

Mark Shea's Apology and Geocentrism

R. Sungenis: It has come to my attention that Mark Shea has made a public apology for the way he has treated various people. I appreciate Mr. Shea's apology and I will take it at face value without questioning his sincerity or his motives.

However, in a recent dialogue with a person going by the moniker "I Am Not Spartacus," Mr. Shea said the following things about me and geocentrism that need to be answered.

Mark Shea: The problem with Sungenis is that he's making some pretty wacky claims, actually trying to convince people that the universe revolves around the earth, and uses Sacred Scripture to try to prove his point.

R. Sungenis: Would Mr. Shea conclude that Albert Einstein's following statement is "wacky"?

"The struggle, so violent in the early days of science, between the views of Ptolemy and Copernicus would then be quite meaningless. Either coordinate system could be used with equal justification. The two sentences: "the sun is at rest and the Earth moves," or "the sun moves and the Earth is at rest," would simply mean two different conventions concerning two different coordinate systems" (The Evolution of Physics: From Early Concepts to Relativity and Quanta, Albert Einstein and Leopold Infeld, 1938, 1966, p. 212).

Or would he consider this commentary on Einstein "wacky"?

"According to Einstein, the argument over whether the earth turns around or the heavens revolve around it, is seen to be no more than an argument over the choice of reference frames. There is no frame of reference from which an observer would not see the effects of the flattening of the poles. Thus in frame number 1 (the earth turns round while the sky is at rest), the centrifugal force is a consequence of the earth's motion (uniform acceleration) relative to the heavens. This causes the flattening. In the latter frame, number 2 (the sky rotate and the earth stands still), the centrifugal force should be understood as being an effect of "the rotating heavens," which is generating a gravitational field that causes the flattening of the poles. The two explanations are equivalent as there is equivalence between inertial and gravitational mass" ("Einstein's Ether: D. Rotational Motion of the Earth," Galina Granek, Department of Philosophy, Haifa University, Mount Carmel, Haifa 31905, Israel, Apeiron, Vol. 8, No. 2, April 2001, p. 61).

Or how about this one from physicist Max Born:

"Thus we may return to Ptolemy's point of view of a 'motionless Earth.' This would mean that we use a system of reference rigidly fixed to the Earth in which all stars are performing a rotational motion with the same angular velocity around the Earth's axis...one has to show that the transformed metric can be regarded as produced according to Einstein's field equations, by distant rotating masses. This has been done by Thirring. He calculated a field due to a rotating, hollow, thick-walled sphere and proved that inside the cavity it behaved as though there were centrifugal and other inertial forces usually attributed to absolute space. Thus from Einstein's point of view, Ptolemy and Copernicus are equally right. What point of view is chosen is a matter of expediency" (Max Born, Einstein's Theory of Relativity, 1962, 1965, pp. 344-345).

Or this one from physicist Martin Gardner:

"The ancient argument over whether the Earth rotates or the heavens revolve around it (as Aristotle taught) is seen to be no more than an argument over the simplest choice of a frame of reference. Obviously, the most convenient choice is the universe.... Nothing except

inconvenience prevents us from choosing the Earth as a fixed frame of reference...If we choose to make the Earth our fixed frame of reference, we do not even do violence to everyday speech. We say that the sun rises in the morning, sets in the evening; the Big Dipper revolves around the North Star. Which point of view is "correct"? Do the heavens revolve or does the Earth rotate. The question is meaningless" (The Relativity Explosion, 1976, pp. 86-87).

Unfortunately, Mr. Shea has concluded (and does so without knowing basic cosmology or relativity theory) that to choose between one of Einstein's two options is "wacky." I think it is obvious from the perspective of science that to limit ourselves to one option and exclude the other is "wacky," especially since the Catholic Church has gone on record with a consensus of the Fathers and the formal condemnation of Galileo and heliocentrism in the reigns of Pope Paul V and Pope Urban VIII.

Mark Shea: For these types of Christians, St. Augustine has some pretty harsh words. In his work *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* (*De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim*) Augustine gives this advice which Mr. Sungenis should ponder:

"Usually, even a non-Christian knows something about the earth, the heavens, and the other elements of this world, about the motion and orbit of the stars and even their size and relative positions, about the predictable eclipses of the sun and moon, the cycles of the years and the seasons, about the kinds of animals, shrubs, stones, and so forth, and this knowledge he holds to as being certain from reason and experience.

Now, it is a disgraceful and dangerous thing for an infidel to hear a Christian, presumably giving the meaning of Holy Scripture, talking nonsense on these topics; and we should take all means to prevent such an embarrassing situation, in which people show up vast ignorance in a Christian and laugh it to scorn. The shame is not so much that an ignorant individual is derided, but that people outside the household of faith think our sacred writers held such opinions, and, to the great loss of those for whose salvation we toil, the writers of our Scripture are criticized and rejected as unlearned men.

If they find a Christian mistaken in a field which they themselves know well and hear him maintaining his foolish opinions about our books, how are they going to believe those books in matters concerning the resurrection of the dead, the hope of eternal life, and the kingdom of heaven, when they think their pages are full of falsehoods and on facts which they themselves have learnt from experience and the light of reason?

Reckless and incompetent expounders of Holy Scripture bring untold trouble and sorrow on their wiser brethren when they are caught in one of their mischievous false opinions and are taken to task by those who are not bound by the authority of our sacred books. For then, to defend their utterly foolish and obviously untrue statements, they will try to call upon Holy Scripture for proof and even recite from memory many passages which they think support their position, although they understand neither what they say nor the things about which they make assertion."---*De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim* By St. Augustine

R. Sungenis: Mr. Shea should take a good look in the scientific mirror rather than proof-texting his ideas with out-of-context quotes, especially since St. Augustine was a geocentrist who rejected the heliocentrism of the Greek Pythagorean school and did not consider his reliance on Scripture in this matter as an example of being a "reckless and incompetent expounder of Holy Scripture."

Since modern science (per the quotes I've given above) has admitted that it cannot choose or distinguish between the heliocentric and geocentric systems, then it certainly is a "disgraceful and dangerous thing" for Mr. Shea to require us to reject geocentrism and adopt heliocentrism. If not, then Mr. Shea might find himself as the "reckless and incompetent expounder of Holy Scripture" against whom St. Augustine's warns us.

If Mr. Shea really wants to be sincere about his apology, then he should stop the knee-jerk reaction against geocentrism and heed the words of St. Augustine in light of the knowledge of modern science.

I would also suggest that Mr. Shea heed even more important words from St. Augustine from the same book he quoted, *The Literal Interpretation of Genesis*, about how he and we should regard the Bible when dealing with such questions:

“But more dangerous is the error of certain weak brethren who faint away when they hear these irreligious critics learnedly and eloquently discoursing on the theories of astronomy or on any of the questions relating to the elements of this universe. With a sigh, they esteem these teachers as superior to themselves, looking upon them as great men; and they return with disdain to the books which were written for the good of their souls; and, although they ought to drink from these books with relish, they can scarcely bear to take them up.” (*The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, Book 1, Chapter 20, Para. 41, *Ancient Christian Writers*, *ibid.*, p. 44).

Robert Sungenis

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