

# Knowledge and rebirth: some considerations on Johann Valentin Andreae's "Christianopolis"

## Cunoaștere și renaștere: unele considerații asupra scrierii „Christianopolis” de Johann Valentin Andreae

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### Abstract

*Utopian writings in the seventeenth century were very often a curious combination between literary fantasy and their authors' design for an ideal social, scientific and religious order which they considered to be necessary and imminent. These fictional depictions were generally conceived as necessary complements to a more ample and consistent program for a religious, scientific and social reform. In the following study we attempt to demonstrate just to what extent these preliminary considerations apply to one of Johann Valentin Andreae's best known works, Christianopolis.*

### Rezumat

*Scrierile utopice din secolul al XVIII – lea erau în majoritatea cazurilor o combinație interesantă dintre fantezie literară și proiectul autorilor acestora pentru o ordine socială, științifică și religioasă ideală pe care ei o considerau ca fiind necesară și iminentă. Aceste descrieri fictive erau în general concepute ca fiind complementare unui program mult mai amplu și consistent pentru o reformă religioasă, științifică și socială. În studiul de față încercăm să demonstrăm exact în ce măsură aceste considerații preliminare se aplică uneia din cele mai cunoscute lucrări ale lui Johann Valentin Andreae - Christianopolis.*

**Key Words:** *utopia, Johann Valentin Andreae, knowledge, curiosity, Sacred Wedding*

**Cuvinte cheie:** *utopie, Johann Valentin Andreae, cunoaștere, curiozitate, Nunta sacră*

### 1. Introductory Remarks

The utopian fantastic of the seventeenth century presents a series of peculiarities which should be explained before any further foray into the actual subject of this study is made. This will enable a proper understanding of the genre in its historical and cultural context as well as provide the necessary interpretative lens for the utopian text investigated in these pages.

One of the first and most striking characteristics specific to this genre in its incipient phase is the use of spatial expansions, rather than temporal ones. Unlike modern utopian productions, these ideal societies are not situated in the near or distant future; rather, they are positioned on some island somewhere, which has yet to be discovered. This option is not at all surprising given the fact that the seventeenth century was characterized by an inflation of travel literature which made information concerning spectacular geographical discoveries and exotic and strange cultures and civilizations available to a relatively large audience. [1] Naturally this aroused both the imagination of the masses as well as the intellectual elite. It was after all an age defined by the acquisition of newly explored territories by Britain and the continental empires. Thus it is no wonder that at that time utopian writers projected the contents of their imagination as well as their expectations onto such distant and exotic new discoveries, as well as perhaps nurturing the possibility of future and more fascinating new finds. Indeed the unknown or barely knowable has always been the most fertile sole for phantasies of man overcoming his limitations and stepping into a new Golden Age to

grow roots into and blossom. Once the spatial dimension of this process was exhausted with the colonization of all known land, the creative imagination found sustenance in the perspectives offered by a linear and cumulative progression from simplicity to complexity, fundamentally dependant on time. Thus the future became the cradle for man's most utopian and idealistic aspirations and equally for his most haunting and apocalyptic visions.

A second fundamental element was that such productions were very often carriers of much deeper meanings and implications. These works of fiction were not mere opportunities for those gifted with talent and imagination to exercise such endowments, but most frequently were designed (whether as necessary complements to a much more ample intellectual endeavor or standing on their own) to encapsulate a specific vision and project pertaining to a reformation, whether it was a religious one as was the case with Andreae, or a grandiose reform of knowledge as was the case with Francis Bacon. Either way, these exhibit a very precise social, organizational, religious and above all epistemological concern, one that imposes the logical conclusions that the description of perfect societies attests to their authors' own visions of a reformation and what its outcome should be and most importantly that such stories generate a certain immediacy inherent in their conception and purpose. The paradigmatic shift in knowledge and the production and classification of knowledge precipitated scenarios of what social, institutional, religious and scientific transformations such a shift will bring about. Having this in mind it would be pertinent to reassess the legitimacy of claims which situate writings from this period within the utopian genre. We will further focus our attention on the personality and life of Johann Valentin Andreae.

## **2. Johann Valentin Andreae: Some Biographical Coordinates [2]**

Johan Valentin Andreae was born in 1586 in Wuerttemberg. Given his lineage (he was the son of a Lutheran deacon and his grandfather, Jakob Andreae, was Chancellor of the University of Tübingen and one of the authors of the Formula of Concorde, which stands at the core of Lutheran orthodoxy) as well as his natural inclinations it is no wonder that the young Johann chose to study theology. He became Magister atrium in 1605 and soon after he commenced his studies in theology at the University of Tuebingen which lasted from 1604 until 1606. It is during this period that he wrote two plays, some texts on politics and astrology, as well as the famous novel *Chymische Hochzeit Christiani Rosenkreutz*. The year 1607 proved less propitious for Andreae as he was refused the final examination and also rejected as a candidate for ecclesiastical office following the legal complications spurred by his attaching a libelous note to the door of chancellor Enzlin, one of the close advisors of the Prince of Wuerttemberg.

Following this incident he traveled to Strasbourg, Lyon, Paris and Switzerland where it is presumed that he drafted the *Fama Fraternitatis (Fame of the Brotherhood)* and the comedy *Turbo (Whirlpool)*. After this long sojourn abroad Andreae was eventually allowed to resume his studies which he completed in 1614. That same year he obtained the position of deacon in Vaihingen an der Enz, married and began a correspondence with Johann Arndt who would influence him greatly.

Following 1614 he became active in numerous diplomatic and charitable activities, even creating a charitable association in Claw where he was named deacon. He also very quickly established himself as a prolific writer of theological and literary works for the most part written in Latin. It is through these writings that Andreae sought to facilitate a renewal of church organization and of society as a whole with the intent of establishing a new Christian society. In elaborating this project and articulating its major points he was influenced by Johan Arndt's *Vier Bücher vom wahren Christentum (Four Books of True Christianity)* which consisted of the *Book of Scripture (the Bible)*, the *Book of Life (Christ)*, the *Book of Conscience*, and the "*Grand Universal Book of Nature*". Arndt was an influential theologian and thinker in his time and is viewed as one of the founding fathers of protestant pietism.

In 1615 Andreae published the utopian fantasy *Reipublicae Christianopolitanae descriptio (Description of the Republic of Christianopolis)* dedicated to Johann Arndt. In this book, the author

describes in detail an ideal Christian society, a community of regenerated Christians who live in harmony with God and nature.

Andreae was acutely sensitive to the confessional and social deficiencies of his age and reacted with promptness to these problems through his writings. His often devastating critiques aimed against society and the church found expression in a somewhat diluted form (at least for the superficial reader) in satires and fables. In 1617 he published approximately one hundred satirical dialogues under the title *Manippus*, advocating the cultivation of a pious life and two years later his *Mythologiae christianae sive Virtutum et Vitiorum vitæhumanæ imaginum Libri tres* (*Three Books of Christian Mythology, or Image of the Virtues and Vices of Human Life*) appeared at Strasbourg.

In 1650 Johann Andreae became Abbot and Prelate of Bebenhausen and was eventually named Superintendent General. Four years later he was offered the position of abbot of the evangelical monasterial school of Adelberg but because of his old age and afflictions he died before he could take up that position. He was laid to rest in Stuttgart.

### 3. Christianopolis: The Journey Within and the “Rebirth” of Mankind

As already mentioned *Christianopolis* was published in 1615 with a dedication to Johann Arndt the primary influence on Andreae’s conception of the ideal Christian society depicted in the novel. The book consists of one hundred chapters, each focusing on some aspect pertaining to the social, institutional, religious and scientific organization of this pure Christian community named *Caphar Salama* (which means “village of peace” in Hebrew).

The book itself can be called formulaic in certain respects since it conforms to a well established pattern of travel writings which had considerable influence on the utopian genre of that time. [3] Similarly to Bacon’s *New Atlantis* the story begins with the protagonist embarking on a journey at sea, a journey meant to expand the borders of knowledge with the assumed implicit dangers of such an undertaking:

While wandering as a stranger on the earth, suffering much in patience from tyranny, sophistry, and hypocrisy, seeking a man, and not finding what I so anxiously sought, I decided to launch out once more upon the Academic Sea though the latter had very often been hurtful to me. And so ascending the good ship, Phantasy, I left the port together with many others and exposed my life and person to the thousand dangers that go with desire for knowledge. [4]

As is evident from the above extract, Andreae certainly conformed to formulas that were common place in the literature of his days, yet he always accomplished this with a twist. It must be noted that the explorer does not begin an actual journey at sea, it is rather a journey of the mind using fantasy as its vessel. Discontent with the intellectual sterility of his age, he attempts to conquer new territory on the sea of knowledge despite the eventual obstacles. We believe that what is of paramount importance here is the clear statement that this is an inner journey, a journey of the creative faculties of the mind and not an actual voyage. This aspect is further emphasized by the coordinates of the island where the explorer is wrecked which make its spatial determination impossible: “The site of the island, such as I found it to be a little later, I will not refuse to explain. It is in the Antarctic zone, io of the south pole, 20 of the equinoctial circle, and about 12 under the point of the bull.” [5]

Beyond any interpretative layers or possible symbolism we are lead to give credence without any hesitation to the fact that the above allegory as well as the information regarding its location states the true purpose of this work. Having acknowledged this basic yet fundamental fact our discussion regarding the utopian nuances of *Christianopolis* and the pertinence of subsuming this novel to such a genre fugitively pointed earlier can continue with one additional piece of information. Andreae’s vision of the ideal Christian community was indeed influenced by Arndt inasmuch as it is a society of regenerated Christians, of men and women who have been reborn

through Christ, embracing the true faith. It is nevertheless also an illustration of the *Ecclesia in hac vita occulta* (Church concealed in this life) a theme which Luther approached in his writings. [6] It is therefore an inner church, one that each true Christian is supposed to erect within himself. At the core of this divine edifice is the Living Faith in the Revelation of Christ. Such a conception suspends any confessional differentiations giving precedence to the basic idea of being Christian, of praising God. [7] The universal or inner church is traditionally linked with other two major themes which figure prominently in Andreae's novel: the divine spark present in all of us, as well as the inner renewal or regeneration. Subsequent theological and philosophical writings devoted much attention to this connection with Karl von Eckartshausen associating the corporeal, outer church with the first baptism, the one by water, while the second one, that of Christ, by Spirit is meant to lead us to the realization of a different kind of church. [8]

Naturally there are certain steps that need to be followed in order to attain this privileged state. In this sense the *Christianopolis* can also be read as a propaedeutics in a genuine Christian existence, one that extends far beyond the individual self into all sectors of communal life. It is therefore our view that such an appraisal significantly differentiates this novel from the utopian genre since it is not a spatial or temporal journey of the mind but one within meant to rekindle the divine spark which resides in each and every one of us and facilitate a "rebirth".

A prerequisite for all those who aspire at this second life, as our protagonist soon finds out, is an inner cleansing, one meant to free the mind and spirit from all worldly shackles and allow for this renewal to take place; but the true Christian must be willing and prepared for this purification, it is a voluntary act: "I shall evade neither the bath, the razor, nor the brush, that, being washed, scraped, and cleansed, I may be admitted to the pure abodes of truth and goodness." [9] Once this preliminary requirement is satisfied the inner transformation can take place, progressively of course, but nevertheless the rebirth through Christ reconfigures the very foundations of our relationship to ourselves, to the world, to our peers and last but certainly not least to knowledge - its premises, its aims, its limitations. A new field of possibilities and propensities opens up so that the heavens and earth reveal themselves to us in a completely new light.

The revelation thus achieved can and should be further developed into all forms of scientific inquiry continually seeking a betterment of our moral and mental qualities. The author states this plainly in his chapter on the nature of instruction: "Their first and highest exertion is to worship God with a pure and faithful soul; the second, to strive toward the best and most chaste morals; the third to cultivate the mental powers." [10] Purity of mind and soul as well as humility before God guarantee for a proliferation of our divine heritage into all activities, not only the scholarly ones. Mere crafts should not be considered of lesser importance and nobility, rather they should be conscientiously exercised, for even in such humble preoccupations the brilliance within reveals itself in the end product: "All the things are done not always because necessity demands, but for the purpose of a competition among the mechanics, in order that the human soul may have means by which it and the highest prerogative of the mind may unfold themselves through different sorts of machinery, or by which, rather, the little spark of divinity remaining in us, may shine brightly in any material offered." [11]

In the contemporary dispute regarding which form of knowledge is preferable and more reliable, the empirical knowledge, based on observation and direct experience or the one collected from books, Andreae seems to favor the former. Advancement in the field of natural sciences is possible by painstaking observation of the material world, of the workings of nature. This science of experimentation coupled with an almost exhaustive collection and classification of all things, creatures and phenomena pertaining to the natural world are certain to yield results. The explorer quickly discovers that when it comes to chemistry and physics the inhabitants of the island treasure nothing more than concrete unmediated observation and the practical applications of these finds. It is at this point that he realizes the folly of relying almost exclusively on books without paying attention to the mechanisms of nature: "[...] assisted by books, I had learned nothing of all these

things, which is altogether fitting one should know, and that by my inexcusable folly I had neglected the countenance of nature, which is after all the most attractive.” [12]

Andreae indirectly reiterates his conviction of the falsehood and insufficiency of knowledge gained from tomes when describing the magnificent library found on the island. It contains books from all over the world, in all the known languages and yet the denizens of Christainopolis make little use of the writings collected here, except for the Bible and other holly books. Indeed only that which stems from Christ is of relevance and can be deemed as being authentic knowledge: “Hail Christ, the Book of Life, out of which more easily, surely, and safety we may learn all.” [13] It follows logically then that: “Only Christians have knowledge, but it is of God. All remaining things are foolishness, because they come out of ones self.” [14] In keeping with such a perspective the author actually encourages a blessed ignorance for “there are many things which is expedient not to know in this life, wherefore a holy simplicity is for many a library in itself.” [15] The so called “director of learning”, presumably the greatest scholar on the island seems to conform to such a view when he repeatedly professes ignorance and claims that the greatest achievement one could have is to study under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Such an attitude from Andreae should not surprise us in the least if we consider the semantic content which defined curiosity for the majority of scholars and theologians of his time. *Curiosi* or *curieux* were presented by Andreae and others as “enemies of the community who wish to be different from the crowd, cultivating a singularity.” [16] Such behavior could, in the view of some theologians even lead to atheism. The “excesses” of curiosity alarmed Andreae for two principal reasons - firstly because an epistemology based on curiosity was against his own vision of a reform of knowledge; and secondly because it threatened the idea which stood at the foundation of his ideal social edifice, namely the idea of brotherhood: “So there would seem to be a need of co-operation which only Christianity can give – Christianity which conciliates God with men and unites men together, so that they have pious thoughts, do good deeds, know the truth, and finally die happily to live eternally. Let us then cooperate once lest we be separated for eternity.” [17] The Christian society he envisioned could only come to be in brotherly love and unity. Curiosity denotes precisely the opposite - separation from an established order, disaggregating. *Christianopolis* was not the only writing where Andreae focused on the idea of a pure Christian Brotherhood as this was later developed in *Christenburger Schlacht (The Battle of Christenburg; 1620)*, *Christianæ Societatis Imago (1620)*, and *Christiani Amoris Dexteræ porrecta (The Extended Right Hand of Christian Love; 1620)*. It must also be noted that his vision was not restricted the field of literature; in fact, his ambition was to create such a brotherhood under the patronage of Duke August of Brunswik (1579-1666). It would have been the aim of such a society to advance human knowledge in all sectors, with the fruits of this undertaking eventually constituting the content of an encyclopedia. Although Andreae’s vision was never realized he nevertheless took solace in the fact that in 1646 he was admitted into the Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft (Fruit-Bearing Society) in 1646, which bore some similarities with his own fraternity. [18]

In regards to the writer’s epistemological project, the explanation presents itself as a necessary complement to the above considerations. It is obvious that the reform of human knowledge proposed by Andreae would be unattainable without the reification of the Christian brotherhood. The transfigured Christian gains a novel insight into the dynamics of the heavens and the earth which necessarily leads to a radically different form of investigating nature and the universe. However, such a development is only possible within a true Christian community. If we eliminate the latter, all the components of Andrae’s project collapse like domino pieces. The writer thus identifies the curios as being the false scholars and alchemists, magicians and practitioners of divination. In short all those inquisitive spirits who fail to see God at the centre of all things and phenomena thus persisting in error and folly.

In the *Treatise on the Pestilence of Curiosity*, published in 1620, he resumes the description of an ideal Christian society while at the same time denouncing curiosity as one of the greatest threats to such a community: “curiosity... or that immodest thirst to know and do what lies beyond

the customary cleverness of human beings.” [19] Another of Andreae’s writings representative for his position regarding this issue is the *Institutio magica pro curiosis (Magical Institute for the Curious)* where a dialog between Curiosus and Christianus becomes a confrontation between two divergent perspectives on what knowledge is and how it should be approached. Curiosus wants to gain access to the secrets of magic, but Christianus suggests that magic resides in the grand Temple of Nature illuminated by three torches: that of divine Providence, that of society and that of the anatomy of the world. [20]

At this point it seems appropriate to emphasize that for Andreae, nature, the object of scientific investigation, is imbued with the presence of the Divine. Of course only the reborn Christian is aware of this aspect, as his regeneration grants him a new perspective of the universe, and consequently enables him to adopt an adequate scientific approach. One short passage seems to validate such an interpretation - after his wreckage, amazed by the beauty and richness of the island, the protagonist states: “One might think that here the heavens and the earth had been married and were living together in everlasting peace.” [21] A similar passage surfaces in the chapter “*The Laboratory*” in which the research conducted in a chemical laboratory is described in detail: “Here the sky and the earth are married together.” [22] It must be remembered that in Andreae’s time chemistry differed greatly from our present conception of this science. In fact in those days chemistry was synonymous with alchemy, which was more of a spiritual discipline than an exact science. In an alchemical interpretation the image of a union between the skies and the earth (a hierogamy, as Mircea Eliade would call it) suggests the “*coniunctio*”, the sacred marriage between man’s divine spirit with the soul and ultimately with the body. In a much broader sense, the “*coniunctio*” denotes the union of opposites such as fire and water, dryness and wetness, warmth and cold, the volatile and the fixed, the bodily and the spiritual, the Sun and the Moon, gold and silver, circle and square but also, and most importantly for our text, the union between the divine energies and the earthly energies. [23] This interpretation seems appropriate given the fact that in chapter forty-four the alchemical laboratory is explicitly linked with the image of the sacred union. An extract from the *Gospel of Thomas* found at Nag Hammadi encapsulates what the sacred marriage, in all its variables basically represents:

When you make the two into one, and when you make the inner like the outer and the outer like the inner, and the upper like the lower, and when you make male and female into a single one, so that the male will not be male nor the female be female, when you make eyes in place of an eye, a hand in place of a hand, a foot in place of a foot, an image in place of an image, then you will enter [the kingdom]. [24]

#### 4. Concluding remarks

Much more than a gratuitous game of the imagination, *Christianopolis* was a thoroughly conceived intellectual endeavor meant to precipitate a Christian rebirth and a renewal in all sectors of human existence without overlooking the epistemological implications of such a transfiguration. As we have attempted to demonstrate in these pages it is this very epistemology that best indicates the cultural context in which Andreae evolved and wrote.

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