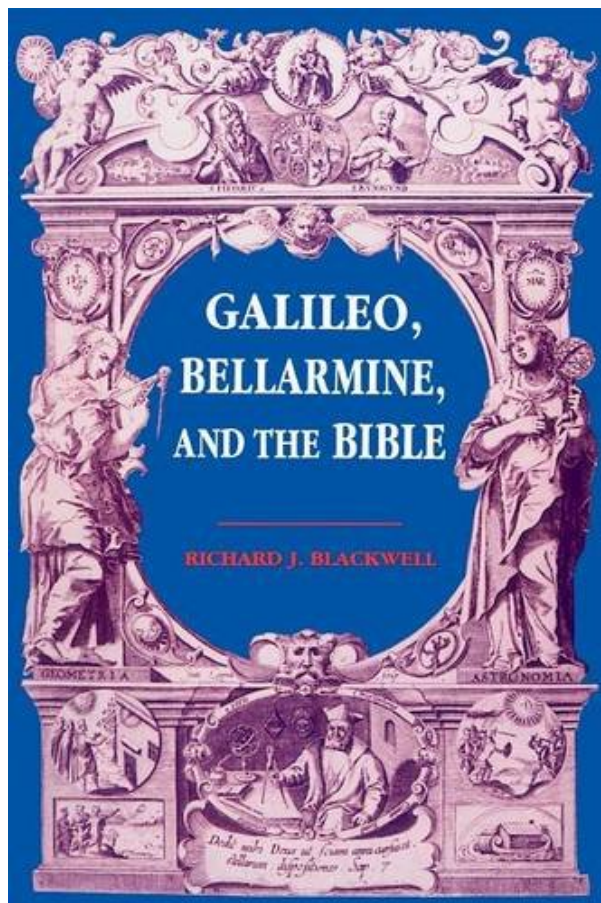


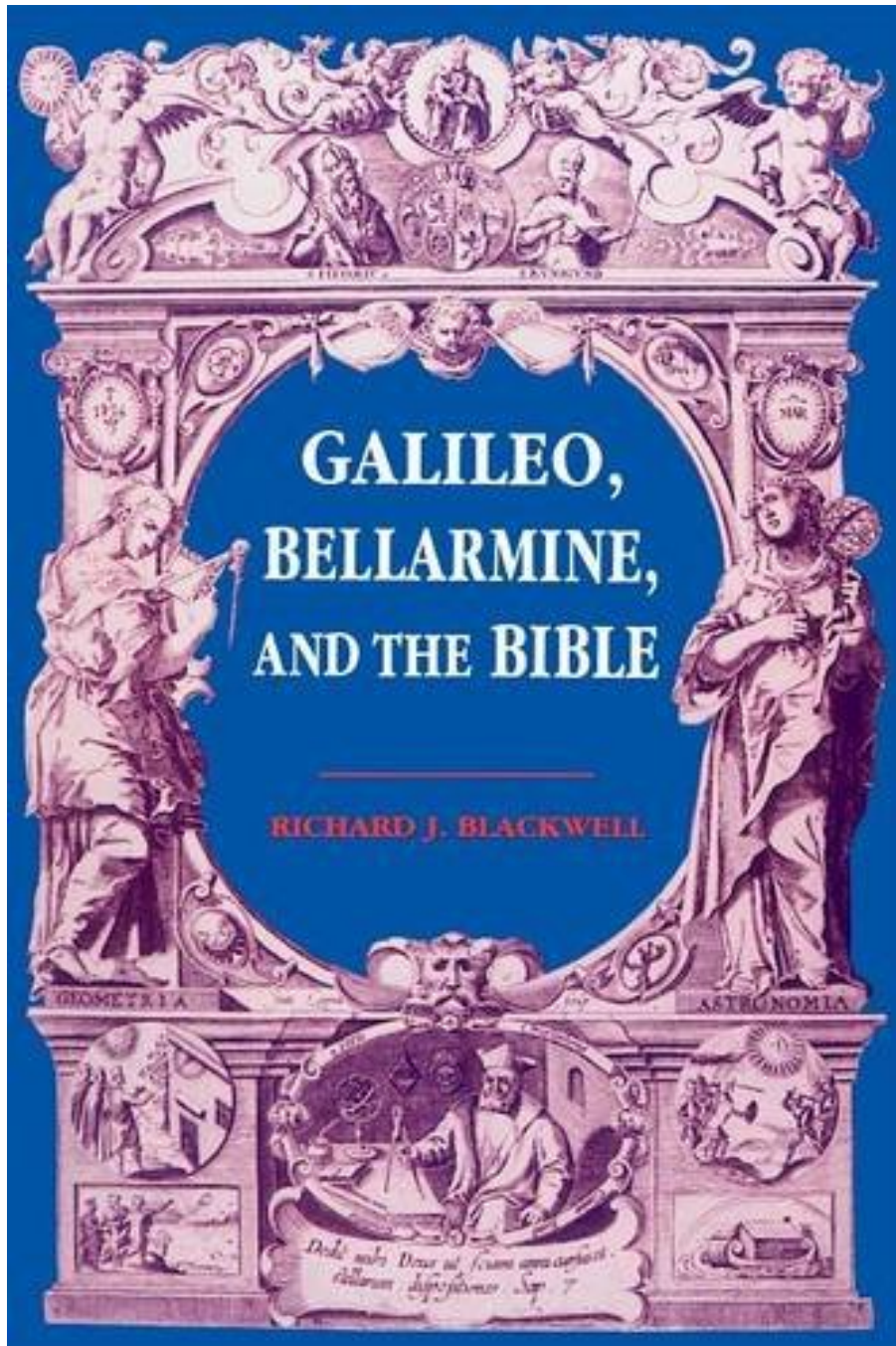
GALILEO, BELLARMINE, AND THE BIBLE

BY RICHARD J. BLACKWELL



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About the Author

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Considered the paradigm case of the troubled interaction between science and religion, the conflict between Galileo and the Church continues to generate new research and lively debate. Richard J. Blackwell offers a fresh approach to the Galileo case, using as his primary focus the biblical and ecclesiastical issues that were the battleground for the celebrated confrontation. Blackwell's research in the Vatican manuscript collection and the Jesuit archives in Rome enables him to re-create a vivid picture of the trends and countertrends that influenced leading Catholic thinkers of the period: the conservative reaction to the Reformation, the role of authority in biblical exegesis and in guarding orthodoxy from the inroads of "unbridled spirits," and the position taken by Cardinal Bellarmine and the Jesuits in attempting to weigh the discoveries of the new science in the context of traditional philosophy and theology.

A centerpiece of Blackwell's investigation is his careful reading of the brief treatise *Letter on the Motion of the Earth* by Paolo Antonio Foscarini, a Carmelite scholar, arguing for the compatibility of the Copernican system with the Bible. Blackwell appends the first modern translation into English of this important and neglected document, which was placed on the Index of Forbidden Books in 1616. Though there were differing and competing theories of biblical interpretation advocated in Galileo's time—the legacy of the Council of Trent, the views of Cardinal Bellarmine, the most influential churchman of his time, and, finally, the claims of authority and obedience that weakened the ability of Jesuit scientists to support the new science—all contributed to the eventual condemnation of Galileo in 1633. Blackwell argues convincingly that the maintenance of ecclesiastical authority, not the scientific issues themselves, led to that tragic trial.

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About the Author

Richard J. Blackwell is professor emeritus of philosophy, Saint Louis University.

Most helpful customer reviews

17 of 20 people found the following review helpful.

A Must Read Book About the Galileo Controversy

By A Customer

This well researched and written book focuses upon the impact of the Counter-Reformation upon Biblical

exegesis (interpretation), as determined by the Council of Trent, and how the Catholic Church managed to stumble into perhaps the most humiliating mistake in its long history--the condemnation of the Copernican view of the solar system. Surprising, to me at least (I am not Catholic), is the fact that this book was published by the University of Notre Dame Press, since it pulls no punches in assessing who was at fault and why.

It is one of those rare books that provide a whole new way of looking at a familiar subject. Highly recommended.

9 of 12 people found the following review helpful.

Petty wars

By Viktor Blasjo

The counter-reformation unwittingly provided the weapons with which Galileo would be attacked. Luther challenged church authority and emphasised reliance on and personal understanding of the Bible (*sola Scriptura*). The Council of Trent was formed to answer this threat. The Council decreed that: God's message was conveyed both through the Bible and unwritten traditions; interpreting the Bible is a matter for the appropriate authorities; "in matters of faith and morals" no one shall dare to interpret the Bible contrary to church tradition and "the unanimous agreement of the Fathers."

Bellarmino, the most important authority in Galileo's time, interpreted these decrees in the most unfortunate way possible for Galileo. Firstly, he took the relation of Bible and tradition to be complementary rather than concurring. Thus the Fathers' approval of geocentrism is independent rather than redundant evidence. Secondly, he took "unanimous agreement of the Fathers" to be achieved when one Father spoke on a matter while the others remained silent. Thus strengthening this independent evidence. Lastly, he interpreted "matters of faith" in such a way that everything in the Bible (geocentrism, the fact that Tobias had a dog, etc.) is a matter of faith. This is the crucial point in Bellarmine's letter to Foscarini. Foscarini and Galileo had a reasonable argument that Copernicanism was not in conflict with the Fathers or the Council, but these authoritative interpretations by Bellarmine effectively made any further debate impossible ("checkmate," as Blackwell says).

But Bellarmine and the church establishment had no interest in bringing about Inquisition proceedings. However, Galileo's Aristotelian enemies (with whom he had debated on floating bodies and mechanics) saw an opportunity. By persistently and prominently accusing Galileo of arguing contrary to scripture they forced him into a dilemma: either let the argument stand unopposed (thus blocking his theories from being accepted and pursued) or get involved with the dangerous matter of scriptural interpretation. Galileo chose the latter option; now all the Aristotelians had to do was to sit back and watch the vultures mince this easy pray. Caccini, a petty priest and "a thoroughly nasty person," took the bait and unwittingly executed the Aristotelians' plan. He preached against Galileo with such fervour that his superior had to send Galileo a formal apology (p. 69). And with considerable effort and calculated deceit he managed to force the matter onto the initially reluctant Inquisition (p. 112).

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

"Two truths cannot contradict one another"

By AmazoNan

If you want to have a better understanding of what really happened between Galileo and the Church, this book is a good place to start. Blackwell tries to deal fairly with the complex religious and sociocultural backdrop of 16th century western civilization. He points out, for instance, that the Church commissioned Copernicus to save appearances of the incorrect calendar predicted by the geocentric theory of Ptolemy, and also that many Jesuit scientists of the day were, at one point, sympathetic to the heliocentric theory being defended by Galileo.

The book acknowledges that, as a devout Catholic himself, Galileo offered detailed explanations of why scripture and science do not conflict in the proposition that the Earth moves around the Sun. The explanations, translated from his own words, are inspiring, and his concepts are surprisingly modern. However, although there were rational Catholic authorities who understood that scripture and science must agree on the same physical truths about the world, they were unfortunately overridden? in the case of heliocentrism? by more powerful legates with an opposing ideology. For someone with a scientific mindset, the key issue that requires our daily vigilance is the unjustifiable silencing of free thought and the abuse of power that can result from centralized authority.

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