

# Jimmy Akin and the Unanimous Consent of the Fathers

## A Critique by Robert Sungenis

In Brett Salkeld's paper, *Creationism as a Conspiracy Theory*, he makes a reference to Jimmy Akin's article, "The 'Unanimous Consent' of the Church Fathers," which was published in the August 17, 2018 issue of the *National Catholic Register*.

Since Akin's thesis is a major plank of Salkeld's thesis, I will make a point-by-point critique of Mr. Akin's paper.<sup>1</sup>



Jimmy Akin is a senior apologist at *Catholic Answers*

**J. Akin:** In 1546, the Council of Trent issued a decree which prohibited people from interpreting Scripture "contrary to the unanimous consent of the Fathers." The meaning and significance of this concept has been widely misunderstood, so let's take a look at the subject. Here are 15 things to know and share . . .

**R. Sungenis:** Mr. Akin will go on to argue the following point as the foundation of his thesis, namely, that the 1983 Code of Canon law abrogated the teaching concerning the "unanimous consent of the Fathers":

**J. Akin:** Consequently, it's establishing a discipline—a law—that barred Catholics from contradicting Church teaching or the unanimous consent of the Fathers about the meaning of Scripture, even in writings not intended for publication. This law is based on doctrinal principles—which we will cover below—but it isn't itself a doctrine. It's a discipline regulating discourse within the Church (note the context, which deals with the edition of Scripture to be used in public, what book printers must and mustn't do, how people are to avoid profaning God's word).

8) What is the status of the law today? There is more to its legislative history than we can cover here, but the short answer is that it is no longer part of Church law per se. Trent added the requirement to the body of canon law that existed at the time, which was

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ncregister.com/blog/jimmy-akin/the-unanimous-consent-of-the-church-fathers>

scattered in many documents, and when canon law was codified (brought together in a single volume) in 1917, the first edition of the Code of Canon Law contained provisions that gave the requirement ongoing legal force.

...and after the Council it was dropped from the legal instruments where it still existed. When the 1983 Code of Canon Law was released, it abrogated both the 1917 Code and “any universal or particular penal laws whatsoever issued by the Apostolic See unless they are contained in this Code” (see can. 6, §1, 1° and 3°). Consequently, canon law has been revised in a way that the decree no longer has legal force.

## Part I

**R. Sungenis:** On the face of it, I think it is safe to say Mr. Akin is aware he is making a novel assessment of the theological and legal standing of the teaching on the “unanimous consent of the Fathers.” Anyone who has been a Catholic for a while knows that appeal to the unanimous consent of the Fathers has been used by hierarch and layman alike for many, many centuries, without much controversy.

Hence for someone to now stand up and tell us that our appeal to the Fathers is not required and was, in fact, abrogated in 1983 by Pope John Paul II without so much as a *moto proprio* from him and that somehow this sacred plank of Catholic belief has been “misunderstood” by Catholics for 20 centuries and that somewhere in the recesses of Church documents this fact was hidden from us until now by some legalese concerning the 1983 Code, is a bit much for some to swallow.

Although I am certainly not the magisterium nor have any authority in the church, I, as Canon 212 of the 1983 Code permits me to do, will endeavor to show that Mr. Akin’s thesis is totally incorrect. Mind you, I believe Mr. Akin is a decent Catholic apologist and has done some excellent work for the church, hence, my critique in no way should be considered as an attack against him. One thing I appreciate about Mr. Akin and his work at *Catholic Answers* over the last 20 years is that, unlike others who have worked there, he is a fair-minded Christian gentleman who wants to know the truth.

So that we cover all the bases on this important issue, in Part I I’m going to argue from the standpoint that Mr. Akin is right that the “unanimous consent of the Fathers” was merely a “discipline” and not a “doctrine,” but in doing so I will argue that he is wrong to conclude the 1983 Code of Canon Law abrogated that “discipline.”

Let’s begin.

Mr. Akin starts with Canon 6 of the 1983 Code since it appears to be a good argument in his favor. It says:

Can. 6 §1. When this Code takes force, the following are abrogated:

- 1° the Code of Canon Law promulgated in 1917;
- 2° other universal or particular laws contrary to the prescripts of this Code unless other provision is expressly made for particular laws;
- 3° any universal or particular penal laws whatsoever issued by the Apostolic See unless they are contained in this Code;
- 4° other universal disciplinary laws regarding matter which this Code completely reorders.

§2. Insofar as they repeat former law, the canons of this Code must be assessed also in accord with canonical tradition.

**R. Sungenis:** First, it is absolutely correct that a new code of canon law supersedes and abrogates a former code, since there cannot exist two legal entities competing against one another. All legal enterprises work the same way.

It is also true, however, that although former cases have no legal authority upon the case presently being argued, still, an attorney will often cite previous legal decisions as “precedent” to help the judge or the jury decide the case at hand. Hence, what was decided in previous times has, in principle, a huge bearing on how the court will decide current issues. Unless there is some overwhelming reason to reject the legal tradition, it will be the most influential source in arriving at a decision.

That being the case, we would not be surprised to see in the 1983 Code the same respect for previous laws and customs. In fact, the 1983 Code goes out of its way to accommodate them. For example, canon 20 states:

A later law [laws in the 1983 code] abrogates, or derogates, an earlier law if it states so expressly, is directly contrary to it, or completely reorders the entire matter of the earlier law.

Here we see the 1983 code puts limits around itself in relation to previous canon law. Apparently, the 1983 code will not allow itself to automatically dismiss an earlier law unless the 1983 code:

- “states so expressly,”
- makes a statement about that law which “is directly contrary to it,” or
- “reorders the entire matter.”

With regard to the unanimous consent of the Fathers, none of these three requirements were exercised in the 1983 code, and thus we can only conclude that if one categorizes the unanimous consent of the Fathers as a mere “discipline,” the 1983 Code does not stipulate it has been abrogated.

To show that we are on the right track, canon 21 reinforces the meaning and extent of canon 20. It states:

In case of doubt [*e.g.*, about the unanimous consent of the Fathers], the revocation of a pre-existing law is not presumed, but later laws must be related to the earlier ones and, insofar as possible, must be harmonized with them.

Far from disavowing itself from the 1917 Code, if the 1983 Code is silent on an issue (*e.g.*, as it is with the unanimous consent of the Fathers), it requires we not presume a previous law was revoked, and, in fact, the 1983 Code says it “must be related to” and “must be harmonized with” the 1917 code.

Although on a legal basis the 1983 code abrogates the 1917 code, it is clear the 1983 code imposes a legal stipulation on itself regarding how it must consider the 1917 code, a stipulation which requires it to address the 1917 code so that the final decision on a given issue will be in harmony with, not opposed to, the 1917 code.

This would be especially applicable in regards to a traditional practice that stretched uninterrupted for over five hundred years from Trent, and another four hundred years from Aquinas (who appealed to the Fathers religiously as the foundation for church teaching) and did so because the church has always taught that the oral tradition passed down to the Fathers is the Tradition we are required to obey.

Hence we see that it is not as simple as Mr. Akin tried to make it by imposing Canon 6 on the issue of a past “discipline,” even if we were to agree the unanimous consent of the Fathers is a discipline as opposed to a doctrinal teaching of the Ordinary magisterium.

Let’s say we wanted to argue the case from the 1983’s title: “Canon Law and Custom.”

Title II of the 1983 code has six canons in regard to “custom.” Custom is important in Catholic legal code for two reasons:

First, Canon 27 says: “Custom is the best interpreter of laws.” This means, even though canon law is its own legal entity, it is not an end in itself, since it must be interpreted in accordance with tradition, and, as we saw above, it must “harmonize” with previous codes of law.

Second, if an act is practiced long enough in the Catholic Church, then it assumes what the 1983 Code calls, “the force of law,” and it becomes a law, in itself, without having to be validated by or

connected to a canonical law. Regardless whether the custom enters or leaves canon law (as it did in 1917 and 1983, respectively), it remains a custom, since custom, legally speaking, is distinct from canon law.

In fact, custom is so strong that, if the custom has been practiced for 100 years or longer (as is the case of the church's requirement to use the unanimous consent of the Fathers), then not even a canonical law can nullify it. We find this law regarding customs stated in two of the 1983 codes. Canon 26 says:

Unless the competent legislator has specifically approved it, a custom contrary to the canon law now in force or one beyond a canonical law obtains the force of law only if it has been legitimately observed for thirty continuous and complete years. Only a centenary [100 years] or immemorial custom, however, can prevail against a canonical law which contains a clause prohibiting future customs.

In the Catholic Church, tradition holds sway. Perhaps the power and ubiquity of tradition is why the 1983 code does not bother to mention anything about biblical interpretation or the unanimous consent of the Fathers, since it would be superfluous in light of the traditional safe guards built around such immemorial customs. It may be the case that what the modern mind thinks is their non-obligation due to Code silence is, in fact, Code silence due to their obligation.

That the force of law associated with centenary or immemorial laws is virtually impregnable is noted in two more canons. Canon 5.1 states:

...contrary customs are...considered suppressed unless the Code expressly provides otherwise or unless they are centenary or immemorial customs...

and Canon 28 says:

...a contrary custom...unless it [the code] makes express mention of them, however, a law does not revoke centenary or immemorial customs...

Thus, even if a custom is "contrary" to the new code, centenary and immemorial customs have virtual immunity from being reversed unless the new code specifically says otherwise.

Additionally, because of canon law's self-imposed limitation, when in the 1983 code John Paul II says:

Therefore, in promulgating the Code today, I am fully aware that this act is an expression of pontifical authority and therefore is invested with a primatial character...

This means, unless he officially decides to rewrite the 1983 code, John Paul II is bound by what he himself put in the code. Thus he is bound to abide by:

- (a) the rule of “customs” as outlined in canons 23-28.
- (b) the stipulations in canons 5, 20 and 21 regarding the limits and proper interpretation of canon law.

As such, Mr. Akin’s thesis that the 1983 Code of Canon law abrogated the requirement for the unanimous consent of the Fathers in biblical interpretation appears to be incorrect.

## Part II

Now I will argue against Mr. Akin’s thesis that the “unanimous consent of the Fathers” was merely a “discipline” and not a long-standing theological doctrine of the Catholic Church.

**J. Akin:** 1) What was the context of the decree?

The Council of Trent (1545-1563) was called to deal with two subjects: (1) doctrinal errors that were being spread by the Protestant Reformers and (2) internal reforms needed within the Catholic Church. Consequently, historian Hubert Jedin notes:

By the terms of the decision of 22 January [1564], dogma and reform were to be discussed simultaneously and every dogmatic decree was to be matched by a decree on Church reform (A History of the Council of Trent 2:87-88).

**R. Sungenis:** A minor point, but the Council of Trent makes no statement it was called to deal with only two subjects. Granted, the Council dealt mainly with Protestant errors and Catholic problems, but the subjects it considered were many and varied.

**J. Akin:** Therefore, the decrees of Trent are divided between those of a doctrinal nature and those of a disciplinary nature.

**R. Sungenis:** The Council itself makes no such distinction. It does not say, “Here is a doctrinal statement,” or “Here is only a disciplinary statement.”

**J. Akin:** Thus the fourth session of the Council thus released two decrees:

Decree Concerning Canonical Scriptures

Decree Concerning the Edition, and the Use, of the Sacred Books

The first of these decrees was dogmatic (i.e., concerning doctrinal matters), and it dealt with which books the Catholic Church regards as sacred and canonical. The second decree concerned Church reform (i.e., disciplinary matters), and it’s the one that mentions the unanimous consent of the Fathers.

**R. Sungenis:** The Council of Trent makes no such distinction when it switches from the Decree Concerning Canonical Scriptures to the very next section on the next page concerning the Decree Concerning the Edition, and the Use, of the Sacred Books.

The only time discipline is introduced is when Catholics disobey the doctrinal decrees in each paragraph, since obviously the church could not discipline Protestants who disobeyed Catholic decrees.

This is precisely why the very section Mr. Akin mentions concerning the “Edition and Use of the Sacred Books” starts out with a decree, such as when it says:

...now in circulation, of the sacred books, is to be held as authentic, **ordains and declares**, that the said old and vulgate edition, which, by the lengthened usage of so many years, has been approved of in the Church, be, in public lectures, disputations, sermons and expositions, held as authentic; and that no one is to dare, or presume to reject it under any pretext whatever.

Furthermore, in order to restrain petulant spirits, **It decrees**, that no one, relying on his own skill, shall, in matters of faith, and of morals pertaining to the edification of Christian doctrine, wresting the sacred Scripture to his own senses, presume to interpret the said sacred Scripture contrary to that sense which holy mother Church, whose it is to judge of the true sense and interpretation of the holy Scriptures, hath held and doth hold; or even contrary to the unanimous consent of the Fathers...

After the decree is made, only then does the Council prescribe the discipline for violators against the decree, stating...

Contraveners shall be made known by their Ordinaries, and be punished with the penalties by law established.

In other words, in order to have a discipline, a decree must be stated first. The decree stated that no one is allowed to interpret Scripture on his own nor “contrary to the unanimous consent of the Fathers.”

If so, this means Mr. Akin has made a false dichotomy. As noted, the Council made no such dichotomy between the first and second paragraphs of Session 4, and it only follows logically that every discipline must have a decree it follows.

I grant that in the first paragraph the ultimate discipline of “anathema” is given to “any one receives not, as sacred and canonical, the said books entire with all their parts, as they have been used to be read in the Catholic Church....and knowingly and deliberately contemn the traditions aforesaid,”

but that is only because such sins of rejecting Scripture and Tradition are an apostasy from the faith.

Conversely, those who fail to recognize the unanimous consent of the Fathers in their interpretations of Scripture is a lesser crime and thus does not receive an anathema. But this does not mean, as Mr. Akin is insisting, that the decree to not avoid the unanimous consent of the Fathers is not really a decree at all. It is a decree, albeit one with a lesser punishment if the decree is violated than someone who rejects Scripture and Tradition in general.

**J. Akin:** 2) What subjects did the second decree cover?

It dealt with several abuses that had been proposed for reform by one of the Council's committees (Jedin, 70-71). The final, published form of the decree established several disciplinary norms: Of all the Latin editions of Scripture then in circulation, the Vulgate would be used as the standard one "in public lectures, disputations, sermons, and expositions." No one is to interpret the Scripture contrary to the sense held by the Church or the unanimous consent of the Fathers. Printers are not to publish copies of the Scriptures unless they have been approved by the local bishop; the same applies to books of a theological nature, which also must carry their authors' names; and the same applies to the circulation of unprinted manuscripts. No one is to use the words of Scripture in superstitious or profane practices (*e.g.*, incantations or defamatory libels). The second decree also empowered bishops to impose appropriate penalties on those who violated these norms.

**R. Sungenis:** As I noted above, these requirements were "decrees" that the Council "ordained and declared," not merely disciplinary stipulations.

**J. Akin:** 3) What did the second decree say about the unanimous consent of the Fathers? The relevant provision says:

Furthermore, in order to restrain petulant spirits, [the Council] decrees, that no one, relying on his own skill, shall—in matters of faith, and of morals pertaining to the edification of Christian doctrine—wresting the sacred Scripture to his own senses, presume to interpret the said sacred Scripture contrary to that sense which holy mother Church—whose it is to judge of the true sense and interpretation of the holy Scriptures—hath held and doth hold; or even contrary to the unanimous consent of the Fathers; even though such interpretations were never (intended) to be at any time published. Contraveners shall be made known by their Ordinaries [*i.e.*, bishops], and be punished with the penalties by law established.

The core of this statement is:

No one . . . shall—in matters of faith and of morals . . . —interpret the said sacred Scripture contrary to that sense which holy mother Church . . . hath held and doth hold;



or even contrary to the unanimous consent of the Fathers; even though such interpretations were never (intended) to be at any time published.

4) What does this mean? It means that the Council is establishing a law providing that—even in writings not intended for publication—Catholics are not to contradict (1) the teaching of the Church about the meaning of Scripture or (2) the unanimous consent of the Fathers about what it means, and if they do, their bishops can apply appropriate penalties.

5) Is this an infallible doctrine? Here we encounter a major misunderstanding of the text. Trent's doctrinal decrees contain infallible teachings. These are found among its canons, which use the formula "If anyone says . . . let him be anathema"—anathema being a type of excommunication that existed at the time (not a condemnation to hell). However, this is not a doctrinal decree but a reform decree. It does not have canons, and it does not use the requisite anathema formula, as the quotation above indicates.

**R. Sungenis:** The Council of Trent nowhere states that only Canons with anathemas are infallible doctrine. In fact, the Council never uses the terms "infallible" or "fallible" in regard to its teachings. There is a good reason it doesn't do so, since it does not want to give the impression that some of its teachings are fallible and others are not infallible. Rather, it wants the church and its people to believe that all the Council says is true and trustworthy.

The Canons are obviously concise and rigorous summations of the Chapters that preceded them. The Canon and the anathema serve as the Church's most rigorous statement to date for judging a particular issue and thus will be used first in a canonical court if someone is accused of heresy.

But this does not mean the preceding Chapters from which the Canons were formed are necessarily fallible. The Council simply does not address that issue. Rather, it assumes all its teachings are true and trustworthy. Obviously, if the Chapters from which the Canons are formulated are wrong, then the Canons themselves will be wrong. For someone to claim the Canons are infallible but the Chapters are not, is to claim something the Council does not say, and therefore it cannot be used as a criteria to judge the application of the "unanimous consent of the Fathers."

Interestingly enough, Mr. Akin's contention that appeal to the unanimous consent of the Fathers" is merely a discipline was not the way the subsequent church after Trent regarded it. Note these references, the first from the *Confession of Faith* of the Council of Trent:

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.<sup>2</sup>

Here is what **Vatican Council I** said in 1870 as it interpreted the decree from the Council of Trent regarding the unanimous consent of the Fathers:

But, since the rules which the holy Synod of Trent salutarily decreed concerning the interpretation of Divine Scripture in order to restrain impetuous minds, are wrongly explained by certain men, We, renewing the same decree, declare this to be its intention: that, in matters of faith and morals pertaining to the instruction of Christian Doctrine, that must be considered as the true sense of Sacred Scripture which Holy Mother Church has held and holds, whose office it is to judge concerning the true understanding and interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures; and, for that reason, no one is permitted to interpret Sacred Scripture itself contrary to this sense, or even contrary to the unanimous agreement of the Fathers.<sup>3</sup>

So whatever distinction Mr. Akin sees in the Council of Trent regarding the unanimous consent of the Fathers, Vatican I posits no such distinction. It treats the unanimous consent of the Fathers as a constant teaching of the church. It does not get into a discussion of whether it is fallible or infallible; rather, it treats the teaching as the church has always held the teaching, that is, true, trustworthy and required by the Council.

Pope Leo XIII also confirmed the words of Cardinal Bellarmine and the Councils in his encyclical *Providentissimus Deus*:

...and, most of all, that they may understand that God has delivered the Holy Scriptures to the Church, and that in reading and making use of His Word, they must follow the Church as their guide and their teacher. St. Irenaeus long since laid down, that where the *charismata* of God were, there the truth was to be learnt, and that Holy Scripture was safely interpreted by those who had the Apostolic succession. His teaching, and that of other Holy Fathers, is taken up by the Council of the Vatican, which, in renewing the decree of Trent declares its “mind” to be this – that “in things of faith and morals, belonging to the building up of Christian doctrine, that is to be considered the true sense of Holy Scripture which has been held and is held by our Holy Mother the Church, whose place it is to judge of the true sense and interpretation of the Scriptures; and therefore that it is permitted to no one to interpret Holy Scripture against such sense or also against the unanimous agreement of the Fathers.” By this most wise decree the Church by no means

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2 The Profession of Faith of the Council of Trent, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*, translated by Roy J. Deferrari, p. 303, ¶ 995. Giovanni Riccioli, S. J., notes that it was the daily routine of Jesuit colleges to open the school year with a recitation of the above oath on the Bible (*Almagestum novum*, Bononiae, Typis Haeredis Victorii Benatii, 1651, Part II, p. 479, as cited in *Galileo, Bellarmine and the Bible*, p. 14).

3 Vatican Council I, Chapter II, Denz. 1788.

prevents or restrains the pursuit of Biblical science, but rather protects it from error, and largely assists its real progress.

The Professor of Holy Scripture, therefore, amongst other recommendations, must be well acquainted with the whole circle of Theology and deeply read in the commentaries of the Holy Fathers and Doctors, and other interpreters of mark. This is inculcated by St. Jerome, and still more frequently by St. Augustine, who thus justly complains: “If there is no branch of teaching, however humble and easy to learn, which does not require a master, what can be a greater sign of rashness and pride than to refuse to study the Books of the divine mysteries by the help of those who have interpreted them?” The other Fathers have said the same, and have confirmed it by their example, for they “endeavored to acquire the understanding of the Holy Scriptures not by their own lights and ideas, but from the writings and authority of the ancients, who in their turn, as we know, received the rule of interpretation in direct line from the Apostles.” The Holy Fathers “to whom, after the Apostles, the Church owes its growth – who have planted, watered, built, governed, and cherished it,” the Holy Fathers, We say, are of supreme authority, whenever they all interpret in one and the same manner any text of the Bible, as pertaining to the doctrine of faith or morals; for their unanimity clearly evinces that such interpretation has come down from the Apostles as a matter of Catholic faith. The opinion of the Fathers is also of very great weight when they treat of these matters in their capacity of doctors, unofficially; not only because they excel in their knowledge of revealed doctrine and in their acquaintance with many things which are useful in understanding the apostolic Books, but because they are men of eminent sanctity and of ardent zeal for the truth, on whom God has bestowed a more ample measure of His light. Wherefore the expositor should make it his duty to follow their footsteps with all reverence, and to use their labors with intelligent appreciation.

Obviously, holding to the unanimous consent of the Fathers is not merely a “disciplinary” matter that can be cast aside when one finds it inconvenient for his penchant for evolution. It is stated quite clearly by both Vatican I under Pius IX and Leo XIII that the “unanimous consent” stipulation is a “decree,” not merely a discipline, and it is required by all those who exegete Scripture and Church teaching.

**J. Akin:** Consequently, it’s establishing a discipline—a law—that barred Catholics from contradicting Church teaching or the unanimous consent of the Fathers about the meaning of Scripture, even in writings not intended for publication. This law is based on doctrinal principles—which we will cover below—but it isn’t itself a doctrine. It’s a discipline regulating discourse within the Church (note the context, which deals with the edition of Scripture to be used in public, what book printers must and mustn’t do, how people are to avoid profaning God’s word).

**R. Sungenis:** Mr. Akin is making conclusions the Council does not stipulate. The Council does not say the unanimous consent of the Fathers “...isn’t itself a doctrine. It’s a discipline regulating

discourse within the Church.” Since it is obvious to Mr. Akin that Vatican I took the statement about the unanimous consent of the Fathers and made it into an ordinary and required teaching of the church, Mr. Akin tries to muddy these waters by comparing Trent’s statement on the unanimous consent of the Fathers with obviously minor and more trivial matters such as, “what book printers must and mustn’t do” so that he can then presume the unanimous consent of the Fathers is in the same general category. It isn’t. Vatican I did not reiterate Trent’s concern about what book printers to use, which is obviously not a doctrinal matter.

Granted, the Council of Trent may not have been the most organized of councils in categorizing its concerns in order, but that doesn’t give someone the right to then deem the unanimous consent of the Fathers as if it were the same things as choosing the right book printer. Anyone can see it is not. In fact, I don’t know of a single official Catholic authoritative source that does not appeal to the unanimous consent of the Fathers as a rigorous and required teaching of the Church.

**J. Akin:** The status of this requirement as a law was underscored by Pope Leo XIII (1878-1903), who referred to it as a “very wise law” (*Providentissimus Deus* 14) and by Pope Pius XII (1939-1958), who included it among “the rules and laws promulgated by the Church” (*Divino Afflante Spiritu* 47).

**R. Sungenis:** A “very wise law” is not necessarily a discipline. In fact, my version of Leo’s statement says “most wise decree” (as noted above).

As for Mr. Akin’s citation of the “rules and laws,” it comes from this statement by Pius XII:

“Let them bear in mind above all that in the rules and laws promulgated by the Church there is question of doctrine regarding faith and morals,”

But Pius XII does not say this statement refers to the Council of Trent but to all church teaching. Be that as it may, Mr. Akin forgot the most important reference of all—the one made by Vatican I that stated it was going to be the interpreter of the Council of Trent’s statement on the “unanimous consent of the Fathers,” which interpretation did not refer to it as merely a “discipline” that could be changed in the future or something not required by exegetes presently.

**J. Akin:** 6) Does the decree mean that Catholics can’t interpret the Bible and must simply repeat what the Church or the Fathers say it means? No. The decree doesn’t say anything so restrictive. Catholics are free to read and interpret the Scriptures. The law merely established that they weren’t to contradict Church teaching or the unanimous consent of the Fathers when these sources had a definitive teaching on the meaning of a passage.

7) Are there many such passages? No. Pope Pius XII pointed out in his encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu*: “There are but few texts whose sense has been defined by the authority of the Church, nor are those more numerous about which the teaching of the Holy Fathers is unanimous (n. 47).”

Catholic biblical interpreters thus have a broad liberty of interpretation. As Leo XIII stated: “By this very wise law the Church by no means retards or blocks the investigations of biblical science, but rather keeps it free of error, and aids it very much in true progress. For, to every private teacher a large field is open in which along safe paths, by his industry in interpretation, he may labor efficaciously and profitably for the Church (Providentissimus Deus 14).

8) What is the status of the law today? There is more to its legislative history than we can cover here, but the short answer is that it is no longer part of Church law per se. Trent added the requirement to the body of canon law that existed at the time, which was scattered in many documents. Subsequently, Vatican I (1870) renewed the decree,

**R. Sungenis:** I find it curious Mr. Akin quickly brushes over Vatican I’s reiteration of the Council of Trent’s decree on the unanimous consent of the Fathers. We saw above, however, that Vatican I’s reiteration was to show that abiding by the unanimous consent of the Fathers was a church doctrine and that no one could disobey it. Whatever ambiguity Trent had, Vatican I erased and made the unanimous consent of the Fathers into Catholic doctrine.

**J. Akin:** and when canon law was codified (brought together in a single volume) in 1917, the first edition of the Code of Canon Law contained provisions that gave the requirement ongoing legal force.

**R. Sungenis:** The Code of Canon Law has nothing to do with the church’s teaching that an interpreter is to follow the unanimous consent of the Fathers. If Mr. Akin feels otherwise, then he needs to show the authoritative sources that says Canon Law can override an official teaching of the church, regardless whether the doctrine has been deemed infallible.

The Code of Canon Law deals with legal issues that arise after the church has already made its doctrinal decrees. It also issues disciplines and punishments for those who transgress various ecclesiastical laws, customs, and how the trial is to be conducted, among various other details.

It is not the job of Canon Law to issue doctrine or retract doctrine, which can only be done by the pope’s official statement or a council under the pope.

The problem started, of course, when Mr. Akin insisted the “unanimous consent of the Fathers” was merely a disciplinary rule and not a doctrinal decree, and as such, he believes it comes under the jurisdiction of Canon Law. Neither Trent, Vatican I nor Leo XIII’s *Prov. Deus* ever declared the unanimous consent of the Fathers as a mere discipline or that it wasn’t required for exegesis.

**J. Akin:** However, Vatican II (1962-1965) did not repeat the requirement...

**R. Sungenis:** Vatican Council II didn’t have to “repeat the requirement,” if by claiming such Mr. Akin is trying to make it appear that every reiteration must be in the form of a command, especially when Paul VI said that Vatican II issued no doctrines but was only a pastoral council. Be that as it

may, not only did Vatican II abide by previous church teaching regarding the unanimous consent of the Fathers, it stated so eight times:

The words of the holy fathers witness to the presence of this living tradition, whose wealth is poured into the practice and life of the believing and praying Church.<sup>4</sup>

The bride of the incarnate Word, the Church taught by the Holy Spirit, is concerned to move ahead toward a deeper understanding of the Sacred Scriptures so that she may increasingly feed her sons with the divine words. Therefore, she also encourages the study of the holy Fathers of both East and West and of sacred liturgies.<sup>5</sup>

...faithful to the truth which we have received from the apostles and Fathers of the Church, in harmony with the faith which the Catholic Church has always professed.<sup>6</sup>

Following the study of Sacred Scripture, the Holy Fathers, the doctors and liturgy of the Church, and under the guidance of the Church's magisterium...<sup>7</sup>

The knowledge of the sacred minister ought to be sacred because it is drawn from the sacred source and directed to a sacred goal. Especially is it drawn from reading and meditating on the Sacred Scriptures, and it is equally nourished by the study of the Holy Fathers and other Doctors and monuments or tradition.<sup>8</sup>

...the words and deeds which God has revealed, and which have been set down in Sacred Scripture and explained by the Fathers and by the magisterium.<sup>9</sup>

The Fathers of the Church proclaim without hesitation...<sup>10</sup>

This doctrine is contained in the word of God and it was constantly proclaimed by the Fathers of the Church.<sup>11</sup>

**J. Akin:** "...and after the Council it was dropped from the legal instruments where it still existed. When the 1983 Code of Canon Law was released, it abrogated both the 1917 Code and "any universal or particular penal laws whatsoever issued by the Apostolic See unless they are contained in this Code" (see can. 6, §1, 1° and 3°). Consequently, canon law has been revised in a way that the decree no longer has legal force.

**R. Sungenis:** As I have argued, Mr. Akin's use of the 1983 Code of Canon Law is erroneous, not only because the issue of the unanimous consent of the Fathers is a consistent teaching of the

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4 *Dei Verbum*, Ch. 2, 8.

5 *Dei Verbum*, Ch. 6, 23.

6 *Unitatis Redintegratio*, Ch. 3, II, 24.

7 *Lumen Gentium*, Ch. 8, IV, 67.

8 *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, Ch. 3, 3, 19.

9 *Ad Gentes*, Ch. 3, 22.

10 *Ad Gentes*, Ch. 1, 3.

11 *Dignitatis Humanae*, Introduction, 10.

church from Thomas, Trent, Vatican I and Leo XIII and is therefore not merely a “disciplinary” matter covered by Canon Law, but even Canon Law puts strictures on itself that bar it from abrogating many such customs and teachings of the church.

Doing a word search through the 1983 Code, one will not find phrases such as “unanimous consent of the Fathers” or “biblical interpretation” or the “Council of Trent.” You won’t find these phrases in the 1917 Code of Canon Law either. Why? Because the Code of Canon Law does not deal with doctrine. It deals with church protocol in legal matters subsequent to the doctrines already made by the church.

For example, the church issued a doctrine under various popes and councils on marriage, divorce and re-marriage. The Code of Canon Law then explains the legal procedures one must go through and how to go through them so that the marriage, the divorce or the remarriage are done properly and legally.

**J. Akin:** However, this does not mean that we don’t have to honor the doctrinal principles behind it.

**J Akin:** 9) What are the doctrinal principles behind the decree? In the case of Catholics not contradicting the teaching of the Church regarding the meaning of Scripture, the decree spelled out the underlying doctrinal principle. Catholics aren’t to do this because the Church “is to judge of the true sense and interpretation of the holy Scriptures.” That’s just as true today as ever, and Catholics are bound today to honor the teaching of the Church when it intervenes authoritatively on the meaning of a Scripture passage.

**R. Sungenis:** According to the 1983 Code, it is much more than “honor” of the doctrinal principle. Rather, it is a canonical law of the 1983 Code that unless the 1983 Code: (1) “states so expressly,” or (2) makes a statement about that law which “is directly contrary to it,” or (3) “reorders the entire matter,” then the unanimous consent of the Fathers stands as a viable and constant discipline under canonical law, not merely “honor.”

**J. Akin:** However, apart from a handful of cases, the Church presently gives interpreters very broad liberty in how they take particular passages (see my piece, *The Limits of Scripture Interpretation*).

**R. Sungenis:** This is irrelevant, since the single issue at hand is whether the unanimous consent of the Fathers is Catholic doctrine and required in interpreting the Bible. From everything we have seen, even allowing Mr. Akin’s “canonical” argument, it is certainly Catholic doctrine.

**J. Akin:** Trent did not spell out the doctrinal principles underlying the requirement that Catholics not contradict the unanimous consent of the Fathers. However, it was explored by Leo XIII in *Providentissimus Deus*:

The Holy Fathers, we say, are of supreme authority, whenever they all interpret in one and the same manner any text of the Bible, as pertaining to the doctrine of faith or morals; for their unanimity clearly evinces that such interpretation has come down from the apostles as a matter of Catholic faith. The opinion of the Fathers is also of very great weight when they treat of these matters in their capacity of doctors, unofficially (n. 14).

Here he considers two different situations: When the Fathers “all interpret in one and the same manner any text of the Bible, as pertaining to the doctrine of faith and morals,” and “When they treat of these matters in their capacity as doctors [i.e., teachers], unofficially.”

In the first situation, he says that their unanimity shows that “such interpretation has come down from the apostles as a matter of Catholic faith,” while in the second situation he says that their opinion is “of very great weight.” We thus need to distinguish, in any given case, which of these two applies. If it is the latter then a modern interpreter needs to give the Fathers’ views due weight, but he is not ultimately bound to accept them. If, however, something they teach is a matter of Catholic faith, then it is binding. In fact, to say that something is “a matter of Catholic faith” is a term of art in theology that indicates an infallibly defined teaching. This means that we need to situate Leo XIII’s statement within the doctrinal development that has occurred on when the Church teaches infallibly.

10) What doctrinal development has occurred on the Church’s infallibility? When Leo XIII issued *Providentissimus Deus* in 1893, the First Vatican Council (1870) had met and defined papal infallibility. However, because of the wars going on in Europe at the time, the Council was unable to complete its work, and it fell to Vatican II to formulate other aspects of the Church’s infallibility. This was done in its document *Lumen Gentium*.

It held that God has given the Church a charism of infallibility. This gift protects the Church as a whole from error in matters of belief (in *credendo*), and it protects the Church’s Magisterium from error in matters of teaching (in *docendo*). Infallibility manifests in the following ways:

Through the *sensus fidelium* (the sense of the faithful, “from the bishops down to the last member of the laity”)

Through the “ordinary magisterium” of the bishops scattered throughout the world, teaching in union with the pope

Through the “extraordinary magisterium” of the bishops meeting in an ecumenical council

Through the “extraordinary magisterium” of the pope when he issues an *ex cathedra* statement



The conditions for the first of these are discussed in Lumen Gentium 12 (cf. CDF, *Mysterium Ecclesiae* 2) and the others in Lumen Gentium 25.

11) How do the Fathers relate to these categories?

The Fathers were a mixed group. Some were bishops (e.g., St. Augustine), some priests (e.g., St. Jerome), some deacons (e.g., St. Ephrem the Syrian), and some lay faithful (e.g., St. Anthony of Egypt). The Fathers as a whole thus do not represent the Church's Magisterium, which consists only of the bishops teaching in union with the pope. They would, however, be representative of the whole people of God in their day, and thus a unanimous consensus among them could be taken as an unerring manifestation of the *sensus fidelium*.

On the other hand, the Fathers who were bishops would be capable of exercising the Church's infallibility, and a unanimous consensus among them could be taken as an infallible exercise of the ordinary magisterium.

12) How would a consensus of the Fathers as a whole manifest the unerring *sensus fidelium*?

According to Lumen Gentium 12:

The entire body of the faithful . . . cannot err in matters of belief. They manifest this special property by means of the whole peoples' supernatural discernment in matters of faith when from the bishops down to the last of the lay faithful they show universal agreement in matters of faith and morals.

One of the keys to understanding this passage is recognizing that the Church's infallibility applies "in matters of belief" (Latin, *in credendo*). This is a technical term referring to truths which must be believed as part of the faith, as opposed to mere theological opinions. They therefore represent things which have a definitive character—things that are to be held by the faithful definitively.

The passage then indicates that the unerring sense of the faithful is manifested in these matters when three conditions are met:

"The entire body of the faithful . . . from the bishops down to the last of the lay faithful" is involved

"They show universal agreement"

This agreement concerns "matters of faith and morals"

For the Fathers to fulfill these conditions regarding the interpretation of Scripture, we would need to understand them as representative of the people of God of their time, which is reasonable, thus fulfilling condition (1).

The Fathers then would need to show universal agreement, fulfilling condition (2). The precise nature of this agreement will be discussed below.

Finally, to fulfill condition (3), the matter in question would have to be the interpretation of a particular Scripture text involving “matters of faith and morals.” This is significant because, as Leo XIII noted in *Providentissimus Deus*:

[The Fathers], in interpreting passages where physical matters are concerned, have made judgments according to the opinions of the age, and thus not always according to truth, so that they have made statements which today are not approved. Therefore, we must carefully discern what they hand down which really pertains to faith or is intimately connected with it . . . for in those matters which are not under the obligation of faith, the saints were free to have different opinions, just as we are (n. 19).

Here the pontiff has in mind matters like the geocentric model of the cosmos, which was one of “the opinions of the age” in which the Fathers lived but which was a “physical matter” that did not “really pertain to faith.”

**R. Sungenis:** I was wondering when the poor and abused strawman of geocentrism was going to make its entrance as a proof text for Mr. Akin’s theory about the consensus of the Fathers. All I can say is that Mr. Akin didn’t disappoint.

First, let’s ask the obvious question. Does Leo XIII mention geocentrism as an example of what he is talking about? No, and this is especially surprising since it would have been very easy for Leo to prove his case if, indeed, geocentrism was such an example. Just one brief mention of it and his case is made and we would never have another controversy about geocentrism for the life of the church. Think about it. All the pope had to say was three words: “such as geocentrism.”

Second, as we have seen in several instances, Mr. Akin ‘reads into’ church documents what he wants to see. It started with his arbitrary dichotomy between paragraphs 1 and 2 at the fourth session of Trent; his refusal to see the unanimous consent of the Fathers became a consistent teaching of the Ordinary magisterium and was not on the same level as what printer a Catholic decided to choose; and ended with his one-sided view of the 1983 Code of Canon Law.

Third, there is a good reason Leo XIII did not refer to geocentrism as an example of a non-binding patristic belief. That is because he is quite aware that his two predecessors, Paul V and Urban VIII, said heliocentrism was a formal heresy and that Galileo was “vehemently suspected” of holding that heresy. He knew the church afterward made no official statement overturning those papal actions, or said that geocentrism was wrong and heliocentrism was right, although as stated above, if the popes were wrong and geocentrism was wrong, all he had to do was add three words to his encyclical: “such as geocentrism.” The fact that he didn’t means the Holy Spirit guided him as such.

Fourth, what other things might Leo XIII have been referring to if he can't be referring to geocentrism? It could be anything from spontaneous generation to blood-letting. At least from the time of Aristotle in the 4th century BC, the science of that day believed small organisms could indeed come into being spontaneously, that is, non-living things can produce living things. In fact, it was "common knowledge" among Christians and non-Christians alike that creatures such as worms, beetles, frogs and salamanders could come from dust, mud, or uncovered food, since within hours they would see the aforementioned mediums teeming with life.

Every year in the spring, the Nile River flooded areas of Egypt, leaving behind nutrient-rich mud that enabled the people to grow that year's crop of food. However, along with the muddy soil, large numbers of frogs appeared that were not seen in drier times. Their conclusion? Well, it was perfectly obvious for sane people to realize that muddy soil produced frogs.

Likewise, in many parts of Europe, medieval farmers stored grain in barns with thatched roofs. As a roof aged it usually began leaking. This would lead to spoiled or moldy grain. Since there were lots of mice appearing at around the same time, it was obvious to the farmer that the mice came from moldy grain.

Since there were no refrigerators prior to the late 1800s, people made daily trips to the butcher shop. Carcasses were usually hung by their heels and customers selected which chunk the butcher would carve off for them. But there were always flies around the dead animal carcasses, so the people obviously concluded that rotting meat hanging in the sun all day was the source of the flies. It wasn't until the days of the Italian physician Francesco Redi in the late 1600s, and more firmly rediscovered by Louis Pasteur in the 1800s, that science discovered that organisms do not spontaneously generate from dead animal carcasses.

In fact, so firm was the idea of spontaneous generation in the minds of the populace and scientists that even as late as 1748, John Needham, a Scottish clergyman and naturalist claimed that there was a "life force" present in the molecules of all inorganic matter, including air and the oxygen in it, that causes spontaneous generation to occur, thus accounting for the presence of bacterial growth in his soups. In fact, he tried to prove the case by briefly boiling some of his soup and then pouring it into "clean" flasks which he then sealed with cork lids, but the microorganisms still grew. Little did he know, however, that briefly boiling soup does not kill all the microorganisms; that his flasks were not completely sterile, and that cork lids do not keep out all the air and its attending bacteria from a container.

In any case, Needham's insistence that the microorganisms were a product of the "life force" present in inorganic matter allows us to see why Augustine's concept of "seminal principles," which he in turn had borrowed from the Greeks, existed well into the mid-eighteenth century. It wasn't until the experiments of Louis Pasteur that the final nail was put into the coffin of spontaneous generation.

## A Short History of the Galileo Affair

Since Mr. Akin injected geocentrism into the discussion and we are discussing the validity of using the consensus of the Church Fathers, the foremost example of the latter's application is Robert Cardinal Bellarmine against Galileo. The reasons were obvious. The Fathers read in Scripture that the earth did not move and was thus the center of the universe. The Fathers believed all of Scripture inspired and inerrant (unlike many today who, from their idiosyncratic interpretation of *Dei Verbum* 11, consider only salvation statements in Scripture as inspired and inerrant).

Of the two categories of patristic consensus given by Leo XIII, Bellarmine did not consider that the consensus of the Fathers was merely "of very great weight." He told Galileo that the church was "bound" to the consensus of the Fathers on this issue. According to Mr. Akin, that means Bellarmine considered the Father's consensus as infallible.

Even if Bellarmine considered the patristic consensus only a "very great weight," he still would have used it against Galileo since Bellarmine knew the whole tradition believed in geocentrism,<sup>12</sup> and that a literal interpretation of Scripture (which the church had always taught), in addition to the fact that Galileo had no proof for his thesis, made it an unavoidable and very authoritative source even if it was "a very great weight."

Nevertheless, Bellarmine added that, although our binding to Scripture and the consensus of the Fathers was not based on the idea that earth's motion itself was a matter of faith and morals, but since Scripture said the earth was motionless, it is a matter of faith and morals *ex parte dicentis*,<sup>13</sup> that is, because Scripture says it, we must believe it, just as Scripture says Jacob had 12 sons, not 11. Bellarmine said that if someone claimed Jacob had 11 sons, he would be a material heretic.

There were only two ways to interpret the Bible in this case: (1) the Bible's teaching on a motionless earth was literal, or (2) it was not literal. The Father's, in absolute consensus, chose literal.

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12 As Bellarmine argued it: "Second, I say that, as you know, the Council [of Trent] has prohibited interpretation of Scripture contrary to the common agreement of the Holy Fathers. And if Your Reverence will read not only the Holy Fathers but also the modern commentaries on Genesis, the Psalms, Ecclesiastes, and Joshua, you will find that they all agree on the literal interpretation that the sun is in heaven and rotates around the earth with great speed, and that the earth is very far from the heavens and stands immobile in the center of the world. Ask yourself then how could the Church, in its prudence, support an interpretation of Scripture which is contrary to all the Holy Fathers and to all the Greek and Latin commentators?"

13 Bellarmine argues: "Nor can one reply that this is not a matter of faith, because even if it is not a matter of faith because of the subject matter [*ex parte obiecti*], it is still a matter of faith because of the speaker [*ex parte dicentis*]. Thus anyone who would say that Abraham did not have two sons and Jacob twelve would be just as much of a heretic as someone who would say that Christ was not born of a virgin, for the Holy Spirit has said both of these things through the mouths of the Prophets and the Apostles" ("Nè si può rispondere che questa non sia material di fede, perchè se non è material di fede *ex parte obiecti*, è material di fede *ex parte decentis*")

They did so because: (1) they saw no compelling reason to interpret it non-literally, and (2) because every other doctrine they gave to the church was from literal interpretation, e.g. baptism, confession, eucharist, confirmation, holy orders, matrimony, extreme unction; papal primacy, infallibility and succession; marriage and divorce; the Trinity and Incarnation; hell, heaven, purgatory; Original sin; grace, faith, works, justification, sanctification, glorification, etc. etc.

The only time Scripture was interpreted other than literally was when it specifically stated the text was non-literal or that the context was non-literal, which was very often the case, for example, with prophecy.

When Bellarmine posed these Scriptural and patristic requirements to Fr. Foscarini (who published a book on heliocentrism in 1615) and Galileo (who wrote letters defending heliocentrism in 1616), he was under orders from Pope Paul V. Previous to these orders, Paul V set up a commission of 11 cardinals to examine the merits and demerits of Galileo's teaching on heliocentrism. The cardinals came back to Paul V and Bellarmine with the recommendation that heliocentrism was a formal heresy. On this recommendation, Bellarmine, again under Paul V's orders, gave Galileo a canonical injunction never to teach, write or even speak about heliocentrism.

Incidentally, Copernicus' book on heliocentrism, published in 1543, had already been put on the *Index of Forbidden Books* in 1559, and thus the 1616 magisterium was working under the tradition that went before them. In 1620, all references in Copernicus' book stating the earth revolved around the sun were either removed or rewritten as hypothetical for the sake of mathematical and geometrical studies.

By 1623, Galileo disobeyed the canonical injunction and began writing the book, *The Two Great World Systems*, which favored the heliocentric system. He sought to get an imprimatur for the book in 1632. The then reigning pope, Urban VIII, found out about Galileo's attempt and responded by ordering Galileo to appear at the Vatican for a heresy trial in 1633.

At the trial, Urban VIII presided as the head of the Holy Office, and he retrieved the records of Paul V from 1616, including the recommendation from the 11 cardinal consultors that heliocentrism was a formal heresy. Although Galileo's book espoused heliocentrism, the fact that it was written in a fictional dialogue between three fictional characters, Urban VIII decided not to convict Galileo of being a formal heretic but of being "vehemently suspect of heresy."

Obviously, Urban VIII could not convict Galileo of even being "suspect" of heresy if he hadn't already confirmed that heliocentrism was a heresy. The declaration of heresy must come first and then the conviction of heresy. As noted, the heresy had already been "declared and defined," according to the official documents of in 1616 under Paul V.

So here we have an open and shut case for the fact that the magisteriums of two pontificates considered the patristic consensus on the interpretation of Scripture as binding upon the faithful, and used that consensus to condemn Galileo within a hair's breadth of being a formal heretic.

Since that is the case, why doesn't Mr. Akin believe in the church's teaching on geocentrism?

Modern science, if Mr. Akin understood what it really teaches, cannot come to his aid, since after Einstein it has been admitted by virtually all scientists that geocentrism is a viable and scientifically defensible cosmology and that they continue to prefer heliocentrism for philosophical reasons, not scientific reasons.

The Fathers taught geocentrism in consensus, even against the Greek heliocentrists. In fact, geocentrism has the strongest patristic consensus of any church doctrine, with baptismal regeneration running a close second.

No pope, including Leo XIII and John Paul II, has ever officially condemned geocentrism. In fact, in 1990, Cardinal Ratzinger gave a speech in Parma, Italy, in which he concluded by quoting a popular physicist who admitted: "Then as now, one can suppose the earth to be fixed and the sun as mobile."<sup>14</sup>

The Tradition held to geocentrism not only before Galileo, but long afterwards. Even when in 1820 a Catholic canon by the name of Giuseppe Settele received an imprimatur under the authority of Pius VII, the records indicate the imprimatur was issued under highly irregular circumstances, namely, Cardinal Maurizio Olivieri bald-faced lied to Pius VII about why Galileo was condemned by the 1616 and 1633 magisteriums, making up a story Galileo was condemned because he did not have elliptical orbits of the planets, and that the magisterium of Galileo's day had accepted Kepler's model and rejected Galileo's. It was one of the most audacious falsehoods ever perpetrated. The church condemned Galileo and heliocentrism for one reason only—because Scripture and Tradition said the earth did not move.

Pius VII, not knowing any better because all the Galileo records had been taken when Napoleon invaded the Vatican in 1809, fell victim to Olivieri's deceptive ploy. Additionally, the person who helped Olivieri spring this deception was Cardinal Cappallari, who would then become Gregory XVI in 1831 and who authorized the removal of Copernicus' and Galileo's books from the *Index of Forbidden Books* in 1835, and the rest is history.

All the elements of belief, conviction and doctrine are there, but most Catholics not only don't believe it, they refuse even to consider it. They all think modern science has proven the earth

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14 In Parma, Italy, March 15, 1990, titled: "The Crisis of Faith in Science," partly reported in *Il Sabato*, March 31, 1990, pp. 80ff, and in the *Corriere della Sera*, March 30, 1990, and cited in *30 Days*, January 1993, p. 34

revolves around the sun, and no one bothers to investigate whether that premise is actually true. It isn't.<sup>15</sup>

## Lumen Gentium 12

Since Mr. Akin cited *Lumen Gentium* 12 as the completed doctrine on the issue of papal and conciliar infallibility, ironically, the most significant reason why the doctrine of geocentrism should be considered infallible comes from *Lumen Gentium* 12. Let's reiterate the passage once again:

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).<sup>16</sup> The whole body of the faithful who have an anointing that comes from the holy one (*cf.* 1 Jn. 2:20 and 27)<sup>17</sup> cannot err in matters of belief. This characteristic is shown in the supernatural appreciation of the faith (*sensus fidei*)<sup>18</sup> of the whole people, when, "from the bishops to the last of the faithful"<sup>19</sup> 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

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15 See my book, *Galileo Was Wrong: The Church Was Right* at [www.gwwdvd.com](http://www.gwwdvd.com). See also: *Einstein: The Closet Geocentrist* at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hKCO-TeVegM>

16 "Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name."

17 "But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all know....but the anointing which you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that any one should teach you; as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie, just as it has taught you, abide in him."

18 *Lumen Gentium* 12 adds this footnote: "(The *sensus fidei* refers to the instinctive sensitivity and discrimination which the members of the Church possess in matters of faith. – Translator.)"

19 *Lumen Gentium* 12 adds this footnote: "See St. Augustine, *De Praed. Sanct.* 14, 27: PL 44, 980." This refers to Augustine's work *Predestination of the Saints*, Book II, Chapter 14: This grace He placed "in Him in whom we have obtained a lot, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things." And thus as He worketh that we come to Him, so He worketh that we do not depart. Wherefore it was said to Him by the mouth of the prophet, "Let Thy hand be upon the man of Thy right hand, and upon the Son of man whom Thou madest strong for Thyself, and we will not depart from Thee." This certainly is not the first Adam, in whom we departed from Him, but the second Adam, upon whom His hand is placed, so that we do not depart from Him. For Christ altogether with His members is--for the Church's sake, which is His body – the fulness of Him. When, therefore, God's hand is upon Him, that we depart not from God, assuredly God's work reaches to us (for this is God's hand); by which work of God we are caused to be abiding in Christ with God – not, as in Adam, departing from God. For "in Christ we have obtained a lot, being predestinated according to His purpose who worketh all things." This, therefore, is God's hand, not ours, that we depart not from God. That, I say, is His hand who said, "I will put my fear in their hearts, that they depart not from me."

mere word of men, but truly the word of God (*cf.* 1 Th 2:13),<sup>20</sup> the faith once for all delivered to the saints (*cf.* Jude 3).<sup>21</sup> The people unfailingly adheres to this faith, penetrates it more deeply with right judgment, and applies it more fully in daily life.<sup>22</sup>

Since it is a fact that the “People of God,” which includes “the bishops to the last of the faithful,” have believed unanimously, firmly and without equivocation in the doctrine of geocentrism from the beginning of the Catholic Church, and who were “guided by the sacred teaching authority” to do so (Paul V and Urban VIII), this belief necessarily fulfills the criteria of *Lumen Gentium* 12 that these same People of God “cannot err.”

It is an undeniable fact that all the Fathers, all the medievals, all the bishops, priests, saints, doctors, theologians and the remaining Christian faithful of every nation believed in the doctrine of geocentrism.

Additionally, three popes (Paul V, Urban VIII & Alexander VII) and their Holy Offices officially confirmed this absolute consensus in the 17<sup>th</sup> century against a few men who, because of their own misguided convictions, sought to depart from that consensus, making the attempt in the wake of unproven scientific claims with the express purpose of reinstituting a novel and subjective interpretation of Holy Writ. Even many years after modern science began to treat heliocentrism as a scientific fact, the Catholic faithful still maintained their vigilance for geocentric doctrine. It has only been in the last one hundred years or so that this consensus has waned.

Because of the waning consensus, some objectors might themselves appeal to the principle of *Lumen Gentium* 12 and posit that the Holy Spirit is now teaching the “People of God” that heliocentrism has been correct all along. But that notion, of course, is impossible, since the “People of God” could not have been “aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth” into believing that geocentrism was correct for 1900 years and then have the Spirit suddenly change His mind to teach them the opposite. It would make the Holy Spirit a liar, which is certainly impossible. The reality is, if the “People of God” were led to believe geocentrism was the truth, and which was, according to the stipulations of *Lumen Gentium* 12, “guided by the magisterium” (Paul V and Urban VIII) to confirm their consensus, then there is simply no possibility that a change in their belief could be understood as a movement of the Holy Spirit.

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20 “And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.”

21 “Beloved, being very eager to write to you of our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.”

22 *The Documents of Vatican II*, Austin Flannery, O.P., NY: Costello Publishing, 1975, p. 363.



## **Objection: “The Catholic Church Does Not Teach Geocentrism Today”**

Some Catholics depend on the argument that if geocentrism is a teaching of the church, then the Church would be explicitly teaching geocentrism today. Since the church does not teach it, then geocentrism is no longer an official teaching, and has been replaced by heliocentrism and evolution, which are taught in most Catholic schools today.

Besides the fact this argumentation invariably pits the decisions of the traditional church directly against the practices of the modern church, the deeper question revolves around whether the Church can teach something today that She hasn’t taught in the past, or is different than what She taught in the past; and if She does so, is the new teaching true and official?

The answer will depend on whether supporting examples exist that show the Church has, for all intents and purposes, ceased teaching a particular doctrine and seemingly replaced it with another, yet without either issuing an official reversal of the previous doctrine or an official endorsement of the new doctrine. Additionally, once the breach has been discovered and investigated, did the Church restore the former teaching to its rightful place? There are several such instances in the history of the Church, many of them very recent.

### **1) The Tridentine Mass**

Most of the Church hierarchy in the mid-twentieth century believed the Tridentine Mass was abrogated by Pope Paul VI. Hence, the Church disallowed the Tridentine rite for many years, never officially celebrating it since 1969. In 1988, John Paul II’s *Ecclesie Dei* commission restored the Tridentine to a certain degree, but most clerics were still under the impression that Paul VI had abrogated the Tridentine rite in 1969. Due to pressure from traditionalist Catholics, Pope Benedict XVI then established a commission to investigate whether Paul VI had, in fact, abrogated the Tridentine rite. It was determined that he had not done so, which then led Benedict XVI to fully reinstate the Tridentine, which was published in his *motu proprio* (i.e., “on his own initiative”) titled *Summorum Pontificum* (i.e., “of the Supreme Pontiffs”) in July 2007.

Thus for 38 years the highest members of the Church had mistakenly believed (or perhaps pretended to believe) that something was true when it was actually false. It is our belief the same will be the case with the Church’s teaching on geocentrism. If and when the Church does reinvestigate the issue, She will find the condemnation of heliocentrism has never been officially abrogated, and, in light of the burgeoning scientific evidence that shows there is no proof for heliocentrism and much evidence for geocentrism, She will be required to restore the latter to its rightful place in Church teaching.

### **2) Usury**

Another example of a doctrine that has not officially been abrogated but unofficially replaced by another belief system is usury (i.e., demanding interest on a loan). The Church’s tradition, capped

by Her leading theologian, Thomas Aquinas, taught against usury and the doctrine was officially proclaimed in Pope Benedict XIV's 1745 encyclical, *Vix pervenit*.<sup>23</sup> The modern Catholic Church, however, does not promote the traditional teaching against usury but it also does not cite any official declaration the traditional teaching has been abrogated. The closest the modern Church even addresses usury is in two citations of the 1994 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, but these are very superficial and do not cite *Vix pervenit* as the Church last official teaching on the matter.<sup>24</sup>

Hence, we have another case in which a doctrine of the Catholic Church is either ignored, has fallen into disuse, and/or replaced by a more modern belief, yet without an official abrogation of the previous doctrine or any official teaching of the new belief.

### 3) Biblical Inerrancy

As I noted earlier in this critique, a third example is the Church's teaching on biblical inerrancy. Prior to the aftermath of Vatican Council II, it can be conclusively shown the Catholic Church officially taught Scripture was inerrant not only in its salvation message, but also in its record of historical events. As we have noted, this doctrine was unofficially abandoned in the wake of Vatican II's decree on Holy Scripture, titled *Dei Verbum*, which stated the following in paragraph 11:

Since, therefore, all that the inspired authors, or sacred writers, affirm should be regarded as affirmed by the Holy Spirit, we must acknowledge that the books of Scripture, firmly, faithfully and without error, teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the sacred Scriptures.

This sentence is interpreted today so as to limit inerrancy to the material in Scripture dealing directly with salvation, thus discarding the Church's previous belief that Scripture's accounting of history was protected by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The Church has neither made an official

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23 "The nature of the sin called usury has its proper place and origin in a loan contract... [which] demands, by its very nature, that one return to another only as much as he has received. The sin rests on the fact that sometimes the creditor desires more than he has given..., but any gain which exceeds the amount he gave is illicit and usurious. 'One cannot condone the sin of usury by arguing that the gain is not great or excessive, but rather moderate or small; neither can it be condoned by arguing that the borrower is rich; nor even by arguing that the money borrowed is not left idle, but is spent usefully...' (Denz. 1475). See also Innocent II, Lateran Council I, 1139, *Denz.* 365; Urban VIII, 1107, *Denz.* 403; Clement V, Council of Vienne, *Denz.* 479; Innocent XI, March 4, 1679, *Denz.* 1190-1192

24 There are only two entries in the catechism's Index on usury. The first is paragraph 2269, which merely states that "usurious and avaricious dealings lead to the hunger and death," and paragraph 2449, which although it cites the "juridical measures" of the Old Testament, which includes the "prohibition of loans at interest," it does not specifically state that in the modern age loans at interest are morally wrong, but only digresses into a general teaching about caring for the poor. The catechism's teaching seems to be that usury is only wrong when the interest on the loan is exorbitantly high, as is the case with mainstream Catholic thinking today, but that is not what is taught in either the Old Testament or in *Vix pervenit*, which both held that *any* interest on a loan is not permitted. See the article at <http://distributistreview.com/mag/2012/01/is-usury-still-a-sin/> for more information.

declaration that this novel view of Scripture is the current and official doctrine, nor did She make any official declaration the Church's previous belief in full biblical inerrancy was incorrect or is no longer an official Church teaching. The belief that Scripture is only inerrant with regards to salvation just quietly seeped into the church of the modern age. It is now the case that almost all Catholic academic institutions in the world, including elementary, high school, college and seminary, as well as being the common belief of many high-placed clerics in the Vatican itself, teach the new belief of partial inerrancy as if it were official Church doctrine.

#### **4) The Social Kingship of Christ**

A fourth example is the doctrine of the Social Kingship of Christ taught by Pope Pius XI in his 1925 encyclical *Quas Primas*.<sup>25</sup> Previous to Pius XI the Church taught the Social Kingship of Christ in numerous papal encyclicals and conciliar doctrines. Today there exists a majority of clerics and lay Catholics who openly defy these encyclicals as examples of the Church's primitive era and thus unapplicable to today's society.<sup>26</sup>

#### **5) Six-day, *ex nihilo*, creation**

A fifth example is the Church's teaching on Creation. Up until the aftermath of Vatican II, it was common for Catholics to hold the belief God created the world in an *ex nihilo*, instantaneous and miraculous creation. This belief followed a long tradition stemming from the consensus of the Church Fathers through the medieval age, and was made official both by Lateran Council IV and Vatican Council I.<sup>27</sup> Today, except for small pockets of traditional Catholics, hardly any modern Catholic holds to a miraculous creation. Most believe in evolution and the Big Bang theory advocated by the majority of mainstream scientists.

#### **6) Contraception**

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25 See the official encyclical at <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius11/P11PRIMA.HTM>

26 See, among others, George Wiegman and Joseph Bottum (speaking for Richard John Neuhaus) on EWTN at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LqZ2ybiDlaw>.

27 See Denzinger §428 and §1805. The 1911 Catholic Encyclopedia is decidedly negative toward evolution. It states the following: "The most important General Considerations to be noted are as follows: (1) The origin of life is unknown to science; (2) The origin of the main organic types and their principal subdivisions are likewise unknown to science; (3) There is no evidence in favor of an ascending evolution of organic forms; (4) There is no trace of even a merely probable argument in favor of the animal origin of man. The earliest human fossils and the most ancient traces of culture refer to a true *Homo sapiens* as we know him today; (5) Most of the so-called systematic species and genera were certainly not created as such, but originated by a process of either gradual or salutatory evolution. Changes which extend beyond the range of variation observed in the human species have thus far not been strictly demonstrated, either experimentally or historically; (6) There is very little known as to the causes of evolution. The greatest difficulty is to explain the origin and constancy of "new" characters and the teleology of the process. Darwin's "natural selection" is a *negative* factor only. The molding influence of the environment cannot be doubted; but at present we are unable to ascertain how far that influence may extend." (Vol. V, pp. 654-670).

A sixth example is contraception. Prior to the mid- to late twentieth century, the Catholic Church taught, and most Catholic parishioners practiced, no form of contraception. It was the very reason Catholics were known for having large families. This teaching was reinforced by Pope Pius XI's 1932 encyclical titled, *Casti Connubii*. Later, when the teaching against contraception was officially reiterated by Pope Paul VI in the 1969 encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*, it caused one of the greatest ruptures in loyalty and obedience to the church in history. The practice among a good portion of Catholic women today is the use of artificial birth control devices, including abortion, although the Church has never rescinded its teaching against contraception. Even those who practice *Natural Family Planning* do so without any specific allowance from *Humanae Vitae*, since it only allowed natural contraception in cases of need, not want.

## 7) Head Coverings

A seventh example is the issue of head coverings for women. Prior to the aftermath of Vatican II, the common belief among Catholics, stemming from the first centuries and through the medieval period, was that women must wear a covering on their head whenever entering the church. As late as 1917, the Code of Canon Law required head coverings. Today, however, there are very few women who abide by this teaching, and they do so despite any official statement from the church that rescinds the custom, including the 1975 CDF document *Inter Insigniores* and the 1983 Code of Canon Law.<sup>28</sup> It simply fell into disuse on its own without any official declaration against it.

## 8) No Salvation Outside the Church

An eighth example is the doctrine *extra ecclesium nulla salus* (“no salvation outside the Church”). As even the 1994 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* admits, the doctrine was taught by the Church Fathers.<sup>29</sup> It was reiterated by both Pope Eugene IV and Pope Boniface VIII (although for some odd reason the *Catechism* fails to cite these two important documents).<sup>30</sup> The teaching is reiterated in the Vatican II document, *Lumen Gentium* 14, as quoted by the same *Catechism*.<sup>31</sup> But the reality is, the doctrine is hardly taught at all in Catholic circles today. More prevalent is the “anonymous Christian” doctrine of Karl Rahner or the “dare we hope” [that all are saved] doctrine of Hans Urs von Balthasar, and the whole climate of universal salvation promoted in the aftermath of Vatican II. Protestant and Jews today are considered by many Catholics, lay and hierarchy, to be on the

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28 See my essay on this issue, “Women and Head Coverings.”

29 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §846.

30 Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*, Eugene IV, the Council of Florence, (1438 – 1445), §714 “It firmly believes and professes and proclaims that those not living within the Catholic Church, not only pagans, but also Jews and heretics and schismatics cannot become participants in eternal life, but will depart into everlasting fire...”; Boniface VIII (1294 – 1303), *Unum Santum*, §468 “...we firmly believe and confess this Church outside which there is no salvation nor remission of sin.”

31 “Hence they could not be saved who, knowing that the Catholic Church was founded as necessary by God through Christ, would refuse either to enter it or to remain in it.”

road to salvation. The Jews are even said to have their own covenant and salvation plan with God and thus are not to be targeted with Christian evangelism.<sup>32</sup>

There are other examples that could be cited (many having to do with the interpretations of documents coming from Vatican Council II) but the above will suffice to show that a doctrine or practice in the Catholic Church can be ignored, rejected, or fall into disuse on its own without the Church making any official statement to rescind the doctrine and without any official statement concerning the belief or practice that replaces it.

So it is with the Church's traditional teaching on cosmogony and cosmology. Geocentrism was never officially rescinded and heliocentrism was never officially taught, but the latter has replaced the former in modern thinking.

### **Objection: "The Church Fathers Did Not Debate Geocentrism"**

Some hold the objection that the doctrine of geocentrism cannot be considered a consensus teaching of the Church Fathers because the Fathers did not openly debate geocentrism, or even accept it as a matter of faith, but merely accepted it without discussion as a fact of nature. The premise here, of course, is that a consensus of the Fathers is not legitimate unless the Fathers argue the issue at hand and explicitly state the issue is a matter of faith.

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32 Walter Cardinal Kasper stated to the International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee in New York on May 1, 2001: "The old theory of substitution [i.e., that the New Covenant replaced the Old Covenant] is gone since the Second Vatican Council. For us Christians today the covenant with the Jewish people is a living heritage, a living reality....Therefore, the Church believes that Judaism, i.e., the faithful response of the Jewish people to God's irrevocable covenant, is salvific for them, because God is faithful to His promises....Thus mission, in this strict sense, cannot be used with regard to Jews, who believe in the true and one God. Therefore – and this is characteristic – there does not exist any Catholic missionary organization for Jews. There is dialogue with Jews; no mission in this proper sense of the word towards them." William Cardinal Keeler and the USCCB, along with prominent Jewish rabbis, co-authored the 2002 document *Reflections on Covenant and Mission*. One of the more alarming assertions of the document was: "...while the Catholic Church regards the saving act of Christ as central to the process of human salvation for all, it also acknowledges that Jews already dwell in a saving covenant with God....Campaigns that target Jews for conversion to Christianity are no longer theologically acceptable in the Catholic Church." Francis Cardinal George of Chicago added: "...the Church has also sinned against the Jewish people, first of all, in teaching that God's covenant with Israel is no longer valid for them." In 1992, Johannes Cardinal Willebrands wrote the book, *The Church and the Jewish People*, in which he advocated against converting the Jews. John Paul II then appointed Willebrands as President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. In November 2001, the Pontifical Biblical Commission (PBC), under then Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, issued a 210-page report titled: "The Jewish People and the Holy Scriptures in the Christian Bible," which, among other things, stated: "...the Jewish messianic wait is not in vain," adding that Jews and Christians share their wait for the Messiah, as Jews are waiting for the first coming and Christians for the second. The PBC profusely apologized to the Jewish people for 'anti-Semitic passages' contained in the New Testament, and also stressed the continuing importance of the Torah for both Jews and Christians.

As I noted earlier, the reason this objection is raised stems from the fact that the Council of Trent, along with many other conciliar and papal teachings, declared a belief that was held in unanimous consent by the Church Fathers requires the belief be held as a definitive teaching of the Catholic Church.

As also noted earlier, the consensus of the Fathers was the chief argument Cardinal Bellarmine raised against Galileo, as he stated: “Consider now, with your sense of prudence, whether the church can tolerate giving Scripture a meaning contrary to the Holy Fathers and to all the Greek and Latin commentators.” Bellarmine was referring to Trent’s decree.

As I noted earlier, this teaching was reiterated in the same infallible form by Vatican Council I in 1870:

But, since the rules which the holy Synod of Trent salutarily decreed concerning the interpretation of Divine Scripture in order to restrain impetuous minds, are wrongly explained by certain men, We, renewing the same decree, declare this to be its intention: that, in matters of faith and morals pertaining to the instruction of Christian Doctrine, that must be considered as the true sense of Sacred Scripture which Holy Mother Church has held and holds, whose office it is to judge concerning the true understanding and interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures; and, for that reason, no one is permitted to interpret Sacred Scripture itself contrary to this sense, or even contrary to the unanimous agreement of the Fathers.<sup>33</sup>

The doctrine was upheld by Pope Leo XIII in *Providentissimus Deus*:, as well as Vatican II, who referred to it 8 times, such as

This tradition which comes from the Apostles develop in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit....The words of the holy fathers witness to the presence of this living tradition, whose wealth is poured into the practice and life of the believing and praying Church.<sup>34</sup>  
...faithful to the truth which we have received from the apostles and Fathers of the Church, in harmony with the faith which the Catholic Church has always professed.<sup>35</sup>

The most relevant point we notice from these official conciliar or papal declarations is that none of them involve definitions or limitations of what constitutes a “unanimous consensus of the Fathers.” One would assume that if polemical discussion amongst the Fathers was a critical requirement in order to qualify the consensus as legitimate, and, in turn, critical in requiring our obedience to the consensus, the church would, indeed, address that issue. To say otherwise is simply an argument from silence.

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33 Vatican Council I, Chapter II, Denz. 1788.

34 *Dei Verbum*, Ch. 2, 8.

35 *Unitatis Redintegratio*, Ch. 3, II, 24.

The only matter discussed in later Catholic academic settings was the question regarding how many Fathers, and of those how many *prominent* Fathers, were needed for a quorum of patristic witnesses to establish itself as a legitimate consensus.

The objection that the Fathers were required to debate an issue amongst themselves before the consensus could be considered legitimate has no precedent and therefore has no merit. The Church simply accepted, regardless of the origin, the consensus of the Fathers as evidence the Fathers were reiterating Apostolic teaching and were thus guided by the Holy Spirit to preserve that original teaching.

That such would be the understanding of a patristic consensus fits well within the manner by which the Fathers often arrived at their conclusions about Catholic doctrine. It was most often the case the church would formulate specific doctrines after a common belief or practice of the church was threatened by internal or external objectors. Beliefs such as the Trinity and the Incarnation were viciously attacked by many groups and individuals; and the Fathers responded by arguing against the perpetrators. In due time, a council would be called and the matter would be definitively decided, invariably in favor of the consensus of the Fathers.

This process meant, of course, that the customary beliefs of the practicing church which were not attacked and thus remained as the common conviction of its people were obviously not the results of dialectics or polemics. As such, they remained in their original form.

This fact was especially true of geocentrism, since it was a simply matter of deciding, from very decisive statements in Scripture, whether the Earth moved or did not move.

For geocentrism, there were no complicated issues to discuss like those involving the Trinity and the Incarnation, especially considering the primitive stage of the natural sciences at that time. The topic of ‘geocentrism versus heliocentrism’ was more like the doctrine of the resurrection or ascension of Christ: either Christ rose or he did not rise; either he ascended into heaven or he did not ascend.

The variations were limited due to the nature of the subject matter. If, for example, a Father had decided to reject geocentrism, he would automatically have become a heliocentrist, since these were the only two options available in the theological and scientific circles of the day.

The only change to these options came in the twentieth century when the concept of acentrism arose from Einstein’s theory of Relativity, but even then one must decide, as the Fathers had done long ago, whether the sun revolves around the Earth or the Earth revolves around the sun, since at least one must be true to explain what is observed in the cosmos every day.

Generally speaking, even when the Fathers were in dialectical or polemical discussions on a particular topic, they often did not reach the pinnacle of the Catholic understanding of the doctrine.

For example, the Fathers' discussions about the Holy Eucharist were many and varied.<sup>36</sup> All the Fathers believed, based on their literal interpretation of Scripture, during the Mass the bread changed into the body of Christ. This was their unanimous consent and it was supported by various statements in Church teaching made by early popes and councils.

But the precise debate as to what actually occurs when the bread is changed into the body of Christ was not much argued amongst the Fathers, for that particular debate would not occur until almost a millennia later when Berengarius (c. 1040), a priest from Tours who was following the doctrine of Ratramnus, had rejected the doctrine. Although Berengarius was condemned by Gregory VII, there was no discussion about how the change to the body of Christ occurred; only that it *did occur* and the faithful were required to accept it.

The ultimate understanding of how the Eucharist occurred did not come into being until Thomas Aquinas applied Aristotelian constructs to describe the change, and using the word "transubstantiation," which was here introduced for the first time in history and later confirmed by the Lateran Council in 1215.

The point to be made here is, even when the Fathers engaged in a dialectic regarding a particular subject, they did not establish the church's ultimate understanding of the issue but merely laid the foundation for belief upon which the church would build and communicate Her actual and official doctrine.

Hence, with regard to the issue of geocentrism, even if the Fathers were to argue the issue openly, this does not mean they would have reached a definitive understanding, but only that they would have maintained their consensus based on the clear statements in Scripture that provided the basic belief, both for geocentrism and the bread being changed into the body of Christ.

All that being said, however, there is certainly an element of dialectic and polemics within the patristic era on cosmology and cosmogony. The writings of the Fathers are filled with polemics on cosmology but it is not against themselves but against the Greeks for believing in what was essentially the prototype to Darwin's evolution and Copernicus' heliocentrism.

For example, in his work *The Prooemium*, Hippolytus refutes the Greek philosopher, Echphantus, for his belief in a rotating Earth.<sup>37</sup> This shows us the Fathers understood Scripture's statements regarding a non-moving Earth to include both a non-rotation as well as a non-translation – the same two non-movements Galileo sought to nullify.

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36 See my book, *Not By Bread Alone: The Biblical and Historical Evidence for the Eucharistic Sacrifice* (Queenship Publishing, 2001) for a thorough record of the Fathers' views and debates about the Eucharist.

37 "And that the earth in the middle of the cosmical system is moved round its own center towards the east." (*The Prooemium*, Ch XIII).



In fact, the official church documents containing the condemnation of Galileo make reference to the “Pythagorean school” that advocated heliocentrism as the basis for Galileo’s reintroduction of the system.

By the same token, the Fathers commended the Greek geocentrists, such as Aristotle, although they unanimously rejected the astrology of the Greeks at large. The Fathers were also aware that Babylonian, Egyptian and early Greek thought advanced the idea of a flat Earth, but the Fathers, in consensus, rejected that system for a spherical Earth.<sup>38</sup>

All in all, the Fathers were very aware of the polemical issues concerning cosmogony and cosmology in their day. The major point to be made here is, obviously we have no record of them arguing against each other about these specific issues simply because there was no Father who either contested a motionless Earth or contested that God created the Earth in six miraculous days (except, perhaps, Augustine on the latter issue, preferring a miraculous one-day event than a six-day event, although he accommodated the six days as a real possibility). We should also know that Augustine reached his “one-day” theory of creation because of his mistaken reading of Sirach 18:1.<sup>39</sup>

Scripture was rather clear about these two issues and thus there was not much room for disagreement, except for a few minor details. In any case, the patristic consensus on geocentrism was a legitimate consensus. The consensus was based on the fact that Scripture taught the Earth is motionless, and thus the Fathers understood that this very fact of cosmology was a matter of faith upon which to build our understanding of God’s creation; and it was the very basis upon which Cardinal Bellarmine, backed by Pope Paul V, employed that consensus against the innovations of Galileo.

### Signs of Apostasy?

The above facts, sadly enough, leave open only one other possibility for the shift in thinking against geocentrism. Quite simply, for the present people of the world to depart from what *Lumen Gentium* 12 calls the consensus of the “People of God” means the people have been led astray by false teachings. Is such deception possible on a mass scale? According to Scripture and Tradition, it is not only possible, it is predicted to happen. A worldwide apostasy from the faith predicted by St. Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-12<sup>40</sup> may be the why the masses could depart from almost two

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38 See my 700-page book, *Flat Earth/Flat Wrong* at [www.flatearthflatwrong.com](http://www.flatearthflatwrong.com)

39 See my 600-page book, *Genesis 1-11*, at [www.gwwdvd.com](http://www.gwwdvd.com)

40 <sup>3</sup>Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of perdition, <sup>4</sup>who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. <sup>5</sup>Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you this? <sup>6</sup>And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. <sup>7</sup>For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. <sup>8</sup>And then the lawless one will be revealed, and

millennia of consistent personal belief and magisterial decrees, not only concerning the doctrine of geocentrism, but every doctrine that is affected by the same non-literal and “historically critical” hermeneutic foisted on the church in the last hundred years.

As I noted earlier, the new hermeneutic, spawned as it was by insisting Scripture could be interpreted figuratively where it was once interpreted literally, coupled with the idea that Scripture could err when it addressed non-salvation topics, has totally undermined man’s docile belief in Holy Writ in the modern age.

Another possibility is that the current rejection of the church’s original teaching on both cosmogony and cosmology is following the pattern of blindness to which Jesus alerted us in the Gospels. For example, in Jesus’ conversation with the Pharisees about divorce, we learn divorce was common in Israel, so much so that almost all the populace believed it was a man’s God-given right to divorce his spouse. For a long time, the illusion of the freedom to divorce seemed to be a positive societal development permitted by God, even as heliocentrism and evolution presently enjoy the same apparent freedom today.

So confident were the people in their lifestyle of divorce, they brought the issue to Jesus even though they already knew He had condemned divorce. They reasoned they could catch Him denying both the Mosaic law and ultimately God’s law which inspired Moses to allow divorce. Jesus, as He always managed to do when He was being tested by hypocrites, turned the tables on them. Little did the divorce advocates realize, until Jesus opened their eyes to the stark reality, that their belief in divorce, which opposed the original decree of God, was given to them not because God discovered a better way for them to manage marital conflicts, but for their “hardness of their hearts.”

In other words, Moses, under God’s direction, allowed them to divorce because the people were spiritually destitute. It is a divine principle that is often displayed in Scripture – God turns the rebel over to his own desires as a punishment for his rebellion.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, many today are enjoying the illusion that they have permission to believe and practice many things that were once condemned, claiming that modern science has enlightened them to a new way of life (contraception, artificial insemination, embryonic stem cell research, cloning, eugenics, abortion, same-sex marriage and child adoption, *etc.*). They believe society has been enlightened as never before to wonderful inventions and increased knowledge for the benefit of the human race.

In reality, nothing has changed in Scripture, Tradition or the Catholic Magisterium. The inventions and knowledge only make them sin faster than they ever did before. They believe in false notions

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the Lord Jesus will slay him with the breath of his mouth and destroy him by his appearing and his coming.<sup>9</sup>The coming of the lawless one by the activity of Satan will be with all power and with pretended signs and wonders,<sup>10</sup>and with all wicked deception for those who are to perish, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.<sup>11</sup>Therefore God sends upon them a strong delusion, to make them believe what is false,<sup>12</sup>so that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

41 Cf., Nm 11:1-35; Ez 20:25; Rm 1:20-24; 2Th 2:11.

and engage in immoral practices because they have been deceived by the hardness of their own hearts.<sup>42</sup>

These examples, however, are not to say those who do not believe in geocentrism are either no longer individually faithful to the Catholic Church or that they are an integral part of the apostasy. The masses cannot be blamed for what they have been taught by their authorities. It only means that one of the signs of the general apostasy predicted by Holy Scripture will be a general and pervasive turning away from the previously accepted truths of Scripture and Tradition. The mass rejection of geocentrism is just one sign of that eventuality.

**J. Akin:** As noted above, the Fathers would have to be in agreement that this interpretation represents a mandatory belief for all Christians—that it is a belief to be held definitively. This corresponds to Leo XIII’s distinction between what the Fathers hand on as “a matter of Catholic faith” versus what they teach “in their capacity of doctors, unofficially” (*Providentissimus Deus* 14).

**R. Sungenis:** If one reads carefully the passages of the Fathers on geocentrism, none of them conclude that a Catholic has the freedom to reject either Scripture’s teaching on geocentrism or the Fathers’ consensual interpretation of those passages. Here are some of those passages:

Many of the hundreds of citations from the Fathers regarding the motion of the sun have not been included in this list, due to the redundancy it would create. Only those quotes from the Fathers which have the most logical and comparative relevance have been listed. The names of the Fathers are listed in alphabetical order.

**Ambrose:** Worthy surely was he to stand forth as a man who might stay the course of the river, and who might say: “Sun, stand still,” and delay the night and lengthen the day, as though to witness his victory. Why? a blessing denied to Moses, he alone was chosen to lead the people into the promised land. A man he was, great in the wonders he wrought by faith, great in his triumphs. The works of Moses were of a higher type, his brought greater success. Either of these then aided by divine grace rose above all human standing. The one ruled the sea, the other heaven.<sup>43</sup>

**Ambrose:** But they say that the sun can be said to be alone, because there is no second sun. But the sun himself has many things in common with the stars, for he travels across the heavens, he is of that ethereal and heavenly substance, he is a creature, and is reckoned amongst all the works of God. He serves God in union with all, blesses Him with all, praises Him with all. Therefore he cannot accurately be said to be alone, for he is not set apart from the rest.<sup>44</sup>

**Aphrahat:** For the sun in twelve hours circles round, from the east unto the west; and when he has accomplished his course, his light is hidden in the night-time, and the night is not disturbed

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42 Matthew 19:8: He said to them, “For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.”

43 *Duties of the Clergy*, Bk II, Ch XX, 99.

44 *Exposition of the Christian Faith*, Bk V, Ch II.

by his power. And in the hours of the night the sun turns round in his rapid course, and turning round begins to run in his accustomed path.<sup>45</sup>

**Aphrahat:** Furthermore when the people crossed over in the days of Joshua the son of Nun (it was there), for thus it is written: The people passed over, over against Jericho. Also Joshua the son of Nun by faith cast down the walls of Jericho, and they fell without difficulty. Again by faith he destroyed thirty-one kings and made the children of Israel to inherit the land. Furthermore by his faith he spread out his hands towards heaven and stayed the sun in Gibeon and the moon in the valley of Ajalon. And they were stayed and stood still from their courses. But enough! All the righteous, our fathers, in all that they did were victorious through faith, as also the blessed Apostle testified with regard to all of them: By faith they prevailed.<sup>46</sup>

**Archeleus:** When the light had been diffused everywhere, God began to constitute the universe, and commenced with the heaven and the earth; in which process this issue appeared, to wit, that the midst, which is the locality of earth covered with shadow, as a consequence of the interpositions of the creatures which were called into being, was found to be obscure, in such wise that circumstances required light to be introduced into that place, which was thus situated in the midst.<sup>47</sup>

**Aristedes:** They err who believe that the sky is a god. For we see that it revolves and moves by necessity and is compacted of many parts, being thence called the ordered universe (kosmos). Now the universe is the construction of some designer; and that which has been constructed has a beginning and an end. And the sky with its luminaries moves by necessity. For the stars are carried along in array at fixed intervals from sign to sign, and, some setting, others rising, they traverse their courses in due season so as to mark off summers and winters, as it has been appointed for them by God; and obeying the inevitable necessity of their nature they transgress not their proper limits, keeping company with the heavenly order. Whence it is plain that the sky is not a god but rather a work of God.<sup>48</sup>

**Arnobius:** Has the fabric of this machine and mass of the universe, by which we are all covered, and in which we are held enclosed, relaxed in any part, or broken up? Has the revolution of the globe, to which we are accustomed, departing from the rate of its primal motion, begun either to move too slowly, or to be hurried onward in headlong rotation? Have the stars begun to rise in the west, and the setting of the constellations to take place in the east?<sup>49</sup>

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45 *Demonstrations*, 24.

46 *Demonstrations*, 16.

47 *Disputation with Manes*, 22.

48 *The Apology*, G IV.

49 *Against the Heathen*, Book 1, 2, 5. The Fathers understood “globe” (Latin: *mundi*) to refer to any spherical body, including the universe, the sun, the planets or the earth. If Arnobius had desired to confine the meaning to “earth” the more likely word he would have chosen is *terra*. The original Latin, beginning at “has the fabric of this machine” is: *numquid machinae huius et molis, qua universi tegimur et continemur inclusi, parte est in aliqua relaxata aut dissoluta constructio? numquid vertigo haec mundi, primigenii motus moderamen excedens, aut tardius repere aut praecipiti coepit volubilitate raptari?* Arnobius’ context, which refers to the “mass of the universe” and “the stars begun to rise,” is speaking of the globe of the universe.

**Arnobius:** The moon, the sun, the earth, the ether, the stars, are members and parts of the world; but if they are parts and members, they are certainly not themselves living creatures.<sup>50</sup>

**Athanasius:** For the Sun is carried round along with, and is contained in, the whole heaven, and can never go beyond his own orbit, while the moon and other stars testify to the assistance given them by the Sun...But the earth is not supported upon itself, but is set upon the realm of the waters, while this again is kept in its place, being bound fast at the center of the universe.<sup>51</sup>

**Athanasius:** For who that sees the circle of heaven and the course of the sun and the moon, and the positions and movements of the other stars, as they take place in opposite and different directions, while yet in their difference all with one accord observe a consistent order, can resist the conclusion that these are not ordered by themselves, but have a maker distinct from themselves who orders them? Or who that sees the sun rising by day and the moon shining by night, and waning and waxing without variation exactly according to the same number of days, and some of the stars running their courses and with orbits various and manifold, while others move without wandering, can fail to perceive that they certainly have a creator to guide them?<sup>52</sup>

For by a nod and by the power of the Divine Word of the Father that governs and presides over all, the heaven revolves, the stars move, the sun shines, the moon goes her circuit, and the air receives the sun's light and the aether his heat, and the winds blow: the mountains are reared on high, the sea is rough with waves, and the living things in it grow, the earth abides fixed...<sup>53</sup>

**Athanasius:** For if the sun too, which was made by Him, and which we see, as it revolves in the heaven, is not defiled by touching the bodies upon earth, nor is it put out by darkness, but on the contrary itself illuminates and cleanses them also, much less was the all-holy Word of God, Maker and Lord also of the sun, defiled by being made known in the body; on the contrary, being incorruptible.<sup>54</sup>

**Athenagoras:** To Him is for us to know who stretched out and vaulted the heavens, and fixed the earth in its place like a center.<sup>55</sup>

**Augustine:** Let not the philosophers, then, think to upset our faith with arguments from the weight of bodies; for I don't care to inquire why they cannot believe an earthly body can be in heaven, while the whole earth is suspended on nothing. For perhaps the world keeps its central place by the same law that attracts to its center all heavy bodies.<sup>56</sup>

**Augustine:** For an eclipse of the sun had also happened; and this was attributed to the divine power of Romulus by the ignorant multitude, who did not know that it was brought about by the fixed laws of the sun's course.<sup>57</sup>

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50 *Arnobius Against the Heathen*, Book 3, 350.

51 *Against the Heathen*, Part 1, No. 27.

52 *Against the Heathen*, Bk 1, Part III, 35.

53 *Against the Heathen*, Bk 1, Part III, 44.

54 *Against the Heathen*, Book II, 17.

55 *Why the Christians do not Offer Sacrifices*, Ch XIII.

56 *City of God*, Bk XIII, Ch 18.

57 *City of God*, Bk III, Ch 15.

**Augustine:** This he said either of those things of which he had just been speaking, the succession of generations, the orbit of the sun, the course of rivers, or else of all kinds of creatures that are born and die.<sup>58</sup>

**Augustine:** What is there so arranged by the Author of the nature of heaven and earth as the exactly ordered course of the stars? What is there established by laws so sure and inflexible? And yet, when it pleased Him who with sovereignty and supreme power regulates all He has created, a star conspicuous among the rest by its size and splendor changed its color, size, form, and, most wonderful of all, the order and law of its course! Certainly that phenomenon disturbed the canons of the astronomers, if there were any then, by which they tabulate, as by unerring computation, the past and future movements of the stars, so as to take upon them to affirm that this which happened to the morning star (Venus) never happened before nor since. But we read in the divine books that even the sun itself stood still when a holy man, Joshua the son of Nun, had begged this from God until victory should finish the battle he had begun; and that it even went back, that the promise of fifteen years added to the life of king Hezekiah might be sealed by this additional prodigy. But these miracles, which were vouchsafed to the merits of holy men, even when our adversaries believe them, they attribute to magical arts; so Virgil, in the lines I quoted above, ascribes to magic the power to “Turn rivers backward to their source, And make the stars forget their course.”<sup>59</sup>

**Commentary:** Some object that Augustine is wrong because the sun is not conspicuous for its size and splendor, since there are billions of stars as big or bigger than the sun. The fact is, science cannot prove that the stars are bigger than the sun, since even the strongest telescope sees every star only as a point of light. The “size” of a star is estimated based on various factors, all of which are theories, not proven scientific facts. Even in the realm of modern science, the sun is considered an average size star, with some star being much smaller and some being much bigger. More importantly, if for the sake of argument we agree that Augustine was wrong about the sun, still, the Church, under Pope Paul V and Pope Urban VIII during the trial of Galileo, did not say there was a patristic consensus on the size of the sun or that it was a matter of faith, since Scripture does not say that the sun is bigger or smaller than the stars. The only doctrine promulgated by the Church was that the sun moves around the earth and the earth is motionless. Augustine and the other Fathers had an absolute consensus on a motionless Earth because that is what Scripture clearly stated. Conversely, the Fathers did not have a consensus on the size of the stars.

**Augustine:** For who else save Moses smote the Egyptians with so many and mighty plagues, as when He led the people through the parted waters of the sea, when he obtained manna for them from heaven in their hunger, and water from the rock in their thirst? Who else save Joshua the son of Nun divided the stream of the Jordan for the people to pass over, and by the utterance of a prayer to God bridled and stopped the revolving sun? Who save Samson ever quenched his thirst with water flowing forth from the jawbone of a dead ass? Who save Elias was carried aloft in a chariot of fire?<sup>60</sup>

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58 *City of God*, Bk XII, Ch 13.

59 *City of God*, Book XXI, Ch 8.

60 *Tractates*, XCI, Ch XV, 24-25, 2.

**Augustine:** I desire to know the power and nature of time, by which we measure the motions of bodies, and say (for example) that this motion is twice as long as that. For, I ask, since “day” declares not the stay only of the sun upon the earth, according to which day is one thing, night another, but also its entire circuit from east even to east, according to which we say, “So many days have passed” (the nights being included when we say “so many days,” and their spaces not counted apart), since, then, the day is finished by the motion of the sun, and by his circuit from east to east, I ask, whether the motion itself is the day, or the period in which that motion is completed, or both? For if the first be the day, then would there be a day although the sun should finish that course in so small a space of time as an hour. If the second, then that would not be a day if from one sunrise to another there were but so short a period as an hour, but the sun must go round four-and-twenty times to complete a day. If both, neither could that be called a day if the sun should run his entire round in the space of an hour; nor that, if, while the sun stood still, so much time should pass as the sun is accustomed to accomplish his whole course in from morning to morning. I shall not therefore now ask, what that is which is called day, but what time is, by which we, measuring the circuit of the sun, should say that it was accomplished in half the space of time it was wont, if it had been completed in so small a space as twelve hours; and comparing both times, we should call that single, this double time, although the sun should run his course from east to east sometimes in that single, sometimes in that double time. Let no man then tell me that the motions of the heavenly bodies are times, because, when at the prayer of one the sun stood still in order that he might achieve his victorious battle, the sun stood still, but time went on. For in such space of time as was sufficient was that battle fought and ended. I see that time, then, is a certain extension. But do I see it, or do I seem to see it? Thou, O Light and Truth, wilt show me.<sup>61</sup>

**Basil:** There are inquirers into nature who with a great display of words give reasons for the immobility of the earth...It is not, they go on, without reason or by chance that the earth occupies the center of the universe...Do not then be surprised that the world never falls: it occupies the center of the universe, its natural place. By necessity it is obliged to remain in its place, unless a movement contrary to nature should displace it. If there is anything in this system which might appear probable to you, keep your admiration for the source of such perfect order, for the wisdom of God. Grand phenomena do not strike us the less when we have discovered something of their wonderful mechanism. Is it otherwise here? At all events let us prefer the simplicity of faith to the demonstrations of reason.<sup>62</sup>

**Basil:** If the sun, subject to corruption, is so beautiful, so grand, so rapid in its movement, so invariable in its course; if its grandeur is in such perfect harmony with and due proportion to the universe: if, by the beauty of its nature, it shines like a brilliant eye in the middle of creation; if finally, one cannot tire of contemplating it, what will be the beauty of the Sun of Righteousness?<sup>63</sup>

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61 *Confessions*, Bk XI, Ch XXIII, 30.

62 *Nine Homilies on the Hexameron*, 10.

63 *Homilies*, 6.

**Basil:** From thence the sun, returning to the summer solstice, in the direction of the North, gives us the longest days. And, as it travels farther in the air, it burns that which is over our heads, dries up the earth, ripens the grains and hastens the maturity of the fruits of the trees.<sup>64</sup>

**Basil:** It will not lead me to give less importance to the creation of the universe, that the servant of God, Moses, is silent as to shapes; he has not said that the earth is a hundred and eighty thousand furlongs in circumference; he has not measured into what extent of air its shadow projects itself whilst the sun revolves around it, nor stated how this shadow, casting itself upon the moon, produces eclipses.<sup>65</sup>

**Basil:** In the midst of the covering and veil, where the priests were allowed to enter, was situated the altar of incense, the symbol of the earth placed in the middle of this universe; and from it came the fumes of incense.<sup>66</sup>

**Basil:** Like tops, which after the first impulse, continue their evolutions, turning upon themselves when once fixed in their center; thus nature, receiving the impulse of this first command, follows without interruption the course of ages, until the consummation of all things.<sup>67</sup>

**Basil:** In the Beginning God made the Heaven and the Earth. **3.** Do not then imagine, O man! that the visible world is without a beginning; and because the celestial bodies move in a circular course, and it is difficult for our senses to define the point where the circle begins, do not believe that bodies impelled by a circular movement are, from their nature, without a beginning. Without doubt the circle (I mean the plane figure described by a single line) is beyond our perception, and it is impossible for us to find out where it begins or where it ends; but we ought not on this account to believe it to be without a beginning. Although we are not sensible of it, it really begins at some point where the draughtsman has begun to draw it at a certain radius from the center. Thus seeing that figures which move in a circle always return upon themselves, without for a single instant interrupting the regularity of their course, do not vainly imagine to yourselves that the world has neither beginning nor end. “For the fashion of this world passeth away” and “Heaven and earth shall pass away.” The dogmas of the end, and of the renewing of the world, are announced beforehand in these short words put at the head of the inspired history. “In the beginning God made.” That which was begun in time is condemned to come to an end in time. If there has been a beginning do not doubt of the end. Of what use to men are geometry, the calculations of arithmetic, the study of solids and far-famed astronomy, this laborious vanity, if those who pursue them imagine that this visible world is co-eternal with the Creator of all things, with God Himself; if they attribute to this limited world, which has a material body, the same glory as to the incomprehensible and invisible nature; if they cannot conceive that a whole, of which the parts are subject to corruption and change, must of necessity end by itself submitting to the fate of its parts? But they have become “vain in their imaginations and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.” Some have affirmed that heaven co-exists

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64 *Homilies*, 6, 8.

65 *Homilies*, IX.

66 *The Mystic Meaning of the Tabernacle*, Bk V, Ch VI; Clement of Rome, *Stromata*, Bk V.

67 *Homilies*, V, 10.



with God from all eternity; others that it is God Himself without beginning or end, and the cause of the particular arrangement of all things.

8. If I ask you to leave these vain questions, I will not expect you to try and find out the earth's point of support. The mind would reel on beholding its reasonings losing themselves without end. Do you say that the earth reposes on a bed of air? How, then, can this soft substance, without consistency, resist the enormous weight which presses upon it? How is it that it does not slip away in all directions, to avoid the sinking weight, and to spread itself over the mass which overwhelms it? Do you suppose that water is the foundation of the earth? You will then always have to ask yourself how it is that so heavy and opaque a body does not pass through the water; how a mass of such a weight is held up by a nature weaker than itself. Then you must seek a base for the waters, and you will be in much difficulty to say upon what the water itself rests.

9. Do you suppose that a heavier body prevents the earth from failing into the abyss? Then you must consider that this support needs itself a support to prevent it from failing. Can we imagine one? Our reason again demands yet another support, and thus we shall fall into the infinite, always imagining a base for the base which we have already found. And the further we advance in this reasoning the greater force we are obliged to give to this base, so that it may be able to support all the mass weighing upon it. Put then a limit to your thought, so that your curiosity in investigating the incomprehensible may not incur the reproaches of Job, and you be not asked by him, "Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened?" If ever you hear in the Psalms, "I bear up the pillars of it" see in these pillars the power which sustains it. Because what means this other passage, "He hath founded it upon the sea" if not that the water is spread all around the earth? How then can water, the fluid element which flows down every declivity, remain suspended without ever flowing? You do not reflect that the idea of the earth suspended by itself throws your reason into a like but even greater difficulty, since from its nature it is heavier. But let us admit that the earth rests upon itself, or let us say that it rides the waters, we must still remain faithful to thought of true religion and recognize that all is sustained by the Creator's power. Let us then reply to ourselves, and let us reply to those who ask us upon what support this enormous mass rests, "In His hands are the ends of the earth." It is a doctrine as infallible for our own information as profitable for our hearers.<sup>68</sup>

**Basil:** The philosophers of Greece have made much ado to explain nature, and not one of their systems has remained firm and unshaken, each being overturned by its successor. It is vain to refute them; they are sufficient in themselves to destroy one another.<sup>69</sup>

**John Cassian:** He was a man who, after the close of his life had been decreed and the day of his death determined by the Lord's sentence, prevailed by a single prayer to extend the limits set to his life by fifteen years, the sun returning by ten steps, on which it had already shone in its course towards its setting, and by its return dispersing those lines which the shadow that followed its course had already marked, and by this giving two days in one to the whole world, by a stupendous miracle contrary to the fixed laws of nature. Yet after signs so great and so incredible, after such

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68 *Nine Homilies of the Hexameron*, Homily I.

69 *Nine Homilies of the Hexameron*, Homily 3, 2.

immense proofs of his goodness, hear the Scripture tell how he was destroyed by his very successes.<sup>70</sup>

**Chrysostom:** “For they who are mad imagine that nothing stands still, yet this arises not from the objects that are seen, but from the eyes that see. Because they are unsteady and giddy, they think that the Earth turns round with them, which yet turns not, but stands firm. The derangement is of their own state, not from any affection of the element.”<sup>71</sup>

**Chrysostom:** Dost thou not see how God is daily blasphemed and mocked by believers and unbelievers, both in word and in deed? What then? Has He for this extinguished the sun, or stayed the course of the moon? Has He crushed the heavens and uprooted the earth? Has He dried up the sea? Has He shut up the fountains of waters, or confounded the air? Nay, on the contrary, He makes His sun to rise, His rain to descend, gives the fruits of the earth in their seasons, and thus supplies yearly nourishment to the blasphemers, to the insensible, to the polluted, to persecutors; not for one day or two, but for their whole life. Imitate Him then, emulate Him as far as human powers admit. Can thou not make the sun arise?<sup>72</sup>

**Chrysostom:** And what took place at a later period were few and at intervals; for example, when the sun stood still in its course, and started back in the opposite direction. And this one may see to have occurred in our case also. For so even in our generation, in the instance of him who surpassed all in ungodliness, I mean Julian, many strange things happened. Thus when the Jews were attempting to raise up again the temple at Jerusalem, fire burst out from the foundations, and utterly hindered them all.<sup>73</sup>

**Chrysostom:** And again, David saith of the sun, that “he is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a giant to run his course.” Seest thou how he places before thee the beauty of this star, and its greatness? For even as a bridegroom when he appears from some stately chamber, so the sun sends forth his rays under the East; and adorning the heaven as it were with a saffron-colored veil, and making the clouds like roses, and running unimpeded all the day; he meets no obstacle to interrupt his course. Beholdest thou, then, his beauty?<sup>74</sup>

**Chrysostom:** For He not only made it, but provided also that when it was made, it should carry on its operations; not permitting it to be all immoveable, nor commanding it to be all in a state of motion. The heaven, for instance, hath remained immoveable, according as the prophet says, “He placed the heaven as a vault, and stretched it out as a tent over the earth.” But, on the other hand, the sun with the rest of the stars, runs on his course through every day. And again, the earth is fixed, but the waters are continually in motion; and not the waters only, but the clouds, and the frequent and successive showers, which return at their proper season.<sup>75</sup>

**Chrysostom:** [Referring to the end of the world]: For the heaven shall be disturbed and the earth shall be shaken from its foundations by reason of the fury of the wrath of the Lord of Sabaoth, in

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70 *Twelve Books on the Institutes*, Bk XI, Ch X.

71 *Homily on Titus*, III.

72 *Homilies on First Timothy*, Homily VI.

73 *Homilies on Matthew*, Homily IV.

74 *Homilies to Antioch*, Homily X.

75 *Homilies to Antioch*, Homily XII.

the day when His wrath shall come upon us.” And again “windows” he saith “shall be opened from the Heaven, and the foundations of the earth shall be shaken, the earth shall be mightily confounded, the earth shall be bent low, it shall be perplexed with great perplexity, the earth shall stagger grievously like the drunkard and the reveller; the earth shall shake as a hut, it shall fall and not be able to rise up again: for iniquity has waxed mighty therein. And God shall set His hand upon the host of the Heaven in the height in that day, and upon the kingdoms of the earth, and He shall gather together the congregation thereof into a prison, and shall shut them up in a stronghold.” And Malachi speaking concordantly with these said” Behold the Lord almighty cometh, and who shall abide the day of His coming or who shall stand when He appeareth? for He cometh like a refiner’s fire, and like fullers soap: and He shall sit refining and purifying as it were silver, and as it were gold.”<sup>76</sup>

**Chrysostom:** Consider of how great value is the righteous man. Joshua the son of Nun said, “Let the sun stand still at Gibeon, the moon at the valley of Elom,” and it was so. Let then the whole world come, or rather two or three, or four, or ten, or twenty worlds, and let them say and do this; yet shall they not be able. But the friend of God commanded the creatures of his Friend, or rather he besought his Friend, and the servants yielded, and he below gave command to those above. Seest thou that these things are for service fulfilling their appointed course? This was greater than the [miracles] of Moses. Why (I ask)? Because it is not a like thing to command the sea and the heavenly [bodies]. For that indeed was also a great thing, yea very great, nevertheless it was not at all equal [to the other]. Why was this? The name of Joshua [JESUS], was a type. For this reason then, and because of the very name, the creation revered him. What then! Was no other person called Jesus? [Yes]; but this man was on this account so called in type; for he used to be called Hoshea. Therefore the name was changed: for it was a prediction and a prophecy. He brought in the people into the promised land, as JESUS [does] into heaven; not the Law; since neither did Moses [bring them in], but remained without.<sup>77</sup>

**Chrysostom:** Therefore it was, that Joshua, the son of Nun, said, “Let the sun stand still in Gibeon, and the moon over against the valley of Ajalon.” And again the prophet Isaiah made the sun to retrace his steps, under the reign of Hezekiah; and Moses gave orders to the air, and the sea, the earth, and the rocks. Elisha changed the nature of the waters; the Three Children triumphed over the fire. Thou seest how God hath provided for us on either hand; leading us by the beauty of the elements to the knowledge of His divinity; and, by their feebleness, not permitting us to lapse into the worship of them.<sup>78</sup>

**Clement of Rome:** The sun and moon, with the companies of the stars, roll on in harmony according to His command, within their prescribed limits, and without any deviation.<sup>79</sup>

**Commentary:** Some object that Clement is incorrect since the moon’s path changes and the distance to the Earth changes. Clement is correct, however, since the phrase “without deviation” does not refer to the few centimeters per year that the moon falls away from the earth, but to the

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<sup>76</sup> *Letters to Theodor*, Letter I, 12.

<sup>77</sup> *Homily on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Homily VIII.

<sup>78</sup> *Homily to Antioch*, Homily X.

<sup>79</sup> *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Ch XX.

“roll on in harmony,” that is, to the fact that it continually revolves around the earth without fail, year after year. In either case, neither the Fathers nor the Church ever claimed a consensus or teaching on the moon’s distance from the Earth, but only that the moon revolved around the Earth.

**Clement of Rome:** the Creator, long-suffering, merciful, the sustainer, the benefactor, ordaining love of men, counselling purity, immortal and making immortal, incomparable, dwelling in the souls of the good, that cannot be contained and yet is contained, who has fixed the great world as a centre in space, who has spread out the heavens and solidified the earth.<sup>80</sup>

**Clement of Rome:** For it is manifest even to the unbelieving and unskilful, that the course of the sun, which is useful and necessary to the world, and which is assigned by providence, is always kept orderly; but the courses of the moon, in comparison of the course of the sun, seem to the unskilful to be inordinate and unsettled in her waxings and wanings. For the sun moves in fixed and orderly periods: for from him are hours, from him the day when he rises, from him also the night when he sets; from him months and years are reckoned, from him the variations of seasons are produced; while, rising to the higher regions, he tempers the spring; but when he reaches the top of the heaven, he kindles the summer’s heats: again, sinking, he produces the temper of autumn; and when he returns to his lowest circle, he bequeaths to us the rigour of winter’s cold from the icy binding of heaven.<sup>81</sup>

**Cyril of Jerusalem:** And he, who could not hope to live because of the prophetic sentence, had fifteen years added to his life, and for the sign the sun ran backward in his course. Well then, for Hezekias’ sake the sun turned back but for Christ the sun was eclipsed, not retracing his steps, but suffering eclipse, and therefore shewing the difference between them, I mean between Hezekias and Jesus.<sup>82</sup>

**Cyril of Jerusalem:** The earth, which bears the same proportion to the heaven as the center to the whole circumference of a wheel, for the earth is no more than this in comparison with the heaven: consider then that this first heaven which is seen is less than the second, and the second than the third, for so far Scripture has named them...<sup>83</sup>

**Ephraim the Syrian:** The sun in his course teaches thee that thou rest from labour.<sup>84</sup>

**Eusebius:** The vast expanse of heaven, like an azure veil is interposed between those without, and those who inhabit his royal mansions: while round this expanse the sun and moon, with the rest of the heavenly luminaries (like torch-bearers around the entrance of the imperial palace), perform, in honor of their sovereign, their appointed courses; holding forth, at the word of his command, an ever-burning light to those whose lot is cast in the darker regions without the pale of heaven.<sup>85</sup>

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80 *Homily II, Ch XLV.*

81 *Pseudo-Clementine, Bk VIII, Ch XLV*

82 *Catechetical Lectures, II, 15.*

83 *Catechetical Lectures, VI, 3.*

84 *On Admonition and Repentance.*

85 *Oration of Constantine, Ch 1.*

**Eusebius:** To whom he has permitted the contemplation of celestial objects, and revealed the course and changes of the sun and moon, and the periods of the planets and fixed stars.<sup>86</sup>

**Eusebius:** Even so one and the same impression of the solar rays illumines the air at once, gives light to the eyes, warmth to the touch, fertility to the earth, and growth to plants. The same luminary constitutes the course of time, governs the motions of the stars, performs the circuit of the heavens, imparts beauty to the earth, and displays the power of God to all: and all this he performs by the sole and unaided force of his own nature.<sup>87</sup>

**Eusebius:** The sun and the moon have their settled courses. The stars move in no uncertain orbit round this terrestrial globe.<sup>88</sup>

**Gregory Nazianzus:** But who gave him motion at first? And what is it which ever moves him in his circuit, though in his nature stable and immovable, truly unwearied, and the giver and sustainer of life, and all the rest of the titles which the poets justly sing of him, and never resting in his course or his benefits? How comes he to be the creator of day when above the earth, and of night when below it? Or whatever may be the right expression when one contemplates the sun?<sup>89</sup>

**Gregory Nazianzus:** The sun is extolled by David for its beauty, its greatness, its swift course, and its power, splendid as a bridegroom, majestic as a giant; while, from the extent of its circuit, it has such power that it equally sheds its light from one end of heaven to the other, and the heat thereof is in no wise lessened by distance.<sup>90</sup>

**Commentary:** Some object that Gregory is incorrect, since there would be a great difference in the heat on Mercury as opposed to Pluto. Gregory may be using “lessened” in the sense of “non-existent,” that is, that a very distant planet will still take in heat from the sun, although it is a different amount of heat than it felt on Earth. In either case, neither the Fathers nor the Church ever claimed a consensus or teaching on the sun’s heat.

**Gregory Nazianzus:** There have been in the whole period of the duration of the world two conspicuous changes of men's lives, which are also called two Testaments, (a) or, on account of the wide fame of the matter, two Earthquakes; the one from idols to the Law, the other from the Law to the Gospel. And we are taught in the Gospel of a third earthquake, namely, from this Earth to that which cannot be shaken or moved.<sup>91</sup>

**Gregory Nazianzus:** Amalek shall be conquered, not with arms alone, but with the hostile hand of the righteous forming both prayers and the invincible trophy of the Cross; the River shall be cut off; the sun shall stand still; and the moon be restrained; walls shall be overthrown even without engines; swarms of hornets shall go before thee to make a way for Israel, and to hold the Gentiles in check; and all the other events which are told in the history after these and with these (not to make a long story) shall be given thee of God. Such is the feast thou art keeping to-day;

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86 *Oration of Constantine*, Ch VI.

87 *Oration of Constantine*, Ch XII.

88 *Life of Constantine*, Bk II, Ch. LVIII.

89 *Orations*, XXVIII, XXX.

90 *Funeral Orations for St. Basil*, 66.

91 *Orations*, 5, xxv.

and in this manner I would have thee celebrate both the Birthday and the Burial of Him Who was born for thee and suffered for thee.<sup>92</sup>

**Gregory of Nyssa:** “This is the book of the generation of heaven and earth,” saith the Scripture, when all that is seen was finished, and each of the things that are betook itself to its own separate place, when the body of heaven compassed all things round, and those bodies which are heavy and of downward tendency, the earth and the water, holding each other in, took the middle place of the universe; while, as a sort of bond and stability for the things that were made, the Divine power and skill was implanted in the growth of things, guiding all things with the reins of a double operation (for it was by rest and motion that it devised the genesis of the things that were not, and the continuance of the things that are), driving around, about the heavy and changeless element contributed by the creation that does not move, as about some fixed path, the exceedingly rapid motion of the sphere, like a wheel, and preserving the indissolubility of both by their mutual action, as the circling substance by its rapid motion compresses the compact body of the earth round about, while that which is firm and unyielding, by reason of its unchanging fixedness, continually augments the whirling motion of those things which revolve round it, and intensity is produced in equal measure in each of the natures which thus differ in their operation, in the stationary nature, I mean, and in the mobile revolution; for neither is the earth shifted from its own base, nor does the heaven ever relax in its vehemence, or slacken its motion.<sup>93</sup>

**Commentary:** Some object that Gregory is wrong in saying that the Earth is in the center of the universe because it is heavy and has a downward tendency. But we must recognize that the Fathers did not know all the scientific reasons for why things worked the way they do. This should be no surprise to moderns, since, to this very day, for example, modern science does not have an explanation for why an apple falls to the ground. All science has done for the last three hundred years since Newton is give us an equation for how fast the apple moves downward. Again, the only thing of interest with regard to the Fathers and cosmology is their consensus that the Earth is motionless, since that fact is expressed as an inerrant piece of divine revelation in Scripture.

**Gregory of Nyssa:** But, boasting as they do that they know these things, let them first tell us about the things of inferior nature; what they think of the body of the heavens, of the machinery which conveys the stars in their eternal courses, or of the sphere in which they move; for, however far speculation may proceed, when it comes to the uncertain and incomprehensible it must stop. For though any one say that another body, like in fashion (to that body of the heavens), fitting to its circular shape, checks its velocity, so that, ever turning in its course, it revolves conformably to that other upon itself, being retained by the force that embraces it from flying off at a tangent, yet how can he assert that these bodies will remain unspent by their constant friction with each other? And how, again, is motion produced in the case of two co-equal bodies mutually conformed, when the one remains motionless (for the inner body, one would have thought, being held as in a vice by the motionlessness of that which embraces it, will be quite unable to act); and

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92 *Second Oration on Easter*

93 *On the Making of Man*, 30, 1, 1.

what is it that maintains the embracing body in its fixedness, so that it remains unshaken and unaffected by the motion of that which fits into it?<sup>94</sup>

**Gregory of Nyssa:** And how does earth below form the foundation of the whole, and what is it that keeps it firmly in its place? What is it that controls its downward tendency? If any one should interrogate us on these and such-like points, will any of us be found so presumptuous as to promise an explanation of them? No! the only reply that can be given by men of sense is this: that He Who made all things in wisdom can alone furnish an account of His creation. For ourselves, “through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God,” as saith the Apostle.<sup>95</sup>

**Commentary:** Some object that Gregory is incorrect because the Earth does not have a downward tendency. But Gregory does not mean that “downward tendency” is an actual motion downward but a force going against any attempt to move the earth in the opposite direction, thus allowing it to remain motionless. In either case, neither the Fathers nor the Church ever claimed a consensus or teaching on what keeps the Earth motionless; only that it is motionless.

**Gregory of Nyssa:** “...the vault of heaven prolongs itself so uninterruptedly that it encircles all things with itself, and that the earth and its surroundings are poised in the middle, and that the motion of all the revolving bodies is round this fixed and solid center...”<sup>96</sup>

**Gregory of Nyssa:** And when you look at the waning and waxing moon you are taught other truths by the visible figure of that heavenly body, *viz.* that it is in itself devoid of light, and that it revolves in the circle nearest to the earth, and that it is lit by light from the sun; just as is the case with mirrors, which, receiving the sun upon them, do not reflect rays of their own, but those of the sun, whose light is given back from their smooth flashing surface. Those who see this, but do not examine it, think that the light comes from the moon herself. But that this is not the case is proved by this; that when she is diametrically facing the sun she has the whole of the disc that looks our way illuminated; but, as she traverses her own circle of revolution quicker from moving in a narrower space, she herself has completed this more than twelve times before the sun has once traveled round his; whence it happens that her substance is not always covered with light.<sup>97</sup>

**Commentary:** Some object that Gregory is incorrect because we now know that the planets move in an ellipse, not a circle. First, the planetary orbits are closer to circles than they are noticeable ellipses, so there is little wrong with estimating their orbits by characterizing them as circles. Second, modern science cannot prove the planets have elliptical orbits as opposed to circular orbits with various speeds in the orbit. What is known about planetary orbits is that the planet’s speed changes. One way to explain the speed change is to attribute it to an elliptical orbit in which the planet would move faster at its perihelion than its aphelion. In either case, neither the Fathers nor the Church ever claimed a consensus or teaching on circular versus elliptical orbits.

**Gregory Thaumaturgos:** And the life of men weareth away, as day by day, and in the periods of hours and years, and the determinate courses of the sun, some are ever coming, and others

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94 *Answer to Eunomius’ Second Book.*

95 *Answer to Eunomius’ Second Book.*

96 *On the Soul and Resurrection.*

97 *On the Soul and Resurrection.*

passing away. And the matter is like the transit of torrents as they fall into the measureless deep of the sea with a mighty noise. And all things that have been constituted by God for the sake of men abide the same: as, for instance, in that man is born of earth, and departs to earth again; that the earth itself continues stable; that the sun accomplishes its circuit about it perfectly, and rolls round to the same mark again; and that the winds in like manner, and the mighty rivers which flow into the sea, and the breezes that beat upon it, all act without forcing it to pass beyond its limits, and without themselves also violating their appointed laws.<sup>98</sup>

**Hippolytus:** When Hezekiah, king of Judah, was still sick and weeping, there came an angel, and said to him: “I have seen thy tears, and I have heard thy voice. Behold, I add unto thy time fifteen years. And this shall be a sign to thee from the Lord: Behold, I turn back the shadow of the degrees of the house of thy father, by which the sun has gone down, the ten degrees by which the shadow has gone down,” so that day be a day of thirty-two hours. For when the sun had run its course to the tenth hour, it returned again. And again, when Joshua the son of Nun was fighting against the Amorites, when the sun was now inclining to its setting, and the battle was being pressed closely, Joshua, being anxious lest the heathen host should escape on the descent of night, cried out, saying, “Sun, stand thou still in Gibeon; and thou moon, in the valley of Aijalon,” until I vanquish this people. And the sun stood still, and the moon, in their places, so that day was one of twenty-four hours. And in the time of Hezekiah the moon also turned back along with the sun, that there might be no collision between the two elemental bodies, by their bearing against each other in defiance of law. And Merodach the Chaldean, king of Babylon, being struck with amazement at that time, for he studied the science of astrology, and measured the courses of these bodies carefully – on learning the cause, sent a letter and gifts to Hezekiah, just as also the wise men from the east did to Christ.<sup>99</sup>

**Hippolytus:** We find in the commentaries, written by our predecessors, that day had thirty-two hours. For when the sun had run its course, and reached the tenth hour, and the shadow had gone down by the ten degrees in the house of the temple, the sun turned back again by the ten degrees, according to the word of the Lord, and there were thus twenty hours. And again, the sun accomplished its own proper course, according to the common law, and reached its setting. And thus there were thirty-two hours.<sup>100</sup>

**Hippolytus:** For what richer beauty can there be than that of the circle of heaven? And what form of more blooming fairness than that of earth’s surface? And what is there swifter in the course than the chariot of the sun? And what more graceful car than the lunar orb? And what work more wonderful than the compact mosaic of the stars? And what more productive of supplies than the seasonable winds? And what more spotless mirror than the light of day? And what creature more excellent than man?<sup>101</sup>

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98 *On Ecclesiastes*, Ch 1, 2.

99 Fragments, I, *Discourse on Hezekiah*. Hippolytus’ reference to “twenty-four hours” refers to the second leg of the forty-eight hour period of that unique long day.

100 Fragments, III, *Discourse on Hezekiah*.

101 *Discourse on the Holy Theophany*, 1.



**Hippolytus:** [Refuting the view of the Greek Ecphantus]: “And that the earth in the middle of the cosmical system is moved round its own center towards the east.”<sup>102</sup>

**Irenaeus:** The sun also, who runs through his orbit in twelve months, and then returns to the same point in the circle.<sup>103</sup>

**Jerome:** In Exodus we read that the battle was fought against Amalek while Moses prayed, and the whole people fasted until the evening. Joshua, the son of Nun, bade sun and moon stand still, and the victorious army prolonged its fast for more than a day.<sup>104</sup>

**Jerome:** The moon may dispute over her eclipses and ceaseless toil, and ask why she must traverse every month the yearly orbit of the sun. The sun may complain and want to know what he has done that he travels more slowly than the moon.<sup>105</sup>

**Jerome:** Starting thence she made her way up lower and higher Bethhoron, cities founded by Solomon but subsequently destroyed by several devastating wars; seeing on her right Ajalon and Gibeon where Joshua the son of Nun when fighting against the five kings gave commandments to the sun and moon, where also he condemned the Gibeonites (who by a crafty stratagem had obtained a treaty) to be hewers of wood and drawers of water.<sup>106</sup>

**John Damascene:** For it is night when the sun is under the earth, and the duration of night is the course of the sun under the earth from its rising till its setting.<sup>107</sup>

**Justin Martyr:** The former, after he had been named Jesus (Joshua), and after he had received strength from His Spirit, caused the sun to stand still.<sup>108</sup>

**Justin Martyr:** And again, when the land was given up to you with so great a display of power, that you witnessed the sun stand still in the heavens by the order of that man whose name was Jesus (Joshua), and not go down for thirty-six hours, as well as all the other miracles which were wrought for you as time served; and of these it seems good to me now to speak of another, for it conduces to your hereby knowing Jesus, whom we also know to have been Christ the Son of God, who was crucified, and rose again, and ascended to heaven, and will come again to judge all men, even up to Adam himself.<sup>109</sup>

**Mathetes:** By whom He made the heavens, by whom he enclosed the sea within its proper bounds, whose ordinances all the stars faithfully observe, from whom the sun has received the measure of his daily course to be observed, whom the moon obeys, being commanded to shine in the night,

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102 *The Prooemium*, Ch XIII.

103 *Against Heresies*, Bk I, Ch XVII, 1.

104 *Against Jovinianus*, Bk 2.

105 *Against the Pelagians*, Bk I, 1, 9.

106 *Letter to Eustochium*, 18.

107 *The Orthodox Faith*, Bk 2, Ch 7.

108 *Dialogue with Trypho*, Ch CXIII.

109 *Dialogue with Trypho*, Ch CXXXII.

and whom the stars also obey, following the moon in her course; by whom all things have been arranged, and placed within their proper limits.<sup>110</sup>

**Methodius:** And, of a truth, it seemed worth while to inquire also about the sun, what is the manner of his being set in the heaven; also what is the orbit he traverses; also whither it is that, after a short time, he retires; and why it is that even he does not go out of his proper course: but he, too, as one may say, is observing a commandment of a higher power, and appears with us just when he is allowed to do so, and departs as if he were called away.<sup>111</sup>

**Methodius:** Resuming then, let us first lay bare, in speaking of those things according to our power, the imposture of those who boast as though they alone had comprehended from what forms the heaven is arranged, in accordance with the hypothesis of the Chaldeans and Egyptians. For they say that the circumference of the world is likened to the turnings of a well-rounded globe, the earth having a central point. For its outline being spherical, it is necessary, they say, since there are the same distances of the parts, that the earth should be the center of the universe, around which, as being older, the heaven is whirling. For if a circumference is described from the central point, which seems to be a circle, for it is impossible for a circle to be described without a point, and it is impossible for a circle to be without a point, surely the earth consisted before all, they say, in a state of chaos and disorganization.<sup>112</sup>

**Minucius Felix:** Look also on the year, how it is made by the circuit of the sun; and look on the month, how the moon drives it around in her increase, her decline, and decay.<sup>113</sup>

**Tertullian:** In Exodus, was not that position of Moses, battling against Amalek by prayers, maintained as it was perseveringly even till “sunset,” a “late Station?” Think we that Joshua the son of Nun, when warring down the Amorites, had breakfasted on that day on which he ordered the very elements to keep a Station? The sun “stood” in Gibeon, and the moon in Ajalon; the sun and the moon “stood in station until the People was avenged of his enemies, and the sun stood in the mid heaven.” When, moreover, (the sun) did draw toward his setting and the end of the one day, there was no such day beforetime and in the latest time (of course, (no day) so long), “that God,” says (the writer), “should hear a man” – (a man,) to be sure, the sun’s peer, so long persistent in his duty – a Station longer even than late.<sup>114</sup>

**Memoirs of Edessa:** For look at the sun, and the moon, and the signs of the zodiac, and all the other creatures which are greater than we in some points, and see how individual freedom has been denied them, and how they are all fixed in their course by decree, so that they may do that only which is decreed for them, and nothing else. For the sun never says, I will not rise at my appointed time; nor the moon, I will not change, nor wane, nor wax; nor does any one of the stars say, I will not rise nor set.<sup>115</sup>

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110 *To Diognetes*, Ch 7.

111 *Concerning Free Will*.

112 *Banquet of the Ten Virgins*, Discourse VIII, Ch XIV.

113 *Octavius*, Ch xvii.

114 *On Fasting*, Ch X.

115 *Book of the Laws*.

**Alphonsus Ligouri** (d 1787): “Let us observe the sun, which with great speed goes around the Earth, and without ever varying its course.” (*Verità della Fede*, Cap III, 548, Latin: “Osserviamo il sole, che con velocissimo moto gira la terra, e senza mai variare il suo corso divide deversamente...”)

## **The Consensus of Church Fathers and Medieval Theologians on The Length of the Day in Genesis 1 as 24-Hours**

Of the Fathers which commented on Genesis 1, the majority specify that they understand the “day” as a 24-hour period, the portion of a week, or some other specific or literal designation which is not a long period of time.<sup>116</sup>

**Basil:** “Thus were created the evening and the morning. Scripture means the space of a day and a night....If it therefore says ‘one day,’ it is from a wish to determine the measure of day and night, and to combine the time that they contain. Now twenty-four hours fills up the space of one day – we mean of a day and of a night.”<sup>117</sup>

**Gregory of Nyssa:** Gregory confirms the views of Basil on the details of the Creation in the following passage: “Before I begin, let me testify that there is nothing contradictory in what the saintly Basil wrote about the creation of the world since no further explanation is needed. They should suffice and alone take second place to the divinely inspired Testament. Let anyone who hearkens to our attempts through a leisurely reading be not dismayed if they agree with our words. We do not propose a dogma which gives occasion for calumny; rather, we wish to express only our own insights so that what we offer does not detract from the following instruction. Thus let no one demand from me questions which seem to fall in line with common opinion either from holy Scripture or explained by our teacher. My task is not to fathom those matters before us which appear contradictory; rather, permit me to employ my own resources to understand the text’s objective. With God’s help we can fathom what the text means which follows a certain defined order regarding creation. ‘In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth’ [Gn 1:1], and the rest which pertains to the cosmogenesis which the six days encompass.”<sup>118</sup>

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116 One author noted his exasperation in finding anything but a literal interpretation in the Fathers, stating: “It was too speculative and difficult to appeal to the majority, who preferred to believe that the six days were really periods of time” (F. E. Robbins, *The Hexaemeral Literature*. University of Chicago, 1911, p. 22). Similarly, Stanley Jaki admits: “As I reviewed one after another the great commentaries on Genesis 1, I could not help feeling how close their authors were time and again to an interpretation which is strictly literal and yet at the same time puts that marvelous story at safe remove from any comparison with science, old and new” (*Genesis 1 Through the Ages*, p. xii).

117 *Hexameron* 2, 8.

118 *Hexameron*, PG 44:68-69, translated by Richard McCambly. Eustathius (270-337), Bishop of Antioch, called Basil’s commentary on Genesis 1 an “overall great commentary” (PG 18, cols 705-707).

**Ambrose:** “But Scripture established a law of twenty-four hours, including both day and night, should be given the name of day only, as if one were to say the length of one day is twenty-four hours in extent.”<sup>119</sup>

“In the beginning of time, therefore God created heaven and earth. Time proceeds from this world, not before the world. And the day is a division of time, not its beginning.”<sup>120</sup> “But now we seem to have reached the end of our discourse, since the 6<sup>th</sup> day is completed and the sum total of the work has been concluded.”<sup>121</sup>

**Victorinus:** “The Creation of the World: In the beginning God made the light, and divided it in the exact measure of twelve hours by day and by night, for this reason, doubtless, that day might bring over the night as an occasion of rest for men’s labours; that, again, day might overcome, and thus that labour might be refreshed with this alternate change of rest, and that repose again might be tempered by the exercise of day. “On the fourth day He made two lights in the heaven, the greater and the lesser, that the one might rule over the day, the other over the night.”<sup>122</sup>

**Ephrem the Syrian:** “‘In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth,’ that is, the substance of the heavens and the substance of the earth. So let no one think that there is anything allegorical in the works of the six days. No one can rightly say that the things that pertain to these days were symbolic.”<sup>123</sup>

**Theophilus:** “Of this six days’ work no man can give a worthy explanation and description of all its parts...on account of the exceeding greatness and riches of the wisdom of God which there is in the six days’ work above narrated.”<sup>124</sup>

**Irenaeus:** “For in as many days as this world was made, in so many thousand years shall it be concluded....For the day of the Lord is as a thousand years; and in six days created things were completed: it is evident, therefore, that they will come to an end at the sixth thousand year.”<sup>125</sup>

Among the Fathers, several of them show the same chronology in their eschatological view, that is, that, prophetically speaking, a day equates to one thousand years. Regardless whether the Fathers’ view of a six-millennium span for the world is correct, the only important fact for our purposes is that the ‘day = 1000 years’ schema confirms the Fathers’ belief that a day in Genesis 1 is less than one thousand years, and more specifically, that the day is precisely 24-hours. In other words, these Fathers did not believe that a day of Genesis was 1000 years. Their formula is certainly not 1000 years in Genesis 1 = 1000 years of the earth’s longevity; rather, a single day of 24 hours in Genesis = 1000 years of the earth’s longevity.<sup>126</sup>

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119 *Hexameron* 1:37, FC 42:42.

120 *Hexameron* 1:20, FC 42:19.

121 *Hexameron* 6:75, FC 42:282.

122 *On the Creation of the World*, NPNF1, vol. 7, pp. 341-343.

123 *Commentary on Genesis, I:1*, FC 91:74

124 *Autolycus* 2,12.

125 *Against Heresies* 5, 28, 3.

126 Although it is true that Augustine had at one time adopted the day = 1000 years schema, yet believed the days of Genesis were figurative, that is, accomplished in one instant rather than over six days, he later rejected the day = 1000 years schema. He writes: “...and they allege that this period may be defined six

**Lactantius:** “God completed the world and this admirable work of nature in the space of six days, as is contained in the secrets of Holy Scripture, and consecrated the seventh day....For there are seven days, by the revolutions of which in order the circles of years are made up....Therefore, since all the works of God were completed in six days, the world must continue in its present state through six ages, that is, six thousand years...For the great day of God is limited by a circle of a thousand years, as the prophet shows, who says, ‘In Thy sight, O Lord, a thousand years are as one day.’ And as God labored during those six days in creating such great works, so His religion and truth must labor during these six thousand years.”<sup>127</sup>

Here we notice how Lactantius, as other Fathers, believes in a six-thousand year time-span for the existence of the present heaven and earth. In order to arrive at this calculation, Lactantius must first understand the days of Genesis as twenty-four hour periods, which can then, by application of the “prophets” words, be an analogical prediction to the time of the demise of the Creation.

**Methodius:** “For you seem to me, O Theophila, to have discussed those words of the Scripture amply and clearly, and to have set them forth as they are without mistake. For it is a dangerous thing wholly to despise the literal meaning, as has been said, and especially of Genesis, where the unchangeable decrees of God for the constitution of the universe are set forth, in agreement with which, even until now, the world is perfectly ordered, most beautifully in accordance with a perfect rule, until the Lawgiver Himself having re-arranged it, wishing to order it anew, shall break up the first laws of nature by a fresh disposition. But, since it is not fitting to leave the demonstration of the argument unexamined – and, so to speak, half-lame – come let us, as it were completing our pair, bring forth the analogical sense, looking more deeply into the Scripture; for Paul is not to be despised when he passed over the literal meaning, and show that the word extend to Christ and the Church.”<sup>128</sup>

**Clement of Alexandria:** “For the creations on the different days followed in a most important succession; so that all things brought into existence might have honor from priority, created together in thought, but not being of equal worth. Nor was the creation of each signified by the voice, inasmuch as the creative work is said to have made them at once. For something must needs have been named first. Wherefore those things were announced first, from which came those that were second, all things being originated together from one essence by one power.”<sup>129</sup>

One can get a clearer picture of how literally Clement interprets Scriptural numbers in Book 1, Ch. 21 of the *Stromata*. There he enumerates a long series of chronological data. For our purposes, Clement specifies the length of time from Adam to Noah’s Flood to the very day:

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thousand years, as of six days. Nor have they heeded the words, ‘are but as one day which is past by’ for, when this was uttered, not a thousand years only had passed, and the expression, ‘as a watch in the night,’ ought to have warned them that they might not be deceived by the uncertainty of the seasons: for even if the six first days in which God finished His works seemed to give some plausibility to their opinion, six watches, which amount to eighteen hours, will not consist with that opinion.” (On the Psalms, Psalm 90, NPNF, vol. 8, p. 442).

127 *Institutes* 7, 14.

128 *Banquet of the Ten Virgins*, Discourse III, Ch 2.

129 *Stromata*, Book VI, Ch 16.

**Clement:** “From Adam to the deluge are comprised two thousand one hundred and forty-eight years, four days.”<sup>130</sup>

This would necessarily mean that Clement would have considered the first day of the above enumeration as beginning on the sixth day of creation, which would mean that the seventh day would be the second day, and so on.

**Epiphanius:** “Adam, who was fashioned from the earth on the sixth day and received breath, became a living being (for he was not, as some suppose, begun on the fifth day, and completed on the sixth; those who say have the wrong idea), and was simple and innocent, without any other name.”<sup>131</sup>

**Julius Africanus:** “For the Jews, deriving their origin from them as descendants of Abraham, having been taught a modest mind, and one such as becomes men, together with the truth by the spirit of Moses, have handed down to us, by their extant Hebrew histories, the number 5,500 years as the period up to the advent of the Word of salvation, that was announced to the world in the time of the sway of the Caesars.”<sup>132</sup>

In the same fragment, Julius explains that he understands the numbers of Genesis literally.

**Julius Africanus:** “Adam, when 230 years old, begets Seth; and after living another 700 years he died, that is, a second death (Fragment III); God decreed to destroy the whole race of the living by a flood, having threatened that men should not survive beyond 120 years....For the space of time meant was 100 years up to the flood in the case of the sinners of that time; for they were 20 years old (Fragment IV); Noe was 600 years old when the flood came on. From Adam, therefore, to Noe and the flood, are 2262 years.”<sup>133</sup>

**Cyril of Jerusalem:** “**In six days** God made the world....The sun, however resplendent with bright beams, yet was made to give light to man, yea, all living creatures were formed to serve us: herbs and trees were created for our enjoyment...The sun was formed by a mere command, but man by God’s hands.”<sup>134</sup> “...but the earth is from the waters: and before the whole six days’ formation of the things that were made, the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the water. The water was the beginning of the world...”<sup>135</sup>

**Hippolytus:** “But it was right to speak not of the ‘first day,’ but of ‘one day,’ in order that by saying ‘one,’ he might show that it returns on its orbit, and, while it remains one, makes up the week....On the first day God made what He made out of nothing.”<sup>136</sup>

Hippolytus also critiques the Greek philosophers for allegorizing the days of Genesis. He writes:

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130 Stromata, Book 1, Ch. 21 (ANF, Vol. 2, p. 332).

131 *Panarion* 1:1, translated by Phillip R. Amidon.

132 Extant Fragments, III, 1.

133 Fragment V.

134 *Catechetical Lectures* 12, 5.

135 *Catechetical Lectures*, 3, 5.

136 Genesis 1:5, 1:6; ANF, vol. 5, p. 163.

**Hippolytus:** “When, therefore, Moses has spoken of ‘the six days in which God made heaven and earth’...Simon, in a manner already specified, giving these and other passages of Scripture a different application from the one intended by the holy writers, deifies himself. When, therefore, the followers of Simon affirm that there are three days begotten before sun and moon, they speak enigmatically.”<sup>137</sup>

Hippolytus, as did some of the other Fathers who believed that the world would end in 6,000 years, shows his belief in a literal six days of creation by equating them with the 6,000 years. He writes: “Since, then, in six days God made all things, it follows that 6,000 years must be fulfilled.”<sup>138</sup>

**Chrysostom:** “Acknowledging that God could have created the world ‘in a single day, nay in a single moment,’ he chose ‘a sort of succession and established things by parts’...so that, accurately interpreted by that blessed prophet Moses, we do not fall in with those who are guided by human reasonings.”<sup>139</sup>

**Athanasius:** “For as to the separate stars or the great lights, not this appeared first, and that second, but in one day and by the same command, they were all called into being. And such was the original formation of the quadrupeds, and of birds, and fishes, and cattle, and plants; thus too has the race made after God’s Image come to be, namely men; for though Adam was formed out of earth, yet in him was involved the succession of the whole race.”<sup>140</sup>

We notice that Athanasius specifies that on the day the stars were made they were not made separately; rather, “in one day and by the same command, they were all called into being...” The same, of course, would be true on the fifth day when, as Athanasius says, “the quadrupeds, and of birds, and fishes, and cattle...” were made. By the words, “same command” Athanasius is not saying that the stars and animals were created together, but that each category of creation was made in one day by a specific command on that day. This is confirmed also in II, 49 as he says, “for it was not first one and then another, but all at once were constituted after their kinds.” “Kinds” refers to the specific creatures being made, as Athanasius goes on to say in the remainder of the context.

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137 *Refutation of All Heresies*, Book VI, Ch IX

138 Expressing a similar idea is the Donatist bishop, Tyconius: “Moreover, just as the whole time is reckoned in the first part of any time period, so also the last hour is reckoned as a whole day, or what is left of a thousand years is reckoned as a thousand years. The world’s age is six days, that is, six thousand years. In what is left of the sixth day, that is, of these 1000 years, the Lord was born, suffered and rose again.” (*The book of Rules*, 5); and Firmicus Maternus: “For after long ages, in the last reaches of time, that is, almost at the end of the week of the centuries, the Word of God commingled Itself with human flesh, to save mankind, to conquer death, to link the frailty of the human body with divine immortality.” (*The Error of the Pagan Religions*, 25:3). Hilary of Poitiers (315-367) does the same in *Commentary on Matthew* 17:1; 20:6; and *Tractatus* 1, 41; 2, 10 on his belief that the world would last 6000 years.

139 PG, *Homily* 3, col 35.

140 *Discourse Against the Arians*, Discourse II, 48.

**Athanasius:** “We begin the holy fast on the fifth day...and adding to it according to the number of those six holy and great days, which are the symbol of the creation of the world, let us rest and cease from fasting on the tenth day of the same...on the holy sabbath of the week.”<sup>141</sup>

The other Fathers who comment on Genesis 1 do not specify the length of a day.<sup>142</sup> There is only one patristic witness, however, who specifically and explicitly held that the days of Genesis were figurative. Origen, who is considered on the lower rung of patristic authority, had, because of his influence from the Greek Philo, interpretations of Scripture that were consistently prone to allegory at the expense of the literal meaning.

**Origen:** “Now who is there, pray, possessed of understanding, that will regard the statement as appropriate, that the first day, and the second, and the third, in which also both evening and morning are mentioned, existed without sun, and moon, and stars – the first day even without a sky. And who is found so ignorant as to suppose that God, as if He had been a husbandman, planted trees in paradise....The same style of Scriptural narrative occurs abundantly in the Gospels, as when the devil is said to have placed Jesus on a lofty mountain, that he might show Him from thence all the kingdoms of the world....And many other instances similar to this will be found in the Gospels by any one who will read them with attention, and will observe that in those narratives which appear to be literally recorded, there are inserted and interwoven things which cannot be admitted historically, but which may be accepted in a spiritual signification.”<sup>143</sup>

**Augustine:** Although Augustine entertained a six day creation in the early part of *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* (published in 400 A.D.), he felt there were too many difficulties with it and he ended up favoring a one-day creation in which everything was created simultaneously. In his book *Retractationes*, Augustine remarked on his original effort to form a literal interpretation of Genesis 1 in his work *Genesis Against the Manicheans*, written in 388 A.D. He intended Genesis 1 to be a literally interpreted but with the resignation, “there are more questions raised than answers found and of the answers found not many have been established for certain.”<sup>144</sup>

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141 *Easter Letter*, 10

142 Conspicuously absent from this long list of Fathers is Jerome, a contemporary of Augustine, and one of the Church’s greatest exegetes of Scripture. Unfortunately, even though he had a superior knowledge of the original Hebrew, Jerome did not offer any detailed discussion on the six-day creation in Genesis 1. The only remarks come from his essay titled *Hebraic Questions about Genesis* which includes only four short remarks on Genesis 1 (that “in the beginning” referred to Christ; the *ruach* hovering referred to the Holy Spirit; a remark about the gathering of waters; and that the seventh day was not a complete day of rest).

143 *De Principiis*, Book IV, Ch 1; ANF, v. 4, p. 365.

144 Various evolutionists who reference the Fathers hold that Augustine believed in evolution. Eldon J. Gardner of Utah State University writes: “St. Augustine...favored an allegorical interpretation of the book of Genesis in the Bible and openly promoted an evolutionary concept as opposed to special creation” (*History of Life Science*, Burgess, 1960, p. 93). Henry Fairfield Osborn of Columbia University and the American Museum of Natural History writes that Augustine “sought a naturalistic interpretation of the Mosaic record...and taught that in the institution of nature we should not look for miracles but for the laws of nature” (*From the Greeks to Darwin*, 2nd ed. Charles Scribner and Sons, 1929, p. 11). In the college textbook *Principles of Organic Evolution*, evolutionist Arthur Ward Lindsay of Dennison University writes: “...several of the church fathers expressed ideas of organic evolution even though the trend of ecclesiastical thought led more readily into other lines of reasoning.” He claims that Gregory of Nyssa,



One of his Augustine's chief difficulties regarded the creation of the angels, since neither Genesis 1 or 2 specified *when* they were created. For his own reasons, many of them due to his penchant for Platonism and his fearlessness to ask how things came to be as they are, Augustine felt obliged to include the angels somewhere in the Genesis 1 narrative.<sup>145</sup> Thus he postulated that the creation of Light in Genesis 1:3 referred to the angels.<sup>146</sup> He writes:

What then is the meaning of the repetition in the case of the other works? Perhaps we have here an indication that on the first day, the day on which the light was made, under the term "light" is revealed the creation of spiritual and intellectual creatures, by which we understand all the holy angels and virtues....It is no wonder that when the holy angels were formed by the first creation of light, God first showed them that He was going to create the works to follow. And indeed they would not have known the mind of God except in so far as He Himself had revealed it to them.<sup>147</sup>

Using this as his anchor, Augustine proceeds to interpret the rest of Genesis 1. He then reasons that, since Genesis 1 does not mention the "night" in any of its days, this suggests that the focus is on the "day." He writes:

The angels...have been made to share in the truth. Through all six days, therefore, no mention is made of night, but after the evening and morning there is one day; again after evening and morning, another day....These days have their nights, but it is the days, not the nights, that are described. For night belongs to day, not day to night, when the holy angels of heaven refer their knowledge of creatures in themselves to the honor and love of Him in whom they contemplate the eternal reasons by which creatures were made.<sup>148</sup>

He says very much the same in the *City of God* written some two decades later:

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Basil, Augustine and Aquinas "expressed belief in the symbolic nature of the Biblical story of creation and in their comments made statements clearly related to the concept of evolution" (C. V. Mosby, 1952, p. 21). Hugh Ross, a Christian theistic evolutionist, cites the same personalities in his book *The Fingerprint of God*, 2nd ed. (Promise, 1991, pp. 141ff). W. R. Thompson, Ph.D., a Catholic Creationist, who wrote a now famous 14-page introduction to a 1955 edition of Darwin's *Origin of Species* which challenged evolution's credibility, writes: "As early as 1921, Canon H. de Dolodot in *La Darwinisme*, issued under the auspices of the University of Louvain, cites St. Augustine as holding as certain the theory of absolute natural evolution of living being to the human body itself."

145 One of Augustine's favorite verses was Wisdom 11:20 "But you have disposed all things by measure and number and weight." He writes: "Now we are seeking to know whether the Creator, who has ordered all things in measure, and number, and weight, has assigned to the waters not just one proper place around the earth, but another also above the heavens, a region which has been spread around and established beyond the limits of the air" (*Confessions*, Bk 2, Ch 1, 2).

146 On this question, Aquinas cites Basil, Strabus and Bonaventure: "The empyrean heaven rests only on the authority of Strabus and Bede, and also of Basil; all of whom agree in one respect, namely, in holding it to be the place of the blessed. Strabus and Bede say that as soon as it was created it was filled with angels; and Basil (Hom. 2 in *Hexameron*) says: 'Just as the lost are driven into the lowest darkness, so the reward for worthy deeds is laid up in the light beyond this world, where the just shall obtain the abode of rest.'" *Summa Excursion*, Creation in Six Days, Ques. 66, Art. 3. Zwingli was the only other exegete to hold that the light of Genesis 1:3 referred to the angels.

147 *Literal Meaning of Genesis*, Bk. 2, Ch 8, Nos.16-18.

148 *Literal Meaning of Genesis*, Bk 4, Ch 25, No. 42.

...which is the name given to the sky between the waters above and those beneath, that is the second day; when in the knowledge of the earth, and the sea, and all things that grow out of the earth, that is the third day; when in the knowledge of the greater and less luminaries, and all the stars, that is the fourth day; when in the knowledge of all animals that swim in the waters and that fly in the air, that is the fifth day; when in the knowledge of all animals that live on the earth, and of man himself, that is the sixth day.<sup>149</sup>

From this he reasons that all creation was made simultaneously. He writes:

Hence, we can no longer take “day” to mean the form of the work created and “evening” its completion and “morning” the beginning of another work in the account of creation...But that day, which God has made, recurs in connection with His works not by a material passage of time but by spiritual knowledge, when the blessed company of angels contemplate from the beginning in the Word of God the divine decree to create...Finally, they refer this knowledge of the creature to the praise of eternal Truth, where they had beheld the form of the work to be produced, and this is the meaning of the statement that it was morning. Thus, in all the days of creation there is one day, and it is not to be taken in the sense of our day, which we reckon by the course of the sun.<sup>150</sup>

It is apparent that Augustine more or less forces himself to reject the passage of six literal days due to his self-imposed requirement to include the angels in Genesis 1. Whether inadvertently or by design, the angels become Augustine’s central focus in Genesis 1, since everything that is made is arranged for their contemplation. In effect, once the angels are included in Genesis 1:3, everything else in the chapter must fit in, and Augustine does his best to make them fit.

Although Augustine had a penchant for mixing spiritual and literal interpretations in his biblical exegesis,<sup>151</sup> his attempt at such a methodology in Genesis 1 is very unusual, as even he admits. Even though Augustine makes a concerted effort to fashion a literal interpretation of Genesis, throughout the discourse he slips into many spiritual interpretations, often catching himself, after long spiritual descriptions, to get back on track with the literal interpretation. Because of the difficulties that Augustine imagined with a strict literal interpretation of Genesis, whether by design or habit, the spiritual interpretations become somewhat of a controlling factor in his understanding, the most prominent, of course, is his conclusion to interpret the light of Genesis as a reference to angels. As such, Augustine is isolated from all the rest of the Fathers. It can be safely concluded that Augustine did not get his interpretation of Genesis 1 from Tradition. In fact,

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149 *City of God*, Bk XI, Ch 7.

150 *Ibid*, Ch 26, No. 43.

151 Augustine writes: “Brethren, I must tell you, and teach you according to my poor abilities, which the Lord giveth me for your benefit, and must convey to you what ye may hold as a rule in the interpretation of all Scripture. Everything that is said or done is to be understood either in its literal signification, or else it signifies something figuratively; or at least contains both of these at once, both its own literal interpretation, and a figurative signification also” (*Sermons*, xxxix). “Wherefore, though light and darkness are to be taken in their literal signification in these passages of Genesis in which it is said, “God said, Let there be light, and there was light,” and “God divided the light from the darkness,” yet, for our part, we understand these two societies of angels, the one enjoying God, the other swelling with pride...” (*City of God*, Bk XI, Ch 33).

no Father before Augustine had an overriding concern about *when* the angels were created, and Scripture itself did not seem to share the concern.

As the anomalies in Augustine's view mount, his interpretation becomes increasingly difficult to accept. In Scripture, man's creation is specified with the words "and let us make man in our image," as well as being reiterated throughout Scripture (Gn 5:1; Dt 4:32; Is 45:12; Ec 7:29; Jm 3:9). If, as Augustine claims, the angels are the focus of the first verses of Genesis 1, then why would the text not just mention the word "angels" as even Genesis 1:26 mentions the word "man" when man is created? What is to be gained for the ancient writer by being so cryptic, especially when everything else in the chapter is called by its common name? Moreover, "light" is never specifically identified with angels in Scripture. If there is mention of luminous bodies as representing angels (Jb 38:7), men and God are also signified as such (2Pt 1:19; Ap 22:16; Ml 4:2), and thus, spiritually speaking, there is no distinction for the angels in regard to light. In addition, Scripture makes no issue of "angelic contemplation." All in all, Augustine's self-imposed "angelic" interpretation puts a tremendous strain on the rest of Genesis 1's details, and it appears that it is a burden that the text simply cannot bear.

But Augustine has another "proof text" for his view. He begins by posing the following question:

But if the angelic mind can grasp simultaneously all that the sacred text sets down separately in an ordered arrangement according to causal connection, were not all these things also made simultaneously, the firmament itself, the waters gathered together and the bare land that appeared, the plants and trees that sprang forth, the lights and the stars that were established, the living creatures in the water and on the earth? Or were they rather created at different times on appointed days?<sup>152</sup>

Then Augustine brings his proof text:

In this narrative of creation [Genesis 1-2] Holy Scripture has said of the Creator that He completed His works in six days; and elsewhere, without contradicting this, it has been written of the same Creator that He created all things together. It follows, therefore, that He, who created all things together, simultaneously created these six days, or seven, or rather the one day six or seven times repeated.<sup>153</sup>

We notice that Augustine is not quite sure how the simultaneity of creation works itself out numerically. Be that as it may, Augustine's citation of "...and elsewhere...it has been written...He created all things together" is referring to Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) 18:1. The Greek of the Septuagint reads: ὁ ζῶν εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα ἐκτίσεν τὰ πάντα κοινῇ ("He who lives forever has created all things in common"). The word in question is κοινῇ (koine), which normally means "in common" or "without exception." But the Latin Vulgate from which Augustine read had translated κοινῇ with the words *omnia simul* in the sentence, "*qui vivit in aeternum creavit omnia simul Deus solus iustificabitur et manet invictus rex in aeternum.*"<sup>154</sup> The clause *omnia simul* means "at one time" or "altogether," but this is obviously a questionable translation of the Greek κοινῇ. Sirach 18:1, at least in the original Greek, is not saying that creation was made

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<sup>152</sup> *Literal Meaning of Genesis*, Bk. 4, Ch. 33, No 51.

<sup>153</sup> *Literal Meaning of Genesis*, Bk 4, Ch 33, No 52.

<sup>154</sup> The Douay-Rheims, which translates the Latin Vulgate, reads: "He that liveth for ever created all things together."

simultaneously or altogether, but of all that was made the Lord created it all, without exception. The context of the passage certainly bears this out.<sup>155</sup>

The reason this mistake may have happened is that Augustine's knowledge of Greek was at an elementary level. When he was beginning his commentary on Genesis in 401 AD, his abilities in Greek were poor.<sup>156</sup> It wasn't until Augustine was an old man that he had a modest reading ability of Greek. Unfortunately, Augustine was limited to the Vulgate's translation of Sirach 18:1, and thus he misinterpreted the meaning of the verse. Hence, his "proof text" cannot hold the weight Augustine put on it.<sup>157</sup>

But Augustine has yet another proof text that he feels is his strongest argument. Referring to Genesis 2:4-9 he writes:

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155 "He who lives for ever created the whole universe; the Lord alone will be declared righteous...To none has he given power to proclaim his works; and who can search out his mighty deeds? Who can measure his majestic power? And who can fully recount his mercies? It is not possible to diminish or increase them, nor is it possible to trace the wonders of the Lord" (Sirach 18:1-6, RSV).

156 *Ancient Christian Writers*, ed. Johannes Quasten, et al, Vol. 1, New York: Newman Press, 1982, p. 5.

157 Another possibility for the Vulgate's choice of *simul* for κοινός is that there is a slight semantic overlap between the two words. This usually happens when time and material things are inadvertently interchanged. For example, although *simul*'s common meaning focuses on time (and thus it is usually translated as "at the same time" or "simultaneous"), it could also be confused with the idea of physical solidarity. If, for example, the people of a city stand together against an opposing army, it could be said that the people are both: (a) standing together, at the same time, against the army, and (b) standing together in solidarity against the army. Hence, the entire citizenry's simultaneous standing against the enemy will overlap in meaning with their common solidarity as one united group against the enemy. Naturally, if all the citizens did not stand together simultaneously against the enemy, it could not be said that they were "all together" in their opposition against the enemy. Barring such an example of semantic overlap, time is normally understood as a separate entity from space. Indeed, the normal meaning of "simul" deals with time, not commonality. The Latin Vulgate demonstrates that κοινός normal meaning is "in common," since out of 59 uses of κοινός and its derivatives, only three are translated "simul" by the Vulgate (Sirach 18:1; Sirach 50:17; and Susanna 1:14), and in those three instances, it is due precisely to the semantic "overlap" described above. An examination of the other two instances besides Sirach 18:1 will illustrate this crucial point. The Catholic Revised Standard Version of Sirach 50:17 reads: "Then all the people together (koine/simul) made haste and fell to the ground upon their faces." This verse offers a perfect illustration of the semantic overlap between "simul" and "koine." The people "all made haste" (physically and spatially, as one, "common" physical grouping, "all together"). But they also necessarily made haste "at once," that is, "at one time." It is important to note, however, that when the people "fell to the ground," they did not fall at the same precise instant. Like the members of any crowd acting on a common impulse, the members of this crowd fell to the ground at more or less the same time. In a similar sense the creation of all things took place "at once" – with relative simultaneity – but not "at the same precise instant." Susanna 1:14 illustrates the same phenomenon. The Catholic Revised Standard Version reads: "And then together (simul/koine) they arranged for a time when they could find her alone." Here two men, as one physical group, jointly, "in common" ("all together"), arranged something. But they also arranged something "at the same time." In light of these examples one could say that *simul* in Sirach 18:1 was not so much a mistranslation of κοινός as it was a translation susceptible to misinterpretation through a narrowing of the semantic field. In light of the two other places in the Vulgate where κοινός is translated as *simul*, it is logical to conclude that *simul* in Sirach 18:1 was also meant to join together the two meanings of physical entirety and temporal simultaneity. For an Old Testament author (or translator) who believed in the six days of creation, this is hardly surprising, since God did create the universe in its entirety and at one time, the hexameron.

Since by the terms “heaven” and “earth” the sacred writer...wished us to understand here the whole of creation, we might ask why he added, ‘and every green thing of the field’? I believe that he put the matter in this way in order to emphasize what day he spoke of when he said, ‘When day was made...But when we recall the order in which creatures were made, we find that all the grass of the field was created on the third day, before the sun was made (for it was made on the fourth day)...When, therefore, we hear, ‘When day was made, God made heaven and earth, and all the grass of the field,’ we are admonished to think of that day which may perhaps be a corporeal thing consisting in some sort of light unknown to us, or a spiritual thing made up of the united company of angels.<sup>158</sup>

He concludes:

Now perhaps we have here a confirmation of what we tried to show in the previous book, that God created everything at one time. The earlier narrative [Genesis 1] stated that all things were created and finished on six successive days, but now [Genesis 2] to one day everything is assigned, under the terms “heaven” and “earth,” with the addition also of “plants.” If, therefore, as I have already said, “day” were understood in its ordinary sense, the reader would be corrected when he recalled that God had ordered the earth to produce the green things of the field before the establishment of that day that is marked by the sun. Hence, I do not now appeal to another book of Holy Scripture to prove that God created all things together [Sirach 18:1]. But the very next page following the first narrative of creation testifies to this when it tell us, ‘When day was made, God made heaven and earth and every green thing of the field. Hence you must understand that this day was seven times repeated, to make up the seven days.’<sup>159</sup>

Here again, however, not knowing any of the Hebrew language, Augustine makes conclusions that are simply not supported by the original text.<sup>160</sup> The specific phrasing of Gn 2:4 “*in* the day,” from the Hebrew בְּיוֹם (*beyom*) creates a Hebrew idiom meaning “when God made,” and thus, on strict grammatical grounds, this would disallow Gn 2:4’s “day” from disqualifying Gn 1:5’s “day” from being a twenty-four-hour day.

In addition, whenever the Hebrew *yom* (“day”) is used with an ordinal number in Scripture, it never refers to an indefinite or long period of time. In Genesis 1, there are six ordinal numbers enumerated: “the first day...the second day...the third day...” and so on until the sixth day. In contrast, Gn 2:4’s “day” does not have an ordinal number attached to it, which would eliminate it from comparison to Genesis 1.

All in all, the reason we can levy these critiques on Augustine’s view of Genesis is that he invited such criticism himself. In *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* he writes:

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158 *Literal Meaning of Genesis*, Bk 5, Ch 2, No. 4.

159 *Literal Meaning of Genesis*, Bk 5, Ch 3, No 6.

160 In answering an Objection, neither does Aquinas seem to catch the difference between the Greek and Latin, but still manages to give an adequate answer by making a distinction in the word *creation*: “Objection 2: Further, it is said (Ecclesiasticus 18:1): ‘He that liveth for ever, created all things together.’ But this would not be the case if the days of these works were more than one. Therefore they are not many but one only. Reply to Objection 2: God created all things together so far as regards their substance in some measure formless. But He did not create all things together, so far as regards that formation of things which lies in distinction and adornment. Hence the word creation is significant” (*Summa Theologica*, Bk 1, Ques. 74, Art 2).

Whoever, then, does not accept the meaning that my limited powers have been able to discover of conjecture but seeks in the enumeration of the days of creation a different meaning, which might be understood not in a prophetic or figurative sense, but literally and more aptly, in interpreting the works of creation, let him search and find a solution with God's help. I myself may possibly discover some other meaning more in harmony with the words of Scripture. I certainly do not advance the interpretation given above in such a way as to imply that no better one can ever be found, although I do maintain that Sacred Scripture does not tell us that God rested after feeling weariness and fatigue.<sup>161</sup>

In *The City of God*, he is a bit more cautious about his view:

But simultaneously with time the world was made, if in the world's creation change and motion were created, as seems evident from the order of the first six or seven days. For in these days the morning and evening are counted, until, on the sixth day, all things which God then made were finished, and on the seventh the rest of God was mysteriously and sublimely signalized. What kind of days these were it is extremely difficult, or perhaps impossible for us to conceive, and how much more to say!<sup>162</sup>

At many points we find Augustine still vacillating between the literal and spiritual interpretation. For example, regarding the light of the first day he writes in *The City of God*:

And first of all, indeed, light was made by the word of God, and God, we read, separated it from the darkness, and called the light Day, and the darkness Night; but what kind of light that was, and by what periodic movement it made evening and morning, is beyond the reach of our senses; neither can we understand how it was, and yet must unhesitatingly believe it. For either it was some material light, whether proceeding from the upper parts of the world, far removed from our sight, or from the spot where the sun was afterwards kindled; or under the name of light the holy city was signified, composed of holy angels and blessed spirits, the city of which the apostle says, 'Jerusalem which is above is our eternal mother in heaven.'<sup>163</sup>

At times Augustine seems far from his spiritual interpretation, as it seems here in the *Confessions* (400 AD), written a year before *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*:

For very wonderful is this corporeal heaven, of which firmament, between water and water, the second day after the creation of light, Thou saidst, Let it be made, and it was made. Which firmament Thou calledst heaven, that is, the heaven of this earth and sea, which Thou madest on the third day, by giving a visible shape to the formless matter which Thou madest before all days.<sup>164</sup>

In other works, Augustine applies his spiritual interpretation in other directions:

In the creation God finished His works in six days and rested on the seventh. The history of the world contains six periods marked by the dealings of God with men. The first period is from

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161 Bk 4, Ch 28, No 45.

162 *City of God*, Bk XI, Ch 6.

163 *City of God*, Bk XI, Ch 7.

164 *Confessions*, Bk XII, Ch 8.

Adam to Noah; the second, from Noah to Abraham; the third, from Abraham to David; the fourth, from David to the captivity in Babylon; the fifth, from the captivity to the advent of lowliness of our Lord Jesus Christ; the sixth is now in progress, and will end in the coming of the exalted Savior to judgment. What answers to the seventh day is the rest of the saints, not in this life, but in another.<sup>165</sup>

While we do not have a statement from Augustine that he viewed the days of Genesis as twenty-four-hour periods, Augustine does stipulate that he believes the days of the Flood to be twenty-four hour days:

It is plain that the day then was what it now is, a space of four-and-twenty hours, determined by the lapse of day and night; the month then equal to the month now, which is defined by the rise and completion of one moon; the year then equal to the year now, which is completed by twelve lunar months, with the addition of five days and a fourth to adjust it with the course of the sun. It was a year of this length which was reckoned the six hundredth of Noah's life, and in the second month, the twenty-seventh day of the month, the flood began, a flood which, as is recorded, was caused by heavy rains continuing for forty days, which days had not only two hours and a little more, but four, and-twenty hours, completing a night and a day. And consequently those antediluvians lived more than 900 years, which were years as long as those which afterwards Abraham lived 175 of, and after him his son Isaac 180, and his son Jacob nearly 150, and some time after, Moses 120, and men now seventy or eighty, or not much longer, of which years it is said, "their strength is labor and sorrow."<sup>166</sup>

All in all, as regards evolutionary theory, Augustine cannot come to its aid. For whether the Creation was created in Augustine's "one day," or over six twenty-four-hour days, the fact remains that Augustine believed all of creation came from nothing and occurred instantaneously, in a single moment, not over a long period of time. If anything, Augustine's "day" is infinitesimally less than twenty-four hours, not infinitesimally more.

## The Medieval Theologians

**Aquinas:** "It is necessary to say that God brings things into being from nothing...(ST, I, Q 45, a 2, ad 2); Creation does not mean the building up of a composite thing from pre-existing principles but it means that the composite is created so that it is brought into being at the same time with all its principles."<sup>167</sup>

**Aquinas:** Reply to Objection #7: "The words 'one day' are used when day is first instituted, to denote that one day is made up of twenty-four hours. Hence, by mentioning 'one,' the measure of one natural day is fixed. Another reason may be to signify that a day is completed by the return of the sun to the point from which it commenced its course. And yet another, because at the

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<sup>165</sup> *Contra Faustus*, 400 AD, Bk XII, 8.

<sup>166</sup> *City of God*, Bk 15, Ch 14. As some of the other Fathers believed, Augustine also held that the world in his day was less than 6,000 years old: "...according to Scripture, less than 6000 years have elapsed since He began to be..."(*City of God*, Bk 12, Ch 12).

<sup>167</sup> *Summa Theologica*, I, Q 45, a 4, ad 2.

completion of a week of seven days, the first day returns which is one with the eighth day. The three reasons assigned above are those given by Basil [Homily 2 in *Hexameron*].<sup>168</sup>

**Aquinas:** Reply to Objection #5: “According to Augustine (*De Genesi Contra Manichaeos*), primary matter is meant by the word earth, where first mentioned, but in the present passage it is to be taken for the element itself. Again it may be said with Basil (*Homily 4 in Hexameron*), that the earth is mentioned in the first passage in respect of its nature, but here in respect of its principal property, namely, dryness. Wherefore it is written: “He called the dry land, Earth.” It may also be said with Rabbi Moses, that the expression, “He called,” denotes throughout an equivocal use of the name imposed. Thus we find it said at first “He called the light Day”: for the reason that later on a period of twenty-four hours is also called day, where it is said “there was evening and morning, one day.”<sup>169</sup>

But it [the cosmos] was not made from something; otherwise the matter of the world would have preceded the world...Therefore, it must be said that the world was made from nothing.<sup>170</sup>

As for the issue of the majority of Fathers having a different view of the Creation days than Augustine, Aquinas tries to find a middle road, but appears to end up siding with the former due to the need to explain how the substance obtained its different forms. He explains that the different forms could only come about on successive days:

**Aquinas:** “On the contrary, It is written (Genesis 1), ‘The evening and the morning were the second day...the third day,’ and so on. But where there is a second and third there is more than one. There was not, therefore, only one day. I answer that, on this question Augustine differs from other expositors. His opinion is that all the days that are called seven, are one day represented in a sevenfold aspect (*De Genesi ad literam* iv, 22; *De Civitate Dei* xi, 9; *Ad Orosium* xxvi); while others consider there were seven distinct days, not one only. Now, these two opinions, taken as explaining the literal text of Genesis, are certainly widely different. For Augustine understands by the word day, the knowledge in the mind of the angels, and hence, according to him, the first day denotes their knowledge of the first of the Divine works, the second day their knowledge of the second work, and similarly with the rest. Thus, then, each work is said to have been wrought in some one of these days, inasmuch as God wrought in some one of these days, inasmuch as God wrought nothing in the universe without impressing the knowledge thereof on the angelic mind; which can know many things at the same time, especially in the Word, in Whom all angelic knowledge is perfected and terminated. So the distinction of days denotes the natural order of the things known, and not a succession in the knowledge acquired, or in the things produced. Moreover, angelic knowledge is appropriately called day, since light, the cause of day, is to be

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168 *Summa Theologica*, Bk 1, Question 74, Art 3. Objection #7: “Further, ‘first,’ not ‘one,’ corresponds to ‘second’ and ‘third.’ It should therefore have been said that, ‘The evening and the morning were the first day,’ rather than ‘one day.’”

169 *Summa Theologica*, Bk 1, Ques. 69, Art 1 Objection #5: “Further, the earth is given its name at its first creation by the words, “In the beginning God created heaven and earth.” Therefore the imposition of its name on the third day seems to be recorded without necessity.”

170 *Ibid.*, *Summa Theologica*, Q. 46, art. 2, 248-249.



found in spiritual things, as Augustine observes (*De Genesi ad literam* iv, 28). In the opinion of the others, however, the days signify a succession both in time, and in the things produced.

If, however, these two explanations are looked at as referring to the mode of production, they will be found not greatly to differ, if the diversity of opinion existing on two points, as already shown (Q67, A1; Q69, A1), between Augustine and other writers is taken into account. First, because Augustine takes the earth and the water as first created, to signify matter totally without form; but the making of the firmament, the gathering of the waters, and the appearing of dry land, to denote the impression of forms upon corporeal matter. But other holy writers take the earth and the water, as first created, to signify the elements of the universe themselves existing under the proper forms, and the works that follow to mean some sort of distinction in bodies previously existing, as also has been shown (Q67, A1, 4; Q69, A1). Secondly, some writers hold that plants and animals were produced actually in the work of the six days; Augustine, that they were produced potentially. Now the opinion of Augustine, that the works of the six days were simultaneous, is consistent with either view of the mode of production. For the other writers agree with him that in the first production of things matter existed under the substantial form of the elements, and agree with him also that in the first instituting of the world animals and plants did not exist actually. There remains, however, a difference as to four points; since, according to the latter, there was a time, after the production of creatures, in which light did not exist, the firmament had not been formed, and the earth was still covered by the waters, nor had the heavenly bodies been formed, which is the fourth difference; which are not consistent with Augustine's explanation. In order, therefore, to be impartial, we must meet the arguments of either side.

Reply to Objection 1: On the day on which God created the heaven and the earth, He created also every plant of the field, not, indeed, actually, but “before it sprung up in the earth,” that is, potentially. And this work Augustine ascribes to the third day, but other writers to the first instituting of the world.

Reply to Objection 2: God created all things together so far as regards their substance in some measure formless. But He did not create all things together, so far as regards that formation of things which lies in distinction and adornment. Hence the word creation is significant.

Reply to Objection 3: On the seventh day God ceased from making new things, but not from providing for their increase, and to this latter work it belongs that the first day is succeeded by other days.

Reply to Objection 4: All things were not distinguished and adorned together, not from a want of power on God's part, as requiring time in which to work, but that due order might be observed in the instituting of the world. Hence it was fitting that different days should be assigned to the different states of the world, as each succeeding work added to the world a fresh state of perfection.

Reply to Objection 5: According to Augustine, the order of days refers to the natural order of the works attributed to the days.<sup>171</sup>

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171 *Summa Theologica*, Bk 1, Ques. 74, Art. 2.

**Alcuin** (735-804): Known as the greatest scholar of his age, taught in Charlemagne's Court school. He wrote nine Scriptural commentaries and revised the Latin Vulgate. He was a firm believer in a literal six-day *ex nihilo* creation. He wrote: "God created out of nothing the heaven, the earth, the angels, light, air, water and the soul of man."<sup>172</sup>

**Rabanus Maurus Magnentius** (776-856): student of Alcuin, Abbot of Fulda and Archbishop of Mainz. Highly regarded for his Scriptural and patristic knowledge. Most of his works are exegetical; his commentaries include almost the entire book of the Old and New Testament. He was a firm believer in a literal six-day creation, descriptions of which can be found in *Commentariorum in Genesin libri quatuor*, PL 107, col. 449f.

**Peter Lombard** (c. 1100-1160): Lombard, along with many of his contemporaries, held to an *ex nihilo* creation; the special creation of Adam and Eve, and that "the Catholic faith believes that there was one principle, one cause of all things, namely God." Moreover, Lombard affirmed the "essentially hexameral plan" of creation, holding that God: "creates the angels and the unformed matter *simul* and *ex nihilo*. Then, in the work of six days, he produces individual creatures out of the unformed matter.... The days referred to in Genesis are to be understood literally as lasting twenty-four hours."<sup>173</sup> He writes: "Moses says that the world was made by God as a creator, and he avoided the error of certain men who supposed that many first principles existed without a first principle."<sup>174</sup>

**Thierry of Chartres** (d. 1150): The famous teacher at Paris and Chartres whose *Heptateuchon* is one of the chief sources of our knowledge regarding studies in the first half of the twelfth century. He utilized the first translations of Arabic sources in astronomy and mathematics. He was a firm believer in an *ex nihilo*, six-day creation.

**Peter Abelard** (1079-1142): One of the greatest intellectuals of the entire Middle Ages who studied under the School of Chartres and later under Anselm of Laon. He believed in an *ex nihilo*, six-day creation.<sup>175</sup>

**Hugh of St. Victor** (1096-1141): According to Adolf Harnack, he was one of "the most influential theologians of the twelfth century." A great admirer of Augustine, and although steeped in Platonism, allegorical thought and mysticism, he maintained a belief in a literal six-day creation.<sup>176</sup>

**Nicholas of Lyra** (1270-1340): Professor at the Sorbonne, famous for his meticulous and literal exegesis; decrying the mystical interpretations of some of his predecessors; believed in a literal six-day creation in Genesis 1. Nicholas, although siding with Augustine's literal interpretations, rejected the same's allegorical interpretations of Genesis 1.

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<sup>172</sup> *Interrogationes et responsiones in Genesin*, PL 107, cols 519-521.

<sup>173</sup> Marcia Colish, *Peter Lombard*, Leyden: E. J. Brill, 1994, vol. 1, 330-331; 337, 340-341.

<sup>174</sup> *Opera omnia*, vol. 2, PL 192, col 676.

<sup>175</sup> PL 178, cols. 738-745; 784.

<sup>176</sup> PL 167, col. 191.

**Denis the Carthusian** (d. 1471): the famed *Doctor Ecstaticus*, wrote in his *Enarratio in Genesim*: “Everything was created in six days in which a threefold work is illustrated, that is, creation, distinction, and ornamentation.”

**St. Lorenzo of Brindisi** (1559-1619): a true child prodigy, it was said that Lorenzo knew the entire original text of the Bible, Hebrew and Greek, which was understood to be of supernatural origin. His beatification included the words: “Vere inter sanctos Ecclesiae doctores adnumerari potest” (Truly among holy church doctors he numbers with the mighty). He celebrated Mass often in ecstasies. He wrote commentaries only on Genesis and Ezekiel. Of Genesis 1, which he believed was a literal six-day creation, he wrote: “I have found Moses worthy of respect above all in what relates to his cosmopeia or cosmogenesis.”

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**J. Akin:** 13) How would the bishop Fathers exercise the ordinary magisterium infallibly? According to Lumen Gentium 25:

[The bishops] proclaim Christ's doctrine infallibly whenever, even though dispersed through the world, but still maintaining the bond of communion among themselves and with the successor of Peter, and authentically teaching matters of faith and morals, they are in agreement on one position as definitively to be held.

The following conditions thus need to be met:

The bishops are “dispersed through the world”

They maintain “the bond of communion among themselves and with the successor of Peter”

They are “authentically [i.e., authoritatively] teaching matters of faith and morals”

They “are in agreement on one position as definitively to be held”

Conditions (1) and (2) represent the normal state of the Fathers.

Condition (3) corresponds to Leo XIII’s distinction between what the Fathers hand on as “a matter of Catholic faith” versus what they teach “in their capacity of doctors, unofficially” (Providentissimus Deus 14).

For it to be fulfilled in our context, the subject of their authoritative teaching would have to be the interpretation of a particular Scripture text regarding “matters of faith and morals”—as opposed, for example, to merely “physical matters” or “the opinions of the age” (Providentissimus Deus 19).

**R. Sungenis:** Again, Mr. Akin is making a false dichotomy concerning “physical matters.” Just because something in Scripture is designated as a “physical matter” does not mean it is excluded from either being inerrant or that it is excluded from our requirement to regard the unanimous consent of the Fathers. Here is precisely where Catholic apologists get trapped. Since he has already imposed geocentrism into Leo XIII’s encyclical (*Providentissimus Deus*) as a belief of the Fathers we need not pay any attention (even though, in his own view, geocentrism still remains a “very great weight” that he ignores), this becomes his “physical matter” of choice (or should we say, “straw man” of choice) so that he can claim geocentrism is “not a matter of faith and morals.”

In doing so, Mr. Akin must also ignore the legal and theological precedent that confronts him from the church’s dealing with Galileo. It was there stipulated by both Bellarmine and Paul V that geocentrism IS a matter of faith, *ex parte dicentis*, because Scripture teaches it.

It was so much a matter of ‘faith and morals’ that the 11 cardinal consultors commissioned by Paul V concluded heliocentrism was a “formal heresy,” which became the basis for why the church condemned it and told Galileo never to teach it again.

This very judgment from the 1616 magisterium was then used by the 1633 magisterium under Pope Urban VIII to convict Galileo, in a canonical court, of being “vehemently suspect of heresy.”

But Mr. Akin believes he can ignore all this legal and theological precedent from both the Catholic magisterium and the Catholic Fathers because, well, he has the popular opinions of almost everyone in the world the 1616 and 1633 magisteriums just can’t be right about this issue. As good an apologist as he might be, this siding with popular opinion against past magisteriums is his greatest weakness. He will never advance in his understanding of Catholicism until he reckons with the contradiction he has created.

**J. Akin:** Finally, condition (4) would be fulfilled when they unanimously agree on this particular interpretation of Scripture “as definitively to be held.”

**R. Sungenis:** Again, the Fathers don’t use such language. They do not say any doctrine they teach is “to be definitively held”; rather they espouse their beliefs the doctrine they teach is correct and Catholic. It is the magisterium’s job to make the doctrine “definitively to be held,” at least under the rubric of canonical law and practice. In other words, the magisterium is the final word on whether a particular teaching is to be doctrine and held by all members of the church.

Again, when the issue of geocentrism came up in the church, it was the magisterium that made the final decision. Prior to that, no one called heliocentrism a “formal heresy.” Prior to the magisterium’s decision in 1616, heliocentrism was considered a view opposed to Scripture and Tradition, but no Father, or even a consensus of them, could convict someone of heresy. Conviction of heresy is done by the magisterium alone, and that is precisely what the church

administered in the case of Galileo. Until Mr. Akin recognizes this brute fact, he will continually be confused about church protocol and continually use dubious arguments to defend his position.

**J. Akin:** 14) What kind of unanimity would the Fathers need to display? The Church has not given us a mathematical way of determining what kind of consensus the Fathers would need to display either for the body as a whole to represent the unerring sense of the faithful or for the bishop Fathers to infallibly exercise the ordinary magisterium. In fact, the difficulties of verifying when the conditions regarding these two modes of infallibility are met are the main reason we need the extraordinary magisterium (i.e., the infallible definitions issued by ecumenical councils and popes).

**R. Sungenis:** Again, Mr. Akin traps himself, since it was the “magisterium” in Galileo’s case that officially decided the testimony of the Fathers on geocentrism was a unanimity and was also a matter of faith and morals. And, as noted previously, none of their decisions and determinations have officially been overturned by any subsequent magisterium, and thus their decisions stand as the last official word on the subject.

**J Akin:** However, we can discern the general circumstances that need to occur: We would need a large number of the Fathers to address the interpretation of a specific passage of Scripture. One could not say that a consensus existed among them—much less a unanimous one—if only a relatively small number address the passage.

They would need to teach a single interpretation of this passage as true. Assessing this could be somewhat complex because the Fathers could see passages as teaching several things, based on the different senses of Scripture. However, they would have to hold at least one of these interpretations in common.

They would need to teach this interpretation as definitive—i.e., not just something they believe to be true but that something all Christians must hold to be true. Otherwise, the conditions needed for the unerring sense of the faithful or the infallible exercise of the ordinary magisterium would not be met.

**R. Sungenis:** Again, in the case of Galileo, the church has already decided the “definitiveness” of the consensus of the Fathers on an issue of faith and morals, but it is this very decision that Mr. Akin openly rejects based on nothing more than popular opinion.

**J. Akin:** It is frequently pointed out that absolute unanimity is not needed and that a moral unanimity suffices. This is true. However, the Fathers represent such a small number of individuals that even a few dissenting voices on a question would prevent us from describing their consensus as unanimous.

In fact, even a single, highly influential Father—such as an Augustine—who held a contrary view could be seen as preventing unanimity, though a Father of minor status might not.

In view of the difficulty in verifying that the needed conditions have been met, Pius XII's judgment that the unanimous consent of the Fathers applies only to a few passages seems justified (*Divino Afflante Spiritu* 47).

Anyone who has worked with the texts of the Fathers knows that it is difficult to find cases where the above conditions have been fulfilled.

The Fathers are a relatively small group of individuals, often only a few of them comment on a given passage of Scripture, and when they do they frequently make different proposals about its meaning.

**R. Sungenis:** Again, in the case of Galileo, one of the “few passages” are the geocentric passages of Scripture. The magisterium, led by the Holy Spirit, said those passages must be interpreted in the geocentric, not heliocentric, manner.

**J. Akin:** When there is a reasonable doubt, one must assume that infallibility has not been engaged, for “no doctrine is understood as defined infallibly unless this is manifestly evident” (Code of Canon Law 749 §3).

**R. Sungenis:** Which, if I may add off the cuff, the magisterium, whenever it gives us a doctrine of faith or morals, must state explicitly whether the doctrine is infallible, such as, “This doctrine is infallible.” That way, we won't fight over whether *Humanae Vitae* (birth control) or *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* (women priests) is infallible or not. It cannot be left up to laymen (or even high-placed clerics below the pope) to determine what is infallible. That stipulation must come from the pope who made the doctrine.

This likewise means that no layman can refuse to accept the church's decisions against Galileo by claiming the decisions were not infallible, since he has no authority to judge whether the decisions were infallible. Only the magisterium can decide if they were infallible. This is especially true since the doctrine of papal infallibility was not legally established until 1870, which was 250 years after the Galileo affair. It is also especially true since, when the decisions of the 1616 and 1633 popes against Galileo are carefully examined, they appear to fulfill the four criteria for papal infallibility stipulated by Pius IX in *Pastor Aeternus* of 1870.

Let's observe how we arrive at this position:

## **Facts Concerning Galileo's Condemnation and Trial**

To answer the question of the canonical (legal) status of the Catholic Church's condemnation of Galileo and Copernicanism at large, it is necessary to know what occurred between the Church and Galileo. Here are the facts:

- (1) Galileo was convicted of being "vehemently suspect of heresy" at his 1633 canonical trial, a trial presided over by Pope Urban VIII and whose final decree was approved by the same pope. This shows that the issue is one of heresy, which makes it a matter of faith.
- (2) Logically, in order for Galileo to be convicted of being "vehemently suspect of heresy," there must first be an established heresy of which to convict him.
- (3) To regard something as a heresy, and to make the potential heresy known to the public so that the public is warned not to fall into the heresy, the Church must first officially define and declare the heresy.
- (4) In order to define and declare a heresy, the Church must make a formal, official and binding statement against the heresy, otherwise no one could be either convicted of said heresy or be suspected of it.
- (5) After the trial of 1633, Urban VIII sent letters to all the papal nuncios and heads of universities throughout Europe explaining how the pope and Holy Office determined that Galileo was "vehemently suspect of heresy," as well as how they confirmed from the 1616 decree against Galileo that Copernicanism was a "formal heresy."
- (6) In the letter (see #5), Urban VIII demanded the papal nuncios and heads of universities to acknowledge and comply with the anti-Copernican decrees of 1633 he had approved, stipulating a penalty for non-compliance. Although the penalties would at first be temporary, the ultimate penalty for non-compliance would be excommunication, since continued non-compliance would be interpreted as a willful embracing of the formal heresy. In this way, the penalty would be similar to an anathema put at the end of conciliar canons.
- (7) A year prior to Galileo's 1633 trial, Pope Urban VIII was in protracted discussions with the Archduke of Tuscany, Cosimo Medici II, seeking to convince the archduke that:
  - (a) "these subjects are troublesome and dangerous; this work of his [Galileo's] is indeed pernicious, and the matter is more serious than His Highness thinks..."
  - (b) "that one must be careful not to let Mr. Galilei spread troublesome and dangerous opinions..."
  - (c) "that one is dealing with a very bad doctrine..."

(d) “His Holiness said he was sorry that Mr. Galilei had gotten involved in this subject, which he considers to be very serious and of great consequence for religion...”

(e) “it is erroneous and contrary to the Holy Scripture dictated by the mouth of God.”

(8) Determining a belief as heresy and convicting violators of said heresy means that the decree against the heresy is a matter of faith and not merely a discipline, for heresy deals only with matters of faith.

(9) To Galileo, as an individual, the Church defined and declared the heresy in 1616, before Galileo was finally convicted of being vehemently suspect of the heresy in 1633.

(10) For official notification to the rest of Christendom, in 1616 the Church did so by:

(a) putting the books authored by Galileo, Copernicus, Kepler, Zuniga and Foscarini on the Index of Forbidden Books; and

(b) stating the following in 1616: “The Decree of the Sacred Congregation of the most Illustrious Cardinals of the Holy Roman Church specially delegated by Our Most Holy Lord Pope Paul V and the Holy Apostolic See to publish everywhere throughout the whole of Christendom.”

As noted above, the Church also promulgated the defining and declaring of the heresy to the rest of the world in 1633 when Pope Urban VIII sent official letters to the papal nuncios and universities requiring their compliance.

(11) At Galileo’s 1633 trial, Urban VIII approved the 1616 condemnation of Copernicanism as “the false opinion of the motion of the Earth and stability of the sun...”

(12) At Galileo’s 1633 trial, Urban VIII approved the statement that the condemnation of Copernicanism in 1616 was declared and defined, saying “as an opinion can in no wise be probable which has been declared and defined to be contrary to divine Scripture.”

(13) At Galileo’s 1633 trial, it was stated that the decree against Copernicanism was defined and declared: “at the Holy Congregation held before His Holiness [Pope Paul V] on 25 February 1616.”

(14) At Galileo’s 1633 trial, it was stated that Galileo was canonically bound to obey Pope Paul V’s command given to him in 1616 in the following words: “an injunction should be imposed upon you [Galileo] by the Commissary of the Holy Office to give up the said doctrine and not teach it to others, not to defend it, nor even discuss it.”



(15) The 1616 injunction was made dependent on the pope's authority, stating, "...the Most Illustrious Lord Cardinal himself being also present still, the aforesaid Father Commissary, in the name of His Holiness the Pope and the whole Congregation of the Holy Office, ordered and enjoined the said Galileo, who was himself still present, to abandon completely the above-mentioned opinion that the sun stands still at the center of the world and the earth moves, and henceforth not to hold, teach, or defend it in any way whatever, either orally or in writing; otherwise the Holy Office would start proceedings against him. The same Galileo acquiesced in the injunction and promised to obey..."

(16) At Galileo's 1633 trial, the decrees of 1616 against Galileo were recognized as being verified by legal witnesses, stating: "the command was enjoined upon you [Galileo] by the Father Commissary of the Holy Office of that time, before a notary and witnesses."

(17) Establishing what belief is a heresy, and convicting someone of the heresy, cannot be mitigated by claims that the pope approved the anti-Copernican decrees outside the bounds of papal infallibility. The reasons are as follows:

(a) no one can presume, without positive and indisputable proof (which does not exist), that the pope or his Holy Office (1) erred in the matter of condemning Copernicanism; (2) that they erred in considering geocentrism a matter of faith; or (3) that they erred in saying that departure from geocentrism was a departure from the faith and therefore a heresy. These stipulations are so because no magisterium of the Church has ever officially stated that the Church of 1616 or 1633 erred in any matter whatsoever regarding the condemnation of Galileo or Copernicanism.

(b) papal infallibility would not be necessary in order to define and declare a doctrine, or convict someone of heresy against the doctrine.

(c) neither Pope Paul V in 1616 nor Pope Urban VIII in 1633 could have known what would or should constitute an infallible papal decree since the doctrine of papal infallibility was not defined and dogmatized until 1870. They would have acted as previous popes acted when they believed that for the good of Christendom a false belief should be formally and officially condemned or a true belief should be formally and officially dogmatized. As such, neither Paul V nor Urban VIII considered their approved decrees against Copernicanism as "reformable," otherwise they could not have decreed them.

### **Can the Papal Decisions Against Galileo be Considered Infallible?**

Thesis: No one can presume the 1616 and 1633 anti-Copernican decrees were not issued with papal infallibility since, *prima facie*, the decrees appear to fulfill the four criteria for papal infallibility that would later be dogmatized at the First Vatican Council in Pastor Aeternus, chapter 4...

Criterion 1: "...the Roman Pontiff speaks ex cathedra, that is, when in the discharge of his office as shepherd and teacher of all Christians, and by virtue of his supreme apostolic authority"

It is clear from the record that both Paul V in 1616 and Urban VIII in 1633 spoke from their supreme authority as Roman Pontiffs, and in doing so called upon the witness of tradition from the Church Fathers, the medievals, and esteemed theologians of the past to verify each pontiff's decision against Galileo. The record also recognizes Paul V and Urban VIII as making the final and required approval for the condemnation, both of defining the heresy and convicting Galileo of being vehemently suspect of said heresy.

Criterion 2: "...he defines"

It is clear from the record that specific definitions of the heresy were promulgated both in 1616 and 1633.

Criterion 3: "...that a doctrine concerning faith or morals"

It is clear from the record that because the violation of believing the sun was motionless and the Earth moved were together considered a heresy against the meaning and intent of Holy Scripture, *ex parte dicentis*, this belief constitutes a matter of the faith.

Criterion 4: "...must be held by the whole Church"

It is clear from the record that the heresy of Copernicanism was made public to "the whole of Christendom" in 1616; and all books espousing Copernicanism were put on the Index of Forbidden Books. It is also clear from the record that Urban VIII, in his formal letters to Europe's papal nuncios, made the formal heresy of Copernicanism a public matter and enforced it upon all the Catholic churches and universities of Europe.

If one were to argue that the decrees of 1616 and 1633 were not under papal infallibility, such argumentation can be nullified by considering that, after the Church dogmatized the doctrine of papal infallibility in 1870, She did not provide an official list of prior papal decrees that fall within or outside the domain of papal infallibility. Hence, no argument can be based on whether the 1616 and 1633 decrees were issued with or without papal infallibility since such arguments would only be a matter of opinion, not official declaration. The Church's magisterium is the only entity that can make the final decision on the legal status of the anti-Copernican decrees. So far She has been silent, and thus one cannot presume that the decrees were necessarily fallible.

The Church has never issued a formal and official rescission of the 1616 and 1633 decrees, and has not even officially discussed such an eventuality, either in the Ordinary or Extraordinary magisterium, and thus the anti-Copernican decrees stand in-force and uncontested.

Establishing what is heresy and convicting someone of the heresy cannot be mitigated by claims the pope did not sign a document to that effect in 1633, since there is no stipulation in pre- or post-1870 protocol that the pope must sign a document in order to make it official or infallible, but can also put the document in force by his confirmed and legally witnessed approval.

In the final analysis, after two popes and their Holy Offices defined and declared heliocentrism a formal heresy, and proved their intention by convicting Galileo of being “vehemently suspect” of that very heresy, then the magisterium has spoken, and no quibbling of whether this or that was “infallible” is going to change the impact of that official history. As Pius XII stated it:

But if the Supreme Pontiffs in their official documents purposely pass judgment on a matter up to that time under dispute, it is obvious that that matter, according to the mind and will of the Pontiffs, cannot be any longer considered a question open to discussion among theologians.<sup>177</sup>

If Paul V and Urban VIII did precisely what Pius XII said above, that is, “in their official documents purposely pass judgment on a matter up to that time under dispute,” then no one has an excuse. Either the Holy Spirit guided these pontiffs or He did not. If not, then this opens the whole of Catholic history to the same doubt and our religion is compromised.

**J. Akin:** 15) What’s the bottom line? The concept of the unanimous consent of the Fathers is widely misunderstood. Trent established a discipline that barred Catholics—even in writings not meant for publication—from contradicting the unanimous consent of the Fathers regarding the interpretation of Scripture. This law remained in force until the 20th century, but it lost legal force following the Second Vatican Council.

**R. Sungenis:** As I noted in my two arguments against Akin’s thesis:

(1) even if the unanimous consent of the Fathers could be considered merely a “discipline” and not a doctrine, the 1983 Code of Canon law, according to its own rules, cannot abrogate the practice. Mr. Akin failed to consider all of what the 1983 Code says on such issues and instead made a general stipulation that Canon 6 abrogates everything that came before it.

(2) an examination of the history of the unanimous consent of the Fathers shows it is not a discipline that can be compared to what printer a Catholic should use but was a part of the Ordinary magisterium long before Trent and long after Trent. The continued reiteration of the doctrine by

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<sup>177</sup> *Humani Generis*, 20.

several popes and the last two Councils shows, at the least, that every Catholic is required to consult the Fathers and consider them as either infallible in their consensus on faith and morals, or consider them a “very great weight” in matters outside of faith and morals.

**J. Akin:** However, the law was undergirded by important theological principles that remain in force and that have been illuminated by doctrinal development.

The unanimous consent of the Fathers as a whole can manifest the unerring sense of the faithful, and the bishops among the Fathers represented the Magisterium of their day and thus could teach infallibly under the usual conditions for the infallible exercise of the ordinary magisterium.

The number of cases where this applies to the interpretation of a particular passage of Scripture is small, but such cases must be taken seriously.

**R. Sungenis:** This is easy for Mr. Akin to say but it is not so easy to put into practice, as we have seen in his rejection of both the Church Fathers and the Catholic magisterium in the case of Galileo.