

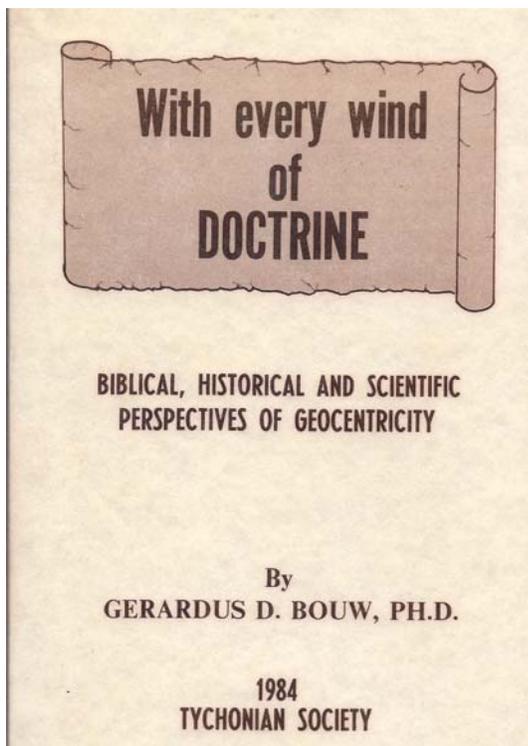
Biblical Christian Scholarship?

In 1987, as a pastor/friend from Ventura, California, gave me a book by Gerardus D. Bouw, he said, “The veracity of Scripture stands or falls on the acceptance/rejection of geocentricity.” I thought, “That is a **bold** pronouncement.” After reading Bouw’s diatribe on the subject, I understood why this pastor made this statement.

I read the book and noted its arguments (historical, scientific, Biblical). For a book of purported scientific scholarship, it lacks a cross-reference and index. It was also self-published and printed on a then “state-of-the-art” dot matrix printer.

Bouw does not inform the reader that the book received any peer-review.

Some Thoughts on the Geocentricity Question



His rendering of history is obviously skewed in an attempt to justify what he wants to say (a tendency in many people who write with a polemic attitude). He calls some of the founders of modern science (e.g., Galileo, Kepler, etc.) stupid. I thought, “It does no good to call these men stupid as part justification of your thesis.” He also likes to pontificate on the fact that the pronouncements of science are nothing but “fickle” or “mindless.” I partially agree (there is bad science afoot), but I also disagree (there is much good science being done, both past and present). Perhaps a better word could be used but Bouw, you see, has an “axe” to grind.

His sources (in his footnotes) show a general lack of depth and breadth (you would expect more from the holder of a Ph.D.). For example, his arguments that Calvin and Luther opposed geocentrism have been proved to be historically false. It was an idea popularized (and thereby propagated in a host of

books in the 20th century), without any supporting evidence, by the founder of Cornell University, Andrew Dickson White (1832-1918). First published in 1896, *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom* (2 vols.) is a diatribe against religion, primarily the version of it represented by Roman Catholicism, and it thereby smells of the putrid odor of *ad hominem*. Both White and Bouw commit the *ad hominem* fallacy a multiplicity of times (it is hard not to be guilty of committing this fallacy).

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Bouw's scientific analysis is interesting and, at some points, valid to a degree. Some of it is somewhat esoteric, exotic, and "creative," especially his explanation as to how far distant galaxies can rotate around the earth every 24 hours.

His Biblical exegesis is poor at best. He sees the many passages of Scripture that state "the earth is not moving" as cosmological truth. The context of most of these passages is an ethical one. For example, God's reign of righteousness stabilizes the earth so it "does not move" (Psalm 93:1; 96:10). And, at times, as a result of God's action of judgment on sin, the earth is shaken or "moves" (Psalm 60:1-2). Bouw uses Psalm 93:1 and 96:10 as part of his Scriptural proof for geocentricity but, although referring to Psalm 60 in an appendix, he remains silent about its "evidence" indicating the earth does move. If you are going to take the Scriptures at "face" value (if a Bible passage says the earth does not move, then it does not move), then you have to be consistent (if a Bible passage says the earth does move, then it does move). Radical literalists like Bouw rarely engage in this type of consistency because they will soon encounter logical conundrums. The same problem rears its head in those commentators who are radically literalistic in their interpretation of the book of Revelation.

Geocentricity: The earth, unmovable and stationary, is the center of the universe and all other celestial objects go around it.

Heliocentricity: The earth and its associated planets orbit the Sun which is the center of our local solar system, a system that possesses galactic rotational dynamics.

Bouw also does not engage Job 9:6, where the Hebrew indicates that the earth "turns on its foundation pillars" or "the pillars of the earth move it back and forth" (literal Hebrew). This poetic passage, along with Psalm 75:3 speaks of "pillars" as the foundation of the earth while another passage, Job 26:11, speaks of "nothing" as the foundation of the earth (Bouw does discuss this passage). If a radical literalist view is used to read Job 9:6, then "movement" of the earth is implied. Galileo (1564-1642) concluded the same in his *Letter to the Grand Duchess Christina* (cited in Stillman Drake, ed. *Discoveries and Opinions of Galileo* [New York: Doubleday, 1957, p. 203]), where he noted a 1584 commentary on the book of Job as his source. At the end of his letter (p. 216), Galileo also quoted the Douay Version of Proverbs 8:26, "He had not yet made the earth, the rivers, and the hinges of the terrestrial orb." The last phrase is somewhat questionable based upon the Hebrew. William Young translates it "the dust of the world." But, in II Samuel 22:16, the Hebrew *tebel* (translated "world" in both passages) could refer to the world's foundations, i.e., its pillars (a metaphor), and the Hebrew *anfâr* (translated "dust" by Young) means "powdered clay," or the mortar of those pillars (cf. Leviticus 14:42; Deuteronomy 9:21). It is a "stretch" to translate

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“mortar” into “hinges,” but, since Job 9:6 speaks of the earth hinged to its foundation pillars, the Douay translation is a possibility.

The other passages in Scripture, about the sun “rising,” “setting,” and “standing still” cannot, to Bouw, be excused as mere anthropomorphisms or “poetry.” To him, these passages must be cosmological and they prove, without a shadow of a doubt, that the Bible teaches geocentricity (and, by inference, to believe otherwise is not just discrediting Scripture ... *it is attacking and denouncing Scripture*).

Bouw continues to exemplify his radical literalist mindset in his chapter on “Sunrise and Sunset.” Contrary to him (p. 59), the 16th and 17th century analysis of these Scriptures was accurate. The Bible speaks to us assuming a framework and that framework, in these Scriptural cases, assumes an earth-relative perspective of things around us as we watch the beginning and ending of each day. We see that the sun comes up and it goes down. Every modern “heliocentric” astronomer today says the same, “The sun rises and the sun sets.” These astronomers are not making a confession of cosmological truth and neither is the Bible.

Non-Christian scientists love to attack Christianity and its many foibles. Sometimes, we Christian invite these attacks by our foolishness. At other times, these attacks are true reactions of darkness to light. Men like Andrew Dickson White mock the Roman Catholic church for its “opposition to the progress of science.” Again, there is plenty of research that counters this talk pulled from “thin air.” J. L. Heilbron is one source. *The Sun in the Church: Cathedrals as Solar Observatories*

(http://www.amazon.com/Sun-Church-Cathedrals-Solar-Observatories/dp/0674005368/ref=sr_1_4?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1299528810&sr=1-4) covers, in brief, the Galileo affair and then he shows how the Roman Catholic church allowed scientists to use their cathedrals as solar observatories, the results of which threw light (pun intended) on the disputed geometry of the solar system and vindicated Kepler’s (1571-1630) discovery that the planetary orbs are, indeed, ellipses.

Speaking of Kepler, Bouw simply doesn’t like him. On page 139, he accuses Kepler of being a pantheist (some of Kepler’s sayings, especially on Geometry, can be interpreted as such, but only when they are taken out of context and not adjusted by the rest of his writings). Bouw then charges Kepler a contributing to a non-Christian view of the universe as an impersonal machine. (NB. This is a classic example of reading into Kepler’s writings an Enlightenment view of the world as a mere mechanism.) Bouw also dismisses Kepler as a clone of the ancient Greek mathematician Pythagoras and a “sun-worshipper” (more *ad hominem*). Kepler could be viewed in this manner but not after you read his psalms of praise to God (Bouw does not quote any of these Psalms ... evidence of “selective scholarship”?). I would assume that Bouw was aware of Max Caspar’s masterful biography *Kepler* (http://www.amazon.com/Kepler-Max-Caspar/dp/0486676056/ref=sr_1_5?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1299529843&sr=8-5), first published in 1948 or any of the works of Stanley L. Jaki (1924-2009) referent to Kepler. All of these

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resources existed in 1984, but Bouw does not engage any of them (for a holder of a Ph.D., this is unforgivable).

I have encountered in my travels and conference engagements a few devotees of geocentrism (they seem to always want to make their position known). Last year (2010), at a conference in Tennessee, I met a man who heard me talk on Kepler and then challenged me about Kepler's heliocentrism. I am sorry to admit that my initial response was laughter. Then I asked, "Where are you coming from?" He showed me his bookstand and gave me *Vital Questions* (Reformation Media and Press, [1994] 1998), by the South African Philip Stott and some of Stott's tapes. A cursory reading of the titles on the tapes (along with some of his conclusions in his book) revealed that Stott was a devotee of Bouw. In general, *Vital Questions* is an adequate book (only two pages of bibliography, though, more resources in the footnotes, but no index) but I wanted to see what Stott said about Kepler, etc. On page 115, he said, "He [Kepler] even 'doctored' his observations to make them fit that scheme [heliocentrism] more convincingly." Well, Mr. Stott, if Kepler doctored his data, you better provide the evidence or a source. (NB. By the way, many scientists are guilty of manipulating data to confirm a presumed conclusion.) But, the little superscripted number is nowhere to be found on the page. This accusation is subtle but purposeful. At this point Stott is setting up for the "kill" by loosely drawing some rope around the reader's neck. And, later in the book, he pulls it tight with his assertion that, indeed, the earth does not move; i.e., heliocentrism is false (p. 125).

I hope you can see that both Bouw and Stott are not consistent examples of Biblical Christian scholarship. Twenty-five years ago, after I read Bouw's book, I concluded that some wars are meant to be fought; others are not. Hence, the onus is upon us to choose our battles wisely. I believe that the geocentric/heliocentric debate is not critical mass (although a few are fighting for geocentricity for reasons that may be genuine or that may be dubious ... I cannot judge a man's motives). Fighting this war at this time is expending valuable resources that could be used elsewhere and will only add fodder to the unbeliever's "attack" arsenal. I would rather be persecuted for the sake of righteousness than ridiculed for mishandling Scripture or exhibiting sloppy scholarship (scientific, historical, or Biblical). *And, if I am ridiculed as such, I deserve it.*

There is a culture dying around us, people are hurting, the Gospel is God's recovery program, and the Word of God, sharper than any two-edged sword, needs to be handled properly by all, scientist, pastor, and layman (Hebrew 4:12-13; II Timothy 2:15). If not, our hands will be holding a dull sword. As the Biblical Christian *wields* this sword (rightly and timely handled by *convincing* power of the Holy Spirit), the darkened thoughts and intensions of many hearts will be brought into redemptive light.

Soli deo gloria.