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BOOK REVIEW

Science and Eastern Orthodoxy From the Greek Fathers to the Age of Globalization

Efthymios Nicolaidis (Translated by Susan Emanuel)

The Johns Hopkins University Press. 2011, 252 + 16 p. ISBN 9781421402987, 55.00 US\$

The long debate on the ambivalent relation between science and religion in Western civilization is well documented in the literature on the history and philosophy of science and religion, but few studies paid attention to that relation within Eastern civilization. Nicolaidis' book provides an overview of the relationship between science and Christian Orthodoxy, the official church of the Oriental Roman Empire. The study covers a time span from the fourth to the twentieth century. The author documents the vision that conflicts between science and the Greek Orthodox church were not science versus Christianity, but rather ecclesiastical debates that traversed the whole of society. This book provides a wealth of information concerning the attitude of the Orthodox (i.e., non-Slavic) Church to science today as well as in the past. But the book covers much more than science and religion: also political debates are documented, as well as the role played by Byzantine emperors in relation with science and Orthodoxy.

The book presents a very useful time line of events and works covering circa AD 300–1980. There are short descriptions of the Ptolemaic cosmos, the spherical universe with its seven planets (i.e., excluding the Earth, but including Sun and Moon), the Hellenic Aristotelian world view, the duration of the world (eternal or created), the place of the Earth, the matter of creation, the nature of darkness and light, day and night, the Sun and stars, the laws of nature. The last two chapters about Greece, from the independence to the European Union (but also covering science and religion in the Greek State), are quite interesting. Particularly fascinating for astronomers is the fact that the very first establishment (in 1842) of the Greek nation-state that could be termed a research institute was the Observatory of Athens, made possible by a donation from a very wealthy diaspora Greek who resided in Vienna.

This is a very useful book to serve as supportive document for the teaching of the history of science and philosophy. It is a well-researched work, with more than 450 notes, and a dozen pages of references. It is a pity, though, that the substantial geographical references and descriptions are not supported by even a single geographical map to guide the reader around Greece and Byzantium.

Unfortunately, this publication is pockmarked by just too many typographical errors that were left in place during the copy-editing process. Worse even is the terrible habit of the translator of transposing native first names into modern English look-alikes: John the Grammarian, Marc Eugenicos, John Moisiodax, and the most ridiculous “John Dominique” Cassini (for Giovanni Domenico/Jean-Dominique).

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