

Response to Stacy Trasancos on “Scream About Geocentrism”

<http://www.acceptingabundance.com/2011/01/05/scream-about-geocentrism>

Stacy: Have some fun for a minute. I know this is simplistic, but I also think truth, while it can represent complexities, is still basically simple. First, let’s just get it out of the way. Say the word, “Geocentrism.” Now everybody scream and get it out of your system.



It’s such a heated topic, tied to the history of the Church, sometimes I wonder why exactly it evokes such a reaction from people today – especially Christians. Why not entertain it, or at least think about geocentrism and hear out the arguments. What is there to lose? Somebody might call you a quack? Is that really a reason to get so discombobulated? Nah. Arguments based on calling people names aren’t worth taking seriously anyway.

R. Sungenis: Much agreed. Scream away! Oh, and I’ll explain the picture a little further below ☺

Stacy: First, a definition. Geocentrism is the theory that the Earth is the center of the universe, and that all other objects orbit around it. That is the literal meaning of the word. “Geo-centric”

(γεω) means the Earth is the center. It is opposed to “heliocentric” which means the Sun (ἥλιος) is the center. We commonly today consider the Sun to be the center of the Solar System, but the Solar System is not the universe. Is the Earth the center of the universe? Do all other objects orbit around it? Notice, I’m avoiding the question of whether or not the Earth itself rotates. Why? It’s actually not part of the literal definition.

R. Sungenis: Actually, the term “geocentrism,” although not technically applied to rotation, connotes or implicitly includes the idea that the Earth does not rotate; rather, the stars rotate around the Earth once per day. When the Church condemned Galileo and the Copernican system, it included a condemnation of a rotating Earth on its axis as well as an Earth revolving around the sun. Why? Because Scripture says the sun revolves around the Earth, and thus the Earth cannot rotate.

Stacy: When forming an opinion a Catholic’s first consideration is to ask whether or not that opinion is in contradiction to Church doctrine. Geocentrism is not. In fact it was defended for much of the Church’s history, and today the Church does not endorse any other theory. One is free to intellectually explore. Actually, this is a reason to want to explore the idea more.

R. Sungenis: Yes, one can explore, but when he does so he will find that the Church officially rejected Copernicanism both in 1616 and 1633, and that it remains the official position of the Church since the decrees were never rescinded. He will find that the Fathers and medievals were in absolute consensus on geocentrism against the Pythagorean heliocentrists. He will find that the Tridentine catechism endorses geocentrism in four separate places. So it's not really a question of which theory the Church "endorses" but which position is and was the official position of the Catholic Church. As may sometimes happen, the Church does not, for political or ecumenical reasons, "endorse" a particular traditional teaching, but that does not mean that the Church's official teaching has been changed (e.g., usury, total biblical inerrancy).

Stacy: The next consideration, then, is to ask whether or not it is conceivable. Yes, it is, as defined. There is absolutely no way that any scientific experiment can produce empirical evidence to determine whether or not, with certainty, anything is the center of the universe. If you constructed a model Solar System with the Sun at the center, that doesn't mean that the model Solar System itself is in the center of the room. To know what is the center of the universe would require actually knowing what the limits of the universe are, and we don't – we can't – know that. There are mathematical cosmological theories, which puts them all on the same footing, as theories in the mind's eye. However, keep in mind that as it actually turns out, God has constructed the universe in a way that leaves us unable to discover its limits. Surely there's a reason for that.

R. Sungenis: Yes, modern science allows geocentrism to be conceivable, but it is not merely by default. We see the stars go around us every night. So, there are only two logical possibilities why this happens: (1) the earth rotates in a fixed star field, or (2) the stars rotate around a fixed earth. If the latter, then the Earth must necessarily be in the center of that rotation. Moreover, there are two sets of scientific data in modern science that can be used to verify Scripture's and the Church's contention that the Earth does not move and is in the center. First, the 1800 and 1900 interferometer experiments (Michelson-Morley, Sagnac, Michelson-Gale) all show the Earth doesn't move. The only possible way around this is to do the same thing Einstein did – invent a new physics, Special Relativity, to explain them away. Second, with the new mapping of the universe provided by the 2001 Wilkinson Microwave Anisotropy Probe and the 2005 Sloan Digital Sky Survey, we have abundant evidence that the Earth is at or very near the center of the universe. Surely there is a reason that God has given us this evidence. I believe it is to confirm both his word and his Church in a day when most of the world has rejected it. What better way to get peoples' attention than to show them that the Bible and the Church were right all along about one of the most interesting and divisive questions ever to face mankind.

Stacy: What would we do with the knowledge anyway? Let's consider for a moment that we could define in three-dimensional space, or any other imagined dimensional space, the limits of the universe, and we, therefore, could determine the exact center of it. What are we going to do? Pack up our things and move there? Are the atheist scientists really going to have an epiphany because of it and be converted?

And that leaves me wondering why it even matters to scientists whether or not the Earth is the center of the universe with all other objects orbiting around it. What difference does that make to us? Is there some need for people to sit around coffee tables scratching their chins in fake Irish wool sweaters, speculating about such ultimately unknowable things? Maybe, but it's only for their own egos. Or maybe those smart people could spend their talents and time trying to figure out other things, like how to cure diseases or

how to feed the starving. Is it crazy to think that science ought to keep as its primary goal the betterment of mankind?

R. Sungenis: Stacy will have to forgive me, but I must say that her position is rather naïve. How many times have we heard the world attempt to ridicule the Catholic Church, claiming that the Church was wrong about Galileo, and thus, what else must she be wrong about? So if the Church says that abortion and homosexuality are wrong (which are, in effect, some of the “diseases” Stacy would like to cure) but the society comes back and says “Look, this is out of your domain. This is about science, and science says that a blastula is not a human being, it is just a bunch of cells; and science says that homosexuality is



purely genetic in origin, so bug off.” In fact, these arguments are commonly used in society against the Church. Last year when the pope visited England there was a picture on one of the public walls depicting a woman dressed in priest garb surrounded by Galileo and Copernicus. You get the idea. The artists who drew it were saying: “the Church got Galileo and Copernicus wrong, and for the same reason the Church is wrong in forbidding women to be priests.” As Sloan said to Natalie in Herman Wouk’s *The Winds of War*, “Don’t you know, Natalie, that Christianity is dead and rotting since Galileo cut its throat” (p. 600).

The same attacks came upon Scripture. Why do you think there has been a whole movement in the Church of late to say that Scripture is only inerrant when it speaks on salvation? (Mind us, the Church has never taught such a thing, but many claim such). It is because they, based on the supposed notion that science has proven the Earth moves and is not in the center, believe Scripture either got it wrong or, at best, must be taken figuratively when it speaks about the cosmos (whereas the Church of tradition said that Scripture spoke inerrantly and authoritatively about the cosmos). Consequently, these people also claim that if Scripture condemns homosexuality or says that women should not be in leadership, well, we can just chalk that up to the fact that Scripture is only inerrant when it speaks about salvation, not social and genetic issues. In fact, St. Paul must have been a homophobe and a misogynist and was, in fact, writing on things of which he had no divine promise of inerrancy. So, as you can see, this issue is much more than what is in the center of the universe. It’s about the veracity and influence that the Church and Scripture, not to mention Catholic tradition, have on society at large. If those three authorities are shown to be so-so authorities, then we can rationalize just about any lifestyle we want. So, it does make a difference, because Truth is something worth fighting for. Truth is what holds the society together. It’s not just about “getting along with diverse ideas.” Sure, diversity and tolerance have their place, but Truth is higher than them. It is Truth that sets one free.

Stacy: Today’s cosmologists that claim they can create universes by thinking about them, ought to do the same for food that rains down out of the sky if they seriously believe that imagining things makes them real. That’s infinitely more useful to the human condition than creating universes in theoretical space, whatever that means.

R. Sungenis: But what Stacy is missing here is the reason modern cosmology is now turning to the idea of creating an infinite amount of universes. They do so because they are wedded to the Copernican Principle which says that we are nothing special. Why? Because if we were something special that means Someone made us that way. But if we are just a product of time and chance the odds are that there is no

Someone behind such randomness. The whole basis for the Copernican Principle is to lessen the odds that there is a Creator to whom mankind must answer. Without knowing so, Stacy is playing right into their hands. They love to hear from Christians that it is no big deal whether the Earth is in the center. They would love to have us go on thinking that there are no implications to where we are placed in the universe. In fact, the very reason they have created so many possible universes is that the scientific evidence they have found in the last few decades shows that not only is Earth in the center of it all, it is all so very finely tuned that it could not work without a Fine Tuner. So what's the atheistic solution to this dilemma? Just say that we are one possible universe in an infinite amount of possible universes. With those odds, we are bound to end up with at least one universe that appears as if its finely tuned. "That's ok," they claim, "because the fine tuning itself is a product of chance." No God. No afterlife. We eat, drink and be merry today, because there is no tomorrow, and we don't have to answer to anyone higher than ourselves.

Stacy: Further, learning not to scream at Geocentrism allows the Christian to read the Bible, "In the beginning God created Heaven and Earth," and smile with assurance. There's the Earth, and there's everything else. Believing that God created the universe is not a matter of science. It is a matter of Divine Revelation, which the truths of science cannot contradict since God is the author of all Truth.

R. Sungenis: Yes, certainly. No one could disagree with that. But the other side of that story is this: today's liberals (those who believe that Scripture is full of errors) love for us to see Genesis as just a general message. They claim that we needn't get into the details of Genesis because the author just wanted to give us the message that "God created the universe." But I'm sure you've heard the expression, "the devil is in the details." These liberals know that they cannot dismiss the entire Scripture (although some have tried), so the next best thing is to convince us that Scripture is just speaking in generalities about life and salvation but has nothing specific to say. Again, take homosexuality as an example. A liberal would say that Scripture just wants us to see that God created life, but the details about sex are specifics added in by the human author. This same hermeneutic has infected our Catholic seminaries. Why do you think there are so many homosexual priests running around today? Because they have been taught that Scripture doesn't address such specific topics, at least with inerrancy and authority. By the same token, they have also been taught that Scripture doesn't address whether the earth was created before the sun, moon and stars. Genesis 1 is said to speak in generalities only – God created the world, and that's all we need to know. This is more like the Deist god. He created the world and then went off never to be seen again because, basically, he's not interested in the details. But this is not what our Catholic tradition has taught. St. Gregory Nazianzus said that if we could prove just one assertion of Scripture wrong, then just throw the whole thing out, because it's not worth the paper it's written on. He's right. Scripture stands or falls on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. It is the same argument that St. Robert Bellarmine and Paul V gave to Galileo, but Galileo tried desperately to give the same arguments that the liberals give today – God only spoke in generalities in Scripture. But the Church condemned Galileo's position, and rightly so.

Stacy: Untrue science could contradict it I suppose, but that only begs the question, "Why would anyone want to believe untrue science?"

So a Christian can say “Geocentrism” and life goes on. For that matter no one can prove heliocentrism, ultimately, either. Maybe God is trying to tell us something. We will never know where the very first man and woman first physically existed either. Maybe it’s enough to just know that they did exist, and move on. You know, progress.

R. Sungenis: Our progress would be that much faster if we would believe what Scripture says about the first man and woman and where they lived, because if we believe that specific issue, we will believe everything else Scripture says about us. The veracity of Scripture in the small places increases the veracity of Scripture in the large places that much more.

Stacy: If you must tell me I’ve lost my mind, commence, but for goodness sake, be entertaining. Or convince me that it’s even worth arguing about this stuff with nonbelievers anyway. They only have science. The believer has Divine Revelation and science, and thus, in humility, we have all the answer we need for the question of Geocentrism. And evolution.

R. Sungenis: But what is that answer, Stacy? Is Stacy ready to say that geocentrism and six-day creation are the absolute truth taught in Divine Revelation? Or will she, because it may be more convenient for comradery, decide that it’s unimportant and that Scripture doesn’t address such details of life? Scripture, literally interpreted, says that both geocentrism and six-day creation are, indeed, the reality. That, and that only, is our “Divine Revelation.” Scripture gives us no alternative. Since that is the case, we have one of the most important and significant facts we can tell to the “nonbeliever,” especially since we can back it up with very convincing evidence from modern science. Imagine a nonbeliever, after he has been taught all his life that the Earth is just a speck of dust out in the remote recesses of space, is suddenly told, and becomes convinced by Scripture and science, that he is actually in the center of the universe and that he doesn’t move. I’ve seen it many times over the last 10 years of dealing with this topic. Either he will fall on his knees; go insane; or decide to become evil and suppress the truth (just as St. Paul says in Romans 1:18-20). The moment of truth has arrived. There is no escape. Both cannot be right. There is no middle ground. The integrity of Scripture, Tradition and the Magisterium are at stake.

Robert Sungenis

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