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COPERNICUS BANNED

The Entangled Matter  
of the anti-Copernican Decree  
of 1616

edited by

NATACHA FABBRI and FEDERICA FAVINO



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CASA EDITRICE LEO S. OLSCHKI  
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50126 Firenze  
[www.olschki.it](http://www.olschki.it)

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FRANCO MOTTA

NATURE, FAITH AND THE JUDGE OF FAITH  
SOME CONSIDERATIONS ON THE HISTORICAL-POLITICAL CONTEXT  
OF COPERNICUS' CONDEMNATION

1. THE DENUNCIATION OF GALILEO AND THE FIRST EXAMINATION OF COPERNICANISM BY THE INQUISITION

The dossier against Galileo that reached the desk of the Prefect of the Index, Cardinal Sfondrati, in February 1615 contains several interesting charges. According to it, some «Galileists, who maintain that the Earth moves and the Sun stands still», are active in Florence; they have drafted a 'scripture' where it can be read that the Bible presents some unfit (*inconvenienti*) expressions, and that the Holy Writ should be the last text to be taken into consideration on questions of natural philosophy since it matters only in questions of faith and its exegetes often fall into error.<sup>1</sup> The author of the dossier, the Dominican friar Niccolò Lorini of Florence, enclosed a copy of this incriminating document with the «suspect or hazardous» sentences duly underlined. As we know, the 'scripture' or text in question was the letter of Galileo to Benedetto Castelli and the sentences brought to the attention of the censors all pertain to issues of biblical hermeneutics.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Niccolò Lorini to Paolo Sfondrati, February 1615, in OG, XIX, pp. 298-299. For a deeper analysis of the inquiry that led to the condemnation of Copernicus in 1616 see, among the most recent studies, JOHN L. HEILBRON, *Galileo*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010, pp. 200 sq.; ALFREDO DAMANTI, "Libertas philosophandi". *Teologia e filosofia nella Lettera alla granduchessa Cristina di Lorena di Galileo Galilei*, Rome, Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2010, pp. 49 sq.; ANNIBALE FANTOLI, *Galileo e la Chiesa. Una controversia ancora aperta*, Rome, Carocci, 2010, pp. 101 sq.; MICHELE CAMEROTA, *Galileo Galilei e la cultura scientifica nell'età della Controriforma*, Rome, Salerno, 2004, pp. 260 sq.

<sup>2</sup> *Processo di Galileo*, OG, XIX, pp. 299-304. The copy of the letter to Castelli delivered by Lorini to the Index diverges in some important passages from the more widespread version; according to Mauro Pesce, this is the effect of the rewriting of it by Galileo himself (MAURO PESCE, *L'ermeneutica biblica di Galileo e le due strade della teologia cristiana*, Rome, Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2005, pp. 29 sq.).

Father Tommaso Caccini, who was the first to denounce Galileo, from the pulpit of Santa Maria Novella, confirmed these charges in a testimony released on March 20 at the Holy Office. According to him, it is «public knowledge» (the expression is borrowed from the terminology of criminal law of the time) that Galileo believes in the motion of the Earth and the immobility of the Sun. But his deposition cited further elements: that Galileo «is considered a good Catholic by many, but is suspect in matters of faith to others, since it is said that he is very close to that friar Paolo the Servite, so famous in Venice for his impieties»; that he has already attracted the attention of the Inquisition; and that he is the member of an «academy» which maintains contacts with «others, in Germany». Furthermore, his pupils would affirm that «God is in no way substance, but rather accident», that He is in some way provided with senses, and that «the miracles which are said to be performed by saints are not real miracles».<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, the picture taking shape before the eyes of Michelangelo Seghizzi, commissioner to the Holy Office, presented decidedly suspect features: Galileo was a close acquaintance of the Venetian intellectual Paolo Sarpi – for ten years among the most insidious enemies of the Apostolic See – and formed part of a cenacle with ties to Germany on various points of shared interest (in Rome «the matters of Germany» usually referred to anything relating to Protestantism). Assertions were attributed to Galileo's students that were apparently contrary to scholastic metaphysics and the cult of saints.

The investigation, which would stretch out over the following months, was assigned to Cardinal Millini, secretary to the Holy Office, since this congregation had exclusive competence in matters of faith. In his testimony Caccini cited Father Ferdinando Ximenes as the expert who had collected the compromising phrases *de auditu*, i.e. he had actually heard them spoken. Ximenes, when questioned on this, confirmed in large part Caccini's statements (except those regarding the cult of saints), mentioning in turn a presumed student of Galileo, Giannozzo Attavanti. When questioned a day later, Attavanti rejected the accusation *in toto*, attributing the charges to a misunderstanding on the part of Ximenes of their conversation.<sup>4</sup>

The case apparently finishes here. The friendship between Galileo and Sarpi; the suspicions that were circulating with regard to Galileo's position on «matters of faith»; the declarations ascribed to the «Galileists» concerning the substance and the senses of God or the origins of miracles – none

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<sup>3</sup> *Processo di Galileo*, OG, XIX, pp. 307-311.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 316-320.

of this seemed to have had any consequences. Benedetto Castelli, the original recipient of the letter that Lorini had passed to the Holy Office, was not even interrogated. He merely received a paternal admonition from the Archbishop of Pisa, Monsignor Bonciani, who on March 12 warned him to abandon the «peculiar opinions» of Copernicus, since «beyond being a pack of nonsense, they were dangerous, scandalous, and reckless [*pericolose, scandalose e temerarie*], being in outright opposition to the Sacred Scriptures».<sup>5</sup>

The adjectives ‘dangerous’, ‘scandalous’ and ‘reckless’ were technical terms drawn directly from the terminology used by the qualifiers and consultants to the Inquisition when defining the degree of deviation of a proposition from orthodox doctrine. This meant that even before the testimony of Caccini issued on March 20, based on the denunciation of Lorini alone, heliocentrism had already raised the suspicions of the authorities responsible for the appraisal and censoring of ideas. Indeed, during a plenary session of the Holy Office held on March 19, Pope Paul V ordered Caccini to be interrogated regarding the «errors of the aforesaid Galileo», thus branding them as such even before any theological examination had been conducted.<sup>6</sup>

One year later, notwithstanding a written denunciation and two testimonies focusing not on Copernicanism itself, but rather on its implications for the interpretation of the Bible, on the hierarchy between philosophy and theology in the explanation of natural phenomena, and on other theses concerning theological and metaphysical questions, the decision of the Holy Office was to submit to the censors two simple sentences limited to the strictly astronomical aspect of Copernicus’ astronomy and leaving aside any philosophical implications: «That the Sun is the center of the world, and consequently motionless in its place [*immobile di moto locale*]. That the Earth is neither the center of the world nor motionless, but moves around itself, also with a daily motion».<sup>7</sup> Such was the text submitted to the consultants on 19 February 1616, exactly one year after Lorini’s denunciation – two sentences drawn almost word for word from the testimony of Caccini («The Earth moves around itself, also with daily motion; the Sun

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<sup>5</sup> Benedetto Castelli to Galileo, 12 March 1615, OG, XII, pp. 153-154. It must be remarked that, from Bellarmine’s correspondence preserved in the Jesuit archives in Rome (see below, notes 12 and 21), Monsignor Bonciani appears to have close and stable relationships with the Cardinal.

<sup>6</sup> *Processo di Galileo*, OG, XIX, p. 276.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 320.

is motionless»), as if no one had taken it upon himself to actually read Copernicus' contested book.

In other words, the Inquisitors seemed to be suffering from a certain lack of zeal, which is quite surprising, especially since in the middle of February 1615 another anonymous consultant to the Holy Office had been given a copy of Galileo's letter to Castelli, and he pointed out three further dubious assertions dealing with the question of the truth of Scripture, Galileo having used unwary expressions such as «false propositions», «abstain» and «pervert» in relation to the actual text of the Bible. In the consultant's report these assertions were qualified as *male sonans* ('evil sounding').<sup>8</sup>

Now the use of the term *male sonans* when referring to a proposition under theological evaluation is not to be taken as a vague or generic accusation. It belonged to the legal lexicon of the Inquisition, which defined to a nicety the different possible degrees of deviation from Catholic truth: 'evil sounding' denoted the fourth degree of error after those of 'heretical', 'erroneous' and 'tasting of heresy' (*sapiens haeresim*).

We can find a detailed discussion of this in an important work that laid out the methodology for the Counter-Reformation scholastic theology, the *Loci theologici* (*Theological Commonplaces*) (1563) by the Salamancan theologian Melchor Cano, in particular in book 12, "De locorum usu in scholastica disputatione" ("On using commonplaces in a scholastic controversy"). Cano's tome was not intended as a handbook for inquisitors, unlike frequently cited texts such as the 14<sup>th</sup> century Inquisitor General of Aragon Nicholas Eymerich's *Directorium Inquisitorum* (republished by Francisco Peña in 1578) or Eliseo Masini's *Sacro Arsenale, ovvero Pratica dell'Uffizio della Santa Inquisizione* (1621), which provided generations of inquisitors with the rules for trials in cases of faith. Cano's treatise was rather intended to train theologians in the correct use of the sources of faith and in the construction of a well-established theological discourse. In this sense, it can be considered a broadly shared set of standards on Catholic theology.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 305. The first two censored assertions can be found already underlined by Lorini in the copy of the letter transmitted to the Index, while the third is autonomously identified by the anonymous consultant. If not otherwise specified, all the original texts are translated by myself.

<sup>9</sup> The importance of Cano in the Second scholasticism is stressed by MELQUIADES ANDRÉS, *El método teológico en la época moderna*, in *El método en teología*, Valencia, Facultad de Teología San Vicente Ferrer, 1981, pp. 201-233, 223 sq., and IGNACIO JERICÓ BERMEJO, *Regula fidei et veritas fidei catholica. El artículo de fe según Melchor Cano*, «Scriptorium victoriense», 30, 1983, pp. 277-315. Cano's consideration of the doctrinal notes is analysed by BRUNO NEVEU, *L'erreur et son juge. Remarques sur les censures doctrinales à l'époque moderne*, Naples, Bibliopolis, 1993, pp. 272 sq.

In a technical sense (*specialiter*), according to Cano «We properly term evil sounding, and offensive to pious ears those propositions where not a manifest error against faith, but rather something out-of-tune and absurd can be noted, appearing shameful to pious and religious ears».<sup>10</sup>

Obviously, ascribing to a suspect sentence this lesser and more subtle degree of incorrectness could be a delicate task and Cano reminded his readers: «It is foolhardy insolence to regard as a crime what the Church has never considered as such». Declaring that the Blessed Virgin was tainted with the original sin of Adam would sound bad «to the ears of the people», even if theologically it was a fully legitimate sentence (the Dominican order, to which Cano belonged, was rigidly hostile to the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception), and the same would be found even for some passages in the Gospel, «should we let ourselves be led by the mob». So we may properly deem as *male sonantes* those sentences that «although not tasting of heresy, nevertheless show an absurd and extraneous sound, disagreeing with the sound teaching and the authentic and well-founded way of speaking of the Church».<sup>11</sup>

Cano added some examples of evil-sounding statements: for example, the declaration that the emperor Constantine and Pope Sylvester had made a mistake when they endowed the Church with temporal possessions, or that the Roman Church is the synagogue of Satan, and so on. It can be seen that these assertions were not strictly heretical since they had never been formally condemned by a council, but they were nonetheless openly opposite to tradition. This was the degree of incorrectness that the anonymous consultant to the Holy Office attributed to three passages in Galileo's letter to Castelli.

There is no doubt that an assessment of this kind must have created some alarm among the cardinals of the Congregation of the Inquisition (indeed, during this period revised copies of Galileo's letter were being circulated on the scientist's behalf in power circles in Rome by his friend, the prelate Monsignor Piero Dini of Florence, reaching the cardinals Barberini, Del Monte and Bellarmine). Furthermore, at the beginning of March 1615 Foscarini published his *Lettera sopra l'opinione de' Pittagorici*, which was entirely devoted to establishing an unprecedented theological concordance between Copernicanism and the Bible. And no later than early June the manuscript letter written by Galileo to the Grand Duchess Christina was

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<sup>10</sup> MELCHOR CANO, *Locorum theologicorum libri XII*, here in the 1734 edition, Patavii, typis Seminarii, XII, 7, p. 391.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 392.



beginning to circulate; in it the scientist expanded on some of the considerations that he had touched upon in his letter to Castelli, advancing his new hermeneutical proposal of a separation between the scientific and the religious spheres and the pre-eminence of the experimental method in explaining natural phenomena.<sup>12</sup>

## 2. THE CRISIS OF THE SACRED COLLEGE AND THE “SOLITUDE” OF CARDINAL BELLARMINE

To what I’ve summed up so far it must be added that in 1615 the whole matter still revolved around a “missing guest” – that is, Nicolaus Copernicus, whose book *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium*, which he dedicated to Pope Paul III, had appeared in print more than seventy years before, remaining since then a rare volume (it was reprinted only once, in Basel, in 1566), and circulating only among professional astronomers.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, Galileo’s two recent booklets showing strong evidence of the tenability of the Copernican system, the *Sidereus nuncius* (1610) and the *Istoria e dimostrazioni intorno alle macchie solari* (1613), had gained a Europe-wide reputation, and the author was even praised in 1611 for his heavenly discoveries by the renowned Jesuit astronomers of the Roman College.

We must also keep in mind that the Copernican question remained a marginal problem for the Roman Curia when compared with the much larger issues which were at stake at the time, involving the fundamental relationship between temporal and spiritual power and the struggle for hegemony between the Apostolic See with its historic prerogatives and the growing claims of secular rulers. In this very context, however, interesting analogies can be found between the debate over heliocentrism and the theological-political issues of the period – analogies that, as I will attempt to show, should be taken into consideration in assessing the reasons that led the Congregation of the Index (*Congregatio pro Indice Librorum Prohibitorum*, created in 1571 by Pius V) to issue their prohibition of Copernicanism *ut thesis* (‘as a thesis’) in 1616.

As we know, the responsibility for resolving the question raised by Lorini and Caccini and countered by the alternative proposals of Foscarini

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<sup>12</sup> That Bellarmine must have known Galileo’s letter to Christina is proved by the Cardinal’s autograph note in Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, *Opp. NN. 245*, c. 43 (see DAMANTI, “*Libertas philosophandi*”, cit. note 1, pp. 365-366).

<sup>13</sup> The rareness of the *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium*, at the time, is remarked by MICHEL-PIERRE LERNER, *L’hérésie heliocentrique: du soupçon à la condamnation*, in *Sciences et religions de Copernic à Galilée (1540-1610)*, Rome, École Française de Rome, 1999, pp. 69-91, 75.

and Galileo fell to the Jesuit cardinal and theologian Robert Bellarmine. A trusted advisor to the papacy, he served as the unofficial mediator on the case for the Holy Office and undoubtedly for Paul V himself. On such a complex issue Bellarmine probably seemed the natural candidate; he was universally esteemed for his learning and had earned a reputation for diplomatic tact after serving in the summer of 1591 on the special commission established to correct the many errors introduced by Pope Sixtus V in the revised edition of the Vulgate – an embarrassing incident that had shown the Sacred College how delicate questions touching on the letter of the Bible could be.<sup>14</sup>

Bellarmino accompanied, so to speak, from start to finish what has been called the ‘first trial’ of Galileo. As we know, in April 1611 he had requested the opinion of the mathematicians of the Roman College on the veracity of the new astronomical discoveries: notwithstanding the full confirmation which he received, his initial suspicion regarding the scientist, as far as we know, dates from that circumstance.<sup>15</sup> In a conversation with Prince Federico Cesi (founder of the Accademia dei Lincei) presumably dating to early January 1615 and therefore preceding Lorini’s denunciation, he declared, in Cesi’s words, that: «As for Copernicus’ opinion [...] he holds it to be heretical, and that the motion of the Earth, without any doubt, is against Scripture».<sup>16</sup> He was the advisor whom Paul V summoned to a meeting on 24 February 1616 following a harsh confrontation with Cardinal Alessandro Orsini, at the end of which the pope concluded that «Galileo’s opinion» must be considered «erroneous and heretical».<sup>17</sup> Finally, Bellarmine is the one who notifies the scientist on February 26 of the report handed down two days before by the consultants to the Holy Office and

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<sup>14</sup> The incident is briefly retraced in FRANCO MOTTA, *Bellarmino. Una teologia politica della Controriforma*, Brescia, Morcelliana, 2005, pp. 586 sq.

<sup>15</sup> «Among the others, Bellarmine told me [...] that if [Galileo] would have stayed here too long, they couldn’t do without asking him some justifications of his case»: Piero Guicciardini to Curzio Picchena, 5 December, 1615, recalling Galileo’s visit to Rome four years earlier, OG, XII, pp. 206-207; Bellarmine’s letters to the Fathers of the Roman College and their response, OG, XI, pp. 87-88. On the cardinal’s views in astronomical matters see UGO BALDINI, *L’astronomia del cardinale and Bellarmino tra vecchia e nuova scienza*, in *Id.*, *Legem impone subactis. Studi su filosofia e scienza dei gesuiti in Italia, 1540-1632*, Rome, Bulzoni, 1992, pp. 285-303, 305-344. Baldini’s studies have raised some critics, centered not on the depth of his inquiry but rather on his interpretive approach, emphasizing the ‘modernity’ of the perspective of Bellarmine and, more generally, of the Jesuits about the relation between faith and science: see, for instance, MAURIZIO TORRINI, *Da Galileo a Kircher: percorsi della scienza gesuitica*, «Galilæana», 2, 2005, pp. 3-17.

<sup>16</sup> Cesi to Galileo, 12 January 1615, OG, XII, pp. 128-130, 129.

<sup>17</sup> Piero Guicciardini to Cosimo II, 4 March 1616, OG, XII, pp. 241-243, 242.

implicitly approved in the plenary session of the *Congregazione dell'Indice* the day before – for which we have no minutes – whereby Copernicanism is condemned as erroneous and heretical.<sup>18</sup>

Based on the hints in letters received by Galileo from Tuscans living in Rome and members of the Florentine court (all supporters of the scientist, but each of whom had his own views on his chances: Monsignor Dini was optimistic, while Prince Cesi was more cautious and the ambassador of the grand duke, Guicciardini, was impatient with Galileo's eagerness to stand up for his ideas), Cardinal Bellarmine's stance during the fourteenth months preceding the official censure of Copernicanism was somewhat vacillating. While, as we have seen, in January 1615 he declared «the opinion of Copernicus» and in February 1616 «the opinion of Galileo» to be heretical (although in the latter case he may have been referring to the Copernican cosmology combined with the hermeneutical theses contained in Galileo's letters to Castelli and Christina), in the interval between these two uncompromising statements he showed some willingness to engage in dialogue. On 7 March 1615 Monsignor Dini informed Galileo of a conversation that he had had with the cardinal: «As for Copernicus [...] he does not believe that it is going to be prohibited, and the worst that could happen is that some glosses will be added, explaining that his doctrine was introduced to save appearances, or something of the kind».<sup>19</sup> And in fact this would prove to be the substance of the decree issued one year later, not prohibiting but rather «suspending» the *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* until it could be amended. At the same time Father Christoph Grienberger of the Roman College assured Dini that Bellarmine was well disposed toward the receipt of any further mathematical evidence of heliocentrism that Galileo might provide before approaching the biblical question.<sup>20</sup>

It must be added that Bellarmine's behavior was probably influenced by serious diplomatic considerations – on one side the deference due to the House of Medici of which he was a 'natural' subject, having been born in Montepulciano, and on the other his close dealings with Christina of Lor-

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<sup>18</sup> *Processo a Galileo*, OG, XIX, pp. 321-322. As is well known, the genuineness of the Bellarmine's notification to Galileo has been strongly debated. The hypothesis that the document is a forgery drafted in Rome, during the 1633 trial, has been advanced through a well-researched analysis by VITTORIO FRAJESE, *Il processo a Galileo Galilei. Il falso e la sua prova*, Brescia, Morcelliana, 2010. Much criticism about Frajese's hypothesis has then been expressed by SERGIO PAGANO, *Il precetto del cardinale Bellarmino a Galileo: un 'falso'?, con una parentesi sul radio, Madame Curie e i documenti galileiani*, «Galilæana», 7, 2010, pp. 143-203.

<sup>19</sup> Dini to Galileo, March 7, 1615, OG, XII, pp. 151-152.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 151.

rairie as an intermediary with the Florentine court – as he protected the interests both of his own family (Bellarmine presided over a large patronage network comprising his brothers, sisters, cousins and nephews) and the diocese of Montepulciano, for which he held the role of ‘protector’ in Rome.<sup>21</sup> It was a member of the House of Medici – Mary, the widow of Henry IV of France and cousin of the grand duke – who prevented the burning of Bellarmine’s *De potestate Summi pontificis in rebus temporalibus* (‘On the power of the pope in temporal matters’) in November 1610 by suspending the sentence issued by the Parliament of Paris. The book had been condemned for damaging the monarchical prerogative and directly inspiring the theories on regicide that had materialized so menacingly a few months before with the assassination of Henri IV.

There is no clear evidence regarding the differing viewpoints held within the Sacred College, especially among the theologians of the Holy Office and the Index, with respect to Copernicanism. The cardinal of Aracoeli, Agostino Galamini – a zealous Dominican friar, and formerly inquisitor in Brescia, Genoa and Milan as well as Master of the Sacred Palace – appears to have been Caccini’s contact and the promoter behind the scenes of the trial.<sup>22</sup> Felice Centini – cardinal of Ascoli, member of the Friars Minor Conventual, and a docile *creatura* of Pope Paul V with staunch pro-Spanish leanings – probably shared his position.<sup>23</sup> In contrast Alessandro Orsini, Francesco Maria del Monte, and above all Bonifacio Caetani and Maffeo Barberini assumed a different posture; they were more prudent, even overtly favorable to Galileo and to the legitimacy of a heliocentric exegesis of the Bible.<sup>24</sup>

Faced with such a constellation of opinions, Bellarmine appears to have adopted the position of the mediator, made possible by his personal authority and by his close proximity to the pope as his most influential advisor on theological matters. On the other hand, the fact that he was entrusted to

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<sup>21</sup> Bellarmine’s correspondence with the Grand-Duchess Mother Christina, the Grand-Duke and the Grand-Duchess, stored in the Archivio di Stato of Florence and the Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, is also available in the typewritten copies drafted in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by Fathers Xavier-Marie Le Bachelet and Sebastiaan Tromp (*Epistolae Bellarmini*), in the Archivio della Pontificia Università Gregoriana in Rome (Apug 1601-36).

<sup>22</sup> MASSIMO BUCCIANINI, *Contro Galileo: alle origini dell’affaire*, Firenze, Olschki, 1995, pp. 38 sq.

<sup>23</sup> On Galamini see *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, vol. 51, pp. 325-326 (S. Rivabene); on Centini *ibid.*, vol. 23, pp. 593-597 (G. Benzoni).

<sup>24</sup> On the opposition of Caetani and Barberini toward a condemnation of Copernicanism for the charge of heresy see the 1633 memo of Giovanfrancesco Buonamici, OG, XV, p. 111 and OG, XIX, pp. 407-411, mentioned by CAMEROTA, *Galileo Galilei* (cit. note 1), p. 320.

handle Copernicus' case could be read as a symptom of the overall weakness of the Sacred College, and more specifically of the Congregations of the Index and of the Inquisition in the second decade of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Cardinal Bellarmine was born in 1542 (one year before the death of Copernicus and the publication of his work) and by 1615 he was an elderly man. In January of that year he published his celebrated *De ascensione mentis in Deum per scalas rerum creaturarum* ('On the ascension of the mind to God through the ladder of created things'), which testifies to his allegorical vision of nature and hence his intellectual distance from any realist approach to natural philosophy. This book was also the first in a series of devotional pamphlets that would appear annually until 1620, as if in anticipation of the canonization process that the Society of Jesus would undertake after his death in 1621.<sup>25</sup>

In other words, despite his tireless dedication to the Roman congregations of which he was a member (the Holy Office and the Index, but also the Congregation of Rites which was responsible for the processes of beatification and canonization, matters where his theological expertise would have been invaluable), Bellarmine seemed to be preparing to retire from his institutional commitments and withdraw into a life of asceticism and spirituality. He had produced the magnum opus of his intellectual career, the *Disputationes de controversiis christianae fidei* ('Disputations about controversies on the Christian faith'), some thirty years before and his later contributions to the theological and political debates of the time – such as the *De potestate Summi pontificis in rebus temporalibus* or his confutations of the arguments of James I and the theologians of Venice against the supreme authority of the pope – were little more than a reworking of themes already dealt with in it.

In 1615 Bellarmine therefore was one of the last remaining protagonists in a crucial period in the Church's history that was coming to a close. He belonged to the generation of theologians and prelates trained in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and called upon to interpret and enforce the decrees of the Coun-

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<sup>25</sup> On Bellarmine's epistemology in the light of the *De ascensione mentis in Deum* see *ibid.*, pp. 289-290, and more recently FRANCESCO BARRECA, *Cosmologia ed ermeneutica biblica nel De ascensione mentis in Deum di Roberto Bellarmino*, «Galilæana», 10, 2013, pp. 119-136. A comparison between his allegorical concept and the emblematic approach to natural knowledge, which was peculiar to the Jesuits' Aristotelism – most famously represented by Athanasius Kircher –, has been first advanced by WILLIAM B. ASHWORTH, JR., *Catholicism and Early Modern Science*, in DANIEL C. LINDBERG – RONALD L. NUMBERS (eds.), *God and Nature. Historical Essays on the Encounter between Christianity and Science*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1986, pp. 136-166, and RIVKA FELDHAY – MICHAEL HEYD, *The Discourse of Pious Science*, «Science in Context», 3/1, 1989, pp. 102-142.

cil of Trent under the pontiffs Pius V, Gregory XIII and Sixtus V, thereby contributing to the rise of the Counter-Reformation.

During the pontificate of Paul V the Roman Curia was gradually depleted of the best of this generation of prelates, leading to the erosion of its spiritual and intellectual standing and to a situation of «crisis of the Counter-Reformation», as Delio Cantimori described it in his essay on the trial of Galileo.<sup>26</sup>

In my opinion the key to understanding the difficulty of Bellarmine's role in the episode of Galileo's 'first trial' lies here; that is, in the entire absence of any official interlocutor in the Congregations of the Index and the Holy Office, one capable of drawing up a strategy to cope with an emerging new order of knowledge that was gaining support across the Catholic world.

Here it will suffice to note a series of prosopographical facts. The *sommo inquisitore*, Giulio Antonio Santori, last heir to the uncompromising line adopted by Paul IV and Pius V, a man of the utmost severity who kept the reins of power at the Holy Office firmly in his hands for more than twenty years, died in 1602. He was followed the next year by one of his most influential opponents, Silvio Antoniano. The father of Catholic pedagogy and the most gifted Latinist in the Curia, Antoniano had pressed for a milder policy with regard to the censorship of books and therefore often found himself at loggerheads with the Congregation of the Inquisition. In 1606 Cardinal Agostino Valier passed away; a humanist and a 'reforming bishop', one of the founders of the Tridentine rhetorical style, and mediator between Rome and the Republic of Venice, he himself advocated a certain degree of tolerance (the partial lifting of the ban on the works of Erasmus' works began with him). The scholarly Caesar Baronius, prefect of the Vatican Library and author of the founding text of Catholic historiography, the *Annales ecclesiastici*, died in 1607, and Ascanio Colonna, one of the most learned scholars and manuscript collectors in Rome, in 1608.

Some even more influential cardinals had passed away at the end of the preceding century: the powerful Giovanni Ludovico Madruzzo (1600), a key figure in relations between Rome and the Hapsburg imperial court; Marcantonio Colonna (1597), a member (together with Bellarmine) of the special commission on the Sixtine Vulgate, Prefect of the Index, and himself favorable to a policy of expurgation rather than the outright prohibition of condemned books; and Francisco de Toledo (1596), the first

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<sup>26</sup> DELIO CANTIMORI, *Galileo e la crisi della Controriforma*, in CANTIMORI, *Storici e storia*, Turin, Einaudi, 1971, pp. 657-674.



Jesuit to be appointed a cardinal, distinguished professor of philosophy and theology at the Roman College, and a key player in the strategy of rapprochement between the Apostolic See and the new French king, Henry of Navarre, the former leader of the Huguenots.<sup>27</sup>

Most of these prelates (apart from Santori) supported the policy of a partial opening up of the rights of the book market; this led to the Index of 1596, a measure decided by Pope Clement VIII to moderate the harshness of the previous Sixtine Index. Thus, formerly prohibited works were for a brief period allowed to circulate after undergoing a process of expurgation – books such as the Latin Bibles published in Protestant countries, and astrological works that had been condemned by Sixtus V in his *Coeli et terrae creator*.<sup>28</sup> This period of relative tolerance ended with the death of Clement VIII (1605), but the decision in favour of the expurgation of Copernicus' work rather than prohibiting it outright seems to echo this precedent.

Moreover, these cardinals – like other prominent members of the papal entourage such as Antonio Possevino, the author of the *Bibliotheca selecta* (d. 1611) – were historians, writers, scholars, theologians and humanists of outstanding intellectual stature, architects of the Tridentine cultural strategy that, by employing profane knowledge for apologetic ends, provided the Church with suitable tools to oppose the Reformation and create a new hegemony in Catholic countries.

However, this exceptional generation left no real successors and in 1615-1616 only Bellarmine and the celebrated Cardinal Federico Borromeo, founder of the Biblioteca Ambrosiana in Milan, remained. The scion of an influential family, Borromeo became a prelate of exemplary virtue and scholarship, but he was based in Milan, having been appointed archbishop there in 1595. These two cardinals found themselves having to deal with the Congregations of the Index and the Holy Office, which were now dominated by lower level officials with a purely bureaucratic approach to censorship.

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<sup>27</sup> On Santoro, Antoniano, Valier, Baronio and Marcantonio Colonna, from the perspective of their role in the Roman congregations, see the entries in ADRIANO PROSPERI (ed.), *Dizionario storico dell'Inquisizione*, Pisa, Edizioni della Normale, 2010, respectively III, pp. 1370-1377 (S. Ricci); I, pp. 70-71 (M.T. Fattori); III, pp. 1638-1639 (M.T. Fattori); I, pp. 138-139 (M.T. Fattori); I, p. 350 (P. Mazur). On Madruzzo and Ascanio Colonna see *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, respectively vol. 67, pp. 181-186 (R. Becker); vol. 27, pp. 275-278 (F. Petrucci). On Toledo, see *Diccionario histórico de la Compañía de Jesús. Biográfico-temático*, Rome-Madrid, Institutum historicum SI-Universidad pontificia Comillas, IV, pp. 3807-3808 (J.P. Donnelly).

<sup>28</sup> FRAJESE, *Nascita dell'Indice. La censura ecclesiastica dal Rinascimento alla Controriforma*, Brescia, Morcelliana, 2006, pp. 151 sq.

It is not surprising that in the face of the unprecedented challenge posed to the conception of biblical truth by the implications of heliocentrism and heliocentric exegesis, the Jesuit cardinal Bellarmine found himself having to cope with a general sense of uncertainty widespread in the Roman Curia.

### 3. AN EXTRAJUDICIAL SOLUTION: BELLARMINE'S LETTER TO FOSCARINI

It is perhaps partly on these grounds that Bellarmine's response to Galileo and Foscarini took the shape of a private admonition, as if to avoid an official pronouncement from the Holy Office. Indeed, Bellarmine's solution was a political rather than a judicial one, conveyed in the well-known 'confidential letter' – which had in fact been conceived and written as a public letter – to Foscarini dated 12 April 1615.

Detailed analyses of this document can be found elsewhere in the ample historiographic literature on Galileo and Copernicanism.<sup>29</sup> It is sufficient here to remind the three main points under which – as was his custom – the cardinal developed his arguments. To begin, he posits that the merits of heliocentrism can be discussed in an equitable manner if the theory is treated as a hypothesis («*ex suppositione*, and not absolutely») rather than as an objective fact since it overtly contradicts Scripture. Second, a Copernican interpretation of Scripture does not accord with the consensus of the Church Fathers and later commentators, and as such it is contrary to the statements on doctrine issued by the Council of Trent. Third, the orbital motion of the Earth and the immobility of Sun has not yet been demonstrated by any physical evidence, and it is unlikely that it ever will be. Therefore, there is no reason to abandon the long-established empirical observation that the Sun moves in the third heaven.<sup>30</sup>

It is clear that Bellarmine chose to conclude that the notion of heliocentrism must be rejected based on disciplinary rather than theological or scientific grounds, based on the precept that the first obligation of believers is obedience to the decrees of the Church. He cited «the shared consensus of the Church Fathers» and «the modern commentaries on Genesis» without explicitly mentioning any authors; after all, even the most recent of these,

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<sup>29</sup> On the historiographical interpretations of Bellarmine's letter to Foscarini see MOTTA, *Epistemologie cardinalizie. Ipotesi, verità, apologia*, in GIAN MARIO BRAVO – VINCENZO FERRONE (eds.), *Il processo a Galilei e la questione galileiana*, Rome, Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2010, pp. 93-103.

<sup>30</sup> OG, XII, pp. 171-172.



such as the influential Jesuit theologians Jean Lorin (Joannes Lorinus) and Nicolaus Serarius, had written their works before Galileo's discoveries.<sup>31</sup> Instead, he bowed to the authority of the Council of Trent, considered at the time to be the definitive repository of Catholic dogma.

As for Galileo's argument that astronomical matters could be excluded from the binding jurisdiction of the Bible because they did not pertain to faith, Bellarmine appealed to a strict biblical literalism when he ascribed the value of truth to Geocentrism using evidence presented *ex parte dicentis* ('according to who is speaking'). Yet he was perfectly aware that, according to the Tridentine decrees, *pars dicens* ('the part which is speaking'), i.e. the source of truth, lies not only in Scripture (as stated in the Reformed principle of the self-sufficiency of the Bible), but also in the continuity between Scripture and tradition guided by the Church's interpretation. Or, to cite the Council of Trent, «the meaning which the Holy Mother Church, which is entitled to pass judgment on the real sense and the interpretation of Scripture, has believed and currently believes».<sup>32</sup> Here it is in fact the possibility of a change in the Church's attitude towards the connection between biblical truth and natural philosophy that is under discussion, at least according to Galileo's proposal.

The position of Bellarmine in the *Controversiae* – as well as that of the entire body of Catholic controversialist theologians in the age of confessions going back to Luther's first opponent, Johannes Eck – was founded on the premise that «Scripture is not so clear in itself as to be sufficient, without further explanation, to resolve controversies of faith» – where such controversies also, and indeed primarily, include where to draw the dividing line between what pertains to faith and what does not.<sup>33</sup>

Within the doctrinal context of Catholic scholasticism, which was characterized by an objective rather than a subjective conception of faith – that

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<sup>31</sup> Special attention has been devoted by scholars to the Jesuits Juan de Pineda, *Commentariorum in Job libri tredecim*, 1598 and 1602, Jean Lorin, *Acta apostolorum commentaria*, 1605, Nicolaus Serarius, *Iosue, ab utero ad ipsum usque tumulum*, 1609, who rely on Clavius in ruling out the plausibility of a heliocentric exegesis of the Bible. VOLKER R. REMMERT, "Sonne steh still über Gibeon", «Zeitschrift für historische Forschung», 28, 2001, pp. 539-580: 559 sq. See also IRVING A. KELTER, *The Refusal to Accommodate: Jesuit Exegetes and the Copernican System*, «Sixteenth Century Journal», 26/2, 1995, pp. 273-283.

<sup>32</sup> *Concilium Tridentinum*, ed. Societas Goerresiana, V, *Actorum pars altera*, sess. IV, April 8, 1546, decr. II on the authenticity of the Vulgate, p. 92.

<sup>33</sup> *Disputationes de controversiis christianae fidei adversus huius temporis haereticos*, here in the Venetian edition of Bellarmine's *Opera omnia*, apud Ioannem Malachinum, 1721-28, I, I controversy *De Verbo Dei*, b. 3 *De Verbi Dei interpretatione*, ch. 1, *Scripturam non esse tam apertam per se, ut sine explicatione sufficiat ad controversias fidei terminandas*, p. 64.

is, faith conceived as a complex of dogmatic articles rather than the moving of the individual conscience towards God – the importance to the religious sphere of a statement made in the profane (that is, merely secular or philosophical) sphere depended not so much on its content as on whether the Church considered it to be binding. In other words, it was not actually the subject of a proposition that decided whether it was to be considered *de fide*, rather that the *magisterium* or Church tradition had taken a position on the matter (or were thought to have, as in case of Geocentrism according to Bellarmine). What was *de fide* simply had to be believed in ‘on faith’, whereas what was not *de fide* could be left to the discretion of the faithful or – better – could be debated among the different theological schools.

Against this complex backdrop, several hotly debated issues with far more theological weight than the motion of the Earth – and with explicit religious significance today – were not considered to be *de fide* at the time: the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception; the question of the action of divine grace on the human disposition toward God (which lay at the heart of the controversy *De auxiliis* between the Dominicans and the Jesuits, and which Paul V – on the advice of Bellarmine – brought to an end in August 1607 by imposing the silence on the two parties); and one of the most controversial issues in the history of the early modern Church – the hierarchy of power between the papacy and the council: indeed, this last fuelled a subterranean conflict between Rome and the French episcopacy that rumbled on until the dogma of papal infallibility was declared in 1871.

In contrast, an implicit indulgence was perceptible in the Church’s attitude toward the theses in the *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium*. Copernicus’ book, with its dedicatory letter to Paul III, had circulated for decades without opposition, even during the papacies of the notoriously unbending Paul IV and Pius V. This detail did not escape the attentive eye of Paolo Sarpi; in the advisory opinion that he prepared for the Venetian Senate regarding the censorship of Copernicanism he wrote: «The suspension of the book cannot but have the effect of causing amazement at the unprecedented act of suspending an old book already seen by the entire world and never censored in the past, whether by the Council of Trent or in Rome».<sup>34</sup>

In other words, Bellarmine’s letter to Foscarini advancing an extrajudicial compromise – «It seems to me that Y[our] P[aternity] and Mr. Galileo would act wisely if they content themselves with speaking *ex suppositione*,

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<sup>34</sup> PAOLO SARPI, *Sopra un decreto della congregazione in Roma in stampa presentato per l’illustrissimo signor conte del Zaffo a 5 maggio 1616. 7 maggio 1616*, in SARPI, *Opere*, ed. by G. and L. Cozzi, Milan-Naples, Ricciardi, 1969, pp. 602-605, 603.

and not absolutely» – was hardly couched in the tones of an authoritative statement intended to settle a dangerously contentious issue. Indeed, it sounded weak and dilatory – «I will not believe that this evidence [of the motion of the Earth] exists, until it will be shown to me» –, betraying the absence of a clear position on the matter within the Roman Curia.

At least this is how it was perceived by its addressees. Benedetto Castelli, writing to Galileo on May 6, regarded it as a victory for their side. Piero Dini noted a few days earlier that it represented «a point now gained, that is, the possibility to address issues as a mathematician, hypothetically», and on May 16 urged his friend to «wind up that piece of writing [i.e. the Letter to Christina] that you told me you have drafted», adding that «as for the letter of the Carmelite Friar, Sir Prince [Cesi] tells me that soon it will be reprinted with the addition of further authorities, to have his interpretation made more clear». <sup>35</sup> Indeed, Foscarini was even then working on a «full and exhaustive treatise in the Latin language» provided, Dini writes, with «many passages from the holy Fathers, whereby he strengthens himself». <sup>36</sup>

The feeling in Rome was that the informal intervention of Bellarmine had brought the issue to an honorable conclusion; on April 18 Cardinal Barberini informed Dini that «I hear no more talk about the affairs of Mr. Galileo»; two days later an unnamed Jesuit Father also congratulated Dini that «Mr. Galileo's affairs have been sorted». <sup>37</sup> As we know, this perception would be proved wrong in the following autumn, as the inquiry was resumed after the interrogation of Ximenes and Attavanti. Galileo's departure for Rome «to account for himself concerning some charges, or rather calumnies» – as Cosimo II wrote in a letter recommending his mathematician to no less a personage than the Cardinal-nephew Scipione Borghese – marked the turning point of the whole case. <sup>38</sup>

#### 4. THE LITERAL MEANING OF THE SCRIPTURES

Galileo's stay in Rome from December 1615 to June 1616 has been generally interpreted as a spontaneous move, implicitly falling in with the agreement that had been proposed by Bellarmine in the hope of persuad-

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<sup>35</sup> Castelli to Galileo, 6 May 1615, OG, XII, pp. 177-178; Dini to Galileo, 2 May and 16 May 1615, OG, XII, pp. 175-176, 181.

<sup>36</sup> Cesi to Galileo, 20 June 1615, OG, XII, pp. 189-190.

<sup>37</sup> Dini to Galileo, 18 April and 20 April 1615, OG, XII, pp. 173-175.

<sup>38</sup> Cosimo II to Scipione Borghese, 2 December 1615, OG, XII, pp. 205-206.

ing the Church authorities of the veracity of the heliocentric model by employing «the tongue instead of the pen».<sup>39</sup>

Various clues suggest, however, that Galileo came to Rome at the specific request of the Holy Office rather than voluntarily. In his correspondence from that period he maintained the most rigorous discretion regarding the matters discussed at various meetings, as was the custom in inquisitorial proceedings; he wrote about his direct or indirect dealings with the cardinals of the Holy Office («those most distinguished personalities handling such matters»); he hints at discreet, albeit in-depth inquiries into his behavior and ideas («kind access and a hearing were granted me, and the freedom to reassure them as to my every act, saying, thought, opinion and teaching»),<sup>40</sup>

Again the most plausible hypothesis is that the tribunal on issues of faith was trying to find an extrajudicial solution to a case that had serious diplomatic implications, that had been reopened on the basis of the contradictory testimony of two witnesses, and that was further fuelled in Rome by the charges of certain «enemies», who can be identified as Caccini and, probably, the Dominican friars of the Church of the Minerva.

The concurrence in time between the interrogations of Father Ximenes and Galileo's student Attavanti and the initiation of the inquiry in Rome is confirmed by some veiled references by Galileo to «so many and such grievous slanders» that have been brought against him by his accusers, who have «plotted against my reputation», and regarding which, nonetheless, he has managed to justify himself. It seems, therefore, that we are dealing with charges that were not based on written testimony, and it is not difficult to identify in such charges the alleged theses regarding the «substance» and the «senses» of God that we find in the denunciations by Lorini and Caccini that led to the opening of the inquiry.<sup>41</sup>

However, in the overall context I believe that it is important to underscore two details. The first detail is that this informal inquiry represented the first time that the pope's inquisitors focused on both the theses of Galileo – or those ascribed to him – and Copernicanism itself as a cosmological theory:

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<sup>39</sup> Galileo to Dini, May 1615, OG, XII, pp. 183-185. See HEILBRON, *Galileo* (cit. note 1), pp. 215 sq., DAMANTI, “*Libertas philosophandi*” (cit. note 1), pp. 107 sq., FANTOLI, *Galileo e la Chiesa* (cit. note 1), p. 104, CAMEROTA, *Galileo Galilei* (cit. note 1), pp. 303-304. BUCCIANINI, *Contro Galileo* (cit. note 22), pp. 69 sq., on the contrary, is more inclined toward the hypothesis of a convocation of Galileo. See Querenghi to Alessandro d'Este, 1 January 1616, OG, XII, p. 220.

<sup>40</sup> See Galileo's letters to Picchena, especially the ones of 8 January and 6 February 1616, OG, XII, pp. 222-223, 230-232.

<sup>41</sup> Galileo to Picchena, 8 January 1616 (see above).

I say to you – Galileo wrote to Picchena on February 6 – that my affair has been wholly concluded as for the part concerning my own person; [...] But [...] a charge is annexed to my cause, not concerning my own person, rather the entire whole of those who have been or still are endorsing in printed works, or private writings, or in public demonstrations and lectures, or even in personal speeches a certain doctrine and opinion that is not unknown to Y[our] Most Illustrious L[ordship], the decision regarding which is presently being discussed.<sup>42</sup>

The *Discorso del flusso e refluxo del mare* ('Discourse over the flow and reflow of the sea') written by Galileo in Rome and dedicated to his patron Cardinal Orsini, is dated 8 January 1616. Despite its (laconic) profession of hypotheticism («Taking, therefore, *ex hypothesi* the motion of the Earth...»), the text is intended to prove the reality of the Copernican system through the evidence of the tides, so as to offer Bellarmine the «demonstration» of the Earth's motion that the latter, however skeptically, had referred to in his letter to Foscarini.<sup>43</sup>

The *Disputatio de situ et quiete terrae* ('Disputation on the place and immobility of the Earth') by Francesco Ingoli, a prelate in the household of Cardinal Caetani, dates to these same weeks. As is well known, Ingoli was soon to be appointed by the Congregation of the Index as the consultant charged with the task of emending Copernicus' text. The *Disputatio* is a short refutation of heliocentrism, the drafting of which was very likely entrusted to Ingoli by the Holy Office itself. It was founded upon *argumenta mathematica, physica* and *theologica*, and appears to be the first official statement of the Church's position with regard to Copernican cosmology (apart from the Dominican theologian Giovanni Maria Tolosani's *De coelo supremo immobili*, a work which was written, however, some seventy years earlier).<sup>44</sup> In other words, early in the year 1616 the Holy Office was beginning to take a more direct interest in the Copernican theory, in its physical and astronomical perspectives, and in its doctrinal consequences.

The second detail relates to the fact that Galileo came to his confidential interrogations armed with documents that he presented to his interlocutors for examination. «I thank God – he wrote to Picchena after the

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 230.

<sup>43</sup> OG, V, pp. 377-395: 381. The importance of this text is underscored by DAMANTI, "Liber-tas philosophandi" (cit. note 1), pp. 109-110, albeit stressing too much, in my opinion, Galileo's alleged hypotheticist approach.

<sup>44</sup> BUCCIANTINI, *Contro Galileo* (cit. note 22), pp. 84 sq. On Tolosani see MIGUEL ANGEL GRANADA, *Giovanni Maria Tolosani e la prima reazione romana di fronte al De revolutionibus: la critica di Copernico nell'opuscolo De coelo et elementis*, in BUCCIANTINI – TORRINI (eds.), *La diffusione del copernicanesimo in Italia 1543-1610*, Florence, Olschki, 1997, pp. 11-35.

conclusion of the affair – that what I said has been always proved by me with writings, copies of which are kept by myself». A few months later this fact was confirmed by Cardinal Del Monte, who assured the Grand Duke that «to his person [i.e. to Galileo] there is not the least flaw to be ascribed, and he will be able to answer for himself and to refute the calumnies of his persecutors, since all that he has been requested to provide is proven by writings». <sup>45</sup>

Among those «writings» was perhaps the *Discorso del flusso e reflusso del mare* even if, in my opinion, this hypothesis is not highly plausible. It is more likely that Galileo included the *Istoria e dimostrazioni intorno alle macchie solari* ('History and demonstrations concerning sunspots'), which the Holy Office had in fact ordered to be examined in the very period coinciding with Galileo's departure for Rome. <sup>46</sup> Almost certainly there would have been the letter to Castelli – which Monsignor Dini had been circulating on behalf of Galileo among certain cardinals of the Holy Office – and the letter to Christina of Lorraine.

This means that very probably between December and January, before beginning an evaluation of the Copernican system, the Holy Office carried out an informal inquiry on the suspect assertions ascribed to Galileo but then quickly clarified by him, and on the methodological principles laid out in his public letters: i.e., the Bible may sometimes speak inaccurately to settle the opinions of uncultivated people; its exegetes may be subject to error; it has binding authority only in matters concerning faith; and that therefore on questions of natural philosophy it is less trustworthy than mathematical and philosophical inferences.

As we know, these premises formed the foundation of Galileo's hermeneutical proposal. They were described and discussed as such in the written denunciation sent to Rome by Lorini, as already seen at the beginning of this paper, and in Bellarmine's letter to Foscarini. In other words they must be considered as the conceptual core around which the entire Galileo *affair* of 1615-1616 revolved.

Notwithstanding this, after the interrogation of Galileo behind closed doors, those assertions did not become the object of any formal censure, nor was he notified of any obligation to renounce them. Indeed the conclusion of the trial centered entirely upon the mathematical aspect of the

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<sup>45</sup> Galileo to Picchena, 26 March 1616, OG, XII, p. 251; Cardinal Del Monte to Cosimo II, 4 June 1616, OG, XII, p. 264.

<sup>46</sup> *Processo a Galileo*, OG, XIX, p. 320: «Die 25 9mbris 1615. Videantur quaedam litterae Gallilei, editae Romae cum inscriptione *Delle macchie solari*».



heliocentric theory, which was judged to be false and contrary to Scripture. It was on this basis that Foscarini's *Lettera sopra l'opinione de' Pittagorici* was prohibited and the commentary on the Book of Job by Diego de Zuñiga was sentenced to expurgation, since they now figured as attempts to harmonize the letter of the Bible with a condemned thesis.

In fact, the hermeneutical theses advanced by Galileo contained nothing that was intrinsically incorrect. First, the idea that when disputing issues of natural philosophy the Bible should not be contrasted with «the experiences and reasons of philosophy» (*experimentis et rationibus philosophiae*), to use the words of Father Benito Pereyra – professor of Sacred Scripture at the Roman College and one of Galileo's sources for documents in his own defense – was widely shared. It meant that on such issues the standard arguments should be drawn from physics (Aristotelian physics, in Pereyra's case) and the exegetes had to conform with them.

In his *Commentarii et disputationes in Genesim* (1591-99) Pereyra gives several examples of what he means. He mentions ancient authors who committed macroscopic errors concerning the structure of the world and the universe; some of these had traditionally been viewed with suspicion, like the early Christian theologians Origen and Lactantius, but there was also John Chrysostom, an influential Father of the Church. Adhering strictly to the letter of the Scriptures, they argued that the heavens are not spherical in shape, that they are motionless, and that the planets move freely through them «like fishes in the water, and birds through the air»; they also rejected the existence of the antipodes and asserted that the level of the oceans could exceed the highest mountain ranges. Statements like these, adds Pereyra, «now appear to be false, in the light of evident experiences and necessary demonstrations».<sup>47</sup>

Obviously, I am not arguing that Pereyra anticipated Galilean physics; as shown by his rejection of the free motion of heavenly bodies, he remained attached to the Ptolemaic vision of the solidity of the planetary spheres, a vision that had already been challenged in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century and that Bellarmine himself dismissed in his Louvain lectures. Nonetheless, when arguing for the stability of the Earth at the center of the universe, Pereyra based his reasoning on the Aristotelian principle of the heaviness

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<sup>47</sup> BENITO PEREYRA, *Commentarii et disputationes in Genesim*, Lyon, ex officina Iuntarum, 1594, I, p. 25. On Pereyra hermeneutical theses see CORRADO DOLLO, *Galileo Galilei e la cultura della tradizione*, ed. by G. Bentivegna, S. Burgio, G. Magnano San Lio, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino, 2003, pp. 170 sq.; REMMERT, "Sonne steh still über Gibeon" (cit. note 31), p. 550.

of this element, so contradicting the literalism of Justin and the Second Epistle of Peter which, following Ex. 20 and Ps. 24 [23] and 136 [135], had affirmed that the Earth was founded upon the waters. In the same way, when commenting on the two *luminaria magna* of Gen. 1,16, he made it clear that the passage must be interpreted as referring to how these phenomena commonly appeared to the senses, given that the Moon is actually much smaller than the Sun and all the other heavenly bodies, apart from Mercury.<sup>48</sup> In other words, setting aside his loyalty to Ptolemaic cosmology and Aristotelian physics, what Pereyra was showing was a notable example of an exegesis of biblical passages based on philosophical and astronomical evidence.

So, from a hermeneutical perspective the adapting of scriptural interpretation to the findings of natural philosophy was not in itself subject to censorship, at least not in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. A more rigid form of biblical literalism arose soon thereafter, especially under the tutelage of Cornelius a Lapide, who was appointed professor of Sacred Scripture at the Roman College in 1616. While this literalism would blur over time in Catholic culture, it continued to influence the more orthodox strands of Lutheran and Calvinist scholarship.<sup>49</sup>

Secondly, it was acknowledged that the Bible could contain what at first sight might appear to be misleading sentences, that its text could sometimes be unclear or appear to indulge popular beliefs, and that therefore its exegetes were subject to errors of interpretation. Indeed, this was the premise upon which the entire system of Catholic controversialist theology rested, since the uncertainty and obscurity of the Biblical text justified the spiritual authority of the Roman pontiff as the ultimate judge on controversies over matters of faith.

Bellarmino's *Disputationes de controversiis* make the principle of the pope's authority clear at the very beginning, as they deal with the «interpretation of the Word of God» in the chapter mentioned above (see above, note 33), reminding the reader that there are «countless sources of diffi-

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<sup>48</sup> PEREYRA, *Commentarii* (cit. note 47), I, pp. 56-57, 142-143. Bellarmine's views on the fluidity of the heavens have been highlighted and discussed by BALDINI – GEORGE V. COYNE, *The Louvain Lectures (Lectioes Lovanienses) of Bellarmine and the Autograph Copy of his 1616 Declaration to Galileo*, Vatican City, Specola Vaticana, 1984. REMMERT, *Im Zeichen des Konsenses. Biblexegese und mathematische Wissenschaften in der Gesellschaft Jesu um 1600*, «Zeitschrift für historische Forschung», 33 / 1, 2006, pp. 33-66, 50 sq., mentions further Jesuit authors that stressed the importance of philosophical and mathematical learning for the purpose of a correct biblical exegesis, in particular José de Acosta, Jerónimo de Prado and Juan Bautista Villalpando.

<sup>49</sup> FRANÇOIS LAPLANCHE, *Herméneutique biblique et cosmologie mosaïque*, in OLIVIER FATIO (ed.), *Les Églises face aux sciences du Moyen Age au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Geneva, Droz, 1991, pp. 29-51, pp. 34 sq.



culty» in the text, «words and expressions that are ambiguous», «imperfect», or «inappropriate», as well as «phrases that are unique to the Jews». <sup>50</sup> Another influential theologian of the Society of Jesus, Father Jean Lorin (who succeeded Pereyra in the chair of Sacred Scripture at the Roman College), when explaining the use of the term *firmamentum* in the Vulgate to indicate the heavens of the planets, resorted to the will of Moses to «accommodate, when writing, the impressions of the common people». <sup>51</sup>

Concord among authors and loyalty to Catholic tradition were of course a guarantee of correct interpretation, but Bellarmine himself – a young man still at the beginning of his teaching career – had overlooked that concord in his commentaries on the *Prima* of Aquinas' *Summa theologiae* delivered in his Louvain lectures between 1570 and 1572. At the time, with reference to the story of the Creation, he indeed resorted to Scripture to reject the theory of the incorruptibility and inalterability of the heavens posited by orthodox Aristotelians, as well as by Aquinas and «many scholastic doctors». <sup>52</sup>

##### 5. A HYPOTHESIS ON THE REASONS BEHIND COPERNICUS' CONDEMNATION

Hence, if we look at the case from a purely doctrinal perspective, it seems unlikely that the conditions for a condemnation of Galileo's hermeneutical theses, as explicated in his letters to Castelli and Christina of Lorraine, were present. Instead, things change if we adopt a historical perspective.

At that particular time, during the reign of Paul V, those principles must have appeared extremely suspect to the Holy Office, and to the Roman Curia in general. First of all, they were expounded in quite a singular form.

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<sup>50</sup> I controversy *De Verbo Dei*, b. 3, ch. 1 (see above, n. 33), p. 65. On these passages see also REMMERT, *Im Zeichen des Konsenses* (cit. note 48), pp. 40-41, who indicates comparable assertions in the *Prolegomena in sancta evangelia* (1598) of Father Alonso Salmerón, one of the major experts in biblical exegesis of the first Jesuit generation. On the correlation between biblical hermeneutics and the power structure within the Church see LAPLANCHE, *Bible, sciences et pouvoirs au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Naples, Bibliopolis, 1997, pp. 24 sq.

<sup>51</sup> JEAN LORIN, *Commentarii in librum Psalmorum*, Venice, apud Iacobum Tomasinum, 1737 (orig. 1612), p. 247 (in Ps 18 [19]). On Lorin see also DOLLO, *Galileo Galilei* (cit. note 47), pp. 140-141.

<sup>52</sup> *The Louvain Lectures, An coelum natura sua sit corruptibile; An coelum de facto corrumpetur*, pp. 9-11. Bellarmine deems also «more probable» the autonomous motion of the stars than their fixity to the heavenly spheres, though adding that «if there will ever come out an evidence [of this latter theory] it will be necessary to correct the comprehension of the Scripture, so that they will not conflict with a manifest truth»: *ibid.*, p. 21.

The statements about the pre-eminence of the mathematical and physical sciences in the explanation of natural phenomena, as well as the emphasis on the risks connected with a literalist exegesis of the Bible, were set forth in Galileo's writings as the foundations of a precise and explicit hermeneutical argumentation. On the contrary, the biblical commentaries of Pereyra and Lorin were scholarly canonical works intended for the higher education of the clergy – and moreover their authors had already been subjected to the pre-emptive internal censorship of the Society of Jesus.

Secondly, over and above this, even more sensitive topics can be found in Galileo's letters, especially in his letter to Christina; for instance, the appeal for *libertas philosophandi*, the 'freedom to philosophize', or the distinction that he made between «the debatable and the demonstrative disciplines», with the significant «great difference [...] between giving orders to a mathematician or a philosopher, and ruling over a merchant, or a lawyer». <sup>53</sup> Even his continual references to Augustine could raise suspicions, since the controversy *De auxiliis* had shown how difficult, if not impossible, it was to bend this particular Church Father's writings to the disciplinary demands and logic of the scholastic theology embraced by the regular orders.

These topics must have been perceived as elements of a possible new knowledge system that was exempt from and even a rival to the Church's teachings, at least in the sphere of biblical hermeneutics and with regard to the description of natural phenomena.

At the time, the interpretation of the Bible was the methodological framework within which not only the categories of religious and moral discourse, but also the legitimacy of the temporal and spiritual powers were elaborated. As such, in the first quarter of the 17<sup>th</sup> century it was the sphere in which the harsh theological-political debate between the Roman Church and other 'centers' of power such as the English monarchy and the Gallican Church unfolded. <sup>54</sup>

I believe that one of the main reasons that led to the condemnation of Copernicanism by the Catholic Church can be identified if we approach

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<sup>53</sup> GALILEI, *Lettera a Cristina di Lorena sull'uso della Bibbia nelle argomentazioni scientifiche*, ed. by F. Motta, Genoa, Marietti 1820, 2000, p. 114. I rely on this critical edition since, as is well known, the version of the letter to Christina included in OG has been reconstructed by the editor, Antonio Favaro, by blending together texts taken from different witnesses. See also the more recent critical edition by BUCCIANI – CAMEROTA in *Scienza e religione. Scritti copernicani*, Rome, Donzelli, 2009, pp. 33-84.

<sup>54</sup> According to LAPLANCHE, *La Bible en France entre mythe et critique. XVI<sup>e</sup>-XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1994, p. 13, in the decades between the Council of Trent and the Thirty Years' War the biblical issue emerged as the leading issue around which claims for truth and the use of violence were acted out: «De l'une et de l'autre, la solution est cherchée dans le Livre».

the whole affair from this historical perspective. The hermeneutical theories delineated in Galileo's writings, as I noted before, were scarcely censurable in themselves, if viewed as abstract proposals of methodology, but their significance changed if they were seen as the premises for substantial, unorthodox conclusions. In such cases, an exegesis of the Bible aimed at legitimating assertions contrary to the official doctrine would have been wholly unacceptable. The same distinction between issues that were *de fide* and adiaphoric ones would have made no sense, since such issues, if judged to be in conflict with the sources of faith (Scripture and tradition), would have been considered as pertaining to faith.

This is exactly what happened to Copernicus' heliocentric theory. Having ascertained Galileo's «candidness and integrity» in early February, the supreme tribunal of faith moved on to the examination of «a certain doctrine and opinion [...], the resolution concerning which is now under discussion». <sup>55</sup> On February 19 a brief description of the Copernican system – based, as I noted above, on two sentences extracted from Caccini's denunciation – was distributed to the consultants of the Holy Office; a copy of Ingoli's *Disputatio* was probably made available to them as well.

That the two sentences submitted to the censors lacked any astronomical or theological contextualization appears to be in line with inquisitorial practice. This ordinarily involved the extrapolation of particular sentences from the text under examination using an analytical method in which such sentences might not even be direct citations from the text, but paraphrases deemed to represent its theses. The most well known case is that of the five propositions ascribed to the *Augustinus* of Cornelius Jansen and condemned by Pope Innocent X with the bull *Cum occasione* in 1653, which sparked the huge Jansenist controversy. <sup>56</sup>

The unanimous judgment of the consultants on Copernicanism was recorded on paper in a meeting held on 24 February 1616. Heliocentrism was evaluated not only from a theological, but also from a philosophical point of view, a fact that might appear surprising at first glance since profane knowledge did not pertain, strictly speaking, to the jurisdiction of the Holy Office. However, it reflects the increasing focus of Church censorship on natural philosophy in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century (as evidenced by the inclusion of Telesio and Patrizi in the Index), based on the principle of a concordance between truths of reason and truths of faith proclaimed in the bull

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<sup>55</sup> Galileo to Picchena, 6 February 1616 (as in note 40).

<sup>56</sup> *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, 8/1, pp. 474-496 (J. Carrère). NEVEU, *L'erreur et son juge* (cit. note 9), pp. 512 sq.

*Apostolici regimini* (1513) of the Fifth Lateran Council.<sup>57</sup> In any event, the double judgment issued in 1616 effectively blocked the possibility that the heliocentric theory, now defined as being contrary to Scripture, could be considered as compliant with philosophical truth.

The assertion that the Sun is the center of the universe and does not orbit around the Earth was defined as «foolish and absurd in philosophy» and from a theological viewpoint «formally heretical»; the theory of the motion of the Earth received the same censure on philosophical grounds, while theologically it was judged to be «erroneous», that is, just one degree below heresy in the scale of deviation from orthodoxy.<sup>58</sup>

The document was signed by eleven theologians of the Congregation, among them the commissioner of the Holy Office, Seghizzi, and Father Benedetto Giustiniani of the Society of Jesus, the same priest who, when entrusted some twenty years earlier with the examination of Francesco Patrizi's *Nova de universis philosophia*, did not raise any objections to the author's thesis of a daily rotation of the Earth in a geocentric system.<sup>59</sup> Giustiniani also served as rector of the Roman College between 1599 and 1602, and in 1607 actively participated in the debate over the Venetian Interdict, writing two pamphlets, one of them a defense of Bellarmine's statements on the jurisdictional privileges of the Church against the attacks of the theologians of the Republic.<sup>60</sup>

As for Galileo, the inquiry closed as it began, quite informally. He was privately informed by Bellarmine on behalf of the pope of the Holy Office's censorship of the heliocentric theory – as ostensibly decided on February 25 by the congregation in a plenary session, but of which, as far as we know, no memorandum exists –, with the warning to «abandon it». If he refused, then any further research on, or the teaching or defense of heliocentric ideas would be prohibited.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> As Maria Pia Donato remarks, the *Apostolici regiminis* «acted as the ideological and juridical framework of theological censorship against philosophical-scientific thought in the early modern age» (*Scienze della natura*, in *Dizionario storico dell'Inquisizione*, III, pp. 1394-1398, 1394).

<sup>58</sup> *Processo a Galileo*, OG, XIX, pp. 320-321.

<sup>59</sup> LERNER, *L'hérésie heliocentrique* (cit. note 13), p. 77.

<sup>60</sup> *Diccionario histórico de la Compañía de Jesús*, II, p. 1740 (J.P. Donnelly). It is worth reminding at least two other prestigious members of the commission: the Augustinian Gregório Nuñez Coronel, former preacher to the Duke of Savoy and secretary of the *De auxiliis* commission, and the Dominican Tomás de Lemos, himself involved in the proceedings of the *De auxiliis* as attorney of his own order. S. *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, III, p. 61, and VI, p. 942.

<sup>61</sup> *Processo a Galileo*, OG, XIX, p. 321.

The story of the relationship between Galilean thought and the Bible, with its remarkably modern ring, ends here; the works that followed did not touch upon topics of biblical hermeneutics. The publishing history of the letter to Christina of Lorraine unfolded entirely within the world of the Reformation and of Catholic anti-Roman dissent, from the Latin translation published in Strasbourg in 1636 by Elia Diodati (*Nov-antiqua sanctissimorum Patrum, ac probatorum theologorum doctrina de Sacrae Scripturae testimoniis in conclusionibus mere naturalibus*) to the Italian edition printed secretly in Naples by Lorenzo Ciccarelli in 1710.<sup>62</sup>

From this perspective the extrajudicial solution chosen by the Holy Office, probably on the suggestion of Cardinal Bellarmine, proved to be effective: Galileo was silenced with regard to his hermeneutical proposals, but the official mathematician and philosopher of the Grand Duke of Tuscany was saved from any possible judicial consequences. The attempt to legitimize a heliocentric scriptural exegesis was forestalled with the prohibition of Foscarini's *Lettera*. This was, so to speak, a pre-emptive use of doctrinal censorship, whose effect was to avert the possible opening up of an area of uncertainty on such a thorny issue as the monopoly over the interpretation of the Bible and Catholic tradition.

As we know, the fate of Copernicus' work was somewhat different from that envisaged by the consultants to the Holy Office. The concise memorandum of the session of the Index held on March 1<sup>st</sup> in Bellarmine's residence hints of a prolonged debate in which some cardinals of the Congregation managed to change the accusation of formal heresy against heliocentrism to the more vague charge of 'falsity' and 'opposition to Scripture'. Accordingly, Copernicus' *De revolutionibus* was not prohibited, but suspended until it could be 'corrected' – a provision that would have been regarded as far too mild for a book written by a heresiarch, as Copernicus was in all respects after the judgment handed down by the consultants of the Inquisition. The corrected version, as we know, was prepared with surprising rapidity; the decree of emendation, which adopted the proposals advanced by Ingoli, to whom the question had been entrusted, dates to May 1620.<sup>63</sup>

As I noted above, this revision to the doctrinal censure of the heliocentric theory was ascribed at the time to the intervention of Cardinal Caetani and Cardinal Barberini (although it is possible that pressure had also been

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<sup>62</sup> MOTTA, *Nota al testo*, in *Lettera a Cristina di Lorena sull'uso della Bibbia* (cit. note 53), pp. 67-80.

<sup>63</sup> PIERRE-NOËL MAYAUD, *La condamnation des livres coperniciens et sa révocation à la lumière de documents inédits des Congrégations de l'Index et de l'Inquisition*, Rome, Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1997, pp. 37-42, 69-71, 77-79.

applied by Cardinal Orsini on Paul V).<sup>64</sup> This decision was taken during a session of the Index, and therefore not under the authority of the Congregation of the Holy Office, which was formally responsible for decisions concerning the nature of a suspect proposition. The Congregation, however, took official note of the change in a session held on March 3 *coram Sanctissimo* ‘in the presence of the Most Holy’, that is, the pope himself.<sup>65</sup> The decree of the Index, dated 5 March 1616, made public the text of the condemnation drafted four days earlier, whereby the «Pythagorean doctrine» was declared *falsa* and *Sacrae Scripturae adversans*.

Diplomatic considerations must have provided the main reason for such a change of opinion, with the evident wish to avoid giving offence to the Grand Duke.<sup>66</sup> Perhaps it is no coincidence that on February 13 the Cardinal-nephew Scipione Borghese wrote to Cosimo II personally to assure him that special consideration would be accorded to Galileo. The scientist himself, writing to the Florentine Secretary of State in the aftermath of the censure decree, referred – not without reason, although his tone perhaps betrayed an excessive degree of optimism – to a danger that had finally been averted, since the Church had dismissed the accusation that the heliocentric theory was «against the faith and heretical», merely declaring that «such opinion does not agree with the Sacred Scripture».<sup>67</sup> All the same, the real significance of the fact that the grave accusation of heresy and error hovered over the thesis of heliocentrism – even if for just a few days – still must be assessed.

In introducing my assessments, I would like to make it clear that I do not wish to re-open the question concerning the doctrinal notes relating to Copernicus issued by the consultants to the Congregation of the Inquisition, i.e. whether the notion of heresy they applied had a dogmatic or a mere technical nature – a question that primarily touches on the ‘second trial’ of Galileo and his condemnation in 1633, rather than on the 1615-1616 affair.

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<sup>64</sup> See above, note 24. In a memory written during his own pontificate, and preserved in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Barb. Lat. 4900, Maffeo Barberini reminds that the solution had been approved by Bellarmine: FRANCESCO BERETTA, *Urbain VIII Barberini protagoniste de la condamnation de Galilée*, in JOSÉ MONTESINOS – CARLOS SOLÍS (eds.), *Largo campo di filosofare*, Eurosymposium Galileo 2001, La Orotava, Fundación canaria orotava de historia de la ciencia, 2001, pp. 549-574, 557, note 37.

<sup>65</sup> *Processo a Galileo*, OG, XIX, p. 278.

<sup>66</sup> CAMEROTA, *Galileo Galilei* (cit. note 1), pp. 320-321.

<sup>67</sup> Galileo to Curzio Picchena, 6 March 1616, OG, XII, pp. 243-245.



As is well known, the need to distinguish between a ‘theological’ and an ‘inquisitorial’ heresy was introduced in Galilean historiography more than a century ago – although with very little critical reaction at the time – by the *abbé* Léon Garzend with his weighty treatise *L’Inquisition et l’hérésie* (1912), which was recently brought back to the attention of historians by Bruno Neveu during the first conference on the history of the Holy Office held in Vatican City in 2003.<sup>68</sup> Since then we have had the stimulating considerations of Francesco Beretta, who points out that the abjuration by Galileo in 1633 was an act endowed with intrinsic magisterial value by the Holy See, and the equally well documented reappraisals by Neveu and by Father Pierre-Noël Mayaud.<sup>69</sup>

For my part, I believe that the idea of enclosing the complex and often contradictory facts of historical dynamics within the abstract categories of theology and canon law is always unsafe, particularly when dealing with the governing mechanisms of the Old Regime, with its juridical instruments, political concerns, and the will of those in positions of power perpetually intertwining without actual discontinuity.

## 6. HERESY AS A MIRROR OF CHURCH AUTHORITY

What I would like to underscore here is just one among the many possible interpretations of the historical, and especially the theological-political reasons – meaning by this term the permanent and reciprocal mirroring between theology and politics that formed the background against which the Christian confessions and the temporal powers of the time maneuvered – that led the Roman Church to censure Copernicanism in 1616, even coming close to condemning it outright as heresy.

If we turn back to the theological categories envisaged by Melchor Cano, we can see how the two higher degrees of deviance from orthodox faith are described in great detail. Basing himself on the writings of the eminent theologians Thomas Aquinas and Cardinal Cajetan, Cano insisted

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<sup>68</sup> NEVEU, *Y a-t-il une hérésie inquisitoriale?*, in AGOSTINO BORROMEO (ed.), *L’Inquisizione. Atti del Simposio internazionale*, Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 2003, pp. 469-491.

<sup>69</sup> BERETTA, *Le procès de Galilée et les archives du Saint-Office. Aspects judiciaires et théologiques d’une condamnation célèbre*, «*Révue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques*», 83, 1999, pp. 441-490; NEVEU – MAYAUD, *L’affaire Galilée et la tentation inflationniste. À propos des notions d’hérésie et de magistère impliquées dans l’affaire*, «*Gregorianum*», 83/2, 2002, pp. 287-311; BERETTA, *L’affaire Galilée et l’impasse apologétique. Réponse à une censure*, «*Gregorianum*», 84/1, 2003, 169-192; NEVEU – MAYAUD, *Impasse apologétique ou tentation inflationniste? À propos de l’affaire Galilée*, «*Archivum historiae pontificiae*», 42, 2004, pp. 205-209.

that no heresy can be established in the absence of the violation of an article of faith proclaimed as such by the Church:

As long as a question is uncertain, and the Church has not spoken yet in favour of one of the two parties in a controversy, there is no judgment about the concordance of one opinion or the other with Catholic faith. We can understand from this that there does not exist any heresy unless someone takes a position against a Catholic truth that the Church has prescribed with certainty. We must add to this that it is very far in itself from the name of Catholic truth, that someone calls Catholic truth [a doctrine] that is shared by everyone as a probable opinion, but that neither the Church has ever requested to be believed nor the faithful believe out of instilled faith.<sup>70</sup>

Cano ascribed the quality of erroneousness to three different kinds of statements. The first is the class of sentences that «shake», but «do not overturn» faith, since they oppose «Catholic and universal truths in which the universal Church believes» but that are not truths of faith; for example, that the mendicant orders must live on charity rather than manual labor is true, but is not a matter of faith. The second class of statement includes propositions that contradict «a truth that, according to the strong [*vehemens*] conviction of the experts, is a truth of faith, despite it not having yet been declared as such by the Church nor proved with indisputable arguments». Finally, a third class of erroneous statement regards a proposition «that is certainly in opposition to Catholic faith, although not in a manifest way, but rather on the basis of the very probable and nearly necessary opinion of all the experts».<sup>71</sup>

We may note that on the basis of this theological taxonomy a charge of heresy against the heliocentric cosmology would have required as a necessary precondition the clear acknowledgment of Geocentrism as a revealed truth by the Church, a pronouncement that historically had never been made. Instead Cano's second, more flexible designation of erroneousness would seem to apply to this issue, referring to theses that may contradict a truth of faith that has not yet been officially proclaimed as such but is believed to be true with a high degree of certainty by expert theologians. And yet, in this case as well the fact remains that neither a council nor the *Cathedra Petri*, the teaching of the Bishop of Rome, had ever explicitly ad-

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<sup>70</sup> CANO, *Locorum theologicorum libri XII* (cit. note 10), p. 370.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 388. A detailed account on the discussion of the notes of error and heresy by the other prominent theologians of Spanish scholasticism, such as Domingo de Soto, Bartolomé Carranza and the *Salmanticenses*, can be found in NEVEU, *L'erreur et son juge* (cit. note 9), pp. 251 sq.



dressed the problem, nor had any clear and firm opinion been issued by scholarly theologians regarding whether Geocentrism was a truth of faith. It was not by chance that Diego de Zuñiga's *Commentarii* passed unscathed the examination of the *Suprema*, the Spanish Inquisition, when they were first published in 1584 (and were eventually reprinted without any changes in Rome in 1591).<sup>72</sup>

Now, I consider it to be worth emphasizing that, at the time of the first informal 'trial' of Galileo, the theological tradition of which Melchor Cano was a representative – and, with him, other outstanding authors of mid-16<sup>th</sup>-century Spanish scholasticism such as Domingo de Soto, and the teacher of both Cano and de Soto, Francisco de Vitoria – had been progressively weakened by the competition of other elements. Most important among those was the process of centralization of the governing powers of the Church in the hands of the papacy, a process that had been accomplished not only in the institutional sphere with the reform of the Roman congregations by Sixtus V and the diplomatic efforts to implement the Tridentine decrees throughout Catholic Europe, but also on a strictly doctrinal level with the production of a rich corpus of theological treatises, written primarily by Jesuits who had been educated at the Roman College or one of the Order's other centers of higher education, like its colleges in Ingolstadt and Cologne. The aim of these theologians was to construct a full model of Church authority based on the papal office of *iudex fidei*, 'judge of the faith'.

In this corpus of works – made up variously of pamphlets, treatises of controversialist theology, and commentaries on the *Summa theologiae* – the exclusive privilege of the Apostolic See to define dogma was emphasized within the framework of a Church model in which the Pope's spiritual sovereignty over the Christian world found legitimacy in his prerogative as the ultimate judge in cases of faith. This argument identified in the Chair of Saint Peter the superordinate source of doctrine, since the Roman pontiff and the bodies appointed by him, such as the Holy Office and the Index, summarized the functions of dogmatic legislation – properly the domain of the Council – with the instruments of doctrinal censorship.

From this perspective censorship operated as a tool of legitimization and as an expression of the spiritual sovereignty of the papacy, hence as an instrument of political action, assessed and administered on a case by case basis, sometimes even to the detriment of the stringent logics formally envisaged by canon law.

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<sup>72</sup> MAYAUD, *La condamnation des livres coperniciens* (cit. note 63), p. 44.

This sort of practice was lucidly denounced by Sarpi in one of the most significant of the reports that he prepared for the Venetian Senate, dating to February 1609. Here the theologian pointed out the gap that formed during the Interdict between the doctrinal censures issued by the Roman Curia and their actual consequences. According to Sarpi, Roman censures were often wanting in doctrinal substance and appeared to reflect political pressures above all else:

[In Rome] they are well aware that the doctrine [of Venice] is well established in divine Scripture, in the canons of the universal Church, in the laws of the Empire and of other Catholic kingdoms, and in the writings of the Holy Fathers. For that reason, they deem it necessary to escape the objections that may be raised against them with such powerful weapons, so they talk in generalities and assert that [this doctrine] contains reckless, slanderous, heretical, erroneous, and scandalous things, respectively. With those names they frighten the world, and, not specifying further details, they don't give anyone the opportunity to protest.<sup>73</sup>

Cano had served as the official theologian representing the emperor Charles V at the Council of Trent in 1551-1552. His *Loci theologici* were conceived as a response to the need of the controversialists to reshape the methods of theology in the aftermath of the council's asserted hierarchy of the sources of faith. From a historical perspective he shared – together with the other authors of the School of Salamanca – the vision of a balance of powers in the Church that acknowledged the primacy of the Roman See within a framework of harmony with the council and the main theological faculties.

At the turn of the century, in the intense and decisive years that witnessed the absolution of Henry IV, the death of Philip II, and the crowning of James I in England, the historical context had decisively changed. From this perspective, at that time the ecclesiological concepts of the School of Salamanca, although still central in the system of higher education of the clergy in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, were no longer the prevailing standard – at least not in Rome.

One example of this may be found in the controversy over grace, where the Spanish Dominicans (who referred to themselves as *thomistae*, 'followers

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<sup>73</sup> *Consulto 50, Scrittura in difesa delle opere scritte a favore della Serenissima Repubblica nella controversia col Sommo pontefice*, February 25, 1609, in SARPI, *Consulti*, I/1, *I Consulti dell'Interdetto (1606-1607)*, ed. by C. Pin, Pisa-Rome, Istituti editoriali e poligrafici internazionali, 2001, pp. 672-695, 677-678. On the different perspectives of the jurisdictional conflict between Rome and Venice, see FRAJESE, *Sarpi scettico. Stato e Chiesa a Venezia tra Cinque e Seicento*, Bologna, il Mulino, 1994, pp. 383 sq., and the studies collected in MARIE VIALON (ed.), *Paolo Sarpi. Politique et religion en Europe*, Paris, Garnier, 2010, pp. 28-54.

of Thomas Aquinas') – represented first and foremost by Domingo Bañez, a pupil and then a colleague of Cano – failed to obtain the condemnation of the Molinist theses upheld by the Society of Jesus, which were stigmatized as 'new' and 'Pelagian' by the majority of observers at the time. It must also be remembered that in the summer of 1601 Clement VIII sought to resolve the controversy himself, based on his papal authority and his prerogative of *iudex fidei*. This effort to define the correct thesis regarding the relationship between human will and divine grace on the basis of the vast amount of Augustinian sources available and the endless paperwork produced by the *De auxiliis* commission eventually came to nothing with the death of the pope, but it provides nonetheless a significant example of the doctrinal power claimed by the Chair of Saint Peter.

It is worth adding that on this particular issue Cardinal Bellarmine, the leading theorist on the question of the spiritual sovereignty of the pope, had cautioned Clement VIII against the solution of acting by himself invoking his role of *iudex fidei*, even submitting an opinion suggesting that a council be convened to settle the question, in a remarkable reversal of roles that tells us a great deal about the insufficiency of a purely doctrinal reading of the intertwining tendencies within the Roman Curia.<sup>74</sup>

## 7. THE JESUITS AND THE JUDGE OF CONTROVERSIES

There is now a vast bibliography available on the role played by the Society of Jesus in the events that culminated in the censures of 1616 and, more generally, their contribution to the germination of experimental science. In particular, a unique feature of Jesuit culture that has been identified by historians of early modern science is their longstanding, steadfast effort to transplant observational and experimental practices into the soil of Aristotelian epistemology.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> MOTTA, *Bellarmino* (cit. note 14), pp. 582 sq.

<sup>75</sup> Among the many titles, see RIVKA FELDHAY, *Galileo and the Church. Political Inquisition or Critical Dialogue*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 203; ID., *The Jesuits. Transmitters of the New Science*, in BUCCIANTINI – CAMEROTA – FRANCO GIUDICE (eds.), *Il caso Galileo. Una rilettura storica, filosofica, teologica*, Florence, Olschki, 2011, pp. 47-74; RICHARD J. BLACKWELL, *Galileo, Bellarmine, and the Bible. Including a Translation of Foscarini's Letter on the Motion of the Earth*, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1991, pp. 135 sq.; KELTER, *The Refusal to Accommodate* (cit. note 31); MICHAEL J. GORMAN, *Molinist Theology and Natural Knowledge in the Society of Jesus 1580-1610*, in *Sciences et religions de Copernic à Galilée* (cit. note 13), pp. 235-254. A detailed bibliographical essay in SHEILA J. RABIN, *Early Modern Jesuit Science. A Historiographical Essay*, «Journal of Jesuit Studies», 1, 2014, pp. 88-104.

Regarding the question under discussion here, I feel that it is important to highlight another aspect of the historical identity and role of the Jesuits in this period – an aspect forged by political conflict, first and foremost the design which they championed of affirming the unlimited sovereignty of the pontiff over the individual consciences of believers.

The decades between the last quarter of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and the outbreak of the Thirty Years War witnessed the height of religious conflict in Europe and the momentum of the theological-political developments of the early modern period. At that time the Jesuits underwent a fundamental process which – in the eyes of their enemies – reshaped their identity from that of an essentially Hispanic order to a multifaceted body devoted to the establishment of papal tyranny.<sup>76</sup>

Expelled from France in 1594 after the attempted murder of Henry IV by a former Jesuit student, Jean Chastel; expelled from Venice in 1606 during the Interdict; expelled from Bohemia in the aftermath of the insurrection against Hapsburg rule, the Jesuits were perceived as a powerful presence dominating the area where the civil and the religious spheres, the temporal and spiritual powers, intersected. In this period Jesuit hegemony over the consciences of the princes of the *Ancien Régime* gained momentum, with many powerful Catholic rulers from the dukes of Bavaria and Savoy to Henry of France and the imperial dynasty choosing Jesuit priests as their spiritual advisors, from Johannes Buslidius to Guillaume Lamormaini, and Pierre Coton, the most renowned and most detested of them all.<sup>77</sup>

The ideal model of the court confessor was outlined by Bellarmine in one of the devotional booklets that he produced during the latter part of his life, the *De officio principis christiani* of 1619. The confessor should not be intimidated by the majesty of his penitent, but he rather sounds out his conscience with even greater religious zeal and devotion, since the private sins of the man could pollute the public person of the sovereign. The Jesuit confessor embodied the hierarchical relationship between the temporal

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<sup>76</sup> ERIC NELSON, *The Jesuit legend: superstition and myth-making*, in HELEN PARISH – WILLIAM G. NAPHY (eds.), *Religion and Superstition in Reformation Europe*, Manchester-New York, Manchester University Press, 2002, pp. 94-115, 109 sq.; JOSÉ MARTÍNEZ MILLÁN, *La trasformazione della monarchia hispana alla fine del XVI secolo. Dal modello cattolico castigliano al paradigma universale cattolico-romano*, in PAOLO BROGGIO – FRANCESCA CANTÙ – PIERRE-ANTOINE FABRE – ANTONELLA ROMANO (eds.), *I gesuiti ai tempi di Claudio Acquaviva. Strategie politiche, religiose e culturali tra Cinque e Seicento*, Brescia, Morcelliana, 2007, pp. 19-53.

<sup>77</sup> ROBERT BIRELEY, *The Jesuits and the Thirty Years War. Kings, Courts, and Confessors*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003; HARRO HÖPFL, *Jesuit Political Thought. The Society of Jesus and the State, c. 1540-1630*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 20 sq.

and sacred powers: he remained seated wearing his *biretta* while hearing the confession, while the prince was on his knees, bareheaded.<sup>78</sup>

This hierarchical relationship between the director of conscience and the sovereign *quoad peccata*, with regard to sins and their absolution, was in a sense the iconic representation of the relationship between spiritual and temporal power outlined in Bellarmine's theory of the indirect power of the pope. According to Bellarmine, as is well known, the prerogative of judging and sanctioning the acts of rule of a prince fell to the Roman See. This comprised acts pertaining to temporal issues if they affected the preservation of faith (one textbook case was the granting of freedom of worship to heretic subjects) and even, if necessary, the excommunication of an errant sovereign and the absolution of his subjects from their bonds of fealty.

The fact that the bond of obedience between subjects and their prince could be broken by excommunication as an act that separated an individual from the community of Christians (an act that was not without precedent, going back to Gregory VII's excommunication of Henry IV in 1076), as opposed to considering this bond to be fixed and indissoluble because it is a tie of nature to the paternal authority of one's sovereign, as established by God at the Creation (the declared position of the English king, James I, and of the French Parliaments) constituted one of the most controversial issues in the political debate across Europe in those years.

What appears interesting to me is that we have here two diverging theories regarding the social pact, one identifying a juridical-political sphere ruled by its own laws stemming from nature and hence not constrained by spiritual power, and the other denying that the sphere of secular power was exempt from religious authority, based on the priority of faith and of the Catholic Church.

To a certain extent an analogy can be drawn between this struggle for authority between the Church and the secular powers and the emerging confrontation between the Church and experimental science, between the hermeneutics of the Letter to Christina, with its notion of the autonomous jurisdiction of natural philosophy, and the hermeneutics of the theologians of the Holy Office, who designated the Copernican theory as false, erroneous and heretical.<sup>79</sup> It must be noted that in both cases the Apostolic See

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<sup>78</sup> NICOLE REINHARDT, *Voices of Conscience. Royal Confessors and Political Counsel in Seventeenth-Century Spain and France*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016, pp. 67 sq.

<sup>79</sup> Analogous considerations can be found in VOLKER REINHARDT, *Il concilio di Trento e le scienze naturali: la controversia fra Bellarmino e Galilei come paradigma*, in PAOLO PRODI – WOLFGANG REINHARDT (eds.), *Il concilio di Trento e il moderno*, Bologna, il Mulino, 1996, pp. 485-501.

exercised its powers with recourse to an act of judgment, be it with regard to the conscience of the prince or to the lawfulness of heliocentrism.

After the failed attempt by Sixtus V to have Bellarmine's *Disputationes* placed on the Index in 1590 because of his rebuttal of the idea of an immediate papal dominance over the kingdoms of the earth, the theory of the indirect power of the pope on temporal issues, though never explicitly recognized as dogma, became the pillar of the theological system substantiating the hegemonic strategies of the Roman Church. It is against this theory, as we will see below, that in 1606 James I forced the suspect Recusants to take an oath of allegiance to the English Crown and in the same year Paolo Sarpi sought to develop a full-fledged theory of the State in opposition to the political views of Jesuit scholasticism.<sup>80</sup>

According to Sarpi, the claim of the *totato* – the all-encompassing authority of the Apostolic See, in his sarcastic words – was to raise to the level of dogma theological concepts that were actually devoid of any real foundation in Scripture and ancient tradition, concepts that had emerged over time with the evolution of the Church. «The imposition of the right to license or to block from kingship, to appoint, or to remove kings – Sarpi wrote in the above-mentioned account – is something that has been attempted for five hundred years, and it has never had success or been put into execution».<sup>81</sup> Later Sarpi wrote to the Gallican magistrate Jacques Leschassier: «Bellarmine condemns [our opinions] as heretical, and establishes as an article of faith that the pope can excommunicate kings and release subjects from their oath, and he unceasingly argues [...] that the excommunicated, as long as they remain such, cannot be given any obedience without committing a sin».<sup>82</sup>

In his political considerations the Servite friar and theologian Fulgenzio Micanzio, another well-known correspondent of Galileo (and biographer of Sarpi), grasped the enormity of the theory of indirect power: «Even eating, drinking, sleeping and everything must be subordinated to the spiritual end and salvation; therefore [the Apostolic See] has authority over everything»; and furthermore: «Every habit that is not directed toward God's glory and toward salvation is an abuse, hence all things, none excepted, would fall under the authority of the ecclesiastical court».<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> This is opportunely noted by CORRADO VIVANTI, *I due governi del mondo negli scritti di Sarpi*, in VIALLO (ed.), *Paolo Sarpi. Politique et religion en Europe* (cit. note 73), pp. 28-54.

<sup>81</sup> *Consulto* 50, p. 680.

<sup>82</sup> 22 December 1609, in SARPI, *Lettere ai gallicani*, ed. by B. Ulianich, Wiesbaden, Franz Steiner, 1961, pp. 61-66: 64.

<sup>83</sup> FULGENZIO MICANZIO, *Annotazioni e pensieri*, in GINO BENZONI – TIZIANO ZANATO (eds.),



In 1616 consultors and cardinals of the Index and the Holy Office did indeed resolve that the theory of the motion of the Earth and the stillness of the Sun was «subject to the authority of the ecclesiastical court» since it conflicted with the Biblical image of the universe which, though never doctrinally codified, was implicitly received by tradition. The same could be said about the hierarchy of the spiritual and temporal powers, which was never recognized as dogma by a council nor did it even formally receive the consensus of scholastic theologians, but which had been firmly and unwaveringly upheld by the acts of a long sequence of popes from Gregory VII to Pius V and also, it must be said, had clearly been envisaged as a thesis by Aquinas.<sup>84</sup>

The point is that explicit recourse to the *potestas indirecta* – notwithstanding the opposition of a widespread, resolutely anti-Roman wing of the Catholic Church – was supported by a vast amount of apologetic scholarship centered around controversialist theology, with the theory of the pope as *iudex controversiarum*, ‘judge of controversies in the realm of faith’, as the conceptual foundation for his indirect power. Not by chance, the central thesis of the most renowned and disputed of Bellarmine’s *Controversiae*, concerning the spiritual power of the pope, was argued as – much of it word for word – a long annotation entitled *De iudice controversiarum disputatio* (‘Disputation on the judge of controversies’), written by him in the margin of his lecture on Aquinas’ *Secunda secundae* that was delivered in Louvain in 1574.<sup>85</sup>

In the area of controversialist theology, during the decades under consideration here, the Jesuits – who were far more prepared, due to their rigorous education and scholarship, than the members of other orders for the debate with Protestants and with the advocates of State authority – were the architects of the pope’s sovereignty based on his position as the highest judge in matters of faith.

The polemical works of the greatest authorities on controversialist matters in the Society of Jesus – such as Martin Becanus, Adam Tanner, Grégorio de Valencia, Edmund Campion, and François Veron, who were active primarily along the confessional border between Catholic and Reformed Europe, i.e., in Germany, the Low Countries, and the Austrian He-

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*Storici e politici veneti del Cinquecento e del Seicento*, Milan-Naples, Ricciardi, 1982, pp. 733-863: 760, 761.

<sup>84</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Th.* II-II, q. 12, *De apostasia*, a. 2, *Utrum princeps, propter apostasiam a fide, amittat dominium in subditos, ita quod ei obedire non teneantur*.

<sup>85</sup> MOTTA, *Bellarmino* (cit. note 14), pp. 363 sq.

reditary Lands, as well as in France after the Edict of Nantes and in the underground circles of English Catholicism – invariably included a treatise *De iudice controversiarum*.

The argumentation in their treatises was usually based on the linking of two elements. The first was hermeneutical: since Scripture was not the transparent, perspicuous text proclaimed by Luther and the Reformation, an impartial judge was needed to resolve the virtually limitless points of conflict that could arise between different interpretations of what was often a rather opaque and obscure text. The second element was analogical, and derived from the quintessentially Tridentine principle of the visibility of the Church and its nature as a *societas perfecta*, a society provided with all the necessary means to reach its own divine ends. «Just as in political and civil matters – Becanus wrote in his commentary to the *Secunda secundae* in 1615 – quarrels and disputes often arise, requiring the presence of a judge issuing a judgment over the parts, the same holds in matters of faith and religion». Moreover, just as in regular tribunals a distinction is made between judge, law and jurisprudence, «in the same way, in controversies on faith we have the judge, the Scripture of the two Testaments, and tradition».<sup>86</sup>

## 8. THE THEOLOGICAL-POLITICAL CONFLICT IN THE AGE OF PAUL V

Niccolò Lorini's denunciation and Galileo's letters to Benedetto Castelli and Christina of Lorraine came to the attention of the Holy Office at the very moment when the hermeneutical and political importance of the debate over who should be recognized as the ultimate judge in faith controversies and biblical interpretation had reached its climax. The ruling élite in the Roman Curia had just come through a bruising doctrinal confrontation over the nature and boundaries of ecclesiastical power – a battle that had mobilized governments and learned milieus from all over Europe – when it was asked to pass judgment on Galileo's theses regarding the distinction between the spheres of natural philosophy and divine Revelation, and the daring proposal for a heliocentric exegesis advanced by Foscarini.

As a matter of fact, at that historical juncture not only Galileo, but also far more powerful political players emerging in the form of secular States – with their own political doctrine and their own apologists who

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<sup>86</sup> BECANUS, *De iudice controversiarum*, in *Opera omnia aucta revisa et in duos tomos distributa*, here in the 1649 edition, Mainz, impensis Ioan[n]is Godefredi Schönwetteri, II, pp. 1235-1252, 1247.



were becoming ever more practiced in theological argumentation – were breaking the monopoly on the interpretation of Scripture traditionally entrusted, in accordance with the Catholic system of learning, to the schools of the regular orders.

In 1609 the Letter of Majesty, an edict emitted by Emperor Rudolf II that guaranteed religious tolerance for his subjects in Bohemia, had been harshly criticized in Rome. Thereafter, for the ensuing decade up to the opening stages of the Thirty Years War, the efforts of Paul V and the Jesuits – his strategists in the campaign to re-Catholicize the Hapsburg lands – had been directed at averting the danger that the Austrian, Hungarian, and Bohemian *Stände* might manipulate the imperial succession to their advantage.

Rome's goal was to prevent a dynastic crisis in the House of Hapsburg after Rudolf II died, since the new emperor Matthias had no direct heirs, a situation that could have led to the assigning of provisional powers to the Elector Palatine Frederick V, a prominent representative of the aggressive Calvinist front. The imperial election of Ferdinand of Hapsburg in 1619, a model pupil of the Jesuits and known for his religious devotion and his zealous campaign against the heretics, was an undeniable victory for the Apostolic See. In this and a handful of other cases the notion that the papacy had the right to exercise surveillance over State affairs when these impacted on the interests of the Church assumed blatantly concrete form.<sup>87</sup>

Also in 1609 a book *De potestate papae* ('On the power of the pope') was published in London. Its author, William Barclay, was a well-respected Catholic jurist of Scottish origin who taught for thirty years in France, and King James I saw in him a precious ally in the war of documents that he was waging against the papacy. Barclay laboured over his book for years, during the darkest period of the French religious wars, during the reign of Henry III. The debate between Rome and London about the Oath of Allegiance and the Interdict of Venice finally persuaded him to prepare a definitive version of his work, which his son had published after his death.

Barclay's aim was to advance a theological-political theory marked by an idea that had characterized the French *Politiques* – the division of power between different spheres of interest:

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<sup>87</sup> On the political dynamics in the Holy Roman Empire during the 1610s and 1620s with regard to the foreign policy of the papacy, see JAN PAUL NIEDERKORN, *Papst, Kaiser und Reich während der letzten Regierungsjahre Kaiser Rudolfs II. (1605-1612)*, in ALEXANDER KOLLER (ed.), *Die Aussenbeziehungen der römischen Kurie unter Paul V. Borghese (1605-1621)*, Tübingen, Max Niemeyer, 2008, pp. 83-99, and KOLLER, *Papst, Kaiser und Reich am Vorabend des Dreissigjährigen Krieges (1612-1621). Die Sicherung der Sukzession Ferdinands von Innerösterreich*, *ibid.*, pp. 101-120.

We must know that, since the beginning, those two powers by means of which the world is bound to its duties, that is the political and the ecclesiastical, are so distinct and separate between them, that (though they both originate from God) each of them is closed within its own limits, and cannot by its own right cross the boundaries of the other, and neither of them exercises power over the other.<sup>88</sup>

The authority over the civil commonwealth that was claimed, even if only in indirect form, by the popes was an usurpation of power dating no further back than Gregory VII. Had God actually ordered it, the Church Fathers would have surely have advised the emperors about it.<sup>89</sup> This was what Barclay argued, and there was no doubt at the time that he had on his side the composite Catholic world which Rome had distanced herself from since the Council of Trent.

The *De potestate papae* was placed on the Index in 1609 together with other titles, among them the *Vindiciae contra tyrannos*, a cornerstone of Calvinist political theory written by Iunius Brutus (Philippe de Duplessis-Mornay) some thirty years earlier, in 1579. Bellarmine refuted Barclay's positions in his last published work on controversialist and theological-political issues, the *De potestate Summi pontificis in rebus temporalibus adversus Gulielmum Barclaium* (1610). In it Bellarmine presented well-known theses already elucidated in the *Disputationes* and widely taught in Jesuit schools; nevertheless, at the time it was received as an official intervention of the Holy See, intended to reaffirm the doctrinal nature (as an article of faith) of the *potestas indirecta* of the pope, against the Gallican tradition that prevailed in France.

The moment chosen could not have been worse: the deadly attack on Henry IV in May of that year made the country sink again into the fear of religious war. As I have already noted, the *De potestate Summi pontificis* was condemned in November by the Paris Parliament. Just a few months earlier the Parliament had condemned the *De rege* of Father Juan de Mariana, the author who had come to be widely regarded as the Jesuit theorist of regicide.<sup>90</sup>

The death of Henry IV marked the climax of a historical stage in which the theoretical structure of papal sovereignty proposed by the Ro-

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<sup>88</sup> WILLIAM BARCLAY, *De potestate papae, an et quatenus in reges et principes seculares ius et imperium habeat*, Pont-à-Mousson, apud Iacobum Garnich, 1610, p. 9.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>90</sup> SYLVIO H. DE FRANCESCHI, *La crise théologico-politique du premier âge baroque. Antiromanisme doctrinale, pouvoir pastoral et raison du prince: le Saint-Siège face au prisme français (1607-1627)*, Rome, École française de Rome, 2009, pp. 203 sq.; STEFANIA TUTINO, *Empire of Souls. Robert Bellarmine and the Christian Commonwealth*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010, pp. 160 sq.

man Church in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century reached a critical point within the context of open conflict with other institutional players who were seeking to enforce their absolutist monarchical powers, as in the case of England and France, or to reinforce or defend their customary rights, as in the case of the Republic of Venice. What these players were laying claim to was full autonomy in the realm of the *saeculum* – the political sphere with its own forms of sovereignty and its own ties of obedience and control between governing bodies and the governed, between the ruler and the ruled – and its separation from the realm of spiritual matters and the authority of the Church.

These players perceived the doctrine supporting the interference of the Roman Church in the legitimate structures of sovereign rule and in the jurisdiction of the lay courts as a completely new and unjustified theory, fashioned in the theological workshops of the papacy and overtly going against Christian tradition. In his writings on the Venetian Interdict, Sarpi never tired of reaffirming that the reasons of the Republic were founded on custom and the shared consensus of the universal Church, while the pretensions of Rome in matters pertaining to the judiciary and benefices originated out of distorting modern trends on the part of the Holy See: «A new doctrine seeking boundless and limitless power», aimed at handing over the rights and jurisdictions of the community of the faithful – abbots, bishops, chapters of long-standing Venetian loyalty – to the agencies of the Roman Curia.<sup>91</sup>

At the time, it must be said, clear boundaries dividing the spiritual and the temporal spheres did not exist, and could not even be defined due to the entangled rules in matters of mixed jurisdiction (such as astrology, witchcraft, polygamy, and blasphemy), and because both spheres sought legitimacy in the authority of Scripture, and hence in the interpretation of it.

William Barclay supported his arguments on the separation of powers with numerous passages taken from the Old and New Testaments and the Church Fathers, as did Bellarmine in the treatise written to counter him. The difference lay in the fact that Bellarmine not only could counterpose interpretation to interpretation, biblical passage to biblical passage; he was also able to claim that *his* was the ultimate interpretation as it rested on the pope's authority as the highest judge on matters of controversy.

A theological argumentation would also be used by Galileo in his second letter on sunspots, composed in 1612 and therefore shortly before his 'Copernican writings'. Here the scientist declared that the thesis of the in-

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<sup>91</sup> FRAJESE, *Sarpi scettico* (cit. note 73), pp. 303 sq.

corruptibility of the heavens was linked to the ‘Aristotelian error’ of the eternity of the world, and hence was «an opinion that was not only false, but also erroneous, repulsing the unquestionable truths of the Sacred Writings». Here Galileo was deploying expressions and judgments borrowed from the domain of the Inquisition. Not by chance the Roman censorship intervened, requiring that this passage be erased from the text.<sup>92</sup>

The adoption of the figure of the *iudex fidei* by the controversialists meant that every proposition founded on Scriptural or, more generally, theological arguments fell under the jurisdiction of the Chair of Saint Peter, even if only to establish whether or not something should be considered as pertaining to faith, as in the case of Barclay’s *De potestate papae*. But the breadth and diffusion of the religious discourse, as well as the prominence of the Bible as a virtually infinite repository of ethical, political, and even scientific models, meant that the pope’s authority extended over an enormous area. Within a few years both the jurisdictional debates between the Apostolic See and its secular rivals, and the debate on the character of heliocentric theory would test the boundaries of that jurisdiction.

It must be added that in the view of the Roman Curia the distinction between the field of the jurisdictional claims made by temporal powers and that of real heresy was extremely nuanced.

France was a country of two confessions, and in the Parliaments where debates over papal claims and Jesuit plots were being conducted, Protestant judges were also seated by right of law. As for Venice, Paolo Sarpi was using all of his influence and the English embassy was acting feverishly behind the scenes to bring about an official conversion of the Republic’s ruling class to Protestantism, a possibility that was causing great concern to Pope Paul V.

The Anglican controversy itself – which raged between 1606 and 1610 and sealed the minority status of English Catholics well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century – was played out in the vague borderline area dividing political obedience and membership in a religion.

With the Oath of Allegiance imposed in 1606 on suspect recusants in the aftermath of the Gunpowder Plot, King James sought to shed light on the distinction between ‘loyal’ subjects and the followers of the *potestas indirecta* – which, in his view, was tantamount to a theological justification of

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<sup>92</sup> GALILEO, *Istoria e dimostrazioni intorno alle macchie solari*, OG, V, pp. 138-140, n. 6. See PHILIPPE BOULIER, *L’inaltérabilité du ciel pose un problème théologique*, «Galilæana», 10, 2013, pp. 41-71: 53-54. According to the author, these expressions would be suggested by Castelli, in the perspective of reconciling Galilean physics and Christian metaphysics.

regicide. Indeed, the oath was formulated to include not only a declaration of allegiance to the king but also the rejection of the doctrine that the pope «hath any power or authoritie to depose the king, [...] or to authorize any forraigne prince, to invade or annoy him, or his countreys, or to discharge any of his subiects of their allegiance, and obedience to his Maiestie».<sup>93</sup>

According to King James the oath was merely a political measure – and, for the purposes of my analysis, a further example of a secular sovereign's claim of distinct and autonomous jurisdictions. In the view of the Roman Curia it was instead a wholly unacceptable document, one containing heretical statements, and as such it was condemned by the Holy Office in the spring of 1606.

There followed a long, drawn-out controversy with repeated interventions on both sides. It arose simultaneously with the Interdict and would continue for several years as a Europe-wide debate between the *regnum* and the *sacerdotium* (an issue later summarized in Hobbes' *Leviathan*). In 1609 King James addressed an *Apology for the Oath of Allegiance* (*Apologia pro iuramento fidelitatis*) to all the princes of Europe, an appeal to unite in defense of the rights of the temporal powers (the papal nuncio in France, Monsignor Ubaldini, read between its lines «the style and opinions of Fra Paolo».<sup>94</sup>

English Catholics were forbidden to take the oath by Paul V's brief *Magno animi moerore* issued in September 1606, «seeing it conteines many things which are flat contrary to faith, and salvation».<sup>95</sup> In one of his contributions to the debate, the *Apologia Matthaei Torti* (1608), Bellarmine confirmed the dogmatic nature of the indirect power of the pope, and hence the impossibility of separating membership in the Catholic Church and the obligation to obey the pope as one's spiritual sovereign, i.e. higher in authority than any temporal prince:

This oath not only entails civil obedience in merely temporal matters, [...] but also the denial of pontifical power, which is not a merely temporal matter, but a sacred matter, established by Heaven, which no mortal can abrogate, or diminish.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> The text of the oath may be found in JAMES I, *Triplici nodo triplex cuneus. Or an apologie for the Oath of allegiance, against the two breues of Pope Paulus Quintus, and the late letter of Cardinal Bellarmine to G. Blackwel the Archpriest*, London, by Robert Barker, 1607, p. 48. See on the issue MOTTA, *Bellarmino* (cit. note 14), pp. 385 sq.; DE FRANCESCHI, *La crise théologico-politique* (cit. note 90), pp. 61 sq.; TUTINO, *Law and Conscience. Catholicism in Early Modern England, 1570-1625*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2007, pp. 117 sq.

<sup>94</sup> DE FRANCESCHI, *La crise théologico-politique* (cit. note 90), p. 213.

<sup>95</sup> JAMES I, *Triplici nodo triplex cuneus* (cit. note 93), p. 49.

<sup>96</sup> TUTINO, *Law and Conscience* (cit. note 93), p. 165.

This overlapping of spheres was indeed implicit in the text of the Oath: in a further passage, James' subjects were asked to «abhorre, detest and abiure as impious and hereticall» the doctrine of the dissolution of the duty of obedience to an excommunicated king, and to believe «in conscience» that the pope could not abolish the binding nature of the oath itself.<sup>97</sup>

In all respects James was fully entitled, as the head of the Church of England, to stigmatize a doctrine as impious and heretical, but of course in the eyes of Rome (notwithstanding his diplomatic expressions of deference toward the prestige of the Apostolic See), this could not but emphasize his heretical position. Even worse, his attempt to impose on his subjects a persuasion «in conscience» meant that temporal power was encroaching on the private sphere of the individual conscience, a jurisdiction reserved for the Church and upon which it exerted rigid control by sacrament.<sup>98</sup>

In conclusion, I would like to highlight once again that the hermeneutical issue raised by Copernican cosmology occurred at a moment in history when the Roman Church was in deep crisis caused by what one might describe as an «excess of sovereignty» in the person of the pope, as had been envisaged by Catholic controversialist theology in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century on the basis of the theological-political theory of the judge of controversies. This claim to sovereignty triggered a reaction from the defenders of temporal power, who were becoming increasingly accustomed to using theological arguments to legitimize their own jurisdictional claims.

The heart of the crisis lay in the impossibility of clearly dividing the spiritual and temporal jurisdictions in a context where the Bible still represented the norm and the reference text, but in Rome the very idea of the separation and respective autonomy of the two forms of power was perceived as a challenge to the full spiritual sovereignty of the pope.

I therefore believe it is plausible to argue that this perception reflected – at least by analogy – on Galileo's hermeneutical proposals, causing a reaction that was aimed at preventing another sphere of jurisdiction (in this case the relationship between nature and Scripture) from being subtracted from the highest judge of faith.

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<sup>97</sup> JAMES I, *Triplici nodo triplex cuneus* (cit. note 93), p. 114.

<sup>98</sup> This aspect of the Oath of allegiance has been underscored by TUTINO, *Law and Conscience* (cit. note 93), pp. 133 sq. On the different interpretations of the document, see JOHANN P. SOMMERVILLE, *Papalist Political Thought and the Controversy over the Jacobean Oath of Allegiance*, in ETHAN H. SHAGAN (ed.), *Catholics and the 'Protestant Nation'. Religious Politics and Identity in Early Modern England*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2005, pp. 162-184.