

For star gazers, the August night sky is a wondrous sight. Star maps point out that bright summer stars shine directly overhead. The star Vega is one of the brightest stars in the sky. Many of the constellations can be seen such as Sagittarius, Scorpius, Pegasus and Aquarius.

If I were an ancient star gazer I would be one of those who would have agreed with Aristotle and be pretty certain that the earth and man were at the center of the universe and the glorious heavens revolved around us.

Most everyone knows that it was Nicholas Copernicus who proposed a clear earth-around-the-sun, or heliocentric, universe that in some ways started the modern scientific revolution. I just finished reading Jack Kepcheck's book "Copernicus' Secret," a fascinating view of Copernicus. He notes, for example, that Copernicus was a cleric of the Church who was only an amateur astronomer, and yet he changed our view of the universe forever.

By the way, we commonly view the 16th century Church as unwaveringly antiscientific. In fact Copernicus, as a scientific astronomer, was officially invited by a committee appointed by Pope Leo X to participate in the reform of the Julian Calendar. It was important to understand astronomy and the calendar since the Church had movable feasts such as Easter the date of which had to be accurately determined.

We also frequently view Copernicus' discovery as the product of someone who worked by himself in isolation. But **he** didn't view his discovery that way --he knew better.

Christopher Columbus sailed on his voyages with a book called Ephemerides which projected the position of celestial bodies from 1475 to 1506. Columbus was able to frighten and impress hostile Jamaicans by predicting the lunar eclipse of February 19, 1504. The natives were awed and allowed Columbus and his men to gather food and water. Bing Crosby, in the picture "A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court," employed a similar trick using a celestial almanac. But this time it was the solar eclipse of June 21, 528.

It was not Copernicus who wrote Ephemerides, but a precursor named Regiomontanus, one of the brightest geniuses of the 15th century. I dare say we all have heard the name Copernicus but how many of us have heard the name Regiomontanus? Yet, Copernicus depended on Regiomontanus' observations and books in order to develop his own line of thinking.

I am reminded of the famous phrase of Sir Issac Newton: "If I have seen a little further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants." That was Regiomontanus -- a giant who is practically untalked about today but on who's shoulders stood Copernicus.

The idea of someone on the shoulders of another person may also bring to mind Boys Town which was founded by Fr. Flanagan and the picture of a young boy on another boy's shoulder with the caption, "He ain't heavy, Father -- he's my brother" which became the motto of Boys Town. Think Spencer Tracy playing the part of Father Flanagan in the 1938 classic movie "Boys Town."

Perhaps that's a role that we can see for ourselves : putting another on our shoulders. It can be done, of course, in a number of ways: guidance; support; mentoring; trying to help lessen another person's distress.

That would, of course, make us giants. Oh, we probably won't become as famous as Bing Crosby or Spencer Tracey. But we could be another Regiomontanus, helping someone who might someday transform the world.