

death they find in Scripture. For them, the sacraments, as important as they are, do not have salvific value, but rather function as a means of sanctifying grace for those—and only for those—who respond in Christian faith. Molnar finds this view “impersonal, reified, and alienating” for the church. He thinks that rejecting transubstantiation consigns worshipers to the mere phenomena of the signs which are interpreted subjectively and so divorced from the actual objective reality (or being) of the sacrificial event itself. But the Protestant could reply that the sign helps worshipers subjectively commemorate a unique, objective, and unrepeatable historical event of supreme importance. Worshipers are instructed to respond properly in light of the reality being commemorated. Just how this is “impersonal, reified, and alienating” seems unclear.

Molnar’s critic could further respond that his own view comes close to viewing the Lord’s Supper as a magical rite in which an elixir is dispensed which is automatically efficacious to all involved, irrespective of the subjective state of the recipient. It could also be added that Molnar’s notion of *reliving* the sacred event, rather than *commemorating* it, borders on the cyclical view of history embraced by the very paganism he rejects. (Molnar himself quotes Augustine’s refutation of the cyclical view: “God forbid that we should swallow such nonsense. Christ died, once for all, for our sins.”)

Questions should also be raised regarding Molnar’s understanding of “myth.” He does affirm that the “mythic” need not be factually false. He rightly sees the Christian drama of redemption as “mythic” since it answers a deep primordial need and addresses and answers—through revelation—the universal concern of creation, fall, and redemption. To borrow a phrase from C.S. Lewis, the Christian story is “myth become fact,” or, as G.K. Chesterton put it, Christianity is “an answer to a riddle.”

Yet Molnar believes that the Bible contains some factually false mythical material: “All things considered, the great difference between pagan myths and the Gospels is that most of the latter’s stories are historically factual, and mythical elements touch only the inessentials.” This reminds me of what

Peter Berger calls “cognitive bartering” in which orthodoxy barter with modernity for the supernatural elements it may retain: “We’ll give up the virgin birth, if we can keep the resurrection.” Although this is not Molnar’s aim, to admit any mythical accretions is to begin to undermine all historical authenticity. We cannot edit holy writ according to the whims of modern speculation and hope to escape unscathed (a point Molnar himself makes in reference to the truncated theology of Hans Kung). Moreover, there was insufficient time between the historical events and their commemoration in the Gospels for mythical accretions to develop.

Very importantly, *The Pagan Temple* is a valuable resource for putting various forms of neopaganism and new occultism (which often go under the name of the New Age movement) into better perspective. Neopaganism is not a trifling fad but a perennial temptation with cultural force to transform the West. What is at stake is nothing less than Western civilization as we know it. Although some will find aspects of his sacramentalism unconvincing, Molnar calls us to discern just how modern Christianity itself may be contributing to the pagan allure by neglecting a proper understanding of the imaginative or mythic aspects of orthodoxy.

If it is true, as Molnar believes, that “in the minds of vast segments of the West, the Christian God has died . . . his death is simultaneous with the assumed ascent of humanity to divine status,” we then face a challenge of the highest order.

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Galileo Brought to Book, Again

by Bryce J. Christensen

Galileo: Heretic by Pietro Redondi, Princeton: Princeton University Press; \$29.95.

Galileo Galilei lives in the imagination of every high-school atheist as the ar-

chetypal champion of Truth, standing heroically against the malice and superstition of the ecclesiastical authorities who condemned him. This version of the events works wonderfully as melodrama but fails miserably as history—the Italian scholar Pietro Redondi has uncovered documentary evidence that Galileo’s astronomy was not the principal reason that Church authorities brought him to trial. Rather, the real but hidden issue lay in the impossibility of reconciling Galileo’s materialist philosophy with the Catholic theology of the Eucharist.

Why then was Galileo tried for his views on the earth’s movement? In a painstaking work of historical sleuthing, Redondi traces the tangled motives of the principals involved: Pope Urban VIII, an early defender of Galileo who later came under attack from Spanish clerics for alleged laxity in fighting heresy; Father Grassi, the shrewd scientist, architect, and Jesuit who detected more than a whiff of heterodoxy in Galileo’s writings; Cardinal Bellarmine, the “hammer of heretics” who officially informed Galileo of the Church’s opposition to Copernicanism in 1616; Father Guiducci, Galileo’s student and admirer whose efforts to help his mentor backfired; Cardinal Barberini, nephew of the Pope, who personally stage-managed Galileo’s trial; and Galileo himself, who fanned the winds of controversy with his intemperate polemics. Top Church authorities genuinely wished to avoid the public scandal of bringing Galileo to trial for advocating doctrines contrary to belief in transubstantiation. (In 1624, just nine years before Galileo’s trial, the Inquisition had ordered the body of Mario Antonio De Dominis exhumed and burned because of his advocacy of atomist principles very much like Galileo’s.) Yet to still the damaging allegations and rumors, Church leaders felt it necessary to publicly discipline Galileo on the less serious—and therefore less scandalous—charge of Copernicanism.

The proud defiance of Galileo’s apocryphal “Eppur si muove!” (“It still moves!”) has sounded through the centuries. But the defiance loses its authenticity when we learn that Galileo’s trial was the result of ecclesiastical plea bargaining designed to protect the Vatican as well as the defendant. As Redondi explains: “Since Galileo had been pro-

claimed by the pope . . . to be his devout son, the son's all-too-serious sin, even suspicion of it, would fall too heavily on the father's shoulders."

The immediate objectives may have been achieved, but the Church's strategy has proved disastrous in the long run, diverting attention from the real issues and exposing the Church to centuries of ridicule. While many Christians justly denounce the methods used by the Inquisition, it remains true that Galileo's philosophy (apart from his science) did subvert religious faith. For the orthodox, Galileo's debt to Copernicus is far less troubling than his borrowings from the pagan philosophies of Lucretius, Democritus, and Epicurus. Redondi concludes that Galileo's was "the anxious faith of the heretic, a faith that is always searching and never satisfied."

For Copernicus, the heliocentric system served as a mystical symbol, with the sun representing the glory of God the Father. But Galileo used "Ockham's razor" of explanatory simplicity to pare away from Copernicanism all of its author's spiritual passions, leaving behind only the formulae needed to make predictions about matter in motion. Redondi indeed identifies Galileo as a probable influence upon René Descartes, who regarded the world as a matter-motion machine wholly explicable without reference to spirits, angels, or miracles. Like Descartes, Galileo helped to turn Western civilization away from the awe-inspiring God of Scripture, toward the rationalized Clockmaker God of Deism.

As a set of equations, Galileo's scientific world view provides a set of tools for the mind to use. But as a philosophic cosmology, it fails to provide a transcendent metaphor that can shape the mind through contemplation. Galilean man exerts ever-more technical power while dwindling into spiritual sterility.

Three centuries after Galileo, it is past time to give Ptolemy his due. By any scientific standard, Ptolemy's geocentric system is useless. But that uselessness need not repel us if we remember with Leszek Kolakowski that "science . . . does not deal with reality at all, its meaning being utilitarian." Let those who wish to make predictions about the motions of planets or stars cull their equations from Copernicus, Kep-

ler, Newton, or Einstein. While scientists fret about "saving the appearances," the reality beneath all seeming breaks through in prayer—and poetry. To appreciate the abiding truth captured in the Ptolemaic world view, read again Dante's *Commedia* or Milton's *Paradise Lost*, both depicting a Ptolemaic universe. As a Catholic who lived 300 years before Galileo, Dante had little choice in the matter. But in Milton we confront a militant Protestant who had himself visited Galileo in Fiesole and had probably accepted the scientific validity of Copernicanism. Yet the poet speaks truer than the scientist when he nonetheless uses a Ptolemaic setting for *this* planet's drama of human sin and divine redemption. Besides, all poetry shares with Ptolemaic astronomy the attribute of sublime uselessness (W.H. Auden: "Poetry makes nothing happen").

An increasing number of scientists now in fact share the view of British

physicist Steven Hawking, who believes that an "anthropic principle" governed the mysterious "Big Bang" in which the universe began. Man does somehow define the "target" at which the universe was "aimed." For locating the nub of the universe, Ptolemy proves a better guide than Galileo.

Bryce Christensen is editor of *The Family in America*.

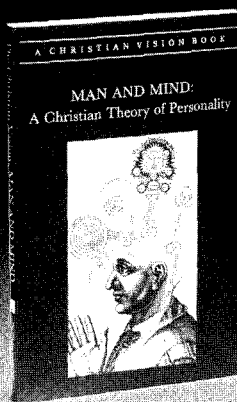
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by Don Feder

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