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Copernicus & the Church: Part II

Lead: The year was 1540.

Nicolaus Copernicus's controversial theory that the planets revolved around the sun instead of the Earth was about to become public.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: In 1540, a student and supporter of Copernicus, Rheticus, published *Naratio Prima*, otherwise known as *A First Account*. This encouraged the aging astronomer to print his own theory. A devout Catholic, Copernicus had struggled

for many years between his loyalty to the Church and his scientific theory that asserted heliocentrism, that the sun was the center of the solar system. He decided it was finally time for the world to hear his opinion of the truth. Three years later, just prior to his death, Copernicus published his treatise *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium*.

Catholic and Protestant leaders were outraged. Reformers Martin Luther and later John Calvin and other clergy denounced the Copernican system. They argued that various Bible passages should be read as literal statements that the Earth does not move. In 1616, the Catholic Church condemned Copernican

theory and forbade the reading of *De revolutionibus*.

It wasn't until much later that other scientists gathered evidence supporting the heliocentric system. This eventually led to the model of the solar system we know today. From the Copernican system, astronomers were able to map the correct order of the planets, their paths, and periods of revolution around the sun. It also provoked a further expansion of scientific study throughout Western Europe.

It would be decades before the first Protestants and centuries before official Roman Catholic policy came to accept Copernicus' theories, but by

the twentieth century a true understanding of the order of the universe was seen by many as confirming not denying faith. Much of the credit for today's astronomical understanding finds its roots in the early and very risky theories of Nicolaus Copernicus, a man who fought an internal battle of conscience between his faith and his intellect.

**At the University of Richmond,
this is Dan Roberts.**

Resources

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