

GEOCENTRIC MODEL OF THE UNIVERSE AND THE SYSTEM OF CHRISTIAN SYMBOLISM

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The Ptolemaic approach to the Universe is analyzed through the prism of Christian symbolism which used the geocentric scientific paradigm as the base for the interpretation of the world according to the soteriological teaching of Christianity. The Copernican revolution brings some ideas concerning the correct relationships between the Church and science.

Keywords: Geocentric scientific paradigm, Copernican revolution, Christian soteriology, symbolism.

The idea of the struggle between the scientific and theological points of view is well-known today. One of the most prominent illustrations of the contradiction between these approaches is the discussion concerning the relation between the Earth and other planets (first of all, the Sun). As the result, the Heliocentric approach invented by N. Copernicus revealed its supremacy because it allowed to research and predict the moving of the planets with higher degree of accuracy. The victory of the Heliocentric paradigm over the Geocentric one became the symbol of the reason's triumph (Thomas Kuhn calls it “the Copernican Revolution” [2]). Besides, some traditionalists do not accept the model which describes the Earth as the moving planet. Among these thinkers are P. Florensky [8], A. Losev [7], J. Evola [9]. The denial of the Heliocentric model is not the result of some kind of disability to look at the Universe through a new scientific paradigm, the reason of it is a sacral interpretation of the Ptolemaic cosmos. This article is the attempt to show the Geocentric approach in its connection with the Christian symbolism. Such research can help to understand the specifics of the contradiction between the traditional thinkers who understand the world through the prism of symbolism and the modern utilitarian science which verifies a theory through its practical aspect.

The Christian religion is based on the symbolical understanding of the reality. The core of the Holy Scripture is a possibility of many different interpretations of the same fact. It is clear even through the multiple parables of Jesus Christ or the attempts to apply the sentences of the Jewish Prophets to the Evangelical events the authors of the Evangelical texts provide. Such approach becomes better organized due to Philo of Alexandria who interpreted the books of the Old Testament as the preface to the New one. To provide such interpretative work the Christian thinkers had to believe that both Testaments contain the Truth and their duty is to show the connection between those two codes of sacral texts. Besides, according to the Christian teaching, whole Universe is the creation of almighty and absolute God (the Book of Genesis [4]). On another hand, the aim of everyone is to return from this world to the Kingdom of God after the death. Through these statements, the Universe also can be understood as the text which contains some symbolical

information concerning the human salvation (God created the world in such a way because he loves humans and wants to help them; he could do it because he is almighty).

The understanding of the world through the symbolical key is also characteristic for the ancient Judaic tradition which contains the roots of Christianity. Besides, the soteriological turn in the interpretation begins from the teaching of Jesus Christ who offered the Kingdom of God for every righteous person. Certainly, according to the Holy Scripture, prophets Enoch [4, Gen. 5:24] and Elijah [4, 2Kings 2:11] were taken to the Heaven during their lives, but these are the exceptions which are not common for the Judaism. In contrast, the idea of human salvation is one of the main in Christianity. That is why, the attempts to interpret the Universe through the soteriological prism became the well-organized system of the symbols that can help to understand the world around a believer as the natural revelation of God. As the base of this symbolical system the Christians used the geocentric approach to the Universe because it was widespread and there was no alternative point of view which could compete with it. It is very important to understand that the symbolical interpretation of the world was closely connected with the dominant scientific paradigm and depended on it. The aim of this interpretation was only soteriological and there was no direct connection between it and astronomy. The system of the Christian symbolic can be understood only through the prism of the geocentric position because its roots belong to the geocentric society.

The main tenets of this system is the structural picture of the world in which the Sun symbolizes God and the Earth possesses the farthest place from him. Sure, the Sun is God only symbolically as the physical illustration of his transcendent qualities: the Sun is eternal and unstoppably moves in the Heaven; it is the only one source of the light (there are a lot of symbolical description of God's essence through the symbolical image of light or fire in the Holy Scripture and the works of the Christian mystics). The Earth without the Sun comes under the darkness of the night: there are a lot of dangers for the people during the nighttime, especially for those who lived in the ancient society. The darkness contains the ignorance, impotency and other qualities contrary to those traditionally attributed to God. The Earth can serve as the best embodiment of passiveness when the Sun represents the active power of the world. Through the symbolical prism, the aim of a Christian between these extremes is to leave the Earth and to achieve the Sun through the mystical journey many Christian thinkers describe (good examples offer St. Bonaventure [6], St. Bernard of Clairvaux [5] and St. John Climacus [1]). The base of the idea of human desire for God can be found in the Song of Solomon (through the interpretation provided by Gregory of Nazianzus). Satan as the power which opposes to the human returning to God has many images that express his different sides in this symbolical system. In respect to the mentioned symbols, one of the best illustrations of the Christian interpretation of the Universe offers St. Paul in one passage from his Epistle to the Ephesians: "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved); and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" [4, Eph, 2:1-6]. Saint Paul connects Satan with the air which separates the people from God. The Christian soteriology exists according to such structural understanding of

the Universe and the Earth as the symbol of the passiveness can not be movable as Copernicus claims, as well as the Sun can not be immovable. The Heliocentric approach destroys the harmony between the Christian teaching and the physical world which illustrates the main tenets of it.

Certainly, the struggle between the followers of the Ptolemaic and Copernican systems of the Universe was only the standard stage of the scientific revolution, but the persecution of the Heliocentric position by Catholic Church reveals the opposition between the symbolical and profane ways to understand the reality. Copernican approach allowed to predict the positions of the stars and planets with greater accuracy, than those of Ptolemy or Tyge Brahe who tried to modernize the Ptolemaic system in order to ensure its potency to compete with the Copernican one. To defend the Geocentric point of view was so important for many thinkers because the Heliocentric turn meant the denial of the symbolic heritage of the Church. In fact, the idea of moving Earth destroyed the image of the Universe the Christian thinkers created to help the people use the world as the eternal reminder about the soteriological teaching of Christianity. The denial of the Ptolemaic system became one of the main causes of the atheistic transformations of the traditional Medieval society, because the idea of the Central Sun contradicts to the spiritual practices of Christian ascetics.

The first edition of Copernicus' work in which he reveals his new approach ("De revolutionibus orbium caelestium") contains the preface by A. Osiander who tried to understand the book without denial of his religion. According to Osiander, the author offers the ideas about the moving Earth and immovable Sun not "to persuade anyone of their truth but only in order that they may provide a correct basis for calculation" [3]. Such understanding of the Copernican revolutionary theory can accept it without any reconsideration of the Christian way to interpret the reality. Furthermore, with acceptance of such position, the followers of Copernicus could avoid the persecutions of the Church because their point of view would not contradict to the Christian doctrine. Besides, they preferred the open struggle in order to save the science from the inhibitory effect of the clerical dominance. Today, in the epoch of growing dehumanization and need of values and sens of life, the lesson of the Copernican revolution and its consequences is especially eloquent example of inability to separate correctly science with its temporal subjects and religion with its concern to the sphere of the eternity. The Catholic Church tries to accept the scientific achievements in order to become more popular (for example, the Intelligent Design is the attempt to "baptize" the Darwinian theory of evolution). In such a way, the Church loses itself. Scientific paradigms are not stable and depend on currently available data, when the religious teaching can not be changed by any trigger except the revelation of God. That is the reason why the Church have to avoid any connections with the secular science to preserve its original doctrine.

CONCLUSIONS

The Christian thinkers symbolically interpreted the Universe through the soteriological teaching and the mystical practices of Christianity. The Ptolemaic approach became an integral part of Christian understanding of the world because it was the most widespread when Christianity appeared. The immovable Earth and the movable Sun symbolized the extremities of passiveness (Hell) and activeness (the Kingdom of God) respectively. The Copernican Revolution denied not only the scientific paradigm of Ptolemy, but also the mystical interpretation of the world the Church provided. The main cause of it is the misunderstanding of the relations between the science and religion that have to be separated for the mutual sake.

LETTER

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