

ON THE REVOLUTIONS OF THE REALMS OF THE CHURCH

OR A SHORT HISTORY HOW THE CHURCH'S REACTS TO PROGRESS

The Catholic Church was officially silent after the publication of Copernicus's *On the Revolutions of Celestial Spheres* in 1543 in Nuremberg. What caused the absence of Church's reaction, was that Copernicus dedicated his work to the Pope. The publishers replaced Copernicus's original introduction with their own in which, they suggested that the work was only a mathematical hypothesis to improve calculations on the movements of the planets.

Indeed, for tens of years the Church's officials were not too interested in the work of Copernicus, until the time, when Galileo announced that Copernicus's theory was not only right, but that it was a scientific breakthrough. The Church's experts declared that the thesis about motionless Sun and orbiting Earth was meaningless, absurd from the philosophical point of view, that it was formally heretic and its publishing was an error in faith. Copernicus's work together with all other works referring to this theory as true, ended up on the infamous *Index of Forbidden Books*. Galileo was awaiting the trial.

In time, however, contrary to the Church's standpoint, increasing number of scientists confirmed Copernicus's theory with even more 'heretic' contents added to it. When Newton published his scientific theories, it was clear that Copernicus, Galileo and Kepler were right, while the 'experts' and theologians of the Church were wrong. Despite this, the books were taken off the *Forbidden Books Index* as late as in 1835. Three centuries later from the date when Copernicus dedicated his work to the Pope.

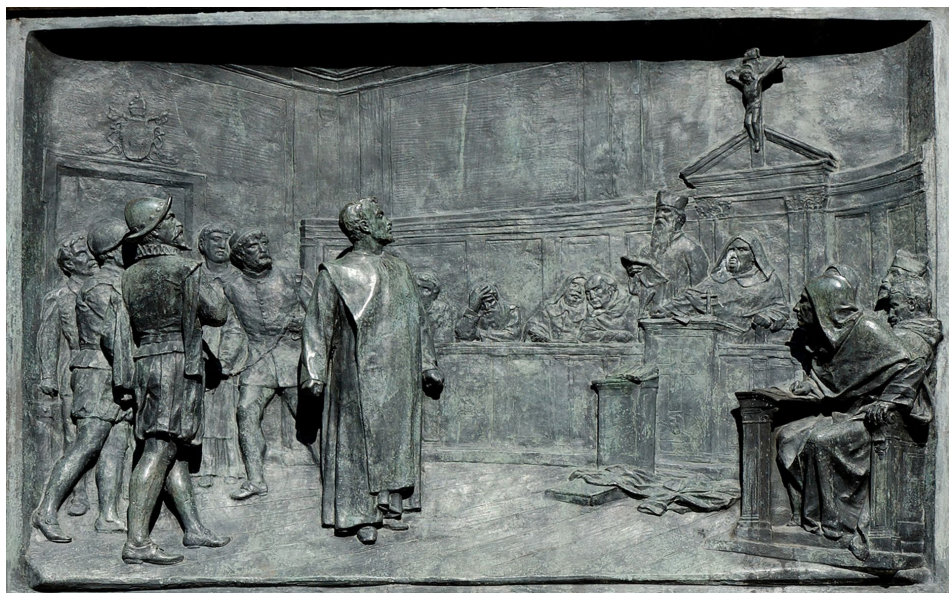
The popes indeed very often were the sponsors, but rather of the art than the science. Art was a good propaganda tool for the authority of the Church, the science undermined it. This is why for centuries, the power of the Church effectively blocked development of science even though, it was increasingly difficult since the reformation as Rome was losing the grip on many European countries. The Jesuit order was found at the time of the counterreformation. The Jesuits were to use science for the purpose of oiling the Catholic machine of authority and propaganda. Regardless of the aims put before the Jesuits, they contributed to the development of education in many Catholic countries. In time though, this education was moving further away from the achievements of the modern science and the dogmatically treated *Index of Forbidden Books* furthered this division.

After the Enlightenment and the Revolution, when the Church finally gave way to the secular authority, the Church's resistance to progress took even more grotesque form. Pope Gregory 16th tried to stop the development of the railways and gas light, which he banned in Rome in the middle of the 19th century. He announced that these were the works of the devil, not because the Pope was stupid enough to believe this, but because he knew that progress would improve trade and the lives of the town people, which in turn, would weaken the last bastion of the Pope's feudal power, the State of the Church.

When Charles Darwin in 1859 published *The Origin of the Species* in which he put forward his theory of natural selection, the world of

science was shocked. How to reconcile scientific thesis with the biblical imagining of the creation of the world? As one can guess, the main controversy in these theories was the origin of man. Darwin avoided direct reference to this and he carefully omitted the word 'evolution'. After heated discussions the book provoked, all churches, including the Protestant Church, more or less condemned Darwin's theory. By 20th century, the Church came to terms with Darwin's publication and started to explain that creation of the world in the Book of Genesis could not be treated literally. If from then on, the Bible may not necessarily be taken literally, why were people condemned to death or burnt at stake for centuries earlier? Why was Giordano Bruno killed?

In times when technological and social advancement was taking humanity out of the dark ages of ignorance and superstition, the Pope Pius the 9th published the encyclical *Quanta Cura* (1864) in which he condemned the separation of the Church from the state, secular education, freedom of the press and conscience. This encyclical was accompanied by *Syllabus*, an updated version of the old Index. This time, however, there were no titles on the condemned list, but whole ideas, including rationalism, modernism, socialism or 'false' ecumenism. To reinforce his authority on the teachings, the Pope Pius 9th in 1870 called the Vatican council, where a dogma about papal infallibility on the matters of faith and morality was proclaimed. Following on from this, if the Pope considered some of the science immoral, did he not secure his infallibility on the matters of science too? Many years have



The trial of Giordano Bruno by the Roman Inquisition. Bronze relief by Ettore Ferrari (1845-1929), Campo de' Fiori, Rome. Source: Wikipedia.

but does not have the right to impose their narrative on everyone, including non-believers by legislations. This is, however, what The Church has been doing through right wing government. Not only the current government.

One thing is surprising – how is it that for nearly 500 years the Church has been attacking every novelty as evil, moreover, this was often a reason for condemnation to death by the Church. In nearly all of such cases, the Church was wrong, why then the Church still played such an important role in our society? If we were listening to the Church we would still be riding to work on horseback, think that the Earth is the centre of the Universe created by God's hand, deny women any rights, obediently listen to our occupiers. We would still burn forbidden books on stakes and perhaps their authors would be graciously spared?

passed since the Pius's pontificate and 'the infallible' popes did change their minds on a number of matters. In time, they noticed that socialism was not too bad and they incorporated some of it into their own social science.

Also in Polish affairs, the popes and the church have a lot to answer for. Today, we mostly remember the fight against communism and John-Paul the 2nd pontificate. History of the Church in Poland, however, has more bad chapters than words chiselled in gold. Starting with the Targowica treason of many bishops, through condemnation of the Polish insurrections, not as precautionary advice, but with the order to 'worship the emperor' whose reactionary politics always gave the Polish bishops much hope. The Polish Epi-

scopate condemned school strike in 1905, considering teaching in the Polish language to be contempt of the occupiers of Poland. The bishops in Poland reacted strongly against the idea of allowing women to vote by writing in 1917 a pastoral letter condemning the League of the Polish Women who demanded equal rights in politics. Fortunately, women succeeded and Marshall Pilsudski granted these rights.

As we entered 21st century the Church's attitude has not changed much – the themes and the battle grounds changed. Today, this is abortion, in vitro, contraception, equal rights for LGBT. The Church invariably holds the stand that these 'whims' are the workings of the devil, they are sinful and evil. Of course, the Church has the right to do so,

The same institution collectively supports the Law and Justice government and one can hear that: 'successes of Jaroslaw Kaczynski are our successes' in the words of the bishops. Actually, this is true, it is the success of the Church. We can take comfort from this: in all of such matters, the Church eventually lost and had to assume the principle of rationality over religiousness. In the current matters, they will lose again one day. The question is, when will this happen?

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