

# Bishop says scientists, church still can learn from Galileo case

VATICAN CITY – The 400-year-old case of Galileo Galilei and the Inquisition still serves as a valid warning that scientists should not presume to teach the church about faith and that the church must approach scientific discoveries with great caution, said the prefect of the Vatican Secret Archives.

Presenting an updated and expanded collection of Vatican documents related to Galileo's trial for heresy, Bishop Sergio Pagano said the case teaches Christians that they must be extremely careful in using the Bible to make judgments about science.

Catholics must be cautious "not to make the same mistakes that were made then" in applying biblical texts to scientific problems in a literal way, he said.

For instance, Bishop Pagano said, "I'm thinking about stem cells, the problem of eugenics, the problems of scientific research in these spheres, which sometimes I have the impression are being condemned with the same preconceptions that were used then" to condemn Galileo in 1633 for defending as fact the Copernican theory that the earth revolved around the sun.

"We must study more, be more prudent, evaluate the facts and be very attentive that the Scriptures, which are our inheritance without defect and cannot err regarding divine revelation, are correctly interpreted," he said.

Immediately after the July 2 press conference where he made the remarks, Bishop Pagano published a brief clarifying statement.

"The Galileo case teaches science not to presume to teach the church on matters of faith and sacred Scripture and, at the same time, teaches the church to approach scientific problems – perhaps even those tied to the most modern research on stem cells, for example – with much humility and circumspection," the statement said.

During the press conference Bishop Pagano said Galileo actually tried to convince theologians to read the Scriptures in a "Catholic way," not taking literally just one or

two passages like Psalm 19:6, which implies the earth stays still while the sun moves in the sky.

In October 1992 Pope John Paul II formally acknowledged that the church erred when it condemned Galileo, even though the theory he taught as fact was not proven for another 100 years.

In acknowledging the church's error, Pope John Paul said the 17th-century theologians and prelates judging Galileo relied on an overly literal interpretation of the Scriptures to insist that the earth was the fixed center of the universe.

Pagano said that if Galileo had stopped at the point of proposing the movement of the earth around the sun as a theory, he probably would not have been condemned.

But church officials also had good reasons for being suspicious of Galileo and his affirmations, he said, because they appeared to conflict with the teaching of Scripture and because a scientist seemed to be trying to teach the church what it should believe, "something which you still see today."

Those who condemned Galileo, he said, "were not stupid," they saw the sun rise and set and Galileo had not proven that it did not, he said.

"Today, in 2009, we have satellites above us. We can identify everything. We can see the earth in every moment of its reality. We see the sun. We have photographed Mars. We have gone to the moon. So we know the scientific reality," he said.

But if you look in the newspaper or listen to the radio each day, you will find out that "the sun will rise" at a specific hour and "the sun will set" at a specific hour, he said. "We all know that the sun does not rise or set, but everyone says it."

The book Bishop Pagano edited and presented, "Vatican Documents From the Trial of Galileo Galilei 1611-1741," updates a volume published in 1984. It includes about 20 documents discovered in the last 25 years.

Most of the new documents come from the archives of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, he said, and consist of Vatican letters denying permission for Catholics, including clerics, to read and study Galileo's writings.