them, or that one may deny propositions infallibly proposed by the Church on the grounds that they are not divinely revealed! It simply means that a different theological qualification applies to errors in

the other two categories – errors which contradict truths falling into one or other of the elliptical categories in the diagram but *not* in the overlapping zone. Any proposition revealed by God must be believed with what theologians call Divine faith even if it has not been infallibly proposed by the Church so as to be believed with Divine and *Catholic* faith. To deny such truth while realising that God had revealed it (for example because it is explicitly taught in the Bible) would be no less a sin than heresy, but would be technically qualified by theologians as an *error in faith* and would not incur automatic excommunication or exclusion from membership of the Church.

And to deny a proposition infallibly proposed by the Church but not as being divinely revealed (the lawfulness of the reception of Holy Communion under one kind, for example) would be to deny a truth which theologians say should be believed with *ecclesiastical faith*. In this case excommunication *would* be incurred exactly as in the case of heresy strictly so called, but the miscreant would not be technically a heretic.

And the situation can be more complicated still when it comes to evaluating a particular unorthodox proposition. For the theologian who wishes to qualify it correctly must not only establish whether it contradicts a truth to be believed with (i) Divine faith, (ii) Divine and Catholic faith or (iii) ecclesiastical faith; he must also establish whether the *contradiction* is *certain*. For if a proposition comes very close to denying a dogma and will generally be understood as denying it, but the denial does not follow directly and *necessarily*, this can be yet another reason why it may be categorised with some lesser theological censure than *heresy*.

Apart from the three categories of truth we have referred to, a theological truth may be classified as *proximate to faith* when there is all but unanimous agreement that it is divinely revealed; or it may be *theologically certain* when it follows by evident and direct logical necessity from two truths one being divinely revealed and the other being naturally certain; or a *Catholic doctrine*¹⁴ when it is sufficiently proposed by the *Ordinary* Magisterium, but not as divinely revealed, etc. In each of these cases denial of the truth in question is mortally sinful though only where Divine revelation or infallible teaching of the Church is directly involved is the sin considered to be *directly* against faith.

With this background we may now proceed to the thesis of the abbé Garzend.

¹⁴ In this sense the term *Catholic doctrine* must be carefully distinguished from the general use of the same term in which includes the whole of the Church's teaching.

Chapter 7

The Argument that Heliocentrism Was Declared to be Heretical in a Special Sense

It was in 1912 that the abbé Leon Garzend published his exceedingly learned tome of more than five hundred pages entitled *L'Inquisition et l'Hérésie: Distinction de l'Hérésie Théologique et de l'Hérésie Inquisitoriale – A propos de l'Affaire Galilée*. In it he sets out to show by reference to a huge mass of writings relative to heresy in the Middle Ages that the theological notion of heresy in the sense explained above was not the only sense recognized in the practical judgement of persons accused of heresy by the Church's tribunals in past centuries. In particular he shows that it was extended to as many as ten cases which today would not be considered strictly heretical and most of which, even at the time, would not have been considered heretical in the exclusively theological sense. These categories are as follows:

(i) Unbaptised persons were sometimes categorised as heretics whereas Canon 1325/2 of the 1917 *Code* limits heresy (as theologians had done for centuries) to those who, *after baptism*, pertinaciously doubt or deny any of the truths which are to be believed with Divine and Catholic faith. From the inquisitorial point of view it was held that, for example, a catechumen who had intellectually embraced the Christian faith but pertinaciously adhered to a heretical proposition before his Baptism was not to be treated differently from one who had already been baptised.

(ii) Heresy was held to exist in a juridical sense when a person made it clear that he was so obstinately attached to his theological opinion on a point not yet definitively settled by the Church that he would not change his mind *even if* the Church were to pronounce upon it definitively.

(iii) Juridical heresy was also deemed present when heretical propositions were propounded through fear without interior assent.

(iv) He who advanced a heretical proposition believing it to be orthodox could be judged an heretic in the external forum.

(v) Denial of truths to be believed with ecclesiastical faith – i.e. infallibly taught by the Church but not as part of Divine revelation – was deemed to be heresy.

(vi) One who refused to give credit to a private revelation made to him by God and of which he knew the Divine origin could be, at least theoretically, judged an heretic in the opinion of some writers if he communicated all the relevant facts to the Inquisitors.

(vii) One could be an heretic for denial of the manifest teaching of Scripture whether or not the Church had proposed that the meaning in question was indeed the manifest sense of the Scriptural passage involved.

(viii) One could be an heretic for rebellion against the doctrinal instruction of the Inquisitors as to what one ought to believe – though this did not apply to learned folk who were able to question with some semblance of sound theological reasoning the basis on which they were instructed.

(ix) It was sometimes deemed sufficient for heresy to reject a doctrine the

promulgation of which by the Church was not evidently infallible.

(x) The same applied particularly to non-infallible decisions of the popes and in some cases even to...

(xi)...opposition to simple theological conclusions or theologically certain propositions.

While there is no doubting the erudition of the abbé Garzend, it seems to us that his erudition was too specialised and limited in scope. He established quite plainly that mediaeval writers of high authority extended the concept of heresy to include the above categories though some were disputed by other writers and not all were followed in practice by the Inquisition. But he seems to overlook the fact that categories (iii) and (iv) could still be deemed heretical today in the external forum by virtue of Canon 2200 which presumes guilt in the internal forum wherever an external infraction of the law has occurred. In most of the other cases, though theologians today would not regard the suspect as *technically* an heretic, there is no doubt that an heretical disposition of mind and will was present. One who rejects what he knows God has revealed is clearly prepared to prefer his own judgement to that of God: the absence of proposal by the Church may save him from being an heretic in the strict and technical sense, but he is no less guilty and – to express the matter in its blunt reality – he will find himself in the same pit of Hell as Martin Luther and every other heretic who has died without repentance. The same may be said of him who rejects the infallible judgement of the Church on a matter not directly contained within Divine revelation. Since it *is* divinely revealed that the Church is infallible even in respect of matters only indirectly following from Divine revelation, there is an *implicit* rejection of God's own authority involved in this crime.

In the case of non-infallible teaching it must never be forgotten that the repeated acts of the Ordinary Magisterium, though in themselves non-infallible, may coalesce to make the doctrine infallibly certain for the simple reason that whatever is repeatedly taught without question by the highest authorities of the Church for a protracted period as belonging to her teaching is thereby proved to be guaranteed by the Holy Ghost who could never permit His Church to lead the faithful into error even by non-infallible teaching, if this teaching were presented so frequently that the faithful could not but receive it as authoritative and obligatory.

We may say in summary, therefore, that we do not think the differences between theological definitions of heresy as we have them today and the cases found guilty of being heretics by the medieval Inquisitors to be as striking and significant as the abbé Garzend claims them to be. There is no single case, it seems to us, listed by Garzend which today could not be tried by an ecclesiastical court and found guilty, if not of heresy, at least of such clear sin against faith as to be worthy of excommunication and liable to have that sentence imposed – except, of course, the case of unbaptised persons which has long been disputed by theologians and which was considered subject to the Inquisition in the Middle Ages only by virtue of the *civil* authority of the Holy See in its territories or by virtue of the concession of other civil rulers. The other exception which might be claimed – namely the refusal to adhere to a private revelation one had received – may safely be classified as a chimaera invented by scholastic canonists as an hypothesis to tax their skills at theological dissection rather than a practical problem.

But while doubting its importance, we do admit that the major premise of Garzend's

case is established: namely that the term heresy was used in earlier days in a wider sense than it is used today. Where we think that Garzend falls down is in his attempt (much less detailed) to show that this applied to the specific case of Galileo – in other words that heliocentrism was condemned as “heretical” in a loose and secondary sense of being in opposition to the mind of the Church without any indication of the infallible certainty of Divine revelation.

To show a substantial distinction between the inquisitorial concept of heresy and the theological concept it would be necessary to show that the former case departed essentially in its definition from the immemorial theological concept of heresy as the rejection of the authority of God revealing a truth to men. And almost all the cases from Garzend which we have cited above do not show this for the simple explanation underlying them all is that the miscreant clearly *did* reject Divine revelation, albeit in an implicit and indirect way. So all that follows from Garzend’s arguments on that score is that the Church today would refrain from condemning as an heretical one whose rejection of Divine revelation was only indirect, preferring to find him guilty of a slightly lesser crime though quite possibly imposing upon him the same censure – excommunication – as he would have incurred as a full-fledged heretic.

But in practice Garzend’s attempt to show that even *this* applied to the case of Galileo is quite unconvincing. His arguments are as follows:

(i) The condemnation and abjuration imposed on Galileo in 1633 refers to him as holding errors contrary to Holy Scripture, but in repeating the text of the 1616 decree it deliberately refrains from qualifying heliocentrism as heretical thereby preferring *not* to confirm the theological ineptitude of the censure selected by the theologian-qualifiers of the Holy Office in 1616.

Value of this argument. While it is true that the word “heretical” is not used in the passage of the condemnation to which Garzend refers, it quite clearly is used elsewhere in the same condemnation when it is stated that Galileo was “vehemently suspect of *heresy*, namely...” Therefore this argument must be rejected as totally worthless.

(ii) The 1633 condemnation of Galileo did not condemn him as heretic but merely as vehemently suspect of heresy – a difference explained by a recognition of the 1633 tribunal that the term “heresy” used in 1616 had not been technically correct in theology but an example of the loose, inquisitorial meaning of the term.

Value of this argument. This argument also seems to us worthless since the background documents to the 1633 trial make it quite plain that Galileo *would* have been condemned as a heretic rather than “merely” *vehemently suspect* of heresy if he had admitted believing heliocentrism after 1616. But he insistently denied this even under threat of torture and the evidence against him, though overwhelming, was deemed to generate one degree less than one hundred per cent certitude, thereby explaining his condemnation as “vehemently suspect”. It should be noted that one who has been condemned as vehemently suspect of heresy, should he later publicly avow the heretical doctrine in question, is condemned as a *relapsed* heretic, i.e. the second, undeniable fall into the heresy is taken as evidence that the vehement suspicion of heresy incurred the first time was in fact a *correct* suspicion so that he has now become a heretic for the *second* time and is therefore offered no further chance of repentance but rather handed over to the civil power for the infliction of the death penalty. (That was the procedure in the days when the civil power was Catholic, having heard nothing

of the Second Vatican Council's decree on religious liberty!) In fact it would have been quite impossible for Galileo or anyone else to be condemned as "vehemently suspect of heresy" if the proposition he was suspected of espousing was not deemed to be an heretical one.

(iii) According to normal inquisitorial procedure one who is found to be vehemently suspect of heresy by the Tribunal of the Inquisition, after abjuration, must be given absolution from excommunication *ad cautelam*.¹⁵ In Galileo's case this was omitted, thereby showing that the tribunal did not consider that he had incurred excommunication; a fact which can be explained only on the supposition that they knew perfectly well that heliocentrism was not, properly speaking, a heresy such that those who embraced it incurred automatic excommunication.

Value of this argument. Having repeatedly read this claim of the abbé Garzend and compared it with the text of the condemnation and abjuration of Galileo found in Appendix I to this study, we can only throw up our hands in despair of understanding how it is possible for a man to devote a learned study of more than five hundred pages to establishing his case on the basis of so preposterous an allegation. We invite the reader to read the text we produced in the Appendix where he will see that Galileo most certainly *was* given absolution *ad cautelam* from excommunication.

We therefore wholly reject the abbé Garzend's attempt to explain away the Church's condemnation of heliocentrism as heretical. We acknowledge simply that the use of the term *heretical* in the decisions of 1616 and 1633 did not *necessarily* imply that heliocentrism was deemed directly contrary to divine revelation infallibly proposed as such by the Church; it may have meant only that one could not espouse heliocentrism without coming into manifest conflict with Divine revelation, the Church's proposal or the nature of the conflict being in some measure indirect or implicit rather than direct and explicit as the term "heresy" would necessarily import today.

But with this much established we need no longer hesitate to state frankly our own opinion in the matter...

¹⁵ i.e., he is conditionally absolved from the excommunication which he has probably incurred.

Chapter 8

True Evaluation of the Theological Status of the Condemnations of Heliocentrism

Our opinion, in a nutshell, is that the Holy See condemned heliocentrism by non-infallible decrees, branding it as *heretical* on the grounds of its manifest opposition to Holy Scripture but without implying that the geocentric sense of the Scriptural passages was infallibly proposed by the Church. This evaluation seems to us to be the only one consonant with the relevant facts and which involves no attempt to strain the data to fit a theory. According to it, the judgement of the theologian-qualifiers on 24th February 1616 that heliocentrism was heretical and contrary to the Scripture was in itself a private and non-authoritative judgement. On the following day Galileo was ordered in the Pope's name to submit to this judgement and reject heliocentrism, whereupon the qualification of heliocentrism as heretical became official and obligatory for Galileo and other persons aware of the Holy See's position in this matter, but not a definition of faith for the reasons already outlined.

The condemnation of heliocentric writings as contrary to Holy Scripture on 5th March 1616 obliged all Catholics to refrain from reading, retaining or circulating heliocentric writings and made universal the duty to reject heliocentrism as contrary to Divine revelation.

The sentence and condemnation of Galileo by the Holy Office in 1633 confirmed the earlier decrees and obliged those to whom the condemnation was made known (by the Pope's wider diffusion of the text) to reject heliocentrism *as heretical*, but once again *not* by an infallible judgement.

The Alexandrine Indexes of 1664 and 1665 increased the disciplinary authority of the obligation to refrain from disseminating pro-heliocentric literature in any way *and* to reject the theory itself, though it too did not attain the status of infallibility. Nor did any decree addressed to the entire Church on this subject at any stage use the word "heretical" in respect of heliocentrism.

To confirm the accuracy of this evaluation it is our duty to answer the chief objection to it: how could non-infallible decrees create a strict obligation in conscience to reject heliocentrism on pain of condemnation as a heretic? In endeavouring to answer this question we think we shall shed light also on the decrees of Pope Pius IX condemning Ubaghs and Günther, showing that Father Roberts was quite right in detecting a close analogy between the condemnation of Galileo and condemnation of these two theologians but quite wrong in repugning at the idea that the Holy See can properly create an obligation in conscience for all Catholics to reject a given doctrine by a decree which does not pretend to be infallible.

Chapter 9

The Binding Force of Non-Infallible Decrees

We think it should be said bluntly that on this subject Father Roberts and those who have taken the same view as he have gone far astray and for no very good reason. There is no need to create a mystery out of an idea which is perfectly commonplace and may be found in any standard work of Catholic theology and repeatedly stated by the Holy See. In addition to her infallible Magisterium, the Church has the right to command the assent of every Catholic to her authoritative teaching even when it is expressed in a non-infallible form. A mind must be far from the spirit of the Church to object, as Father Roberts does, that a non-infallible decree may be erroneous and that one cannot therefore be justified in assenting to it. Countless reasons, natural and supernatural, conspire to assure us that even the non-infallible judgements of the Holy See will *not* be erroneous; but even if a theoretical possibility of error remained, it would surely be far less likely for the pronouncements of Christ's Vicar (direct or indirect) to go astray than for our own fallible opinions to be more reliable than the judgements of the highest authority on earth, or for the consensus of godless scientists to prove itself more worthy of credence than him to whom Christ has said: "He who hears you, hears Me." (*Luke 10:16*)

In our 1986 study on this topic we emphasised this point by extensive quotation from an article on the subject by Canon George D. Smith, Ph.D., D.D., which appeared in the *Clergy Review* for April 1935. Though not equal in authority to the celebrated studies of Cardinal Franzelin and Professor Choupin on this topic, this article is more accessible than they to the non-specialist and is written in our vernacular; it makes available to the English-speaking lay-theologian in an easily digestible form the teaching of greater authorities. In the hope that this present study (which supersedes all that we have written on the topic in the past) may come to be considered as definitive on the topic among faithful Catholics interested in it, we venture to think it worthwhile to include at this point the entire text of the article as it appeared and to invite the reader to study it attentively. Its few pages will repay careful reading, being applicable not only to the Galileo debate but to many topics of no less importance in our days, and we hope that the reader will be sufficiently enlightened by it to enable us to rejoin him later and make more explicit its application to the case we have been considering.

"Must I Believe It?"

The doctrinal power of the Catholic Church is apt to provoke two contrary reactions in those who are outside the fold. Some it attracts, others it repels. The earnest seeker after truth, the man who seriously wants an answer to the riddle of his life and purpose, and is either mentally dazed by the contradictory solutions offered or else baffled by the bland scepticism which so often greets his anxious questionings, may perhaps turn with relief to a Church which teaches with authority, there to find rest from his intellectual wanderings. On the other hand, there is the seeker whose enjoyment, one is inclined to suspect, lies chiefly in the pursuit of truth and who cares little whether he ever tracks it down. To think things out for himself or, like the Athenians, to be telling or hearing some new thing is the very breath of his intellectual life, and to him any infallible pronouncement is anathema. A definitive statement of truth is not for him a happy end to a weary search; it is a barrier which closes an avenue to

his adventurous quest. An infallible teacher is not a welcome guide who leads him home; he is a monster who would deprive him of the freedom which is his right.

To these two opposite attitudes on the part of the seeker there correspond two different methods on the part of the apologist. For the apologist is in some respects like a salesman: he likes to give the inquirer what he wants, and he puts in the forefront the wares which are most likely to attract. To the non-Catholic who is weary of doubt and uncertainty he holds out the alluring prospect of a Teacher who will lead him to the goal which he is restlessly seeking, who with infallible authority will give him the final answer to any problem that may perplex him. To the non-Catholic who is jealous of his intellectual freedom he says: Do not imagine that by submitting to the Church you will be forfeiting your freedom of thought. The matters upon which the Church teaches with infallible authority are relatively few; with regard to the rest you are free to believe as you like.

Admittedly these are bald statements which no apologist of repute would permit himself to make without considerable qualifications. Nevertheless they will serve by their very baldness to illustrate two very different standpoints from which even Catholics themselves may be inclined to view the teaching authority of the Church. It may be regarded as guidance or it may be regarded as thralldom; and according as guidance is desired or thralldom feared the sphere of obligation in the matter of belief will be extended or restricted. There are those who would have the Pope pronounce authoritatively on the rights or wrongs of every war, on vivisection and performing animals, on evolution and psycho-analysis, and are somewhat aggrieved because he defines a dogma so rarely. But there are also those who seem almost to dread the pronouncements of authority, who “hope that the Church will not commit herself ” on this subject or that, who before accepting any doctrine ask whether the Pope has defined it or, if he has defined it, whether it was by an infallible and irrevocable utterance. Either attitude has its dangers, either attitude mistakes the function of the divinely-appointed Teacher. It may even be debated which excess is more greatly to be deplored. However that may be, the title of this article should be taken as indicating that the writer has in view the over-cautious believer, whose unfounded fears he hopes to allay, reserving for another occasion – or leaving to another hand – the task of restraining his over-ardent brother. In considering, therefore, the general principles which should guide Catholics in their attitude towards doctrinal authority we shall have in mind especially the Catholic who approaches every doctrine with the wary question: “Must I believe it?”

I.

Let us be clear about our terms, for the ground is littered with ambiguities. When the Catholic inquires concerning his obligation to believe he understands by belief; not a mere opinion, but an act of the mind whereby he adheres definitely to a religious doctrine without any doubt, without any suspension of assent. When he says that he believes a thing he means that he holds it as certain, the motive or ground of his certainty being the authority of the Church which teaches him that this is so. And this rough-and-ready conception of belief, or “faith,” may be considered for practical purposes and in the majority of cases to suffice. But in the delicate matter of defining the Catholic obligation a greater degree of accuracy is reasonably demanded. It is not exact to say that the ground of belief is always the authority of the Church. Ultimately in a divinely revealed religion that ground is the authority of God

Himself, on whose veracity and omniscience the believer relies whenever he makes an act of faith. Absolutely speaking an act of divine faith is possible without the intervention of the Church. It is sufficient to have discovered, from whatever source, that a truth has been revealed by God for the acceptance of mankind, in order to incur the obligation of believing it by an act of divine faith, technically so called because its motive is the authority of God Himself.

However, “that we may be able to satisfy the obligation of embracing the true faith and of constantly persevering therein, God has instituted the Church through His only-begotten Son, and has bestowed on it manifest marks of that institution, that it may be recognised by all men as the guardian and teacher of the revealed word.”¹⁶ Accordingly the main truths of divine revelation are proposed explicitly by the divinely instituted Church for the belief of the faithful, and in accepting such truths the believer adds to his faith in God’s Word an act of homage to the Church as the authentic and infallible exponent of revelation. The doctrines of faith thus proposed by the Church are called dogmas, the act by which the faithful accept them is called Catholic faith, or divine-Catholic faith, and the act by which they reject them – should they unhappily do so – is called heresy.

But there are other truths in the Catholic religion which are not formally revealed by God but which nevertheless are so connected with revealed truth that their denial would lead to the rejection of God’s Word, and concerning these the Church, the guardian as well as the teacher of the revealed word, exercises an infallible teaching authority. “Dogmatic facts”,¹⁷ theological conclusions, doctrines – whether of faith or morals – involved in the legislation of the Church, in the condemnation of books or persons, in the canonisation of saints, in the approbation of religious orders – all these are matters coming within the infallible competence of the Church, all these are things which every Catholic is bound to believe when the Church pronounces upon them in the exercise of her supreme and infallible teaching office. He accepts them not by divine-Catholic faith, for God has not revealed them, but by ecclesiastical faith, by an assent which is based upon the infallible authority of the divinely appointed Church. Theologians, however, point out that even ecclesiastical faith is at least mediately divine, since it is God who has revealed that His Church is to be believed: “He that heareth you heareth me.”

Already it is apparent that the question: “Must I believe it?” is equivocal. It may mean: “Is this a dogma of faith which I must believe under pain of heresy?” or it may mean: “Is it a doctrine which I must believe by ecclesiastical faith, under pain of being branded as ‘temerarious’ or ‘proximate to heresy’?” But in either case the answer is: “You must believe it.” The only difference lies between the precise motive of assent in either case, or the precise censure which may attach to disbelief. The question thus resolves itself into an investigation whether the doctrine under discussion belongs to either of these categories. And here again there is the possibility of undue restriction.

The Vatican Council has defined that “all those things are to be believed by divine and Catholic faith which are contained in the word of God, written or handed down, and which the Church, either by a solemn judgement or by her ordinary and universal teaching, proposes for

¹⁶ Vatican Council, *De fide catholica*, cap. iii.

¹⁷ E.g.: that a certain book contains errors in matters of faith; that a particular Council is oecumenical, etc.

belief as having been divinely revealed.”¹⁸ What is liable to be overlooked is the ordinary and universal teaching of the Church. It is by no means uncommon to find the option, if not expressed at least entertained, that no doctrine is to be regarded as a dogma of faith unless it has been solemnly defined by an oecumenical Council or by the Sovereign Pontiff himself. This is by no means necessary. it is sufficient that the Church teaches it by her ordinary *magisterium*, exercised through the Pastors of the faithful, the Bishops whose *unanimous* teaching throughout the Catholic world, whether conveyed expressly through pastoral letters, catechisms issued by episcopal authority, provincial synods, or implicitly through prayers and religious practices allowed or encouraged, or through the teaching of approved theologians, is no less infallible than a solemn definition issued by a Pope or a general Council. If, then, a doctrine appears in these organs of divine Tradition as belonging directly or indirectly to the *depositum fidei* committed by Christ to His Church, it is to be believed by Catholics with divine-Catholic or ecclesiastical faith, even though it may never have formed the subject of a solemn definition in an oecumenical Council or of an *ex cathedra* pronouncement by the Sovereign Pontiff.¹⁹

But, satisfied that the doctrine has been authoritatively and infallibly proposed for belief by the Church, our questioner still waits to be informed whether it is a doctrine which has been formally revealed by God and is therefore to be believed under pains of heresy, or whether it is one of those matters which belong only indirectly to the *depositum fidei* and therefore to be believed by ecclesiastical faith. In the majority of cases this is not difficult to decide: dogmatic facts, canonisations, legislation – these evidently are not revealed by God and belong to the secondary object of the infallible *magisterium*. But the line of demarcation between dogmas and theological conclusions is not always so clear. There are some doctrines concerning which it may be doubted whether they are formally revealed by God or whether they are merely conclusions which are deduced from revealed truth, and it is part of the theologian’s congenial task to endeavour to determine this. The doctrine of the Assumption is a case in point. But so far as Catholics generally are concerned it is not a matter of great importance, for if the Church – as we are supposing – teaches such doctrines in the exercise of her infallible office the faithful are bound *sub gravi* to believe them; in practice it is a question of determining whether he who denies them is very near to heresy or whether he has actually fallen into it. In either case he has committed a grave sin against faith.

II.

¹⁸ *Loc.cit.*

¹⁹ Thus various events in the life of Christ (e.g., the raising of Lazarus from the dead) are certainly revealed by God and, though never defined solemnly, are taught by the ordinary and universal *magisterium*. Many theological conclusions concerning Christ (with regard to His knowledge, His sanctifying grace) are universally taught by theologians as proximate to faith, though they may never have been defined either by the Pope or by a general Council. It may be remarked, however, that in common practice a person is not regarded as a *heretic* unless he has denied a revealed truth which has been solemnly defined. (Vacant: *Etudes théologiques sur les Constitutions du Concile* [t.II, pp.117 sq.).

It is time now to turn our attention more particularly to the first word in our question, and to bring our inquiry to bear precisely upon the moral obligation of the Catholic in the matter of belief. For the Catholic not only believes, he *must* believe. To the question: “Why do you believe?” I may answer by indicating the motive or ground of my assent. But to the question: “Why must you believe?” I can only answer by pointing to the authority which imposes the obligation.

It is important, I think, to distinguish two aspects of teaching authority. It may be regarded as an authority *in dicendo* or an authority *in jubendo*, that is, as an authority which commands intellectual assent or as a power which demands obedience; and the two aspects are by no means inseparable. I can imagine an authority which constitutes a sufficient motive to command assent, without however being able to impose belief as a moral obligation. A professor learned in some subject upon which I am ignorant (let me confess – astronomy) may tell me wonderful things about the stars. He may be to my knowledge the leading authority – virtually infallible – on his own subject; but I am not bound to believe him. I may be foolish, I may be sceptical; but the professor does not possess that authority over me which makes it my bounden duty to accept his word. On the other hand the school-boy who dissents, even internally, from what his teacher tells him, is insufferably conceited, and if he disagrees openly he is insubordinate and deserves to be punished. By virtue of his position as authoritative teacher the schoolmaster has a right to demand the obedient assent of his pupils; not merely because he is likely to know more about the subject than those over whom he is set – he may be incompetent – but because he is deputed by a legitimate authority to teach them.

However, let us not exaggerate. *Ad impossibile nemo tenetur*. The human mind cannot accept statements which are absurd, nor can it be obliged to do so. A statement can be accepted by the mind only on condition that it is credible: that it involves no evident contradiction, and that the person who vouches for its truth is known to possess the knowledge and veracity which make it worthy of credence; and in the absence of such conditions the obligation of acceptance ceases. On the other hand, where a legitimately constituted teaching authority exists their absence will not lightly be presumed. On the contrary, obedience to authority (considered as authority *injubendo*) will predispose to the assumption that they are present.

Turning now to the Church, and with this distinction still in mind, we are confronted by an institution to which Christ, the Word Incarnate, has entrusted the office of teaching all men: “Going therefore teach ye all nations...teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.” Herein lies the source of the obligation to believe what the Church teaches. The Church possesses the divine commission to teach, and hence there arises in the faithful a moral obligation to believe, which is founded ultimately, not upon the infallibility of the Church, but upon God’s sovereign right to the submission and intellectual allegiance (*rationabile obsequium*) of His creatures: “He that believeth...shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be condemned.” It is the God-given right of the Church to teach, and therefore it is the bounden duty of the faithful to believe.

But belief, however obligatory, is possible only on condition that the teaching proposed is guaranteed as credible. And therefore Christ added to His commission to teach the promise of the divine assistance: “Behold I am with you all days even to the consummation of the world.” This divine assistance implies that, at any rate within a certain sphere, the Church teaches infallibly; and consequently, at least within those limits, the credibility of her teaching

is beyond question. When the Church teaches infallibly the faithful know that what she teaches belongs, either directly or indirectly, to the *depositum fidei* committed to her by Christ; and their faith thus becomes grounded, immediately or mediately, upon the divine authority. But the infallibility of the Church does not, precisely as such, render belief obligatory. It renders her teaching divinely credible. What makes belief obligatory is her divine commission to teach.

The importance of this distinction becomes apparent when we consider that the Church does not always teach infallibly, even on those matters which are within the sphere of her infallible competence. That the *charisma* is limited in its exercise as well as in its sphere may be gathered from the words of the Vatican Council, which defines that the Roman Pontiff²⁰ enjoys infallibility “when he speaks *ex cathedra*, that is when, exercising his office as shepherd and teacher of all Christians, according to his supreme apostolic authority he defines a doctrine concerning faith or morals to be held by the whole Church.” Hence infallibility is exercised only when the supreme teaching authority, in the use of its full prerogatives, determines in an irrevocable manner²¹ a doctrine on faith or morals to be held, either by divine Catholic faith or by ecclesiastical faith,²² by all the faithful. If, therefore, at any time a pronouncement is issued by the *Ecclesia docens* which is shown not to be an exercise of the supreme authority in all its fullness, or is not addressed to the whole Church as binding on all the faithful, or is not intended to determine a doctrine in an irrevocable manner, then such pronouncement is not infallible.

To formulate and to discuss the criteria by which an infallible utterance may be diagnosed as such is another task for the theologian, and in any case is beyond the scope of this paper. For our purpose it is sufficient to register the fact that much of the authoritative teaching of the Church, whether in the form of Papal encyclicals, decisions, condemnations, replies from Roman Congregations – such as the Holy office – or from the Biblical Commission, is not an exercise of the infallible *magisterium*. And here once again our cautious believer raises his voice: “Must I believe it?”

III

The answer is implicit in the principles already established. We have seen that the source of the obligation to believe is not the infallibility of the Church but her divine commission to teach. Therefore, whether her teaching is guaranteed by infallibility or not, the Church is always the divinely appointed teacher and guardian of revealed truth, and consequently the supreme authority of the Church, even when it does not intervene to make an infallible and definitive decision on matters of faith or morals, has the right, in virtue of the divine commission, to command the obedient assent of the faithful. In the absence of infallibility the assent thus demanded cannot be that of faith, whether Catholic or ecclesiastical; it will be an assent of a lower order proportioned to its ground or motive. But

²⁰ What is said of the Pope alone is true also of the *Corpus episcoporum*, for the Council states that ‘the Roman Pontiff enjoys that infallibility with which the divine Redeemer willed His Church to be endowed.’

²¹ ‘*Definit.*’

²² The word “*tenendam*” was used instead of “*credendam*” in order not to restrict infallibility to the definition of dogmas (*Acta Conc. Vat., Coll. Lac., t.VII, ed. 1704 seq.*).

whatever name be given to it – for the present we may call it belief – it is obligatory; obligatory not because the teaching is infallible – it is not – but because it is the teaching of the divinely appointed Church. It is the duty of the Church, as Franzelin has pointed out,²³ not only to teach revealed doctrine but also to protect it, and therefore the Holy See “may prescribe as to be followed or proscribe as to be avoided theological opinions or opinions connected with theology, not only with the intention of infallibly deciding the truth by a definitive pronouncement, but also – without any such intention – merely for the purpose of safeguarding the *security* of Catholic doctrine.” If it is the duty of the Church, even though non-infallibly, to “prescribe or proscribe” doctrines to this end, then it is evidently also the duty of the faithful to accept them or reject them accordingly.

Nor is this obligation of submission to the non-infallible utterances of authority satisfied by the so-called *silentium obsequiosum*. The security of Catholic doctrine, which is the purpose of these decisions, would not be safeguarded if the faithful were free to withhold their assent. It is not enough that they should listen in respectful silence, refraining from open opposition. They are bound in conscience to submit to them,²⁴ and conscientious submission to a doctrinal decree does not mean only to abstain from publicly rejecting it; it means the submission of one’s own judgement to the more competent judgement of authority.

But, as we have already remarked, *ad impossibile nemo tenetur*, and without an intellectual motive of some sort no intellectual assent, however obligatory, is possible. On what intellectual ground, therefore, do the faithful base the assent which they are obliged to render to these non-infallible decisions of authority? On what Cardinal Franzelin²⁵ somewhat cumbrously but accurately describes as *auctoritas universalis providentiae ecclesiasticae*. The faithful rightly consider that, even where there is no exercise of the infallible *magisterium*, divine Providence has a special care for the Church of Christ; that therefore the Sovereign Pontiff in view of his sacred office is endowed by God with the graces necessary for the proper fulfillment of it; that therefore his doctrinal utterances, even when not guaranteed by infallibility, enjoy the highest competence; that in a proportionate degree this is true also of the Roman Congregations and of the Biblical Commission, composed of men of great learning and experience, who are fully alive to the needs and doctrinal tendencies of the day, and who, in view of the care and the (proverbial) caution with which they carry out the duties committed to them by the Sovereign Pontiff, inspire full confidence in the wisdom and prudence of their decisions. Based as it is upon these considerations of a religious order, the assent in question is called a “religious assent.”

But these decisions are not infallible, and therefore religious assent lacks that perfect certainty which belongs to divine Catholic faith and ecclesiastical faith. On the other hand belief in the Providence which governs the Church in all its activities, and especially in all the manifestations of the supreme ecclesiastical authority, forbids us to doubt or to suspend assent. The Catholic will not allow his thought to wander into channels where he is assured by authority that danger threatens his faith; he will – indeed he must – suffer it to be guided by what he is bound to regard as the competent custodian of revealed truth. In the cases which we are now contemplating, he is not told how to adhere with the fullness of certainty to a

²³ *De Scriptura et Traditione* (1870), p.116.

²⁴ Letter of Pius IX to the Archbishop of Munich, 1861; cf. Denzinger, 1684.

²⁵ *Loc.cit.*

doctrine which is divinely guaranteed by infallibility; but he is told that this particular proposition may be maintained with perfect safety, while its contradictory is fraught with danger to the faith; that in the circumstances and in the present state of our knowledge this or that interpretation of Scripture may not safely be forsaken; that a particular philosophical tenet may lead to serious errors in a matter of faith. And the Catholic must shun the danger of which he is authoritatively warned by bowing to the judgement of authority. He must not doubt, he must assent.

Logically implied in these precautionary decisions is a truth of the speculative order, whether ethical or dogmatic. But upon that speculative truth as such the decree does not pronounce; it envisages merely the question of security.²⁶ Thus, for example, the answer of the Holy Office to the question about craniotomy²⁷ is based upon a moral principle which is a part of Catholic ethical doctrine. But the Congregation did not define that principle as a truth, although it is a truth. It merely stated that it is unsafe to teach that such an operation is licit; that Catholic ethical doctrine would be endangered by such teaching. Therefore the Catholic is bound to reject the suggestion that the operation may be permissible; he must believe that it is not allowed. Otherwise he would put himself in the danger of denying an ethical doctrine of the Catholic Church. On June 7th, 1918, the Holy Office in reply to a question decreed: “non posse tuto doceri...certam non posse dici sententiam quae statuit animam Christi nihil ignoravisse.”²⁸ Implied in this decision is the (speculative) truth that in Christ there was no ignorance. But the Holy Office did not define that truth. It merely stated that it is unsafe to cast any doubt upon the opinion that the soul of Christ was free from ignorance. Therefore the Catholic must hold it as certain that Christ was ignorant of nothing; otherwise he would endanger the integrity of Catholic doctrine.

But in the absence of infallibility there is the possibility of error, and hence the stickler for philosophical accuracy may refuse to religiously assent the attribute of certainty. Without quoting the homily on certainty which the judge reads to the jury at the beginning of his summing-up, we may none the less recall it to memory, and add to it the consideration that in the case before us the presumption in favour of truth, resting as it does upon the *auctoritas universalis providentiae ecclesiasticae*, renders the possibility of error so remote as to engender a high degree of what is known as “moral certainty.” The generality of the faithful are not troubled by difficulties in these matters, and no fear of error assails them. The learned, however, are not always so fortunate; their studies may tempt them sometimes to question the non-infallible decisions of authority. Obedience to that authority, while it does not forbid the private and respectful submission of such difficulties for official consideration, none the less demands that all Catholics, learned and unlearned alike, yield their judgement to the guidance of those whom Providence has set to guard the deposit of faith.²⁹

To sum up, Catholics are bound to believe what the Church teaches. To refuse the

²⁶ Hence it may be understood why such decrees are not of themselves irreformable. It may happen, for example, that the rejection of the authenticity of a Scriptural passage is unsafe at a particular time, but becomes safe at another in consequence of progress in Biblical studies.

²⁷ Denzinger, 1889.

²⁸ Denzinger, 2032.

²⁹ On the subject of religious assent see especially L. Choupin: *Valeur des Decisions doctrinales et disciplinaires du Saint-Siege* (Beauchesne, 1913), pp. 82 ff.

assent of divine-Catholic faith to a dogma is to be an heretic; to refuse the assent of ecclesiastical faith to a doctrine which the Church teaches as belonging indirectly to the deposit of faith is to be more or less near to heresy; to refuse internal religious assent to the non-infallible doctrinal decisions of the Holy See is to fail in that submission which Catholics are strictly bound to render to the teaching authority of the Church.

Are there, then, no fields of thought in which the Catholic may wander fancy-free? There are indeed; and they are the happy hunting-ground of the theologian. But he speculates more freely when he is free from the danger of error. His investigations are more fruitful, pursued within the limits of God's truth. There he is free, with the freedom with which Christ has made him free.

(Canon George D. Smith, Ph.D., D.D.)

Chapter 10

The Exact Theological Qualification of Heliocentrism in the Past and the Present

The reader of Canon Smith's article will find it easy, we think, to concur in our conclusion that the decrees against heliocentrism, though not infallible, were authoritative instructions addressed by the Holy See to the faithful on matters of doctrine, commanding their assent and protected by a special ecclesiastical providence sufficient to justify all in granting them that assent. And this understanding neatly disposes of most of the objections made by those who hold the condemnation to have been infallible, while avoiding the trap of too liberal an interpretation of the decrees as though Catholics were left free to continue to believe in heliocentrism notwithstanding them. Thus the decrees of the Sacred Congregation of the Index in 1660, 1664 and 1665 are assimilated to more recent Index legislation and the widely promulgated sentence condemning Galileo emanating from the Holy Office in 1633 is assimilated to other doctrinal instructions emanating from that source in accordance with the repeated insistence of the popes that Congregational decrees touching doctrine are owed interior and exterior submission by all Catholics (see Denzinger 1684, 1712, 2008, 2113).

But two difficulties remain outstanding which those who reject our thesis will be prompt to draw our attention to: (i) the repeated use of the term "heresy" to designate heliocentrism whereas non-infallible decrees emanating from the Roman Congregations are not sufficiently authoritative to make a proposition heretical, and (ii) the subsequent U-turn on the part of the Holy See by which it was implicitly permitted to Catholics to believe in heliocentrism notwithstanding the previous condemnations.

The first of these difficulties has been at the root of much of the scandal caused by the Galileo affair, but we think it is more apparent than real. Those who are not accustomed to the modalities of theology and the nice distinctions involved in the theological qualification of doctrines in their different degrees of orthodoxy or heterodoxy may indeed feel uncomfortable with the explanation we offer, but we venture to think that the more any reader is familiar with the fine details of this branch of theology, the more he will be at ease with it. It is as follows. (i) the theologian-qualifiers designated heliocentrism to be *heretical* in 1616 on the grounds of its manifest opposition to numerous texts of Holy Scripture all of which the Church infallibly proposes *in globo* as divinely revealed; (ii) the theologian-qualifiers did not hold that the Church had specifically proposed these passages as being geocentric in meaning; (iii) the qualification *heretical* was thus broader than current theological usage would permit, but not inaccurate according to contemporary understanding nor substantially different from our present understanding granted that Holy Scripture *does* in fact undeniably present the universe as geocentric and the sun as being in motion around the earth; (iv) the infallible proposal by the Church on which the qualification *heretical* was based was thus not a specific pronouncement on this topic but the general infallible proposal of the whole of the contents of the Bible by the Church which *eo ipso* obliges all Catholics to accept whatever the Bible explicitly teaches, whether directly theological in content or not, as all theologians have always accepted; (v) the decrees which were based on, and lent their authority to, this qualification of heliocentrism as heretical, not being infallible, created a situation in which Catholics were bound by an authoritative but non-infallible teaching to consider heliocentrism as heretical because of its opposition to the Bible and to reject it; (vi) thus a Catholic who rejected heliocentrism in obedience to these declarations, but at the same time denied that heliocentrism was in fact in conflict with the Scriptures or heretical, would have been acting

without due submission to the theological qualification applied by the decrees, but would not have been thought by anyone to be himself guilty of heresy.

It follows from this explanation that anyone who obstinately adhered to heliocentrism after the condemnation of 1616, or at least after that of 1633 which was diffused more widely and in a more formal way by the Holy See throughout the world, would have been liable, indeed, to condemnation as an heretic for denying what the Holy See had judged to be contrary to Holy Scripture. And this was thoroughly appropriate because anyone who denies the contents of Scripture is indeed guilty of an heretical denial of their Divine inspiration and consequent inerrancy. But any such condemnation (and in practice that of Galileo as *vehemently suspect* of having consented to the heliocentric heresy was the only one to the best of our knowledge) would have had no pretence at being infallible since it would have related only to a given individual. There is therefore not the slightest contradiction between this fact and our conclusion that geocentrism has never been, properly speaking, a dogma. The proposition that heliocentrism is contrary to Holy Scripture is the central theological truth intimated to the faithful by the Holy See in the whole Galileo affair, but so far is it from bearing the characteristics of a dogma to be believed with Divine and Catholic faith, that we do not think it falls into any of the six doctrinal categories we quoted in Chapter 6 from Father Cartechini concerning which the Church's pronouncements are, or at least may be, infallible. Father Cartechini lists a number of other theological qualifications in his study on the subject and he informs us that the content of the doctrinal decrees of the Roman Congregations is properly qualified as *safe* (*securum* or *tutum*) noting that one who opposes such teaching would be guilty of a grave sin of *disobedience* to the ecclesiastical teaching authority and that the offending proposition would be properly termed *temerarious*.

So in our evaluation the proposition that heliocentrism is contrary to Scripture should properly be qualified as *safe doctrine* and the denial thereof as *temerarious*, between 1616 (or at least 1633) and 1757 when the Holy See for the first time indicated that it no longer insisted on the observance of prior decrees on this topic. Since this proposition was *safe*, it follows that the Church acted safely and securely in her readiness to condemn opponents of heliocentrism as heretics, but it does *not* follow that heliocentrism's heretical character was, or was believed to be, a dogmatic truth.

Father Roberts and his like would of course snort at the idea of Catholics being commanded to reject a proposition as heretical which the Church had not reprobated by an infallible judgement, but we have every reason to distrust his standard of judgement for it was that which led him to refuse to submit to the Church's declaration of papal infallibility in 1870. Once he had taken the position that papal infallibility was not acceptable, it is not surprising that he should have done all in his power to argue that the decrees against Galileo (in his day, all but universally held to have been erroneous) ought to have been considered infallible as this would show that papal infallibility could indeed not be true. But we are safer in following the Church's evaluation of her own infallibility than that of her enemies and of traitors from her ranks.

And in fact it should be understood that there are many topics on which the Church's mission obliges her to instruct us, but concerning which she is simply not equipped to pronounce by a directly infallible decision since Sacred Tradition has not transmitted to her any datum which would serve as foundation for such pronouncements.

The second objection is of greater interest since even the appearance of a U-turn on a doctrinal topic is, we believe, unique in the history of the Church. But on the interpretation of the facts we have offered hitherto, there is no great mystery therein either. It may be frankly admitted that after the publication of Newton's writings most scientists came to consider the evidence in favour of heliocentrism to be overwhelming. It had certainly not been so in Galileo's day, but the great difference made by Newton was the presentation of a system explaining the *causes* of the real or supposed movements of the heavenly bodies in terms of fixed laws which not only squared with appearances, but also seemed eminently credible and seemed to lend themselves perfectly to heliocentrism but to be totally incompatible with geocentrism.³⁰ The anti-heliocentric Scriptural passages could be reinterpreted only with the greatest difficulty, but Scripture notoriously contains some passages difficult to understand or to reconcile with what seems to be established conclusions of natural disciplines and theologians would certainly have been prepared to countenance a far-from-literal interpretation of these passages if science had established convincing evidence in favour of heliocentrism *before* the condemnations of 1616 and 1633. Neither condemnation had been infallible. In view of these facts the Holy See found itself faced with a dilemma – which would be the greater scandal – to maintain and renew its condemnation of heliocentrism, thereby becoming the laughing stock of the scientific world and tempting many Catholic astronomers and scientists to rebellion and distrust of the Church in other matters, or tactfully to drop the matter, silently tolerating the heliocentric *status quo* which was creating itself?

If Providence had raised up Catholic scientists able convincingly to confute the pro-heliocentric evidence, no doubt the existing condemnations would have been maintained in force and vigorously applied, for no Catholic need then have felt intellectually embarrassed at standing his ground. With hindsight we may certainly hold that the least scandal would have been caused by renewing the condemnations even more emphatically and declaring formally in an encyclical the definite opposition detected to exist between Holy Scripture and heliocentrism and the consequent fact that any evidence apparently favouring heliocentrism must either be ill-founded or susceptible of another interpretation. But, as we know, at least two popes took the opposite view – Pope Benedict XIV and Pope Pius VII – and it is reasonable for us to sympathise with their predicament and not judge them harshly from the advantage we have in the 1990s when heliocentrism is once more, if not intellectually *respectable* in scientific circles, at least able to hold its own without difficulty in debate against all comers.

Are we saying that the popes were prepared to sacrifice their duty of defending the veracity of the divinely-inspired Scriptures to the need for Catholics to be well-viewed in the eyes of the world? We think that that would be an unduly severe view of what took place. The popes may well themselves have been uncertain as to where the truth lay in view of the new scientific evidence and the non-infallible status of the condemnations. Though learned

³⁰ We now know that this impression was more apparent than real, the scientific “consensus” being created more by what rumour alleged that Newton had shown rather than what his writings actually contained; and in any event our knowledge of the gravitational attraction apparently exercised by distant rotating masses permits heliocentrism to be easily reconciled with what is valid in Newton while recent experimental observations during eclipse conditions has falsified no small part of Newton's ideas in any event; but in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the scientific consensus, for good or for ill, existed and appeared to be based on very solid reasons quite unknown at the time of Galileo.

scientists and astronomers continued well into the nineteenth century to be sceptical of heliocentrism,³¹ their numbers were few indeed and it would have taken a very cool nerve on the part of the Holy See to stand its ground with such scant scientific defence.

But we hear a chorus of expostulation from our readers: surely, surely, we hear you say, you have told us that the non-infallible condemnations of heliocentrism created an obligation of assent in conscience on the part of all Catholics and were protected by a special ecclesiastical providence from leading the faithful astray. How, then, could the popes of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have failed to have a perfect trust in what had been decreed by their predecessors in the seventeenth century? This inquiry invites us to enter into what must be our last theological excursus in this study: an analysis of a special case discussed by some theologians, namely the case in which scholarship unknown to the Holy See at the time it pronounced its non-infallible judgements appears to dutiful *Catholic savants* to make it no longer intellectually tenable to hold what the Holy See has pronounced on a particular topic. Can such a case legitimately exist, and is the Church prepared to recognize, in any such case, the entitlement of a learned Catholic to withhold assent from non-infallible decrees because of some special and exceptional reason?

³¹ Including, for example, the celebrated German scholar Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859). See also *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, vol.6, ed. 1079, para. 5.

Chapter 11

Can It Ever Be Lawful to Suspend Interior Assent to the Doctrinal Content of Congregational Decrees?

It is a fact that some theologians of high authority recognize that in exceptional cases a given individual is not always bound to *internal* assent to non-infallible decrees concerning doctrine. Others seem not to recognize this; at least we have been unable to find any mention of it in Cardinal Franzelin's very authoritative *De Divina Traditione et Scriptura* (Rome, 2nd edition, 1875). And the Holy See has nowhere recognized it and seems in practice to speak as though it were not so. On the other hand it is understandable that there should be a reluctance to recognize what could only be an extremely exceptional case in order to avoid encouraging every Tom, Dick or Harry to think himself sufficiently erudite and his circumstances sufficiently exceptional that he may dissent from what the Holy See tells him he must accept.

“It is not therefore necessary to assent [to non-infallible doctrinal precepts] in such a way as to judge their teaching to be infallibly true or false, but rather in such a way as to judge that the doctrine contained in the judgement in question is safe, either as such, or in the existing circumstances, and that it must be held by us from a motive of obedience.

“But if exceedingly grave reasons should appear to some learned man, he could then suspend assent without temerity and without sin pending recourse to the judgement of the Roman Pontiff.

“Meanwhile, however, *external* obedience is necessary for him too, for the avoidance of scandal.” (Father Cartechini, *op.cit.*, p.115-6)

The distinction made by Father Cartechini seems to us to find some support in the *Motu proprio* of St. Pius X concerning the authority of the judgements of the Pontifical Biblical Commission (18th November 1907 – Denzinger 2113). While insisting that all are obliged in conscience by the duty of obedience to submit to the judgements of the Pontifical Biblical Commission in the same way as all other doctrinal decrees of the Sacred Congregations approved by the Pope, the *motu proprio* declares that grave sin of disobedience and temerity is necessarily committed by anyone who should oppose such judgements *in words or writing* – an observation which pointedly refrains from condemning one who observes a respectful silence but for a special reason on grounds of expert knowledge and consideration of the case considers himself unable in conscience to accept the judgement in question as true.

While it is evident that this principle could lend itself to great abuse if widely published among lay folk unable to judge reliably whether they have indeed sufficient grounds for withholding assent (very unlikely unless they are *extremely* learned) and perhaps unable even to distinguish whether the decree they hesitate to accept may *not*, in fact, be infallible either in itself or on account of the fact that the doctrine it contains may have been repeatedly taught by the Ordinary Magisterium in other ways also; nonetheless the principle does not seem unreasonable in itself. What must always be remembered is that the decrees we are discussing fall into a special category which may be considered a half-way house between doctrinal teaching of the Magisterium, on the one hand, and disciplinary precepts on the other. Everyone knows that the doctrinal teaching of the Magisterium must be simply believed as

true for Christ has guaranteed it to be true; and everyone knows that disciplinary precepts of the Holy See must simply be obeyed, for disobedience to God's vicar is invariably disobedience to God Himself except in the rare case of a private command of the Pope requiring commission of an immoral act, as probably took place in the famous dispute between Bishop Robert Grosseteste and Pope Innocent IV in the thirteenth century. But pronouncements on doctrine emanating from the Roman Congregations with the approval of the Pope are classified by Father Cartechini as "doctrinal precepts", in other words as having the same subject matter as formal teaching, but as sharing the motive and nature of our submission to them with *disciplinary* decrees. Or, as Canon Smith explains, we may say that such decrees oblige us to assent to their contents, but on grounds of obedience and submission, rather than directly of faith; and for this reason one who rejects such decrees is guilty of disobedience and insubordination directly and only indirectly of sin against faith in so far as he jeopardises his orthodoxy by trusting his private judgement more than the non-infallible judgement of the Holy See.

This understanding permits a useful analogy, similar to the one already quoted in Canon Smith's article, with the attitude of a small child to instruction received from his father. A child who dissented from his father's explanation of the conditions necessary for the successful growing of tomatoes or claimed to know better than his father how an internal combustion engine functions would be guilty of insubordination and rightly reprimanded. Should he plead, in his defence, that his father is not infallible he would be promptly cut short by the observation that his father is manifestly far more competent than a small child in such matters and is, in any event, the divinely appointed authority in the family from whom children are to learn according to the order established by God.

So far, so good. But the same analogy necessitates recognition that rare exceptions may occur. Even a child of eight or nine years (and the greatest theologians of the Church are in their relations to the Holy See, with its collective and inherited wisdom and its supernatural enlightenment and protection, no more than as eight- or nine-year-olds to their father) may on one occasion in a million, be right where his father is wrong, and be sufficiently certain of his facts to know that this is so. And in such a case the child's position must be, when possible, to represent modestly his reasons for hesitation to his parents, but in any event not to dissent outwardly from his father's judgement until such time as his father should admit his mistake. And that is precisely the attitude which theologians like Father Cartechini permit in very rare and exceptional cases, to the learned expert *vis a vis* of a doctrinal precept of the Holy See.

Now we must emphasise that we are not offering this in any sense as an excuse for Galileo in his failure to respect the orders of the Holy See communicated to him in 1616 by renouncing heliocentrism and never again speaking or writing a word in its favour. Galileo made not the slightest attempt, whether in 1616 or in 1633, to claim that he had overwhelming reason for thinking that the non-infallible decree might not be right and for internal suspension of assent; he made not the slightest attempt to persuade the Pope of his evidence. On the contrary he readily declared, in 1616, that he rejected heliocentrism from his heart, and in 1633 he insisted (in the face of overwhelming evidence) that he had always internally respected this. And indeed almost all Catholic writers on the Galileo affair, even if they themselves are heliocentrists,³² agree that Galileo had no overwhelming evidence in favour of

³² Writing subsequently to the liberalising legislation of Popes Benedict XIV and Pius VII.

heliocentrism at all and in fact that his arguments were exceedingly weak, the chief of them being universally recognised for hundreds of years to have been not merely weak but wholly invalid and even fatuous.³³

The reason we refer to this principle is to explain how it was possible for Pope Benedict XIV to re-open a subject which had been definitively closed by his predecessor and re-evaluate the evidence, in the light of the writings of Newton and others, rather than rejecting it *a priori* as worthless in view of its opposition to what the Holy See had already determined in the matter. And this we think is easily achieved, not only for those who accept the exceptional lawfulness of suspending assent in this way, but even for those who recognise, what we think is inevitably so: namely that the lawfulness of suspending assent in such cases is at least *theologically probable*.

³³ We refer, of course, to his argument based on the movement of the tides in which he contrived wholly to overlook the fact that the tidal to-and-fro occurs not once but twice in the space of every twenty-four hours!

Chapter 12

The Correct Catholic Attitude to Heliocentrism Today

We have shown that the Church has implicitly withdrawn her condemnation of heliocentrism, so that Catholics are not directly guilty of heterodoxy or disobedience if they hold that the earth revolves around the sun. But we do not think it follows from this that a good Catholic will regard the matter as theologically indifferent and one on which he is perfectly free to follow his opinion taking account only of scientific evidence and considerations of the natural order as though there were no theological or supernatural principles involved.³⁴

There are three reasons for this view, which we shall now explain:

1. We have shown that doctrinal decrees emanating from the Sacred Congregations with the approval of the Pope, though not infallibly *true*, are held by the Church to be infallibly *safe* and supremely *credible*. Otherwise, in requiring Catholics to believe their contents, the Church would be demanding assent of the intellect without proffering proportionate motive for granting such assent and therefore demanding the impossible – a notion which is quite incompatible with her essential mark of holiness.

Now it is argued by Father Roberts in his study to which we have repeatedly referred that if heliocentrism be true, the repeated condemnations of it by the Holy See were neither safe nor credible; and that if the Holy See can repeatedly insist that Catholics espouse an unsafe doctrine on insufficient grounds on one topic, one cannot have the slightest assurance that she may not have been guilty of the same mis-guidance on countless other topics.

It follows that one cannot embrace heliocentrism without effectively undermining the entire authority of the Church in her non-infallible doctrinal precepts and without departing, at least implicitly; from a theologically certain truth: viz, the safety and credibility of *all* such decrees. We have not the faintest idea how Catholic heliocentrists can reasonably defend themselves against this accusation of temerity.

2. While it is not intrinsically unorthodox to hold, as some theologians have done, that in a very rare and exceptional case a doctrinal precept of the Holy See may be inaccurate and need subsequent revision, a loyal Catholic can only be *exceedingly reluctant* to admit that this has occurred in any concrete case. His reluctance is based on his pious respect for the Holy See and docility to all its decisions and his faith in the protection accorded by the Holy Ghost to *all* the acts of the Church. And he would be especially reluctant to admit error on the part of the Holy See in the case of Galileo both because of the gravity of the censure originally applied to heliocentrism and because everyone knows perfectly well that the Galileo affair is the only serious example proffered of a case in which error on the part of the Holy See in non-infallible doctrinal decisions is thought by some to have been established, and even admitted.

³⁴ Still less, of course, does it follow that Catholics are or ever have been obliged or encouraged by the Church to *favour* heliocentrism! The Church ceased to condemn heliocentric writings, but she never gave them the least positive encouragement, nor has she ever in any way discouraged the traditional doctrine of geocentrism. The most one may say is that the Holy See has decided, with every mark of reluctance, to *tolerate* heliocentrism.

The recognition of this view inevitably weakens faith and starkly opposes the filial attitude every good Catholic nurtures towards the Holy See.

We respectfully submit that, this being so, heliocentrism cannot properly be accepted unless its acceptance is genuinely *necessary*, i.e. unless it is a demonstrated truth of natural science. And while many Catholics of unquestioned loyalty mistakenly believed this to be so until recent times, we do not see how it is possible, when in possession of the evidence, to continue to take this view.

3. Even abstracting entirely from the interventions of the Holy See on this topic there remains a theological principle which in our view makes geocentrism obligatory. We refer to the principle of scriptural interpretation that the proper, or literal, meaning of any text is to be preferred to a metaphorical or symbolic interpretation whenever this is possible.

“Next comes the duty to determine whether the words in a given passage should be taken in their proper, or, on the contrary, in their metaphorical acceptance. For this purpose, two general rules should be borne in mind: (1) the words of Holy Writ must be taken in their proper sense, unless it be necessary to have recourse to their metaphorical meaning, and this becomes necessary only when the proper acceptance would yield a sense evidently incorrect, or manifestly opposed to the authority of tradition or to the decisions of the Church as already explained...” (Gigot, Father Francis E., S.S.: *General Introduction to the Study of the Holy Scripture*, Benziger Brothers, New York, 1900, pA.02)

On the basis of this principle an anti-heliocentric argument was formulated by the Jesuit theologian and astronomer Father Ricciolo in the sixteenth century which he states as follows:

“Every proposition affirmed by a canonical writer found in Holy Scripture is to be taken in its literal sense whenever in such a sense there is no contradiction with:

“(a) other propositions of the same Holy Scripture which are equally or more sure,

“(b) or with the definition of the Supreme Pontiff of the Roman Catholic Church,

“(c) or with a proposition which is certain and evident by natural light.

“But the propositions of Holy Scripture in which the movements of the sun and the stability of the earth are affirmed are asserted by a canonical writer and do not contradict any other kinds of proposition mentioned in the major premise; therefore they must be taken in their literal and proper sense.” (*Novum Almagestum*, vol.1, part 2, p.444)

Once again we are left with the conclusion that heliocentrism must be rejected unless it is “a proposition which is certain and evident by natural light.” We respectfully submit that it is no such thing and that those who continue to think it is are only demonstrating their ignorance after the recent example of Mr. Hutton Gibson of Australia who in his *The War Is Now* has chosen to wheel out the antiquated and exploded pro-heliocentric arguments of his distant childhood rather than inform himself objectively of the present state of scientific

evidence and take comfort from the vindication of the Holy See effected in recent years.³⁵

³⁵ Another example of such misinformed prejudice is furnished by a young American Catholic who undertook an animated correspondence with us which, when he discovered our geocentric convictions, he broke off as abruptly (and in fact downright rudely) as if it had been geocentrism, rather than heliocentrism, which the Vicar of Christ had branded as contrary to the word of God!

Chapter 13

Retractions

We wish to take this opportunity to correct some details in previous Britons Catholic Library publications on the heliocentrism versus geocentrism controversy which we now regret. These are as follows:

1. The present, detailed study of the theological status of heliocentrism serves substantially to corroborate the findings of our 1986 study *Galileo's Theory is Heretical* published as an Appendix to N. M. Gwynne's earlier paper *Galileo versus the Geocentric Theory of the Universe* and also published as a supplement to Britons Catholic Library Letter No. 4, volume 4, part 3. For in our 1986 study we already established the essential point that geocentrism has been declared heretical, in the sense of being contrary to the Holy Scriptures, by a non-infallible decree which, however, created an obligation of internal assent on the part of all Catholics.

Where we went astray was in writing as though these decrees were still in full force and without giving adequate weight to the decisions of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century whereby the Holy See extended toleration to the heliocentric hypothesis, *albeit* without explicitly rescinding its earlier condemnations. The chief effect of this is that in our present study we are forced to state with much greater moderation the extent to which Catholics may properly represent it as obligatory *today* to reject heliocentrism.

The 1986 study would also have been improved if we had drawn attention to the fact that at present date theologians do not use the term "heretical" to refer to doctrines which explicitly contradict the definitely correct meaning of Holy Scripture unless that meaning has been infallibly proposed by the Church independently of her general proposal of the *entire* contents of Holy Scripture as divinely inspired.

2. What requires more radical correction is the second Appendix of N. M. G.'s study *Galileo versus the Geocentric Theory of the Universe*, entitled *The Retrial of Galileo*. In the ten pages comprised by this Appendix, along with a great deal of useful information, N. M. G. follows Walter van der Kamp in his criticisms of certain papal decisions and writings bearing directly or indirectly upon the pretensions of modern science to have refuted the literal or proper sense of numerous Biblical texts.

The thesis advanced is that Pope Benedict XIV and Pope Pius VIII,³⁶ by their conceding toleration to heliocentrism, opened the floodgates for all that has occurred since, leading to the position in the 1950s in which many Catholics believed heliocentrism, evolution, Einsteinian relativity and every anti-Catholic aberration which the Masonic scientific establishment claims to have proved, and thought their position orthodox and compatible with Holy Scripture on the grounds that Scripture does not intend to teach science and followed the conceptions popularly believed at the time its respective books were written without regard for their literal accuracy.

And Pope Leo XIII is singled out as particularly culpable for giving further

³⁶ Van der Kamp mistakenly refers to Pope Leo XII in this context, but it is evident from the dates that he means to refer to his successor, Pius XIII.

momentum to this diabolical anti-Catholic and anti-Scriptural tide by his encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* wherein he refers to the fact that the inspired writers of Holy Writ sometimes adapted their phraseology in matters of natural science to that of their hearers or readers, speaking in accordance with appearances rather than objective reality.

We wish to withdraw every criticism of the Holy See contained in this Appendix and in future editions we intend to suppress it entirely, both because it is not the part of a loyal Catholic to criticise papal decisions when there is any question of a favourable interpretation of them,³⁷ but also because we think that criticism is misplaced.

We have done our best in this present study to present the decisions of Pope Benedict XIV and Pope Pius VIII sympathetically (while of course everyone admits that there is no *obligation* on Catholics to consider them to have been the most brilliant decisions that could have been taken in the circumstances). As for the encyclical of Pope Leo XIII, we think it better to say simply that certain passages in it lend themselves to abuse by modernists who purport to infer from them that modern astronomy, evolutionary theory or other spurious findings of pseudo-science are not necessarily incompatible with the revealed Word of God. But we no longer think them *intrinsically* objectionable as what the Pope says is certainly true and soundly based on St. Augustine and St. Thomas. It is indeed the case, for example, that in *Genesis 1:16* it is stated that “God made two great lights: a greater light to rule the day; and a lesser light to rule the night” and that this passage inevitably involved an adaptation to ordinary human parlance and subjective appearances rather than objective reality since the moon, of course, possesses no inherent luminosity and, unlike the sun, merely *appears* to be a source of light by reflecting towards us, according to its phases, the light of the sun during the hours when the sun is hidden from our eyes.

And in this evaluation of Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical, we feel perfectly safe since it is substantially that given by Pope Benedict XV in his own encyclical on Scripture: *Spiritus Sanctus Paraclitus* in which he devotes several pages to correction of the liberal interpretations of his predecessor’s words and points out that the interpretations are incompatible with other parts of the same encyclical; he insists on the correct interpretation which gives no right whatsoever to either scientists or historians to call for a “re-interpretation” of Scripture in the sense of their purported discoveries when it is quite patent that Scripture is in fact incompatible with them.

³⁷ More especially encyclicals and other doctrinal pronouncements which call for docility and submission rather than critical evaluation.

Appendix I

The 1633 Condemnation and Abjuration of Galileo

Whereas you, Galileo, son of the late Vincenzo Galilei, Florentine, aged seventy years, were in the year 1615 denounced to this Holy Office for holding as true the false doctrine taught by some that the Sun is the centre of the world and immovable and that the Earth moves, and also with a diurnal motion; for having disciples to whom you taught the same doctrine; for holding correspondence with certain mathematicians of Germany concerning the same; for having printed certain letters, entitled “On the Sunspots”, wherein you developed the same doctrine as true; and for replying to the objections from the Holy Scriptures, which from time to time were urged against it, by glossing the said Scriptures according to your own meaning: and whereas there was thereupon produced the copy of a document in the form of a letter, purporting to be written by you to one formerly your disciple, and in this divers propositions are set forth, following the position of Copernicus, which are contrary to the true sense and authority of Holy Scriptures:

The Sacred Tribunal being therefore of intention to proceed against the disorder and mischief thence resulting, which went on increasing to the prejudice of the Sacred Faith, by command of His Highness and of the Most Eminent Lords Cardinals of this supreme and universal Inquisition, the two propositions of the stability of the Sun and the motion of the Earth were by the theological Qualifiers qualified as follows:

The proposition that the Sun is the centre 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.

The proposition that the Earth is not the centre of the world and immovable but that it moves, and also with a diurnal motion, is equally absurd and false philosophically and theologically considered at least erroneous in faith.

But whereas it was desired at that time to deal leniently with you, it was decreed at the Sacred Congregation held before His Holiness on 25 February 1616, that his Eminence the Lord Cardinal Bellarmine should order you to abandon altogether the said false doctrine and, in the event of your refusal, that an injunction should be imposed upon you by the Commissary of the Holy Office to give up the said doctrine and not teach it to others, not to defend it, nor even discuss it; and failing your acquiescence in this injunction, that you should be imprisoned. And in execution of this decree, on the following day, at the Palace, and in the presence of his Eminence, the said Lord Cardinal Bellarmine, after being gently admonished by the said Lord Cardinal, the command was enjoined upon you by the Father Commissary of the Holy Office of that time, before a notary and witnesses, that you were altogether to abandon the said false opinion and not in future to hold or defend or teach it in any way whatsoever, neither verbally nor in writing; and, upon your promising to obey, you were dismissed.

And in order that a doctrine so pernicious might be wholly rooted out and not insinuate itself further to the grave prejudice of Catholic truth, a decree was issued by the Sacred Congregation of the Index prohibiting the books which treat of this doctrine and declaring the doctrine itself to be false and wholly contrary to the sacred and divine Scripture.

And whereas a book appeared here recently, printed last year at Florence, the title of which shows that you were the author, this title being: *Dialogue of Galileo Galilei on the Great World Systems*: and whereas the Sacred Congregation was afterwards informed that, through the publication of the said book the false opinion of the motion of the Earth and the stability of the Sun was daily gaining ground, the said book was taken into careful consideration, and in it there was discovered a patent violation of the aforesaid injunction that had been imposed upon you, for in this book you have defended the said opinion previously condemned and to your face declared to be so, although in the said book you strive by various devices to produce the impression that you leave it undecided, and in express terms as probable: which, however, is a most grievous error, as an opinion can in no wise be probable which has been declared and defined to be contrary to divine Scripture.

Therefore by our order you were cited before this Holy Office, when, being examined upon your oath, you acknowledged the book to have been written and published by you. You confessed that you began to write the said book about ten or twelve years ago, 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.

You likewise confessed that the writing of the said book is in many places drawn up in such a form that the reader might fancy that the arguments brought forward on the false side are calculated by their cogency to compel conviction rather than to be easy of refutation, excusing yourself for having fallen into an error, as you alleged, so foreign to your intention, by the fact that you had written in dialogue and by the natural complacency that every man feels in regard to his own subtleties and in showing himself more clever than the generality of men in devising, even on behalf of false propositions, ingenious and plausible arguments.

And a suitable term having been assigned to you to prepare your defense, you produced a certificate in the handwriting of his Eminence the Lord Cardinal Bellarmine, procured by you, as you asserted, in order to defend yourself against the calumnies of your enemies, who charged that you had abjured and had been punished by the Holy Office, in which certificate it is declared that you had not abjured and had not been punished but only that the declaration made by His Holiness and published by the Sacred Congregation of the Index had been announced to you, wherein it is declared that the doctrine of the motion of the Earth and the stability of the Sun is contrary to the Holy Scriptures and therefore cannot be defended or held. And, as in this certificate there is no mention of the two articles of the injunction, namely, the order not “to teach” and “in any way”, you represented that we ought to believe that in the course of fourteen or sixteen years you had lost all memory of them and that this was why you said nothing of the injunction when you requested permission to print your book. And all this you urged not by way of excuse for your error but that it might be set down to a vainglorious ambition rather than to malice. But this certificate produced to you in your defence had only aggravated your delinquency, since, although it is there stated that said opinion is contrary to Holy Scripture, you have nevertheless dared to discuss and defend it and to argue its probability; nor does the license artfully and cunningly extorted by you avail you anything, since you did not notify the command imposed upon you.

And whereas it appeared to us that you had not stated the full truth with regard to your intention, we thought it necessary to subject you to a rigorous examination at which (without prejudice, however, to the matters confessed by you and set forth as above with regard to your

said intention) you answered like a good Catholic. Therefore, having seen and maturely considered the merits of this your case, together with your confessions and excuses above mentioned, and all that ought justly to be seen and considered, we have arrived at the underwritten final sentence against you:

Invoking, therefore, the most holy name of our Lord Jesus Christ and of His most glorious Mother, ever Virgin Mary, by this our final sentence, which sitting in judgement, with the counsel and advice of the Reverend Masters of sacred theology and Doctors of both Laws, our assessors, we deliver in these writings, in the cause and causes at present before us between the Magnificent Carlo Sinceri, Doctor of both Laws, Proctor Fiscal of this Holy Office, of the one part, and you Galileo Galilei, the defendant, here present, examined, tried, and confessed as shown above, of the other part –

We say, pronounce, sentence and declare that you, the said Galileo, by reason of the matters adduced in trial, and by you confessed as above, have rendered yourself in the judgement of the Holy Office vehemently suspect of heresy, namely, of having believed and held the doctrine – which is false and contrary to the sacred and divine Scriptures – that the Sun is the centre of the world and does not move from east to west and that the Earth moves and is not the centre of the world; and that an opinion may be held and defended as probable after it has been declared and defined to be contrary to the Holy Scripture; and that consequently you have incurred all the censures and penalties imposed and promulgated in the sacred canons and other constitutions, general and particular, against such delinquents. From which we are content that you be absolved, provided that, first, with a sincere heart and unfeigned faith, you abjure, curse, and detest before us the aforesaid errors and heresies and every other error and heresy contrary to the Catholic and Apostolic Roman Church in the form to be prescribed by us for you.

And, in order that this your grave and pernicious error and transgression may not remain altogether unpunished and that you may be more cautious in the future and an example to others that they may abstain from similar delinquencies, we ordain that the book of the *Dialogue of Galileo Galilei* be prohibited by public edict.

We condemn you to the formal prison of the Holy Office during our pleasure, and by way of salutary penance we enjoin that for three years to come you repeat once a week the seven penitential Psalms. Reserving to ourselves liberty to moderate, commute, or take off, in whole or in part, the aforesaid penalties and penance.

And so we say, pronounce, declare, ordain, and reserve in this and in any other better way and form which we can and may rightfully employ.

I, Galileo, son of the late Vincenzo Galilei, Florentine, aged seventy years, arraigned personally before this tribunal and kneeling before you, Most Eminent and Reverend Lord Cardinals Inquisitors-General against heretical pravity throughout the entire Christian commonwealth having before my eyes and touching with my hands the Holy Gospels, swear that I have always believed, do believe, and by God's holy will in the future believe all that is held, preached, and taught by the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. But, whereas – after an injunction has been judicially intimated to me by this Holy Office to the effect that I must altogether abandon the false opinion that the Sun is the centre of the world and moves and that I must not hold, defend, or teach in any way whatsoever, verbally or in writing, the said false doctrines, and after it had been notified to me that the said doctrine was contrary to Holy

Scripture – I wrote and printed a book in which I discuss this new doctrine already condemned and adduce arguments of great cogency in its favour without presenting any solution of these, I have been pronounced by the Holy Office to be vehemently suspected of heresy, that is to say, of having held and believed that the Sun is the centre of the world and immovable and that the Earth is not the centre and moves:

Therefore, desiring to remove from the minds of your Eminences, and of all faithful Christians, this vehement suspicion justly conceived against me, with sincere heart and unfeigned faith, I abjure, curse and detest the aforesaid errors and heresies and generally every other error, heresy, and sect whatsoever contrary to Holy Church, and I swear that in the future I will never again say or assert, verbally or in writing, anything that might furnish occasion for a similar suspicion regarding me; but should I know any heretic or person suspected of heresy, I will denounce him to the Holy Office or to the Inquisitor or Ordinary of the place where I may be. Further, I swear and promise to fulfil and observe in their integrity all penances that have been, or that shall be, imposed upon me by the Holy Office. And, in the event of my contravening (which God forbid!) any of these my promises and oaths, I submit myself to all the pains and penalties imposed and promulgated in the sacred canons and other constitutions, general and particular, against such delinquents. So help me God and these his Holy Gospels, which I touch with my hands.

Appendix II

The Condemnation of Louvain Traditionalism³⁸

Two accounts of what happened, the one in a measure supplementing the other, together with the authoritative documents cited, will be found in the first volume of the *Dublin Review* for 1868. From these it appears that, in June 1843, Professor Ubaghs, of the University of Louvain, received notice that the Congregation of the Index had decreed that his works on *Theodicea* and *Logic* contained errors he would be required to correct in a future edition. The points to which his attention was directed on this occasion were his deliverances touching the impossibility of demonstrating, in the proper sense of the term, external metaphysical truths in general, and God's existence in particular. The professor accordingly made some changes; but the Congregation was still dissatisfied with his language, and passed another decree to the effect that he had not made the corrections required. We gather from a later document (Cardinal Patrizi's letter of Oct. 11, 1864) that both these decrees were confirmed by Pope Gregory XVI.

After this the contention between the supporters and opponents of the professor's opinions was allowed to go on for some years. But the publication, in 1859, of a work by Canon Lupus, entitled *Traditionalism and Rationalism Examined*, and the judgement of an eminent Roman theologian that no sound Catholic could hold the opinions on traditionalism taught at Louvain, drove four of the professors to send an exposition of their doctrine to Cardinal de Andrea, prefect of the Index, to be submitted to the Congregation. Instead, however, of doing so, the Cardinal contented himself with the judgement of certain theologians, and returned an answer on his own account, whereon he praised the professors for their submission to the Apostolic See, and declared that the doctrine referred to him "is among those that may be freely disputed on either side by Christian philosophers." But his letter, having no authority – for it did not even profess to be from the Congregation – only supplied fresh matter for contention.

In the following year, July 31, 1861, the Belgian Bishops wrote to the Rector of the University of Louvain, with a view to restore peace. The professors engaged to adhere to all the counsels and rules laid down for them. Then the Pope himself interposed with an Apostolical Letter, dated Dec. 19, 1861, in which he utterly disavowed Cardinal de Andrea's letter, as having no authority whatever. He declared that "the definitive examination and judgement of the doctrines in dispute appertained solely to the Apostolic See," "Quarum definitivum examen et iudicium ad hanc Apostolicam Sedem unice pertinent." That until the Holy See should definitively pronounce judgement on the matter, neither the advocates nor opponents of the opinions in debate were to say that what they taught was the one, true, and the only admissible doctrine on the subject: "Volumus atque mandamus, ut earumdem doctrinarum tum fautores tum oppugnatores, donec definitivum de ipsis doctrinis iudicium haec Sancta Sedes proferre existimaverit, se omnino abstineant sive docendo...sive factis sive consiliis, aliquam ex praedictis philosophicis ac theologicis doctrinis exhibere ac tueri, veluti unicum, veram et solam admittendam, ac veluti Catholicae Universitati propriam." Observe,

³⁸ "Traditionalism" as used by pre-Vatican II theologians, denotes the condemned error of the school which attributed our knowledge of God's existence to tradition rather than natural reason. It has nothing to do with the anti-Vatican II movement of our days.

the Pontiff here plainly asserts that no judgement but a judgement exclusively (*unice*) of the Holy See ought to be accepted as decisive on the points at issue. He implies, therefore, that the decrees he subsequently required the professors to accept as decisive, were to be recognised as expressive of the judgement exclusively (*unice*) of the Holy See.

The Pope then commissioned the Congregations of the Inquisition and Index to examine the whole matter; and on Oct. 11, 1864, Cardinal Patrizi wrote to the Belgian Bishops, announcing the result. The united Congregations resolved that Professor Ubaghs had not really corrected the errors censured in 1843 and 1844. They, therefore, commanded him to do so. They further said that they must not be understood to approve certain other opinions advocated in the more recent editions of the professor's works. His Holiness Pope Pius IX, it was added, has ratified and confirmed with his authority this their sentence.

Professor Ubaghs again set himself to prepare a fresh edition of his works, and in 1865 placed copies of it in the hands of the Roman authorities, intending to publish should his corrections be approved. But the judgement he elicited on this occasion was even more unfavourable to him than that of 1864. The Congregations ruled that the new edition still contained, in substance, the errors previously noted; and they added that they observed in the professor's works teachings very similar to some of the seven propositions condemned by the Holy Office in Sept. 1861; and other opinions were there to be found, at least incautiously expressed, concerning traducianism and the vital principle in man. The two Congregations, therefore, pronounced judgement, "That in the philosophical works hitherto published by G. C. Ubaghs, and especially in his *Logic* and *Theodicea*, doctrines or opinions are found that cannot be taught without danger," "quae absque periculo tradi non possunt;" and this judgement our Holy Lord Pope Pius IX, has ratified and confirmed by his supreme authority." "Quare Eminentissimi Cardinales in hanc devenere sententiam:— In libris philosophicis a G. C. Ubaghs hactenus in lucem editis, et praesertim *Logica* et *Theodicea* inveniri doctrinas seu opinionones, quae absque periculo tradi non possunt. Quam sententiam SSmus. D. N. Papa IX. ratam habuit et suprema sua auctoritate confirmavit." The decree was notified in a letter from Cardinal Patrizi dated March 2, 1866. The writer added:— There is no doubt that Professor Ubaghs, considering his great virtue, and the other professors of Louvain that hold the same opinions, will obey this decision. And the Archbishop is commanded, in the Pope's name, to take measures with his suffragans to give effect to the resolutions notified.

On the receipt of this decree the Belgian Bishops sent a letter, dated March 21, to the Rector and Professors of Louvain, to which they all replied, and gladly gave a declaration of "filial obedience, to be laid at the feet of his Holiness." Professor Ubaghs resigned his chair, and set himself to correct his works; and from this time his name is no more mentioned in connection with these transactions.

"But still," we read, "some difficulty arose with regard to the interpretation of the last decree. Some said that it was disciplinary, not doctrinal. We must not *teach* the condemned opinion" — such was their language — "but we may *preserve it in our heart.*" Others considered that the exposition of doctrine drawn up by the four professors in 1860 was not touched by this decision. M. Laforêt deemed this last opinion probable and lawful, and so did Professor Beelen; and Professor Lefebvre wrote to the same effect to the Bishop of Namur, who, in conjunction with two other Bishops, sent the letter to the Holy See. The Cardinal of Malines also communicated to Cardinal Patrizi his knowledge of the doubts about the force of the decree. The latter, in his reply, requested the Archbishop to convene a meeting of the

Bishops to take measures to secure a full, perfect, and absolute submission of those professors who adhered to the opinions censured, to the decision of the Holy See: “Fac igitur quaeso ut Episcopi suffraganei tui quam primum apud te convenient, hac de re agant et efficiant ut professores notatis opinionibus jam adhaerentes resolutioni S. Sedis plene, perfecte, absoluteque, se submittant.”

In obedience to this letter the Bishops met at the end of July, and invited M. M. Beelen and Lefebvre to express their sentiments. This they did at length, affirming at the same time that they most heartily embraced all the decisions of the Holy See, but that it was not evident to them, from the letters of March 2nd and June 3rd, that any decision had condemned the exposition of doctrine they had forwarded to Cardinal de Andrea. They then, at the request of the Bishops, drew up a carefully worded statement of their opinions to be submitted to Rome, ending with a request to be informed by the Apostolic See whether it had condemned such tenets theologically considered, and whether, therefore, they must be entirely rejected by every Catholic:

“Pergratum nobis erit a Seda Apostolica edoceri, utrum ea, quae hic a nobis sunt exposita, ab ipsa theologice fuerint damnata, ideoque a quovis catholico prorsus sint rejicienda.”

In forwarding this to Rome, the Bishops added a letter of their own to the Pope, dated August 1st, 1866, giving an account of the doubts that prevailed touching the scope and force of the decrees, and they earnestly begged the Pontiff to say whether the doctrine of the professors was really reprobated in those decrees.

Cardinal Patrizi, on the 30th of the same month, replied in the Pope’s name. He remarked that it was wonderful how such doubts could be entertained; that of course the exposition of February 1860 had been fully taken into account. “Assuredly,” he said, “it is the duty of Catholics, and still more so of ecclesiastics, to subject themselves to the decrees of the Holy See, fully, perfectly, and absolutely, and to put away contentions that would interfere with the sincerity of their assent.” “Porro yin catholici, multo vero magis ecclesiastici id muneris habent, ut decretis S. Sedis, pleno, perfecte, absoluteque se subjiciant, e medio sublatis contentionibus, quae sinceritati assensus officerent.” “I write these things in the name of the Holy Father, that you may make them known to the Bishops your suffragans, and that both you and they may admonish in the Lord, and more and more exhort the above-named professors and those who think with them to acquiesce *ex animo*, as it becomes them, in the judgement of the Apostolic See,” “ut sententiae Apostolicae Sedis *ex animo*, sicut eos decet, acquiescant.”

On this the Bishops drew up the following formula of submission, to be signed by all the professors that had in any way committed themselves to the opinions noted:

“In compliance with your orders I hasten to offer you this written testimony of my filial obedience, and I most humbly entreat you to lay it at the feet of our Most Holy Father Pope Pius IX. I fully, perfectly, and absolutely submit myself to the decisions of the Apostolic See issued on the 2nd of March and the 30th of August of this year, and I acquiesce in them *ex animo*. And, therefore, from my heart I reprobate and reject all doctrine opposed thereto, and in particular the exposition of doctrine that was subscribed to by four professors, and sent on the 1st of February 1860 to his Eminence the Cardinal Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of the Index, and other opinions touching the questions mooted at Louvain that the Apostolic

See had reprobated.”

“Obsequens mandatis vestris hocce documentum filialis obedientiae vobis exhibere festino, humillime rogans, ut per manus vestras ad pedes SSmi Domini Pu P.P. IX. deponatur.

“Decisionibus S. Sedis Apostolicae diei 2 Martii et 30 Augusti hujus anni plene, perfecte, absoluteque me subjicio, et ex animo acquiesco. Ideoque ex corde reprobato et rejicio quamcunque doctrinam oppositam, nominatim expositionem doctrinae a quatuor professoribus subscriptam et die 1 Februarii anno 1860 ad Emum. Cardinalem Praefectum S. Congregationis Indicis transmissam, aliaque ad quaestionem Lovanii agitatam spectantia, quae Sedes Apostolica reprobavit.

“Profunda veneratione et omnimoda subjectione permaneo,

“Eminentissime Princeps, Illmi. et Rmi. Antistites.

Humillimus et obedientissimus famulus.

“Lovanii, Dec. 1866.”

Is not this as complete an act of submission as was ever exacted to any *ex cathedrâ* decision that was not a definition of faith? Compare it, e.g., with the submission certain professors were required to yield to Pope Gregory’s Brief that condemned the errors of Hermes – a judgement undoubtedly *ex cathedrâ*. (See *Dublin Review*, January 1868, p. 288.)

If, as Cardinal Franzelin seems to teach,³⁹ the assent *of faith* is claimed in the case of every *ex cathedrâ* utterance, the Pope has long ago implicitly defined the doctrine of his infallibility in minor censures, and to deny that doctrine would unquestionably be against the faith, and constructive heresy. But this it confessedly is not. In the Bull “Apostolicae Sedis moderationi,” teachers and defenders of propositions condemned by the Holy See, “sub excommunicationis poena latae sententiae,” are placed in a separate class from offenders against the faith; and they incur excommunication less strictly reserved even than those who read, without license, a book condemned in an Apostolic Letter.

No one refused to sign the formula, and it looked as if traditionalism at Louvain had received its death-blow. For the circumstances under which it once more put forth a feeler, we must turn to the April number of the *Dublin Review* for 1871. The last chapter of this remarkable history is even more significant for my purpose than the preceding.

It appears that, though the Vatican Council condemned traditionalism in the “*Dei filius*,” it did not specially mention that modified form of it that had been advocated at Louvain. The omission was welcomed by some as an indication that the doctrines so heartily and thoroughly reprobated four years ago might once more be professed. Rome was sounded on the subject, and Cardinal Patrizi, at the command of Pius IX, sent the following response, dated August 7, 1870: “That by the said Synodal Constitution (the ‘*Dei Filius*’), especially by the monitum at its conclusion, all the decrees of the two Congregations insisted on the matter, and especially the one contained in the letters I sent to the Belgian Bishops on March 2, 1866, have not only not been annulled nor weakened, but, on the contrary, have been strengthened by a new sanction.” The monitum cited is this: “Since it is not sufficient to shun heretical

³⁹ *De Devina Traditione et Scriptura*, pp. 124, 130.

pravity, unless those errors also be diligently avoided which more or less nearly approach it, we admonish all men of the further duty of observing those constitutions and decrees by which such erroneous opinions as are not here specifically enumerated have been proscribed and condemned by the Holy See.”

The *Civilta* of March 18 (p.721) declares that the Pope’s reply is more useful than any *treatise* “for the purpose of clearing up better a special point concerning the extension of the object and the Acts of the (Pope’s) Apostolic Magisterium.” And the *Dublin Review* adds: “The Holy Father’s response declares in effect that the Congregational decrees of 1867, expressing as they did the Pope’s confirmation, are to be accounted Pontifical *ex cathedrâ* Acts.”

This much is clear:– According to the mind of Rome, expressed in the declarations and acts we have considered, judgements of the class in question are to be accounted, in a very proper sense, decrees of the Holy See; the doctrine they propound ought to be accepted by all Catholics with unreserved assent – “plene, perfecte, absoluteque;” and, lastly, according to the responses of Pius IX, they are decrees of the Holy See in the sense intended by the General Council.

(Extract from Fr. W. W. Roberts: *The Pontifical Decrees against the Doctrine of the Earth’s Movement*, Parker and Co., Oxford and London, 1885, pp. 5-12.)

Appendix III

The Church's Theological Notes or Qualifications

The following tabular presentation is borrowed, with slight adaptation, from a work of the highest weight and authority entitled (in translation) *On the Value of Theological Notes and the Criteria for Discerning Them* by Father Sixtus Cartechini, S.J. (Rome, 1951), a work which was drafted for use by auditors of the Roman Congregations. Each of the following is a **defined theological note**:

(a) Dogma

Equivalent terms: Dogma of faith; de fide; de fide Catholica; de fide divina et Catholica.

Explanation: A truth proposed by the Church as revealed by God.

Examples: The Immaculate Conception; all the contents of the Athanasian Creed.

Censure attached to contradictory proposition: Heresy.

Effects of denial: Mortal sin committed directly against the virtue of faith, and, if the heresy is outwardly professed, excommunication is automatically incurred and membership of the Church forfeited.

Remarks: A dogma can be proposed either by a solemn definition of pope or council, or by the Ordinary Magisterium, as in the case of the Athanasian Creed, to which the Church has manifested her solemn commitment by its long-standing liturgical and practical use and commendation.

(b) Doctrine of ecclesiastical faith

Equivalent term: *De fide ecclesiastica definita.*

Explanation: A truth not directly revealed by God but closely connected with Divine revelation and infallibly proposed by the Magisterium.

Example: The lawfulness of communion under one kind.

Censure attached to contradictory proposition: Heresy against ecclesiastical faith.

Effects of denial: Mortal sin directly against faith, and, if publicly professed, automatic excommunication and forfeiture of membership of Church.

Remarks: It is a dogma that the Church's infallibility extends to truths in this sphere, so one who denies them denies implicitly a dogma of

Divine faith.

(c) Truth of Divine faith

Equivalent term: *De fide divina.*

Explanation: A truth revealed by God but not certainly proposed as such by the Church.

Example: Christ claimed from the beginning of His public life to be the Messiah.

Censure attached to contradictory proposition: Error (in faith).

Effects of denial: Mortal sin directly against faith, but no loss of Church membership. May incur a canonical penalty.

(d) Proximate to faith

Explanation: A doctrine all but unanimously held as revealed by God.

Example: Christ possessed the Beatific Vision throughout his life on earth.

Censure attached to contradictory proposition: Proximate to error.

Effects of denial: Mortal sin indirectly against faith.

(e) Theologically certain

Equivalent terms: Dogmatic fact; theological conclusion.

Explanation: A truth logically following from one proposition which is Divinely revealed and another which is historically certain.

Example: Legitimacy of Pope Pius XII.

Censure attached to contradictory proposition: Error (in theology).

Effects of denial: Mortal sin against faith.

(f) Catholic doctrine

Equivalent term: Catholic teaching.

Explanation: A truth authentically taught by the Ordinary Magisterium but not as revealed or intimately connected with revelation.

Examples: Invalidity of Anglican Orders; validity of Baptism conferred by heretic or Jews.

Censure attached to contradictory proposition: Temerarious.
Effects of denial: Mortal sin indirectly against faith.
Remarks: The expression Catholic doctrine is sometimes applied to truths of a higher order also, but never of a lower one. In some cases the appropriate censure may be graver than “temerarious”.

(g) **Certain.**

Equivalent terms: Common; theologically certain.
Explanation: A truth unanimously held by all schools of theologians which is derived from revealed truth, but by more than one step of reasoning.
Example: The true and strict causality of the sacraments.

Censure attached to contradictory proposition: Temerarious.
Effects of denial: Usually, mortal sin of temerity.
Remarks: Proportionately grave reason can sometimes justify an individual who has carefully studied the evidence in dissenting from such a proposition; since it is not completely impossible for all the theological schools to err on such a matter, although it would be highly unusual and contrary to an extremely weighty presumption.

(h) **Safe**

Equivalent term: Affirmed in doctrinal decrees of Roman Congregations.
Example: That Christ will not reign visibly on earth for a thousand years after Antichrist.

Censure attached to contradictory proposition: Unsafe/temerarious.
Effects of denial: Mortal sin of disobedience and perhaps imprudence.
Remarks: Exterior assent is absolutely required and interior assent is normally required, since, though not infallible, the Congregations possess true doctrinal authority and the protective guidance of the Holy Ghost.

(i) **Very common / commoner**

Explanation: The most solidly founded or best attested theological opinion on a disputed subject.
Example: Antichrist will be of the tribe of Dan.
Censure attached to contradictory proposition: None.

Effects of denial: None.

Remarks: Very common or commoner opinions can be mistaken and there is no obligation to follow them, though prudence inclines us to favour them as a general policy. It should be noted that an opinion which is “very common” is *less* well established than one which is “common” which implies moral unanimity of theological schools.

(j) Probable

Explanation: A theological opinion which is well founded either on the grounds of its intrinsic coherence or the extrinsic weight of authority favouring it.

Examples: Judas received Holy Communion at the Last Supper; Judas did not receive Holy Communion at the Last Supper.

Censure attached to contradictory proposition: None.

Effects of denial: None.

Remarks: The better founded of two conflicting opinions is referred to as *more* probable; but Catholics are free to prefer some other opinion for any good reason.

We emphasise that the foregoing table is rough and ready. The lesser theological censures have been differently used by different theologians,⁴⁰ and some questions of application, and even of theological distinctions, remain undetermined in their use.

1997 A.D.

NOTES

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This paper computerized in the US [2002] from a [1997] hard copy in EU size paper.

Essay is in US paper size. Although number of pages is the same in EU & US paper sizes, there are slight differences in text location, due primarily to the difference between tkhose paper sizes.

⁴⁰ See Father John Cahill, O.P.: *The Development of the Theological Censures after the Council of Trent (1563-1709)*, Fribourg, Switzerland, 1955.