

## Question 132 – Interview with the Chicago Tribune

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**Manya:** Why did the church stray from geocentrism? What is dangerous and misleading about the theory of heliocentrism? (I am assuming that you consider heliocentrism a theory much like evolution?)

**R. Sungenis:** Just so that you don't misspell it in your article, the correct spelling is geocentrism. Incidentally, all the information I am about to give you here is documented in my two volume work: *Galileo Was Wrong: The Church Was Right.*, available from CAI Publishing, Inc.

The event with the most impact on the society at large in favor of heliocentrism was Isaac Newton's *Principia Mathematica*, published in 1687, which formulated the laws of gravity and motion. Newton was understood to teach that the smaller body must revolve around the larger body, thus, it was believed that the earth must revolve around the sun, not vice-versa. Neither scientists nor clerics could mount much of an argument against Newton's thesis and thus the tide against geocentrism began to gain momentum. The Catholics that remained with the Church's traditional view of geocentrism did so based on their allegiance to the Church's patristic consensus, the centuries of tradition prior to Newton, and the allegiance to papal authority, namely, the four popes of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries who had condemned heliocentrism as "opposed to Scripture" and "formally heretical" (e.g., Popes: Pius V, Paul V, Urban VIII and Alexander VII). For example, Pope Urban VIII approved this condemnation of heliocentrism at the 1633 trial of Galileo: "The proposition that the sun is the center of the world and does not move from its place is absurd and false philosophically and formally heretical, because it is expressly contrary to the Holy Scripture; The proposition that the Earth is not the center of the world and immovable but that it moves, and also with a diurnal motion, is equally absurd and false philosophically and theologically considered at least erroneous in faith"). A good example of the allegiance to these papal decrees is noted in the 1833 Glasgow edition of Newton's *Principia* wherein the Catholic editors, Jacquier and Le Seur, put this disclaimer in the opening pages: "Newton in his third book assumes the hypothesis of the earth's movement. The author's propositions could not be explained except on the same hypothesis. Hence we have been obliged to put on a character not our own. But we profess obedience to the decrees made by the Supreme Pontiffs against the movement of the earth."

We have since discovered after the time of Newton that, although it is correct to say in general that the smaller body must revolve around the larger body, it would only be true in our case if the earth and sun were isolated from the rest of the universe, which contains trillions of stars with gravitational force much greater than the sun's. In reality, Newton did not teach that the smaller must go around the larger; rather, he taught that all celestial

bodies will revolve around the center of mass. As such, even Newton agreed in his *Principia* that the earth could occupy the center of mass if all the other bodies in the universe were strategically placed around it so that all their gravitational masses balanced out at the center. In short, this is the scientific basis for geocentrism – the earth is the center of mass for the universe, and thus the universe will revolve around the earth. This fact of physics was not widely known until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and not advertised until the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Under the pressure of Newton's *Principia*, as well of a few unsubstantiated claims of stellar parallax, various clerics of the Catholic Church made motions toward softening the stance against heliocentrism. Stellar parallax was thought to provide evidence of heliocentrism since it was believed that the only way parallax could be observed from earth is if the earth were revolving around the sun, and thus make it possible to view two stars at six month intervals and see an angle of separation. We now know from modern science, however, that stellar parallax can also be observed from a geocentric system if the revolution of the stars is centered on the sun rather than the earth, and therefore stellar parallax does not prove heliocentrism.

Nevertheless, due to the common (though misguided) presumption of Newton's force laws and stellar parallax, Catholic clerics felt great pressure to conform to the apparent dictates of science and thus the Church made its first departure from geocentrism when it gave an imprimatur to Canon Giuseppe Settele in 1822 for his book *Elements of Optics and Astronomy* which, according to the commentaries, was the first book after the Church's 1616 and 1633 condemnations of heliocentrism to treat heliocentrism as a thesis instead of a hypothesis.

But here is the other half of the story. The manner in which the imprimatur was granted was quite devious. The cleric in charge of issuing the imprimatur, Maurizio Benedetto Olivieri, knew the papal condemnations against heliocentrism were sacrosanct and could not be changed. Since that was the case, Olivieri decided that he would change the *basis* for the condemnations by posing that the 17<sup>th</sup> century popes were merely condemning the *Copernican* version of heliocentrism, not heliocentrism itself. Olivieri reasoned that, since Kepler found that Copernicus' system did not work with the planets revolving in perfect circles and would work better if the orbits were changed to ellipses, then the Church would have accepted Kepler's version of heliocentrism while condemning Copernicus'. It was on this manufactured foundation that Settele received his imprimatur. But Olivieri's reasoning was fallacious on two counts: first, the Church in 1616 and 1633 had specifically condemned *any* thesis which held that the earth moved or that the sun did not revolve around the earth, and said nothing about *how* the bodies revolved; second, Kepler's heliocentrism had already been condemned and placed on the Index of Forbidden books by Pope Alexander VII in 1664. Olivieri had one small excuse, however. In 1809 Napoleon had stormed the Vatican and took all the records dealing with Galileo and brought them to France. They were not returned until 1843 (21 years after Settele's imprimatur) and thus the Church had little historical data to properly adjudicate the Settele case, except the Index of Pope Benedict XIV from 1757. Pope Benedict XIV had kept Galileo and Copernicus on the Index, but had allowed general works teaching heliocentrism provided it was taught as hypothetical, not as a thesis. Additionally, receiving an imprimatur does not mean that the Church is bound to

accept whatever is written in the book. Galileo had received an imprimatur from Cardinal Riccardi for his controversial book in 1631, but it was promptly rescinded in 1632 when Pope Urban VIII discovered it.

The Church's next movement relaxing its prohibition on heliocentrism was the removal of Copernicus' and Galileo's books from the Index in 1835 under Pope Gregory XVI (who was formally Cardinal Capellari and who had served on the committee to give Settele an imprimatur). Similar to the Settele affair, however, this decision was made under false pretenses. Various clerics in favor of heliocentrism (for by this time the clerics were clearly divided) proposed that an instance of stellar parallax had been discovered a hundred years earlier by James Bradley and that this evidence should be used as proof for heliocentrism. Under this information, Copernicus and Galileo were taken off the 1835 Index. But the information was later found to be false, since Bradley did not discover stellar parallax but stellar aberration. Stellar parallax wasn't discovered until three years after the 1835 Index, by Friedrich Bessel in 1838. But, as I noted above, we now know from modern science that even stellar parallax does not prove heliocentrism, and thus the removal of Copernicus and Galileo from the 1835 Index was premature and made under false pretenses.

As noted earlier, during this same time Newton's *Principia* was still being censored in 1833 by Catholic editors for its teaching of heliocentrism, and in 1850 (15 years after the 1835 Index) the Church commissioned Marino Marini, the Prefect of the Vatican Secret Archives, to write an updated apologetic work on the Galileo affair, which was published by the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in Rome under the title: "Galileo el 'Inquisizione." Marini stated that the Catholic Church had saved Europe from heresy and that the Inquisition's punishment of Galileo, which did not include torture, was mild compared to what Protestant churches and state courts were known to do against rebels. Marini concluded that the Inquisition handled the trial of Galileo in "justice, wisdom and moderation," and that "we must affirm that perhaps there has never been a judicial action as just and as wise as this one." It must also be said that Indexes do not have the authority to overturn results of canonical trials, but it is clear from the historical record that Galileo and heliocentrism were condemned under the auspices of a canonical trial in 1633 by Pope Urban VIII.

These unfortunate events, more than any others, started many clerics down the road to an unofficial and tacit acceptance of heliocentrism, yet they did so without any scientific proof and without addressing the decrees from the canonical trial of 1633.

As for what is "dangerous" about heliocentrism, nothing, *per se*. God could have created the universe with the earth rotating and revolving if He wanted to, and if He did we would honor that system. Heliocentrism becomes "dangerous" if it is being propped up as the true system when, in fact, it is a false system. False information leads to false ideas, and false ideas lead to illicit and immoral actions – thus the state of the world today. It just so happens that heliocentrism has been employed since the time of Galileo as proof that the Church makes mistakes in doctrine and, since that is the case, it must then be made subservient to political governments and modern academia. Prior to Galileo, the Church was in full command of the world; and governments and academia were subservient to her.

**Manya:** 2) On that subject, do you believe in the Genesis account of creation or evolution? Do the two (creation and geocentrism) go hand in hand?

**R. Sungenis:** Don't take this wrong, but it doesn't matter whether I believe it. It only matters what the Church has taught in its tradition and conciliar and papal decrees. I'm just the messenger boy, so to speak. Traditionally, the Church has always held to geocentrism and creation. The Church Fathers were in unanimous consent on both, as were the medieval theologians, even in the face of the Greek philosophers and Indian astronomers who were touting both evolution and heliocentrism. The Catechism of the Council of Trent issued under Pope Pius V in 1566 endorsed geocentrism in four separate places. The Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 stated, in an infallible dogma, that creation, not evolution, was the Church's belief ("God...by His own omnipotent power at once from the beginning of time, created each creature from nothing, spiritual and corporal, namely, angelic and mundane, and finally the human" Denz. 428), as did Vatican Council 1 in 1870 ("If anyone does not confess that the world and all things which are contained in it, both spiritual and material, as regards their whole substance, have been created by God from nothing...let him be anathema" Denz. 1805), eleven years after Darwin published his famous *Origin of Species* touting evolution. Genesis is very clear, at least if read at face value (which is the traditional way of reading it), that the earth was made first and everything in the universe was built around it. The modern Big Bang theory says the opposite, that is, an explosion came first and the earth appeared by chance about 8 billion years later. Both cannot be right.

**Manya:** 3) Could you please cite the verses of Scripture that support geocentrism?

**R. Sungenis:** The following are the verses that the Church has used and have been understood to teach geocentrism, either explicitly or implicitly; directly or indirectly. They are all exegeted in detail in our book, *Galileo Was Wrong: The Church Was Right*, Vol. 2, pp. 51-85:

Joshua 10:10-14;  
Ecclesiasticus (Sirach) 46:3-5;  
Habakkuk 3:11;  
2Kings 20:9-12;  
2Chronicles 32:31;  
Isaiah 38:7-8;  
Psalm 8:3-6;  
Psalm 19:1-6;  
1Chronicles 16:30;  
Psalm 93:1-2;  
Psalm 96:9-11;  
Psalm 75:2-4;  
Psalm 104:5,19;  
Psalm 119:89-91;  
Ecclesiastes 1:4-7;  
Ecclesiasticus (Sirach) 43:1-10;  
Job 9:6-10;  
Job 22:13-14;  
Job 26:7-9;  
Job 26:10-11;  
Proverbs 8:27-30;

Wisdom 7:15-22;  
1Esdras 4:34 (apoc.);  
Job 38:12-18

The most historically significant of these in the Church's case against Galileo is Joshua 10:12-14:

12 On this day, when the Lord delivered up the Amorites to the Israelites, Joshua prayed to the Lord, and said in the presence of Israel: Stand still, O sun, at Gibeon, O moon, in the valley of Aijalon!

13 And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, while the nation took vengeance on its foes. Is this not recorded in the Book of Jashar? The sun halted in the middle of the sky; not for a whole day did it resume its swift course.

14 Never before or since was there a day like this, when the Lord obeyed the voice of a man; for the Lord fought for Israel. (New American Bible, Catholic, 1972).

The significance is that it would be very difficult to interpret this passage as a figurative account, since the numerous historical details speak against such a perspective. It would be difficult to do so even on a practical level since Joshua commands that both the moon and the sun stop their movements. If only the sun were commanded to stop, someone could, perhaps, argue that the passage was only figurative. But since the moon, which even the heliocentrist accepts as revolving around the earth, was also commanded to stop its movement, then the passage is weighted toward the understanding that both the sun and moon were revolving around the earth; and the consequent fact that both could not be stopped if the earth ceased rotating (for in that scenario, only the sun would appear to stop, but the moon would keep moving). Galileo, of course, had his own peculiar interpretation of Joshua 10:12-14 which St. Robert Bellarmine and Pope Paul V promptly rejected.

**Manya:** 4) James explained that many people criticize geocentrism as ridiculous. Why do you think that is?

**R. Sungenis:** Because if you have been taught since early childhood, day in and day out, that the earth rotates on an axis and revolves around the sun, you would naturally think it a ridiculous idea if someone told you the opposite. We assume, without question, that the scientists who told us the earth rotates and revolves are correct. As such, one would be foolish not to think geocentrism was ridiculous. I completely sympathize with their predicament. One cannot even begin to see the other side of the story until he is given the right information to make an intelligent decision. We provide this information in our book, and will do so also at our conference.

**Manya:** 5) James said the pope was wrong to issue an apology for the way the church treated Galileo. Do you agree? Why do you think Galileo promoted an alternative structure to the universe?

**R. Sungenis:** Again, although I respect James, his opinions (whether I agree with them or not) do not speak for the conference or for me. That being said, the fact is, Pope John Paul II did not issue a formal apology for the way the Church treated Galileo. You will not find

the word "apology" or anything similar in John Paul II's 1992 speech to the Pontifical Academy of Science. In fact, the speech said that both parties could be faulted for indiscretions. According to the most qualified historians who are authorities on the Galileo issue (e.g., McMullin, Finocchiaro, Coyne, et al.) the most that can be attributed to John Paul II's 1992 speech is that the whole ordeal between Galileo and the Church was a big "misunderstanding." (We cite these historians in our book). Not surprisingly, the world's newspapers gave a biased interpretation of John Paul's slight concessions and turned them into explicit evidence that the medieval Church was in error and that Galileo was correct. That particular position was not admitted by John Paul II, although I can imagine why some think he conceded. In any case, the papal speech of 1992 was only a private affair between John Paul II and the Pontifical Academy of Science and in no way should be misconstrued as official Catholic doctrine. The fact remains that, except for the lifting of Copernicus and Galileo from the 1835 Index (which was made under false information), the 1616 and 1633 condemnation and trial against Galileo and heliocentrism has never been officially overturned or rescinded, in any manner, and thus remains in force to this very day.

**Manya:** 6) Why are you on a mission to promote geocentrism?

**R. Sungenis:** Because I am on a mission to reveal the truth to the world, the Gospel, for Jesus said that "the truth will set you free." No greater love do I have than for the truth, whether it be religious or scientific. After reading the leading lights in cosmology for the past dozen years (e.g., Einstein, Hawking, Sagan, Ellis, Hubble, et al.), I have learned they all admit in their writings that the cosmological evidence clearly shows the earth is motionless in the center of the universe, but they also admit that their secular philosophy and anti-religious convictions force them to suppress this evidence. For example, when Edwin Hubble (from whose name we dubbed the Hubble Space Telescope) saw in his telescope that the earth was in the center of the universe, he rejected it with these emotional words: "Such a condition would imply that we occupy a unique position in the universe, analogous, in a sense, to the ancient conception of a central Earth....This hypothesis cannot be disproved, but it is unwelcome and would only be accepted as a last resort in order to save the phenomena. Therefore we disregard this possibility...the unwelcome position of a favored location must be avoided at all costs... such a favored position is intolerable..." (*The Observational Approach to Cosmology*, 1937, pp. 50, 51, 58-59). Reading between the lines, we can surmise that the main reason Hubble and men like him want to suppress these facts is they know instinctively that if the earth is motionless in the center of the universe this could not happen by chance. Someone had to place it there, which invariably brings them right to the throne of God to Whom they are accountable for their lives. Putting the earth in the remote recesses of space and pretending that it got there by chance convinces them, at least for the moment, that God doesn't exist. We only need cite Stephen Hawking's remark last week, stating that he is of the conviction that God wasn't necessary to create the universe. As we demonstrate in our book by quoting Hawking, he admits that the cosmological evidence shows the earth is in the center of the universe, but he then feigns humility and says that this honored position is not worthy of the human race, and convinces himself that he must find some other scientific explanation to convince people the earth is not in the center, and this has been his life's mission. Conversely, my life's mission is to expose this hypocrisy and lead people back to God, the God who, according to the Catholic Church's time-honored tradition, made the earth out of

nothing and put it in the center of the universe so that men would give Him the honor and obedience He is due.

**Manya:** 7) Belief in the Genesis account of creation has seen a renewal in recent years. Why do you think that is? Do you hope or believe the same will happen with geocentrism?

**R. Sungenis:** The renewal is due, in part, to the efforts of Christians who boldly entered the scientific domain that was previously dominated by secularists. These Christian scientists showed that the cosmogony and cosmology of modern science is without scientific foundation or even good evidence. Ever since Morris and Whitcomb wrote *The Genesis Flood* in the 1960s, Christians have been on a march to discover and demonstrate the scientific evidence against evolution. It also helps when the secular evolutionists come to our aid by admitting the same lack of proof, as was the case, for example, when the leading evolutionists, Stephen Gould and Niles Eldredge, admitted to a packed house of the world's scientists in Chicago in 1972 that the search for the "missing link" and other intermediate fossils was a total failure, since after almost a hundred years of searching modern science was not able to find even one.

Yes, I do feel the same thing will happen to geocentrism as has happened for creationism. We are where Morris and Whitcomb were in the 1960s. Sooner or later the evidence for geocentrism is going to be widespread, but it takes time. I may be dead and gone before my dream is ever realized. The case for geocentrism may, however, go a little faster than it has for creationism, since the case for geocentrism is so much easier to demonstrate than creationism. I can explain the scientific evidence for geocentrism in about 20 minutes to a qualified listener, and after I'm done he will either walk away absolutely amazed at the new truth he just discovered or he will do everything in his power to suppress and ridicule what I just told him and call me a lunatic for even broaching the subject, since he realizes, but rejects, the theological and global implications of what I am saying. It all depends on the person and his personal agenda and belief system.

**Manya:** 8) How many people are attending this conference in South Bend? Anyone from Notre Dame?

**R. Sungenis:** We have six weeks to the conference, but so far we are close to 75 attendees. Last week we had a flurry of phone calls and emails as well as over 130,000 hits on our website in just two days, since the word got out on Twitter that we were having the conference. So I expect more people will come. The conference will be recorded on video and audio for those who cannot come. Our limit is 125 attendees at this point. As regards Notre Dame, yes, we have almost two dozen students and a few faculty coming to the event. All students and clergy are admitted free and will receive a copy of our recently published book, *Galileo Was Wrong: The Church Was Right: A Synopsis*, which is a 100-page summary of the main arguments in the two volume work of over 1100 pages.

**Manya:** Many thanks.

**R. Sungenis:** My pleasure. May God be with you.