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## *What Do Galileo, Darwin, And Lent Have In Common?*

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*  
by the Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler,  
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This week, I will be glad to remember the birthdays of Charles Darwin and Galileo Galilei, Darwin born on February 12 (1809), and Galileo born on February 15 (1564). It so happens that their birthdays occur during the Christian season of Lent this year. We all know how much controversy their work caused the Church (and society!), but the Christian Church should be forever grateful for their courage and their wisdom. In fact, Galileo, Darwin, and Lent have something in common.

Both Galileo and Darwin actually set out to be friends of the Christian Church. Educated in an Italian monastery, Galileo intended to join the Camaldolese Order of the Church; but his father had already decided that he would be a medical doctor. Galileo's interests, of course, turned from medicine to mathematics and the natural world. With the use of the newly developed telescope, Galileo recorded wonders of the natural world-the stars and the heavens-that no one had ever seen. Of course, these were the observations and interpretations that would also change the world.

Galileo would finally be charged with heresy, for adopting the Copernican view that the earth revolved around the sun. After all, Psalm 93:1, Psalm 96:10, and 1 Chronicles 16:30 all say something like "the world is firmly established, it cannot be moved." Ecclesiastes 1:5 states that "the sun rises and sets and returns to its place, etc." Was Galileo denying the Bible? Galileo apparently believed in some form of biblical inerrancy, but he struggled with interpretation. He wrote to a friend that the Bible should always be interpreted in the light of what science had shown to be true.

Charles Darwin, at one time, studied to become an Anglican priest. He, too, was in love with the natural world and was convinced at one time in the naturalist William Paley's argument that design in nature proved the existence of God. But later Christians objected to several elements of *On the Origin of Species*; that book refuted the notion that creatures had been individually designed by God, it claimed that the Earth was much older than the literal biblical account, and in claiming a common ancestor for apes and human, it denied a certain uniqueness to humanity.

How strangely ironic that many in the Church should be blinded to the truth that these two gentlemen showed the world. For, in essence, both Galileo and Darwin were using science to claim that humankind is not at the center of everything. Our earth is not at the center of God's creation, and our species is not at the center of God's creation.

Isn't this what Lent is supposed to teach us? "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return" we heard on Ash Wednesday. Lent is supposed to remind us of humility. The opposite of humility is hubris, to be so self-obsessed as to think we are at the center of everything.

Galileo, Darwin, and Lent all teach us about truth and humility. A holy Lent is about acknowledging the truth of ourselves, and the truth of this beautiful world, no matter how uncomfortable that truth might be. A holy Lent is also about acknowledging our own humility. No matter who we are, we are not at the center of everything, and we are not at the beginning of everything. May God bless the memories of both Galileo and Darwin, and all who lead us in the paths of truth and humility this Lent.

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