

Response to David Palm's Latest Attempt to Deal with the Galileo Issue

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D. Palm: The neo-geocentrist fixation on their pet cause is like a monkey who reaches into a precious Ming vase to grasp a pebble. Intent only on holding onto that bit of rock and unable to extract his clenched fist, the monkey will happily smash the vase to get his "prize", heedless of the priceless nature of the treasure he has wrecked.

R. Sungenis: Except that I think David Palm is the monkey. Catholics who try to preserve popular science's status quo so that they can spare themselves the "embarrassment of looking like cave men" (as one critic once put it to me) is an act that, by all appearances, seems to save Catholicism from shame, but in the long run the vase breaks because the Church is forced to contradict herself, since for the first 1900 years she believed in geocentrism, and now all of a sudden she doesn't, based on nothing more than the boasts of 17th and 18th century astronomy which has since been proven to be dubious and unsupported by the findings of modern science.

D. Palm: It looks to me as if at least some of these individuals will do anything to hang onto their private judgment that geocentrism is taught as an article of faith, even if it means (were it possible) smashing the Catholic Faith itself. On Dave Armstrong's blog, one "johnmartin" (a pseudonym) was perfectly content to assert that, "I've presented a list of doctrines that have been de facto denied by the modern church" and "I believe the church silence on the matter of geo[centrism] in the last 300 years is easily accounted for through either inept leadership or fear of the science establishment". Three hundred years of doctrinally inept and cowardly Popes—gee, what faithful Catholic could fail to be content with such a simple explanation?

He offered as "proof" for this supposed ineptitude a whole panoply of issues which the Catholic Church had "stopped teaching": the sinfulness of contraception, the indissolubility of marriage, the nature of and need for the sacrament of matrimony, the sinfulness of homosexual behavior, the inerrancy of Scripture, the Virgin birth, and the establishment of the sacrament of Holy Orders by Christ himself. It was painful to have to point out to this fellow Catholic the obvious, namely, that the Magisterium has explicitly taught each and every one of those things, right up to the present day.

R. Sungenis: Mr. Palm missed the point. Mr. Martin is not talking about what is in theological books and catechisms but what is actually being taught in many Catholic institutions, many of which are ignoring what is written in the catechisms. Mr. Palm and I have been over this before. I previously used the example of biblical inerrancy that Mr. Palm (at least the one I knew previously) holds near and dear to his heart. The Church taught full inerrancy for over 1900 years. But today you can hardly find a Catholic institution in the world that teaches full inerrancy. What happened? Did the

doctrine change? No, they just stopped teaching it, all because a few liberal clerics convinced the world that Dei Verbum's phrase "for the sake of our salvation" meant inerrancy was limited to salvation, not the whole Bible. Same thing with geocentrism. The official teaching has not changed, but you can hardly find anyone who teaches it any longer. (Incidentally, "johnmartin" is not a pseudonym. His name is John Martin and he lives in Australia).

D. Palm: NB: I will be posting a continuing series of essays on various aspects of neo-geocentrism. Until the series is complete comments will be disabled.

Posted by thepalmhq at [6:41 AM](#) [0 comments](#)

Thursday, June 9, 2011

Neo-geo Exaggerations: The Catechism of Trent

D. Palm: In my [last piece on neo-geocentrism](#) I pointed out how neo-geocentrists consistently exaggerate the nature and authority of the various ecclesiastical documents that touch on the topic.

R. Sungenis: That "piece" was on Pope Leo XIII's encyclical, Providentissimus Deus, and I'm sorry to say that Mr. Palm did rather poorly on it. He makes all kinds of assumptions and assertions that simply have no basis in fact. We answered him and it is posted on the www.galileowaswrong.com website.

D. Palm: Another example of this may be found in how they treat some passages in the Catechism of the Council of Trent. Here's what a leading neo-geo has to say about it:

One of the clearest official and authoritative statements from the Catholic Church defending the doctrine of geocentrism comes from the catechism issued under a decree of Pope Pius V, known as The Catechism of the Council of Trent or more simply, The Roman Catechism. (Bob Sungenis, GWW2, 163).

"One of the clearest official and authoritative statements"....keep that phrase in mind as we look into this a little further. Bob deploys several passages from the Roman Catechism to try and make this case. Here's one of them:

*He also gave to the sun its brilliancy, and to the moon and stars their beauty; and that they might be for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years. **He so ordered the celestial bodies in a certain and uniform course, that nothing varies more than their continual revolution, while nothing is more fixed than their variety.***

Now a lot of non-geocentrists are going to look at that and say, Okay, but I agree with that. How exactly does that clearly teach geocentrism? Bob deploys another passage from the Catechism of Trent to try and answer that:

Rather, to expel any doubt about what objects are revolving the catechism adds that the sun, moon and stars have a "continual revolution." Although the unspecified reference to "revolution" might cause a heliocentrist to infer that the sun's revolution does not necessarily mean it is revolving around the Earth, a few pages later the catechism disallows that inference by stating the following:

The earth also God commanded to stand in the midst of the world, rooted in its own foundation and made the mountains ascend, and the plains descend into the place which he had founded for them....

The problem for Bob is the context that he left off after the ellipses makes his application of this passage to the earth's place in the universe untenable. Let's have the whole passage, including what he omitted:

The earth [terram] also God commanded to stand in the midst of the world [mundi], rooted in its own foundation, and made the mountains ascend, and the plains descend into the place which he had founded for them. That the waters should not inundate the earth, He set a bound which they shall not pass over; neither shall they return to cover the earth. He next not only clothed and adorned it with trees and every variety of plant and flower, but filled it, as He had already filled the air and water, with innumerable kinds of living creatures.

While *mundus* can mean "universe", it can also just mean "world", e.g. *Mundus vult decipi, ergo decipiatur*, "The world wants to be deceived, so let it be deceived." But from the whole context it appears that the Catechism is using the word "earth" (*terra*) in terms of the "land", as distinct from the "air" and "water" and the word "world" (*mundus*) to mean the whole globe. (This echoes the wording of Gen 1:10, "And God called the dry land, Earth [*terram*]").) Thus in this context "rooted in its own foundation" means that the land is fixed in place with relation to the water, not in relation to the cosmos. If "earth" here means the entire globe then the passage ceases to make sense, since in the last sentence the "earth" is specifically contrasted with the "air" and "water" and God certainly didn't cover the entire globe, including the air and water, "with trees and every variety of plant and flower".

This passage, then, doesn't represent a description of the globe's place in the universe and it has no application to geocentrism. I should note that the English version of this Catechism by J. A. McHugh and C. J. Callanon which appears in many places on the Internet (e.g. [here](#)) has the heading "Formation of the Universe" over this section. This is a mistranslation of the Latin, *De terrae creatione*, which is correctly translated "Creation of the earth" (as in, e.g. the translation by J. Donovan ([link](#))). It is perhaps this mistranslation—along with an insufficient attention to context—that has misled certain neo-geocentrists to read this as if it addressed the earth's place in the universe.

R. Sungenis: Sure, I'll grant to Mr. Palm that "mundus" could refer to the earth and earth could refer to the land. But that doesn't get him off the hook with the previous passage that says the sun, moon and stars revolve around the earth. Mr. Palm's mundus could either

mean earth or universe, but the burden of proof is on him to show that it means earth since the catechism has already stated it believes the sun, moon and stars revolve around the earth.

As such, Mr. Palm will also have to accept the fact that he cannot interpret land and earth literally in the catechism and then interpret the sun, moon and stars moving around the earth non-literally. And this would be especially true since the 1566 Catechism of Trent is about 50 years before the Galileo controversy, at a time when very few were questioning geocentrism. Those that did were silenced, as was Copernicus' book in 1548. At best, Mr. Palm's argument is anachronistic. Even die-hard modernists admit that the Tridentine catechism teaches geocentrism. They just don't want to accept it, but at least they are not foolish enough to force the catechism into a mold that it cannot hold.

D. Palm: There are a couple of other passages Bob cites to try and bolster this notion that the Catechism of Trent teaches geocentrism, but they get weaker and weaker.

*But though God is present in all places and in all things, without being bound by any limits, as has been already said, yet in Sacred Scripture it is frequently said that He has His dwelling in heaven. And the reason is because the heavens which we see above our heads are the noblest part of the world, remain ever Incorruptible, surpass all other bodies in power, grandeur and beauty, and **are endowed with fixed and regular motion.***

*...all goods both natural and supernatural, must be recognised as gifts given by Him from whom, as the Church proclaims, proceed all blessings. If the sun by its light, **if the stars by their motion and revolutions,** are of any advantage to man; if the air with which we are surrounded serves to sustain us...nay, those very causes which philosophers call secondary, we should regard as so many hands of God, wonderfully fashioned and fitted for our use, by means of which He distributes His blessings and diffuses them everywhere in profusion.*

Obviously, non-geocentrists can affirm all that this Catechism says. There is no explicit affirmation of geocentrism here whatsoever; these are generic statements that fit modern cosmologies equally well. Yet despite the weakness of this evidence in favor of his pet cosmology, Bob speaks of the "Roman Catechism's dogmatic assertion of geocentrism" (GWW2, pp. 164f.). This is a manifest exaggeration.

R. Sungenis: If anyone is exaggerating it is Mr. Palm. He wants us to believe that the 1566 Tridentine catechism, which had no notion of heliocentrism in its author's mind since there had been no Catholic teaching on heliocentrism in the prior 1566 years, molded its language on the cosmos so as to accommodate modern heliocentric cosmology! How could the Tridentine author accommodate a view of cosmology he had no notion of? Either the Tridentine author would have had to have been clairvoyant or a liar, but I can assure you he was neither. Rather, he was a faithful follower of the consensus of the Fathers just as Cardinal Bellarmine was when he argued with Galileo that he could not go against that

patristic consensus. Let me digress a bit here. What this attempt by Mr. Palm shows us is that he is desperate, even to the point of an absurd anachronism, to promote the status quo of popular science today.

D. Palm: We have seen that, far from containing a "dogmatic assertion of geocentrism", the Catechism of the Council of Trent says nothing at all on the subject. The evidence strongly suggests that this is a modern, private interpretation of the Catechism based on a mistranslation and a misunderstanding. The following fact should pretty much clinch that case. Bob claims that this is, "One of the clearest official and authoritative statements from the Catholic Church defending the doctrine of geocentrism. . ." But surely, if that were true, this would have been the very centerpiece in the original Galileo controversy. And yet this source was never, as far as I have seen, brought up either by the Congregation of the Index or the Congregation of the Holy Office during the Galileo affair. The silence is deafening.

R. Sungenis: First, we've already seen that it is Mr. Palm's ignoring of the three clear references in the catechism to the sun, moon and stars revolving around the earth, from a Tridentine author who could not have been trying to promote heliocentrism. Second, the only silence that is deafening here is Mr. Palm's silence as regards whether the Tridentine catechism was ever cited. Mr. Palm tries to cover his ignorance by the clever "as far as I have seen" ploy, but what he really means to say is that he hasn't researched the issue but he'll nevertheless take a wild guess and say that no one in 1616-1633 made a reference to the catechism.

Be that as it may, Bellarmine didn't need to lean on the catechism as his centerpiece when, in fact, the Council of Trent was his centerpiece, which he used when he told Galileo that the Council of Trent forbids anyone to ignore the consensus of the Fathers on a given doctrine. The Tridentine catechism was merely telling us what that consensus was, that is, that the sun, moon and stars revolved around the earth, not vice-versa. We certainly don't find Bellarmine or Paul V or Urban VIII taking Mr. Palm's anachronistic argument, that is, that the language of the sun, moon and stars revolving around the earth was accommodating a future belief in heliocentrism. Their silence is deafening in that regard.

This is the dilemma Mr. Palm is in. He has at least half a dozen popes and their sacred congregations all condemning heliocentrism as a breach of the faith, yet the only way for him to explain this breach is that somehow the Holy Spirit left the Church for several scores of years and allowed her to fall into canonical and doctrinal error, and not find out the error of her ways until the anti-Catholic and Arian, Isaac Newton, came along to set her straight about 150 years later. And why it is Mr. Palm clings to Newtonian science and avoids all the science from modern cosmology showing the earth in the center, begs the question. Who is Mr. Palm and why is he so insistent on heliocentrism if he doesn't know the science about heliocentrism?

D. Palm: The Catechism of the Council of Trent does not teach geocentrism as an article of faith.

R. Sungenis: The Tridentine catechism doesn't treat geocentrism as an "article of faith" (if by that we mean something to be held under the threat of punishment) simply because no one had contested geocentrism at that time. The same can be said about the Eucharist. It wasn't declared a formal "article of faith" until it was defined at the 1215 Lateran Council. Prior to that theologians could debate its nature and significance. The same was true on the canon of scripture. It wasn't formally defined and made a formal "article of faith" until the Council of Trent. But in 1633, heliocentrism was declared a formal heresy and approved as such by the pope, and it has never been rescinded. Granted, Urban VIII did not make geocentrism an infallible teaching, but papal infallibility did not formally exist in his day. At the least, geocentrism was an authoritative teaching, and until it is rescinded or until science gives us irrefutable evidence of heliocentrism, we are morally obligated to support geocentrism, even as *Lumen Gentium* 25 teaches.

Moreover, *Lumen Gentium* 12 teaches:

The holy People of God shares also in Christ's prophetic office: it spreads abroad a living witness to him, especially by a life of faith and love and by offering to God a sacrifice of praise, the fruit of lips praising his name (*cf.* Heb. 13:15). The whole body of the faithful who have an anointing that comes from the holy one (*cf.* 1 Jn. 2:20 and 27) cannot err in matters of belief. This characteristic is shown in the supernatural appreciation of the faith (*sensus fidei*) of the whole people, when, "from the bishops to the last of the faithful" they manifest a universal consent in matters of faith and morals. By this appreciation of the faith, aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth, the People of God, guided by the sacred teaching authority (*magisterium*), and obeying it, receives not the mere word of men, but truly the word of God (*cf.* 1 Th 2:13), the faith once for all delivered to the saints (*cf.* Jude 3). The people unfailingly adheres to this faith, penetrates it more deeply with right judgment, and applies it more fully in daily life.

Since it is a fact that the "People of God," which includes "the bishops to the last of the faithful," have believed unanimously, firmly and without equivocation in the doctrine of geocentrism from the beginning of the Catholic Church and throughout two millennia, and who were "guided by the sacred teaching authority" to do so, this belief necessarily fulfills the criteria of *Lumen Gentium* 12 that these same People of God "cannot err." It is an undeniable fact that all the Fathers, all the medievals, all the bishops, priests, saints, doctors, theologians and the remaining Christian faithful of every nation believed in the doctrine of geocentrism. Additionally, three popes and their Holy Offices officially confirmed this absolute consensus in the 17th century against a few men who, because of their own misguided convictions, sought to depart from that consensus, making the attempt in the wake of unproven scientific claims with the express purpose of reinstating a novel and subjective interpretation of Holy Writ.

D. Palm: And of course, the Church's next universal Catechism, promulgated by Pope John Paul II, also says not a word about geocentrism either. And yet the Holy Father stated in *Fidei Depositum IV*:

The Catechism of the Catholic Church, which I approved 25 June last and the publication of which I today order by virtue of my Apostolic Authority, is a statement of the Church's faith and of Catholic doctrine, attested to or illumined by Sacred Scripture, Apostolic Tradition and the Church's Magisterium. I declare it to be a valid and legitimate instrument for ecclesial communion and a sure norm for teaching the faith.

"[A] statement of the Church's faith and of Catholic doctrine..." But not a peep about geocentrism. That silence too is deafening.

R. Sungenis: First, the Tridentine catechism says in its introduction that it was written for the express purpose to: "examine every statement in the Catechism from the viewpoint of doctrine," yet Mr. Palm refuses to accept the face value statements of the Tridentine catechism on geocentrism and prefers to engage in anachronism by saying that it was accommodating heliocentrism.

Second, speaking of deafening arguments, Pius V didn't say one word about heliocentrism in his catechism, so why is Mr. Palm arguing that Pius V was accommodating heliocentrism? Arguments from silence work both ways. Mr. Palm tries to make an issue that JP2's catechism doesn't teach geocentrism. But does it teach heliocentrism as a fact of science? No. The reality is, the only thing JP2 would be responsible for saying (that is, if he really believed that heliocentrism was dogmatic scientific fact) is that he was rescinding the 1633 canonical decision of heliocentrism as a formal heresy. But the fact is, his catechism contains no such language, but 1994 was the perfect time to do so if the Church really needed to hear it. The silence is deafening.

Robert Sungenis

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