

# Refutation of David Armstrong' Teaching On Galileo in the "One Minute Apologist"

By Robert Sungenis

In his short two-page article from his new book, *The One Minute Apologist*, Mr. Armstrong tries to deal with some of the more common objections to the Catholic Church's treatment of Galileo.



The main objection he tackles is: "The Galileo incident proves that the Catholic Church isn't infallible" and "It also shows that Catholicism opposes science and scientific open-mindedness."

As the "One-Minute Apologist," Mr. Armstrong begins his answer and says:

**Mr. Armstrong:** One Church tribunal's proclamations about Galileo do not overthrow the doctrine of infallibility; nor—once the facts of the matter are properly understood—do they show the Catholic Church to be opposed to science.

The popular story of the Catholic Church's censure of the astronomer Galileo (1564-1642) in 1616 and 1633, supposedly for his rejection of a geocentric universe, may be the most notorious and famous anti-Catholic myth of them all – especially for those who believe religion and science are inexorably opposed.

But the truth of the matter is that Catholic dogma had never enshrined geocentrism, and Galileo (a faithful Catholic) had been supported in his scientific work by many notable churchmen, including three popes. Indeed, his biographer Giorgio de Santillana stated that "It has been known for a long time that a major part of the church intellectuals were on the side of Galileo, while the clearest opposition to him came from secular ideas."<sup>1</sup>

**R. Sungenis:** Let's take Mr. Armstrong's claims one at a time. He first claims that "Catholic dogma had never enshrined geocentrism." I'm not sure what Mr. Armstrong means by the metaphor "enshrined," but I assume he is trying to say that the Catholic Church never made an infallible dogma about geocentrism. If that is the case, let's ask Mr. Armstrong if he believes and practices things in his Catholic faith that have never been taught infallibly by the Church? If he knows anything about his Catholic faith he would have to give a hearty affirmative to that question. In fact, most of what Catholics believe and practice today has never been stated infallibly. Most of our faith and morals comes from the Ordinary

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<sup>1</sup> *The Crime of Galileo* (University of Chicago Press, 1955), xii-xiii.

Magisterium, and the Ordinary Magisterium is rarely singled out as infallible dogma. There have been only two definite instances of the exercise of papal infallibility. The first was in 1870 when the doctrine of papal infallibility was decreed as a doctrine in itself, and the second was in 1950 when the doctrine of the Assumption of Mary was decreed. Every other teaching by the popes, past and present, has never been officially defined as an *ex cathedra*, infallible, and irreformable teaching. Of course, the Church could go back and analyze various teachings of past popes in order to decide whether one or the other was teaching infallibly on a given issue, but she has never done so, and thus there is no list of infallible papal teachings. Suffice it to say, Mr. Armstrong has no way of knowing whether the decrees against Galileo were not infallible, since the Church has never officially stated they were not infallible. He can only go by his own judgment which, of course, is fallible.

Irrespective of the problem of what in past Catholic history is infallible, let's look at the Ordinary Magisterium. I don't think too many people will argue that the Ordinary Magisterium of the Catholic Church both condemned Galileo and the doctrine of heliocentrism. It would be quite difficult to argue against this thesis considering the following words issued and approved by the then reigning pope, Urban VIII, at the 1633 tribunal of Galileo:

"The proposition that the sun is the center of the world and does not move from its place is absurd and false philosophically and formally heretical, because it is expressly contrary to the Holy Scripture."

"The proposition that the Earth is not the center of the world and immovable but that it moves, and also with a diurnal motion, is equally absurd and false philosophically and theologically considered at least erroneous in faith."<sup>2</sup>

Prior to issuing this decree, Pope Urban VIII was in protracted discussions with the Grand Duke of Tuscany about putting a stop to Galileo, stating that Galileo's teaching was a "pernicious danger to the Catholic faith."<sup>3</sup> After the 1633 decree, Pope Urban VIII sent letters to all the papal nuncios and universities of Europe stating that Galileo had been condemned and that heliocentrism was branded as "formally heretical" and not to be taught

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<sup>2</sup> *Galileo E L'Inquisizione*, Antonio Favaro, 1907, p. 143.

<sup>3</sup> The 1633 sentence against Galileo stated that heliocentrism was: *è propositione assurda e falsa in filosofia, e formalmente heretica* ("an absurd proposition and false in philosophy and formally heretical") cited in *Galileo E L'Inquisizione*, Favaro, p. 143. Maurice Finocchiaro's *The Galileo Affair* has one of the better confirmations of Urban's appeal. In the chapter titled "Diplomatic Correspondence 1632-1633" he shows that the bulk of the correspondence was between Pope Urban VIII and the ambassador to the Duke of Tuscany, Francesco Niccolini, detailing Urban's outright rejection of Galileo's assault on "Holy Scripture, religion, and Faith," wherein Urban implored the Duke to help in "shielding Catholicism from any danger" because "this work of his is indeed pernicious, and the matter more serious than his Highness thinks" (*ibid.*, pp. 232, 235, 236, quotes taken directly from Urban VIII as recorded in *Le Opere di Galileo Galilei*, vol. 14, pp. 388-393).

by anyone.<sup>4</sup> Most important is the fact that the 1633 decision condemning heliocentrism as formally heretical has never been overturned by the Catholic Church, even to the present day.

Prior to Urban VIII there was Paul V. In 1615 he appointed a commission of 11 cardinals, including Cardinal Robert Bellarmine, to analyze the claims of Galileo. They reported back to the pope that Galileo's thesis that the earth revolved around the sun was "formally heretical." From this report, the pope had the Sacred Congregation issue a canonical injunction against Galileo to renounce his teachings and never again teach on the subject for the rest of his life.

Prior to Paul V was Pius V and the *Catechism of the Council of Trent*. In four separate places of the 1566 catechism the geocentric conception of the universe is taught. This is especially significant since the preface states that the catechism was written with the goal of teaching and clarifying the doctrinal beliefs of the Catholic Church.

Prior to Pius V was the whole medieval period, led by Thomas Aquinas. Except for two, all of them were geocentrists. Prior to the medievals were the Church Fathers who were in absolute unanimous consensus on geocentrism. Moreover, their consensus was not by default. They held to their position of geocentrism against many of the Greek philosophers who were teaching heliocentrism, namely, the Pythagorean school.

After Urban VII, in 1664, there was Alexander VII. He signed his name to the Index of Forbidden books, and included in the forbidden list of books the teachings of heliocentrism by Copernicus, Galileo and Kepler.

After Alexander VII was Benedict XIV who in 1741 and 1758 continued to keep Copernicus, Galileo and Kepler on the Index and did not allow any book written on heliocentrism to be published that treated it as a thesis.

The only changes to this almost 1800 years of geocentric consensus in the Catholic Church were two incidents of subterfuge. The first was in 1822 when Canon Settele received an imprimatur in the reign of Pius VII for his book treating heliocentrism as a thesis. But Settele received the imprimatur when the Commissary General of the Index, Maurizio Olivieri, had lied about the reasons Copernicanism was condemned by Paul V in 1616 and Urban VIII in 1633. The second was in 1835 when the Vatican received false reports of the discovery of stellar parallax (an astronomical analysis that was then believed to prove heliocentrism) and which led to the removal of Galileo and Copernicus from the Index under false pretenses.

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<sup>4</sup> As Dorothy Stimson reports, "Pope Urban had no intention of concealing Galileo's abjuration and sentence. Instead, he ordered copies of both to be sent to all inquisitors and papal nuncios that they might notify all their clergy and especially all the professors of mathematics and philosophy within their districts..." (*The Gradual Acceptance of the Copernican Theory of the Universe*, 1917, pp. 67-68).

Suffice it to say, with this pedigree of belief in geocentrism and the two incidents of subterfuge in an attempt to change that consensus, Mr. Armstrong has a lot of explaining to do.

The other problem is this: Dave Armstrong, like every other Catholic apologist who wants to insist that the Catholic Church was wrong in its official teaching that the earth was motionless in the center of the universe, must invariably resort to the “infallibility” issue to answer the secular critics. Although it may provide a temporary escape from being further scrutinized, it is always at the cost of consigning all non-infallible doctrines taught by the Ordinary Magisterium for the past 2000 years into the category of interesting but not necessarily true, and certainly not binding. If the Tradition, the Scripture and the canonical decrees against Galileo and heliocentrism are not to be regarded as true and binding, then why should any other non-infallible teaching of the Catholic Church? We can just pick and choose what we want to believe. As you can probably guess, this kind of dismissive apologetic will eventually destroy the Catholic Church, not help it. God forbid we should question the status quo of modern science. One fact is certain: Pope Paul V and Pope Urban VIII, both of which approved their Sacred Congregations conclusion that heliocentrism was “formally heretical,” certainly didn’t think that their decrees were not binding.

But the escape is only temporary. The same apologists who find it so easy to use the “infallible” card soon find themselves at odds with Pius XII’s teaching in *Humani Generis* #21 that all non-infallible teachings of the popes are to be considered true and authoritative. It also puts them at odds with *Lumen Gentium* 25 which says the same.<sup>5</sup> Suffice it to say, these Church declarations on the authority of its own non-infallible teachings puts today’s Catholic apologist who dismisses the decrees against Galileo and heliocentrism between the proverbial rock and a hard place.

There’s more. Mr. Armstrong’s “infallible” argument eventually becomes the victim of his own pick-and-choose apologetic. There exist dogmas the Church has stated infallibly but which Mr. Armstrong, because he is an ardent evolutionist, decides not to accept because he believes modern science has disproven the decree. For example Lateran IV and Vatican I state quite clearly that God created all things ex nihilo,<sup>6</sup> which necessarily rejects the theory of evolution, yet Mr. Armstrong, either oblivious to these teachings or who has done his best to neutralize them, rejects them in favor of evolution.

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<sup>5</sup> “This loyal submission of the will and intellect must be given, in a special way, to the authentic teaching authority of the Roman Pontiff, even when he does not speak *ex cathedra* in such wise, indeed, that his supreme teaching authority be acknowledged with respect, and sincere assent be given to decisions made by him, conformably with his manifest mind and intention, which is made known principally either by the character of the documents in question, or by the frequency with which a certain doctrine is proposed, or by the manner in which the doctrine is formulated.”

<sup>6</sup> Lateran IV: “God...by His own omnipotent power at once from the beginning of time created each creature from nothing, spiritual and corporal, namely, angelic and mundane, and finally the human, constituted as it were, alike of the spirit and the body.” Vatican I: “If anyone does not confess that the world and all things which are contained in it, both spiritual and material, as regards their whole substance, have been produced by God from nothing...let him be anathema.”

**Mr. Armstrong's** next argument is: "Galileo (a faithful Catholic) had been supported in his scientific work by many notable churchmen, including three popes."

**R. Sungenis:** First, Galileo, at least until the end of his life, was anything but a "faithful Catholic." He had a longtime mistress by the name of Marian Gamba and had three illegitimate children with her. Two of them he forsook. When he was given a canonical injunction from Paul V not to teach on heliocentrism any longer, Galileo immediately ignored it and began his book, *The Dialogue Concerning the Two World Systems*, supporting heliocentrism. He then illegally obtained an imprimatur for the same book in 1631 and did so by employing the help of the Grand Duke to persuade a wayward cardinal to accept the book. Galileo's character wasn't much to be admired either. As one historian puts it:

Judging by Galileo's correspondence and other records of his opinion of himself he was fantastically selfish intellectually and almost unbelievably conceited. As an illustration of the former there is the now well-known fact that he refused to share with his colleagues or with acquaintances such as Kepler any of his own findings or insights; he actually claimed to be the only one who ever would make any new discovery!<sup>7</sup>

Second, I find it interesting that Mr. Armstrong claims that "three popes supported" Galileo. He doesn't name the popes but it is certain that he wants to leave the reader with the impression that Galileo had little opposition from the papacy. The truth is, there wasn't one pope who supported Galileo, much less three. The only remote possibility for Mr. Armstrong's thesis is Cardinal Barberini who had supported Galileo initially and had even given him the title of his book, *The Dialogue Concerning the Two World Systems*. But when Barberini became Pope Urban VIII in 1623-1644 everything changed, for it was Urban who approved the Sacred Congregation's condemnation of Galileo as "vehemently suspect of heresy," and condemned heliocentrism as a "formally heretical." Prior to Urban was Gregory XV in 1621-1623 but there is no record of him favoring Galileo. Prior to Gregory was Paul V in 1605-1623, who became the pope five years before Galileo made his first public acceptance of heliocentrism, and was the same pope who six years after Galileo revealed his position approved his commission of cardinals' finding that heliocentrism was a "formal heresy."

As for Mr. Armstrong's quoting from biographer Giorgio de Santillana, who wrote: "It has been known for a long time that a major part of the church intellectuals were on the side of Galileo, while the clearest opposition to him came from secular ideas," obviously Mr. Santillana, even though he is a devout heliocentrist, doesn't make the claim that "three popes" supported Galileo. As for Santillana's claim that a "major part of church intellectuals" sided with Galileo, this proves very little. We can cite a similar example when Paul VI commissioned sixty-four "church intellectuals" to give him their opinions on whether artificial birth control was licit. Sixty of the sixty-four told him it was licit! So it makes little

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<sup>7</sup> A. C. Custance, "The Medieval Synthesis and the Modern Fragmentation of Thought," in *Science and Faith*, p. 153.

difference what “church intellectuals” claim. The fact remains, no pope (the one who decides whether the “church intellectuals” are right or wrong), supported Galileo. Irrespective of this truth, however, is the fact that Santillana’s “majority” was not that decisive of a majority (more like 51% to 49%), and the measurement of the majority actually depends on what period in the controversy one is examining since it shifted back and forth.

The most disturbing thing in Mr. Armstrong’s analysis of the popes during this period is that he mentions no popes that were against Galileo, but there were at least a half dozen.

**Armstrong:** Problems arose when the scientist, although basically correct, became overconfident and obstinate in proclaiming his scientific theory as absolute truth – over and above even Scripture. Accordingly, St. Robert Bellarmine, who was directly involved in the controversy, made it clear that although heliocentrism (a sun-centered universe or solar system) was not irreversibly condemned, a not-yet-proven theory could not be called an unassailable fact.

**R. Sungenis:** And so the myth surrounding Robert Bellarmine goes, but it is just a myth. Bellarmine based his condemnation of heliocentrism on both the Patristics and Scripture. Since the Church Fathers were in absolute consensus concerning geocentrism, and since the Council of Trent stated about fifty years earlier that when the Fathers were in consensus we could not deviate from their teaching; and since these same Fathers appealed to the clear and literal language of Scripture to formulate their teaching of geocentrism (even in opposition to the Greek Pythagoreans who were promoting heliocentrism), Bellarmine concluded that there would never be proof forthcoming for heliocentrism. Otherwise, he would have never taken the risk of condemning heliocentrism if he believed that, in the distant future, his condemnation would someday be overturned. Popes Paul V and Urban VIII felt the same way, otherwise they would have never allowed heliocentrism to be called a “formal heresy.” Bellarmine showed the same tenacity when he condemned Fr. Foscarini’s thesis on heliocentrism just a year prior (1615).

But this is not just my opinion of Bellarmine’s motives and actions. It is the opinion of the major Galileo historians. Let’s take a look at them. Ernan McMullin states:

Did he [Bellarmine] think that a demonstration [of heliocentrism] might conceivably be found? It seems altogether unlikely that he did. Nor was his concession an evidence of open-mindedness with regard to this issue; it was evidence only of the innate courtesy for which Bellarmine was famous. He went on in the remainder of the letter to list several reasons why such a proof would not be forthcoming. Mathematical astronomy, the genre to which he thought Copernicus’s constructions to belong, was inherently incapable of producing such a proof; the best it could do was to save the appearances....This had been Bellarmine’s view when teaching astronomy long before in Louvain....He had not changed his mind in the years since....If Bellarmine, solicitous for the reputation of the Church as he was, had believed that there was the slightest possibility that the Copernican ordering of sun

and earth might later prove correct, he would never have allowed the decree of 1616 to go through.<sup>8</sup>

Fr. George Coyne expressed a similar conclusion:

From the concluding sentences of the Letter it is clear that Bellarmine was convinced that there could be no demonstration of Copernicanism. A further indication of this conviction on Bellarmine's part is that he supported the Decree of the Congregation of the Index, which was aimed at excluding any reconciliation of Copernicanism with Scripture. If he truly believed that there might be a demonstration of Copernicanism, would he not have recommended waiting and not taking a stand, a position embraced at that time, it appears, by Cardinals Barberini and Caetani? And why did he agree to deliver the injunction to Galileo in 1616? This injunction prohibited Galileo from pursuing his research as regards Copernicanism. Galileo was forbidden to seek precisely those scientific demonstrations, which, according to Bellarmine, would have driven theologians back to reinterpret Scripture.<sup>9</sup>

Annibale Fantoli sees it the same way:

As we know, Bellarmine in his response to Foscarini had faced the possibility, although with a considerable and basic skepticism, that a proof for Copernicanism might be given. But by signing, as he did, the ecclesiastical decisions of February-March 1616, he had himself by now come to preclude completely that possibility, however tenuous it might be. And, I repeat, the other Churchmen were also precluding it. Therefore, to hold that the provisions of 1616 were only intended to break the untimely zeal of Galileo for Copernicanism without blocking further careful scientific research on the matter appears to me to be completely untenable.<sup>10</sup>

**Armstrong:** In 1633 the Church tribunal condemned Galileo's "false opinion of the motion of the Earth and the stability of the Sun" as "contrary to divine Scripture," as well as the notions that "the Sun is the center of the world and does not move from east to west and that the Earth moves and is not the center of the world."

**R. Sungenis:** The Church did a little more than that. The Church called heliocentrism a "formal heresy," and it disseminated its condemnation to all of Europe demanding allegiance to its decree.

**Armstrong:** Obviously this was incorrect science.

**R. Sungenis:** "Incorrect science"? Even modern science says today that it has no incontrovertible proof for heliocentrism. Listen to the words of Albert Einstein himself:

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<sup>8</sup> "The Church's Ban on Copernicanism," in *The Church and Galileo*, pp. 180-181.

<sup>9</sup> Lecture by Coyne, delivered at a conference titled: "The Galileo Case: Did the Church Make a Mistake?" held at the Polish Academy of Learning in Cracow, Nov. 14, 2002.

<sup>10</sup> Galileo: *For Copernicanism and the Church*, p. 481.

Since the time of Copernicus we have known that the Earth rotates on its axis and moves around the sun. Even this simple idea, so clear to everyone, was not left untouched by the advance of science. But let us leave this question for the time being and accept Copernicus' point of view (Albert Einstein and Leopold Infeld, *The Evolution of Physics*, 1938, 1966, pp. 154-155.)

"The struggle, so violent in the early days of science, between the views of Ptolemy and Copernicus would then be quite meaningless. Either CS [coordinate system] could be used with equal justification. The two sentences: 'the sun is at rest and the Earth moves,' or 'the sun moves and the Earth is at rest,' would simply mean two different conventions concerning two different CS" (*Ibid*, p. 212).

So how can Mr. Armstrong tell us that the Church was using "incorrect science" in 1633? What we never see from Mr. Armstrong in these discussions is *even the possibility* that the assortment of claims to having demonstrated heliocentrism (by either Bessel, Foucault, Newton, *et al*) could have been wrong. Scientific claims, despite the fact that they change from decade to decade and century to century, always seem to get a free pass with Catholic apologists. But didn't St. Augustine warn Christians not to forsake the Scripture and cover at the boasts of scientists:

"But more dangerous is the error of certain weak brethren who faint away when they hear these irreligious critics learnedly and eloquently discoursing on the theories of astronomy or on any of the questions relating to the elements of this universe. With a sigh, they esteem these teachers as superior to themselves, looking upon them as great men; and they return with disdain to the books which were written for the good of their souls; and, although they ought to drink from these books with relish, they can scarcely bear to take them up" (*The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, Book 1, Chapter 20, Para. 41, Ancient Christian Writers, *ibid.*, p. 44).

Conversely, if Mr. Armstrong would give the Church the benefit of the doubt and adhere to her traditional teaching on geocentrism (unless incontrovertible proof can be supplied by science that heliocentrism is true and no other possibility could ever be entertained), I would not be making this critique of his views. But when popular science's claims are treated as if they were virtually infallible, and to the point that we are now forced to put the consensus of the Fathers; the tradition of the Church for almost two millennia; and the reputation of at least six popes on the line as being duped by false claims; then that is a different matter altogether.

As St. Augustine said: "But if they are able to establish their doctrine with proofs that cannot be denied, we must show that this statement of Scripture...is not opposed to the truth of their conclusions" (*The Literal Interpretation of Genesis* Book 2, Chapter 9, paragraph 21). But "proof" is a very, very demanding proposition. It means that there is no other alternative to consider. It is only then that there is no benefit of the doubt afforded to the 17<sup>th</sup> century Church, for all doubt has been alleviated by proof. I don't mind discussion of heliocentric science, or the Big Bang, or Relativity of Quantum Mechanics, etc. But I do

mind when these things, which are nothing more than theories (and many with an atheistic pedigree behind them) are propped up as the last word to which the Church, who has said the opposite through her whole history, must now bow without hesitation.

If this apologetic is not corrected, I cannot see how Mr. Armstrong can escape the position he is forced to, namely, that the Holy Spirit was not guiding the Fathers, the medievals and all her popes, cardinals and bishops for 95% of the Church's history, until the adulterers and atheists (such as Galileo, Kepler, Newton and Einstein) finally gave us the truth.

Of course, Mr. Armstrong will probably fall back on his thesis that only infallible statements of the pope are worthy of consideration in a question of this magnitude, and therefore we cannot say that the Holy Spirit left these six popes unguided, for, according to Church protocol, there was never any guarantee that the Holy Spirit would guide these six popes when they spoke from a fallible venue. This is the inevitable trump card, as anachronistic as it is, that is always employed by Catholic apologists trying to save face in the Galileo affair. It will sometimes be backed up by appeals to the case of Pope Honorius in the sixth century who made an error in his letter to Sergius that Christ had only one will, not two. "Honourous was not speaking from his infallible chair of Peter, so we cannot conclude that the Church is fallible" will be the assertion. I don't have a problem with that apologetic since I've used it myself. The problem is that using Honorius to back up the claim that the Holy Spirit was still in the Church but somehow these six popes weren't listening to Him is simply the proverbial case of comparing apples and oranges. The logic is simple. There was no pope, saint, doctor, Father, catechism or council before Honorius who was teaching that Christ had one will. Honorius had no Tradition behind him; he had no Scripture to support his case; and he had no support from the magisterium. But that is not the case with the doctrine of geocentrism. All the popes, saints, doctors, Fathers, catechisms and councils before the 17<sup>th</sup> century were teaching and defending geocentrism. It was this very Tradition, in conjunction with Scripture's replete evidence for a motionless earth and a moving sun, that led these popes to conclude that heliocentrism was a "formal heresy."

As such, Lumen Gentium 12 tells us that such persistent traditional and magisterial belief, as is the case for geocentrism, **is infallible**, since the Holy Spirit cannot allow the whole Church for so long a time into error.

The holy People of God shares also in Christ's prophetic office: it spreads abroad a living witness to him, especially by a life of faith and love and by offering to God a sacrifice of praise, the fruit of lips praising his name (cf. Heb. 13:15). The whole body of the faithful who have an anointing that comes from the holy one (cf. 1 Jn. 2:20 and 27) **cannot err in matters of belief**. This characteristic is shown in the supernatural appreciation of the faith (sensus fidei) of the whole people, when, "from the bishops to the last of the faithful" they manifest a universal consent in matters of faith and morals. By this appreciation of the faith, aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth, the People of God, guided by the sacred teaching authority (magisterium), and obeying it, receives not the mere word of men, but truly the word of God (cf. 1 Th 2:13), the faith once for all delivered to the saints (cf. Jude

3). The people unfailingly adheres to this faith, penetrates it more deeply with right judgment, and applies it more fully in daily life.

So, the burden of proof is on Mr. Armstrong. He must show: (a) incontrovertible proof for heliocentrism (and this doesn't mean just posting an assortment of claims from various websites but explaining and demonstrating on a scientific basis which one of these arguments irrefutably proves his case); and (b) to show us why the Church's belief in and defense of geocentrism for almost two millennia, without any official retraction, is not already, according to Lumen Gentium 12, an infallible belief that was upheld faithfully by the 17<sup>th</sup> century popes and their successors.

**Mr. Armstrong:** Yet in fairness to the Church it should be noted that Galileo was scientifically fallible, too (Bellarmine certainly had the superior understanding of the nature of a scientific hypothesis). He held that the entire universe revolved around the sun in circular (not elliptical) orbits, and that tides were caused by the rotation of the earth. True heliocentrism wasn't conclusively proven until some 200 years later.

**R. Sungenis:** Mr. Armstrong's pass for the Church is anachronistic, since her condemnation of heliocentrism went way beyond the fallible proofs of Galileo. The Church stated very clearly that heliocentrism was wrong because it went against the consensus of the Fathers and the literal reading of Scripture – which type of reading was the mainstay of the Catholic faith (*e.g.*, the literal interpretation of "this is my body" as referring to the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist). This is the very reason that Alexander VII put Kepler's elliptical orbits on the Index of Forbidden Books as well as Galileo and Copernicus' books.

Mr. Armstrong says that heliocentrism was "conclusively proven...200 years later" but doesn't specify what the proof was. Why not? We all know what was purported as proof both from Galileo and others, but unless Mr. Armstrong can name the proof and show, scientifically, that it is irrefutable, he has no case. For the record, we've shown Mr. Armstrong, many times, that what purports for proof today for heliocentrism in the end shows itself to be of the same fallacious character as the proofs that Galileo gave the Church. According to modern science, all the supposed proofs can be explained from a geocentric perspective, and thus they are discredited for heliocentrism.

**Mr. Armstrong:** In recent times Pope John Paul II famously apologized for the Church's embarrassing mistake, but the Holy Office had in fact already done so—in 1825; and Galileo's written works had been permitted since 1741.

**R. Sungenis:** Mr. Armstrong has failed to study the history and continues to depend on popular myths. Pope John Paul II did not "apologize for the Church's embarrassing mistake." You won't find the words "the Church apologizes" to Galileo or anything even close to those words in the speech John Paul II gave to the Pontifical Academy of Science in 1992. And even if he were to apologize, his words would mean little unless they were deemed the official position of the Church on the Galileo issue, since the Church does not turn the private opinions of popes into Catholic doctrine.

The main fact to be noticed is that neither John Paul II nor any other pope has ever overturned the results of the 1633 canonical trial of Galileo in which heliocentrism was called a "formal heresy." Only a reversal of that trial could ever clear the books for the Church and free her from its canonical constraints. The most that can be said for John Paul II's 1992 speech is that it considered the controversy between Galileo and the Church a big "misunderstanding."<sup>11</sup> One of the reasons it could dismiss the controversy is because John Paul II believed that science now believes that everything is "relative"<sup>12</sup> in regards to what goes around what. Einstein himself said much the same: "The struggle, so violent in the early days of science, between the views of Ptolemy and Copernicus would then be quite meaningless. Either coordinate system could be used with equal justification. The two sentences: "the sun is at rest and the Earth moves," or "the sun moves and the Earth is at rest," would simply mean two different conventions concerning two different coordinate system."<sup>13</sup> Of course, that tack still doesn't get the modern Church off the hook, since the previous Church said the earth was motionless in space.

Be that as it may, Mr. Armstrong continues "but the Holy Office had in fact already done so—in 1825; and Galileo's written works had been permitted since 1741."

1825? No, nothing happened in 1825. What Mr. Armstrong should have referred to is 1822 when Canon Settele was given an imprimatur for his book on Astronomy that held heliocentrism as a thesis instead of a hypothesis. Similar to Mr. Armstrong, other Catholic apologists have made appeals to the Settele case to show that the Church changed her mind, but these efforts are futile.

First, there exists no signed statement from Pius VII granting an imprimatur nor any statement from him declaring that he overturned the 1633 trial of Galileo so that he could even grant an imprimatur.

Second, imprimaturs can be given to anyone, and sometimes they are done surreptitiously, as was the case in 1631 when Galileo received an imprimatur for his book promoting heliocentrism from a wayward cardinal that was pressured to do so by the Grand Duke of Tuscany. When Pope Urban VIII got wind of the chicanery he rescinded the imprimatur in 1632. The same kind of chicanery was used to get Settele an imprimatur. The Commissar of the Index, Benedetto Olivieri, got an approval when he invented an ingenious excuse as to why the Index could give Settele an imprimatur even though the Church condemned heliocentrism in 1616 and 1633. Olivieri fabricated a story that the Church condemned

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<sup>11</sup> "A tragic mutual incomprehension has been interpreted as the reflection of a fundamental opposition between science and faith. The clarifications furnished by recent historical studies enable us to state that this sad misunderstanding now belongs to the past."

<sup>12</sup> "The emergence of the subject of complexity probably marks in the history of the natural sciences a stage as important as the stage which bears relation to the name of Galileo, when a univocal model of order seemed to be obvious. Complexity indicates precisely that, in order to account for the rich variety of reality, we must have recourse to a number of different models."

<sup>13</sup> *The Evolution of Physics: From Early Concepts to Relativity and Quanta*, Albert Einstein and Leopold Infeld, 1938, 1966, p. 212.

heliocentrism at that time only because Copernicus' model didn't have Kepler's elliptical orbits of the planets. This, of course, was a boldfaced lie, since the Church made it clear in the 1633 decree already cited that it was condemning ANY model of the universe that made the earth move, including Kepler's whose model was later put on the Index in 1664 by Alexander VII.

As for Mr. Armstrong's claim that "Galileo's written works had been permitted since 1741," he is incorrect. Pope Benedict XIV kept Galileo's book on the Index both in 1741 and 1758, and also kept Copernicus, Foscarini, Zuniga, and Kepler on the Index. The new development, however, was that the Holy Office granted an imprimatur to the first edition of the complete works of Galileo in addition to omitting the general prohibition of Copernican books for the new Index. The imprimatur was granted under the condition that the stipulations of the Padua Inquisitor, Paolo A. Ambrogio, be observed. The result was that the publication in 1744 had to exclude Galileo's Letter to Christina and the Letter to Castelli, which were two of Galileo's most formidable defenses of Copernicanism. Furthermore, Galileo's Dialogue of the Two Great World Systems had to be printed in Volume IV and accompanied by the 1633 sentence against Galileo (i.e., "vehemently suspected" of "formal heresy"), as well as the text of Galileo's abjuration. The most important feature of the re-publication was that it was required to contain a preface emphasizing the "hypothetical" character of the book's contents. This requirement shows the consistency of the Church's position, for the same permission was granted to the works of Copernicus in 1620.

Regarding the 1758 decision, no carte blanche permission was given to Copernican cosmology; rather, the decree contained precautionary and limiting stipulations very similar to the 1741 decision. We can understand these stipulations if we reflect on the prohibitions in the 1619 edition of the Index. It, as well as subsequent editions, had two categories of prohibitions for Copernican works: specific works and general works. The edition of 1758 excluded only the general. Still included were Copernicus' *De Revolutionibus*, Galileo's *Dialogo* and Kepler's *Epitome*, obviously intending to give no endorsement to Copernican cosmology.

In light of its conclusion, the events that led to the 1758 decision are important to know. In July 1753, Pope Benedict XIV issued a bull titled *Sollicita ac Provida* directing reforms of the criteria for publications that would be prohibited by the Index of Forbidden Books. In January 1754, Agostino Ricchini, secretary to the Congregation of the Index, inquiring to the pope for additional reforms, desired to remove the ban on various books if proper corrections were made to them. Among the examples he cited were works by Descartes, Copernicus and Galileo. Without much ado, Benedict XIV approved Ricchini's request on February 12, 1754. The important point that cannot be missed in this simple transaction is that the basis upon which any changes to the Index were approved, or any prohibitions of the heliocentric system were relaxed, centered consistently upon the stipulation that the proposed book must contain the "proper corrections," namely, that the use of the Copernican system not be promoted as a thesis, but as a hypothesis. Hence, on that specific basis, on April 1757, with the apparent approval of Benedict XIV, the Congregation of the Index eliminated the prohibition concerning "all books teaching the earth's motion and the sun's immobility," and thus the new Index was published in 1758, although it still included

the prohibition against Copernicus, Foscarini, Zúñiga, Kepler and Galileo, perhaps because they stood “uncorrected” in their present form.

**Mr. Armstrong:** Far more embarrassing and numerous “Bible versus Science” fiascoes in the Protestant world are not nearly as well-known. Martin Luther called Copernicus an “upstart astrologer” in 1539, appealing to Joshua 10:13 as proof that the sun moves around the earth. John Calvin “proved” geocentrism from Psalm 93:1 and contended that belief in a rotating earth would “pervert the order of nature.” The Protestant University of Tubingen condemned the heliocentrism of Lutheran astronomer Johann Kepler (1571-1630), not long before the Galileo incident. The Lutheran philosopher Leibnitz (1646-1716) attacked Newton’s theory of gravitation. On the other hand, Catholic philosophers such Nicholas Oresme (c. 1325-1382) and Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464) had long posited a moving earth, and the sphericity of the earth had been taught even earlier by St. Albert the Great, St. Thomas Aquinas, and Dante.

**R. Sungenis:** Mr. Armstrong doesn’t reveal that Nicholas of Cusa and Nicholas of Oresme were also rejected by the Catholic Church for teaching heliocentrism. Galileo wasn’t the first. As for Albert the Great and St. Thomas Aquinas’s belief in a spherical earth, so what? The Church Fathers also believed in a spherical earth, as did every other Catholic. What Mr. Armstrong should have revealed is that Thomas Aquinas was a geocentrist, but he obviously had his own reasons for leaving that fact out.<sup>14</sup> As for Mr. Armstrong’s mention of the Protestants who also rejected heliocentrism, again, so what? More importantly, notice how Mr. Armstrong avoids mentioning the popes, cardinals and catechisms of the Catholic Church who anathematized heliocentrism. This allows Mr. Armstrong to leave the impression that it was just a Protestant issue. Not once does Mr. Armstrong mention Pius V, Paul V, Urban VIII, Alexander VII, Benedict XIV, Cardinal Bellarmine, the eleven cardinals on the commission of Paul V, or anyone else by name in the Catholic Church who officially rejected Galileo and his heliocentrism. Not only does he not mention Benedict XIV, he errs in saying that Galileo’s books were allowed to be read in 1741.

**Mr. Armstrong:** In any event, the Galileo affair does not threaten the Catholic doctrine of infallibility, because the Church doesn’t claim that tribunals possess that gift; only that popes, and ecumenical councils in agreement with them, do.

**R. Sungenis:** Here again is the excuse of “it wasn’t infallible!” that every Catholic apologist falls back on today to answer the Galileo issue, when in reality all they have done is undermine the Catholic Church by calling into question every doctrine she has taught for 2000 years that has not used the venue of the extraordinary magisterium for its dissemination. How sad.

But let’s look a little closer at Mr. Armstrong’s logic. He says “the Church doesn’t claim that tribunals possess that gift.” True enough, but that’s not the issue. The issue is: a tribunal’s

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<sup>14</sup> “The Earth stands in relation to the heaven as the center of a circle to its circumference. But as one center may have many circumferences, so, though there is but one Earth, there may be many heavens” (*Summa Theologica*, “Treatise on the Work of the Six Days,” Question 68, Article 4).

canonical decision stands until another tribunal or the pope rescinds the decision made by the former tribunal. A tribunal's decision does not go away all by itself. It remains in force until rescinded. John Paul II could have made an official rescission of Galileo's trial, but he obviously chose not to do so.

Mr. Armstrong also says: "only that popes, and ecumenical councils in agreement with them, do." Not necessarily. It is only popes that issue ex cathedra infallible and irreformable decrees in agreement with a tribunal. But since the popes have only issued two such decrees (1870 and 1958), and since no pope has ever affirmed the decision of a tribunal with an infallible decree, this leaves Mr. Armstrong without a well from which to draw.

As for Mr. Armstrong's mention of "ecumenical councils," what does he do with the Council of Trent that infallibly and irreformably taught that when the Fathers are in consensus on a given doctrine, we must accept and believe their testimony?<sup>15</sup> This was the very argument that Cardinal Bellarmine, Pope Paul V and Pope Urban VIII gave to Galileo, for they all stated that they were bound to geocentrism by the consensus of the Fathers and their interpretation of Scripture. Of course, Mr. Armstrong ignores this little wrinkle of Catholic protocol.

**Mr. Armstrong:** The Catholic faithful were not bound to hold the tribunal's opinion as an article of faith, since it had nothing to do with faith or morals. (The First Vatican Council in 1870 would clarify the longstanding Catholic belief that these were the sole subjects of infallible declarations.)

**R. Sungenis:** Is Mr. Armstrong trying to tell us that Catholics are only bound to doctrines on faith and morals when the doctrines are decreed infallible? If so, he doesn't know his Catholic faith. As I noted previously, both *Humani Generis* 21 by Pius XII and *Lumen Gentium* 25 state that we are bound to non-infallible teachings of the pope, even if the binding is on a lesser level than an infallible decree.

Be that as it may, Mr. Armstrong is also incorrect in stating that the 1633 tribunal condemning Galileo and heliocentrism was not about "faith and morals." If he would only read our book he would find out that, according to the very words of Bellarmine, Paul V and Urban VIII, it was precisely faith and morals that was the issue! If the issue wasn't about

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<sup>15</sup> "Furthermore, in order to curb impudent clever persons, the synod decrees that no one who relies on his own judgment in matters of faith and morals, which pertain to the building up of Christian doctrine, and that no one who distorts the Sacred Scripture according to his own opinions, shall dare to interpret the said Sacred Scripture contrary to that sense which is held by Holy Mother Church, whose duty it is to judge regarding the true sense and interpretation of Holy Scriptures, or even contrary to the unanimous consent of the Fathers, even though interpretations of this kind were never intended to be brought to light." *The Council of Trent, Fourth Session*, 1563. "The Apostolic and ecclesiastical traditions and all other observances and constitutions of that same Church I most firmly admit and embrace. I likewise accept Holy Scripture according to that sense which our Holy Mother Church had held and does hold, whose it is to judge of the true meaning and interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures; I shall never accept nor interpret it otherwise than in accordance with the unanimous consent of the Fathers." *The Profession of Faith of the Council of Trent*.

faith and morals then the Catholic Church wouldn't have bothered to put its magisterium on the line. In the end, Mr. Armstrong not only faults the Church for making a wrong decision against Galileo and heliocentrism, he faults her for even getting involved in the issue!

When Galileo claimed that Scripture could no longer be interpreted literally when it spoke of the sun revolving around the earth, this was a very serious matter for Catholic hermeneutics since the Church had long held in her tradition the literal interpretation of Scripture. For example, by the literal interpretation the Church arrived at the doctrine of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, since she interpreted the words of Matt. 26:26 ("this is my body") and the words of John 6:54 ("he who eats my flesh...has eternal life") in a very literal fashion, against the rest of the world. Undermining the literal interpretation of Scripture would call into question these very doctrines that were the foundation of the Church's system of belief. This foundation was precisely the reason that at the 1633 tribunal heliocentrism was categorized to be "formally heretical because it is expressly contrary to Scripture,"<sup>16</sup> and Galileo was condemned as "vehemently suspect of heresy" because he, at least in his writings, held to that formally heretical teaching. If that's not "faith and morals" what is?

**Mr. Armstrong:** A PROTESTAND FURTHER OBJECT:

But wasn't Galileo also imprisoned and tortured by the Inquisition, in order to force him to recant his theory? Even if it wasn't pretending to act "infallibly" in this case, these cannot be the actions of Christ's Church.

THE ONE-MINUTE APOLOGIST SAYS:

In 1633 Galileo was "incarcerated" in the palace of one Niccolini, the ambassador to the Vatican from Tuscany, who admired Galileo. He spent five months with Archbishop Piccolomini in Siena, and then lived in comfortable environments with friends for the rest of his life (although technically under "house arrest"). No evidence exists to prove that he was ever subjected to torture or even discomfort until his death nine years later. Nor is there any evidence, as another myth goes, that he was deliberately blinded (he lost his sight naturally in 1637). Stories of Galileo's "torture" are myths invented and proliferated by a strange alliance of (anti-Catholic) fundamentalists and (anti-religion) skeptics.

**R. Sungenis:** I wish Mr. Armstrong had been as diligent and specific in his answers to the other issues as he is now regarding the issue of Galileo's imprisonment. But this is what I invariably find among Catholic apologists when dealing with the Galileo issue – when it is to their advantage to be detailed and specific, they spare no words; when it is to their detriment, they simply refuse to reveal the proper or complete information. They've been

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<sup>16</sup> "Che il sole sia centro del mondo et immobile di moto locale, è propositione assurda e falsa in filosofia, e formalmente heretica, per essere espressamente contraria alla Sacra Scrittura" The Tribunal's 1633 Decree Against Heliocentrism by Pope Urban VIII, June 22, 1633. Original Italian of the decrees, as cited in *Galileo E L'Inquisizione*, Antonio Favaro, 1907, p. 143.

able to use this hit-and-run apologetic for many years without being discovered, but that time has come to an end with the revelations we are making public.

**Mr. Armstrong:** [I]t was a churchman, Nicholas Copernicus, who first advanced the contrary doctrine that the sun and not the earth is the center of our system, round which our planet revolves, rotating on its own axis....Neither Paul III, nor any of the nine popes who followed him, nor the Roman Congregations raised any alarm." The Catholic Encyclopedia, "Galileo."

**R. Sungenis:** Mr. Armstrong doesn't give us the page number to follow up his quote from the Catholic Encyclopedia. I also find it interesting that Mr. Armstrong is more than willing to call into question the decrees issuing from the 1633 tribunal which condemned Galileo and heliocentrism, but apparently the Catholic Encyclopedia is beyond reproach when it comes to this issue. Let me clue you in. The Catholic Encyclopedia is just as prone to error as any other non-infallible venue that Mr. Armstrong wishes to demote. In fact, the CE is much more prone to error since most of its articles are written by one person who was rarely edited for content. Many authors of the CE had already bought into the heliocentric theory just as they had bought into the evolutionary theory. For example, in the 1911 CE on evolution, A. J. Maas touts evolution and doubts the literal interpretation of the Noachic Flood. So much for faithfulness to the Catholic tradition.

The present statement by the CE, namely: "*Neither Paul III, nor any of the nine popes who followed him, nor the Roman Congregations raised any alarm,*" is one of the most egregious half-truths I think I have ever seen in a Catholic document. First, Paul III didn't "raise any alarm" only because Copernicus' work on heliocentrism was presented to him as a hypothesis and not as a thesis, and was made purposely so by the Lutheran Andreas Osiander who published Copernicus' book. Still, even though Copernicus' book was touted as hypothetical, Bartolomeo Spina, the Master of the Sacred Palace from 1542 until his death in 1547, sought to have Copernicus' book banned, which was eventually carried out by his Dominican colleague Giovanimaria Tolosani, all under the reign of Paul III.

Second, we have to ask the \$64,000 question to the author of the CE: why did he cite only the 9 popes following Paul III instead of the 17 popes after Paul III? The answer is obvious. He knew that from 1550 until 1591, which is the length of the reigns of the next 9 popes after Paul III, the issue of heliocentrism had not been prevalent, since everyone still understood that it was not accepted as a viable cosmology. So accepted was geocentrism as the only true cosmology that Pius V, who reigned from 1566 to 1572 and was the 5<sup>th</sup> pope in the CE arbitrary list of 9 popes, taught geocentrism in four separate places of the *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, published in 1566!<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> "...He also gave to the sun its brilliancy, and to the moon and stars their beauty; and that they might be for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years. He so ordered the celestial bodies in a certain and uniform course, that nothing varies more than their continual revolution, while nothing is more fixed than their variety." Although this wording is somewhat brief, it correctly describes the Church's historical position. It states very clearly that the "sun...the moon and stars" are "celestial bodies" which move with a "certain and uniform course" and does not say that the Earth moves among them. Rather, to expel any

Third, if the CE author had bothered to mention 17 popes since Paul III instead of his arbitrary 9 popes, the list would have included Paul V (the 13<sup>th</sup> pope), Urban VIII (the 15<sup>th</sup> pope) and Alexander VII (the 17<sup>th</sup> pope). It was these popes who began to address the issue of cosmology more seriously because, for the first time in history, the popes were confronted with a man, namely, Galileo, who told them that Scripture and its interpretation were to be called into question over the issue of heliocentrism. No one in all of Catholic history had been as bold. Hence, it is not only an egregious matter for the CE writer to refer only to the 9 popes after Paul III, it is unconscionable that an author, purporting to give his Catholic audience the truth of this matter, would leave out the subsequent 8 popes who either condemned or supported the condemnation of heliocentrism.

This is the kind of shoddy historical analysis that Catholic scholars have been perpetrating on their Catholic audiences for the last couple hundred years. Why? All because they shun the embarrassment of having to support the idea that the sun revolves around the earth, since popular science (of which few of them have ever studied in any depth) has told them

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doubt about what objects are revolving the catechism adds that the sun, moon and stars have a "continual revolution." Although the unspecified reference to "revolution" might cause a heliocentrist to infer that the sun's revolution does not necessarily mean it is revolving around the Earth, a few pages later the catechism disallows that inference by stating the following: "The earth also God commanded to stand in the midst of the world, rooted in its own foundation and made the mountains ascend, and the plains descend into the place which he had founded for them...." The Roman Catechism then says the following toward the end of the book: "But though God is present in all places and in all things, without being bound by any limits, as has been already said, yet in Sacred Scripture it is frequently said that He has His dwelling in heaven. And the reason is because the heavens which we see above our heads are the noblest part of the world, remain ever Incorruptible, surpass all other bodies in power, grandeur and beauty, and are endowed with fixed and regular motion." A few pages later the Catechism confirms its cosmology and the God who designed it: "...all goods both natural and supernatural, must be recognised as gifts given by Him from whom, as the Church proclaims, proceed all blessings. If the sun by its light, if the stars by their motion and revolutions, are of any advantage to man; if the air with which we are surrounded serves to sustain us...nay, those very causes which philosophers call secondary, we should regard as so many hands of God, wonderfully fashioned and fitted for our use, by means of which He distributes His blessings and diffuses them everywhere in profusion. One of the more significant facts regarding the Roman Catechism's dogmatic assertion of geocentrism is that it remained unchanged in all subsequent editions, including the last Roman Latin version in 1907 and the 1914 edition published in Turin, which, incidentally, was just three years before the Fatima visions of 1917 showing the sun moving in the sky. Obviously, no editor saw fit to remove the geocentric teaching from the catechetical regimen of Catholic doctrine. The introduction states: "The original manuscript of the Catechism is not extant. But of the innumerable Latin editions that have appeared, the earliest are: The Manutian (Rome, 1566), so called because it was printed by Paulus Manutius by command of Pope Pius V....Among later Latin editions may be mentioned the following issued at Rome: The edition of 1761, which contains the Encyclical of Clement XIII on the excellence and use of the Roman Catechism; the Propaganda editions of 1858, 1871 and 1907." Also highly significant is the fact that the Roman Catechism makes a point of not only reiterating the dogmatic decrees from the Council of Trent, but its purpose was also to "examine every statement in the Catechism from the viewpoint of doctrine..."

the opposite is true. They have thrown their lot in with popular science as their infallible guide to the universe, and as Augustine says in the following quote, they can hardly pick up the Scriptures to read them any longer. If they would only study the science, they would find that true science supports geocentrism and actually disfavors heliocentrism. As it stands, however, few if any of the major Catholic apologists will read the science supporting geocentrism. I've sent them my books free of charge, but they refuse to read them. Catholic radio stations refuse interviews. The secularists are more interested in what we have to say than the leaders in my own Catholic Church.

“But more dangerous is the error of certain weak brethren who faint away when they hear these irreligious critics learnedly and eloquently discoursing on the theories of astronomy or on any of the questions relating to the elements of this universe. With a sigh, they esteem these teachers as superior to themselves, looking upon them as great men; and they return with disdain to the books which were written for the good of their souls; and, although they ought to drink from these books with relish, they can scarcely bear to take them up.” (St. Augustine in *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, Book 1, Chapter 20, Para. 41, Ancient Christian Writers, p. 44).