

Galileo Anniversary Ignites Faith-Science Dialogue

Vatican Joins in Year of Astronomy Conference

By Carmen Elena Villa

FLORENCE, Italy, MAY 26, 2009 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- There is a fundamental dialogue between faith and reason, and an international conference on Galileo can serve to prove it, according to the archbishop of Florence.

Archbishop Giuseppe Betori affirmed this in speaking of the conference under way in his archdiocese on "The Galileo Affair: A Historical, Philosophical and Theological Re-examination."

The event was inaugurated today at the Basilica of the Holy Cross, where Galileo is buried. It is an initiative of the Jesuits' Niels Stensen Foundation, and is part of the celebrations for the International Year of Astronomy sponsored by UNESCO.

Italian President Giorgio Napolitano was at the inauguration. The conference will feature 33 speakers and has brought together 18 institutions, including the Pontifical Council for Culture, the Pontifical Academy of Science, and the Vatican Observatory.

Archbishop Betori spoke about Galileo and the Church. He asserted that the case has been read for centuries as a "tragic and reciprocal lack of understanding," reported L'Osservatore Romano.

The prelate said he wants the Year of Astronomy to "re-establish and present again in a creative way the fundamental dialogue that exists between faith and reason, from the perspective of a permanent collaboration between the Church and institutions of scientific investigation, economic development and social promotion."

"Faith does not grow with the rejection of rationality but rather integrates itself in a more ample horizon of rationality," Archbishop Betori added.

When reason is separated from faith, he continued, the risk arises "of being reduced to a calculation and an exclusive evaluation of conflicting interests." In this way, it "often is unaware of or remains blind to the vital questions, fundamental values and dramatic human situations."

According to the archbishop, the Galileo conference has "not only a high cultural and symbolic value, but also shows that there are conditions for a constructive sharing of responsibilities, in the awareness of respective roles and tasks."

The event ends May 30 in Florence, in the last home where Galileo lived.
