

Campanella's 'City Of The Sun'

By León Zeldis

Thomas Campanella was born in Stilo, a village in Calabria, Italy, in the year 1568. At a tender age (13 or 14 years), he entered the Dominican Order, where he remained for the rest of his days. He was a great admirer of Saint Thomas Aquinas, in whose honour he assumed his name, as his christening name was Giovanni Domenico. Nevertheless, throughout his life he fought against the theories of Aristotle and the Scholastics, of whom Saint Thomas is the exemplary representative.

Campanella was a prolific author, who started writing at the age of nineteen. Very soon after he came into conflict with the ecclesiastic authorities, because of his eager and curious mentality, and his admiration for the sciences that he, Campanella, believed to be called to conciliate with Christian, or rather Catholic, doctrine.

In his writings, Campanella insists again and again that we can arrive at an understanding of reality and of nature exclusively through our senses. This was totally opposed to the Aristotelian and scholastic method, founded on blind faith and pedantic abstraction divorced from any experimental verification.

Already in 1592 he was condemned, in an ecclesiastical trial in Naples, to return to his native Calabria, as punishment for having left the monastery. Among the accusations against him, we should note that he was charged with having sought the company of a rabbi called Abraham, magician and astrologer, who allegedly had introduced him to occultism.

Furthermore, and this was a serious charge at the time, he was accused of having taken out books from the library without receiving permission. The young friar was driven by thirst for knowledge. His intellectual appetite knew no boundaries. As he himself declared, he had studied the philosophies of Pythagoras, Epicurus, Plato, Thales, the Stoics and the Peripatetics [Aristotelians], of all ancient and modern sects, the laws of ancient peoples and of Hebrews, Turks, Persians, Moors, Chinese, Brahmins, Peruvians, Mexicans, Abyssinians and Tartars. This was no empty boasting, because in his writings Campanella introduces numerous details and demonstrates his knowledge of the most diverse subjects.

Campanella was convinced that the world was approaching a millenary crisis, a total revolution in the order of things, that would create a fundamental change in the Church, at a time this was conducting a furious battle against the Reform. This revolution, forecast by Campanella, would find expression in the most astounding progress of philosophy, science and politics. In certain respects, he can be regarded as a forerunner of the Rosicrucian manifestos.

In his opinion, philosophy is founded on facts and not words, it should discard opinions and turn to testimonies, that is to say, philosophy should give knowledge the first place,

incorporating all the new discoveries. We should keep in mind that 'philosophy' at the time was a wide-ranging concept, including many areas of knowledge that today we designate as sciences.

Let us examine now some of the arguments raised by Campanella against abstract speculation. Saint Augustine, speculating, rejects the existence of the antipodes, while navigators have demonstrated it. Aristotle, speculating, maintains the incorruptibility, that is to say, immutability of the stars, while Galileo's telescope has discovered the phases of Venus. Zeno denies the existence of movement, while our senses, on the contrary, prove it irrefutably. Luther, speculating, rejects human freedom, on the pretext of divine predestination, 'but this writing pen I am holding, who can claim that I don't have the power to move it or not, to write or not write?'

Campanella's modernist and renovating spirit can be summarized in his observation, made in *The City of the Sun*, that 'this century of ours has more history in a hundred years than the world has had in four thousand, and in these hundred years more books have been written than in five thousand.'

The writer is deeply impressed by the recent discoveries and sees in them signs of the approaching millennium; the discovery of the new world, the compass, the printing press, the harquebus, receive philosophical explanations.

In 1600, as we know, another Italian thinker, Giordano Bruno, was burned at the stake as a heretic. Campanella did not suffer the same fate, but he was persecuted for his views and remained in prison, subject to privation and tortures, during no less than 27 years.

His last years he spent in a monastery of his order in France, where he passed away on 21 May 1639.

The City of the Sun was written in Italian in 1602, while he was held in prison. He probably started writing while recovering from the torments of the inquisitors. The work appeared in a Latin translation in Frankfurt, in the year 1623. The second edition, still in Latin, came out in Paris in 1637. The first edition in the Italian original dates only from 1904, but the text is faulty. The best edition is that of Bobbio, of 1941, in both Italian and Latin.

In his book, Campanella describes an ideal society, in a state close to nature. The novel is written in the form of a dialogue between a seaman called Colon's pilot, and somebody called the Hospitaler, that is, a brother of the military order of Hospitalers of Saint John of Jerusalem. We know that Masonic lodges are intimately connected with Jerusalem, the Hospitalers and particularly with Saint John. Symbolic lodges are dedicated to Saint John and the feast days of the two Saint Johns (the Baptist and the Evangelist) are celebrated up to the present in many Masonic lodges.

The city of the sun is located on the island of Ceylon. "The city is distributed into seven concentric circles, named after the seven planets. You enter from one to another through four roads and four gates facing the four quarters of the world." Here we have a representation of the Masonic lodge, with its four walls oriented to the four cardinal points. The number seven has important esoteric and symbolic meaning. The number and position of the Officers in the lodge are related to the seven planets. The image of 'seven circles'

had been used by Dante in his Divine Comedy (1314), where he describes both hell and heaven composed of seven circular stages.

In the center of the city is built a perfectly round temple, in whose center stands an altar. Here, again, we find the parallelism with the Masonic lodge, and the difference of the altar's placement with that in a church.

'On the altar there is only a very large map of the world, painted with all the heavens, and another showing the earth.' In many lodges, a terrestrial globe is placed on top of the B column, and a celestial globe or an armillary sphere on top of the J column.

'Seven lamps are always burning, named for the seven planets.' On the ceiling of the lodge, usually seven stars are depicted. The resemblance of stars and lamps is evident.

The city, writes Campanella, is governed by a prince called Sun or the Metaphysic, assisted by three collateral princes named Pon, Sin and Mor, that is to say, Power, Wisdom and Love.

The parallelism with the government of a Masonic lodge is astonishing. In effect, the three 'lights' of the Masonic lodge are the Master and the two Wardens, who represent Wisdom, Strength and Beauty, respectively. Wisdom is identical in both cases. Power is Strength, and love is beauty, because when the author describes the functions of the Love 'prince', he enumerates the arts and crafts, and strangely enough, eugenics.

Power, knowledge and desire, or potency, wisdom and love, are the three 'primaries' that constitute, in Campanella's words, the 'essentiality' of a thing. Although they are separate, in fact they are the same and identical with the essence.

A similar idea is expressed when speaking of the 'three lights' of the lodge, or the three who rule the lodge. In the Royal Arch, this identification of three governing the lodge (or the Chapter) is even clearer, and the Chapter cannot perform even its opening ritual without the concurrence of the three principal officers. The Royal Arch, as we know, appears simultaneously or soon after the creation of the premier Grand Lodge.

Of course, the solar triad may be conflated with all the traditional sacred triads, such as the Christian Trinity and so many others recorded in the history of religions.

An interesting fact is that the governor of the city is called Sol, the sun. The three principal officers of the Masonic lodge represent, by their situation, the positions of the sun from dawn to dusk. In many rituals, also, movements on the floor of the lodge are dextrorsum, or clockwise, resembling the apparent course of the sun on the sky of the northern hemisphere.

Let us continue with the description of the city and its inhabitants. 'All the young people are called brothers... and then, officers are attentive to everything in order to prevent any person from harming another within the fraternity.' Here Campanella gives the city its proper name.

All inhabitants work. Campanella writes: 'Each wishing to be first in his work... whoever learns more arts and excels in them is regarded as nobler.'

The importance Masonry assigns to work is well known. Masonic meetings in many languages are known as 'works' (travaux, trabajos). This concept of work is totally

contrasting to the contempt in which manual work was held in medieval Europe. ‘Solarians [inhabitants of the city] make ridicule of us, who call craftsmen dishonorable, while we say that plebeian are those who don’t learn any art and remain idle.’

There are still other parallelisms between Campanella’s ideas and the traditions and symbols of our craft. The Solarians ‘all dress in white during the day and red at night or out of the village.’ ‘Pride is considered a grave sin and they condemn an act of pride in the same manner as it has been committed. Therefore, nobody considers degrading to serve at the table, in the kitchen, or elsewhere, but they call it learning... and they don’t have slaves.’

‘If strangers want to become citizens, they may remain a month in the villages and one year in the city, and then they decide whether to accept them, with certain ceremonies and oaths.’

The Metaphysic, that is, the sun, ‘presides as architect over all the sciences.’ Campanella is not the first to assign the character of architect to the supreme maker of the world, but his identification of architecture with the sun is remarkable.

In the temple, there are twenty-four priests. The temple, as mentioned before, is in the center of the city. The priests chant some psalms praising the Lord in the morning, night and midnight. Note this relation with the 24-inch ruler, and with the working hours of symbolic lodges in the Scottish Rite.

‘Prayers are directed towards the four cardinal points and, in the morning, towards the orient, second, towards occident, third towards the south, and fourth to the north.’ If we take the first three movements, these are parallel to the movements of a brother who enter the lodge, in the Scottish Rite, when saluting the three main officers of the lodge. ‘All their feats are four main ones, that is to say, when the sun enters Aries, Cancer, Libra and Capricorn.’ That means they celebrated solstices and equinoxes. Masons, too, celebrate the solstices.

A point that deserves underlining in Campanella’s thoughts is his trust in reason. As Estebanez, one of his translators, points out, for Campanella, to live in accordance with reason has not only the same religious and moral meaning than Christianity, but is even sufficient to be saved. We must not assume that Campanella was against religion. Far from it, he is deeply religious and theist. For him the soul, for instance, is part of Eternal Reason in God, only one manifestation of the divinity. Religion is for him a congenital dimension of man and even, in a lower degree, of animals. Here, attention must be paid that the natural religion propounded by Campanella has the same content for all men who search for it through correct philosophy. This content is expressed in various rites and ceremonies, adapted to each society. This development, different for the diverse cultures, is called the added (addita) religion. Rites are accidental and may differ from one religion to another, without doubting their truthfulness. This concept of religion is perfectly in accord with that of Speculative Freemasonry.

‘The Solarians hold as certain the immortality of the soul. They make of being, who is God, and nothingness, that is absence of being, the metaphysical principles of things.’

The duality of nature finds expression in pain and pleasure, the two spurs that direct everything. This reminds us of the sweet and bitter cup tasted by the initiate in the Scottish Rite ceremony, and also points to the symbolism of the checkerboard pavement.

Campanella mentions the appearance of a new star in Cassiopeia, 'that announces a great new monarchy and the reformation of the laws and the arts and prophets and renovation.'

This same thing appears in the first Rosicrucian manifesto of 1614, the *Fama Fraternitatis*, where new stars in *Serpentarius* and *Cygnus* are mentioned, with the same millenarian hope of renewal and reformation of the world.

The City of the Sun has other points of contact with the Rose-Croix. For instance, the Solarians, like the Rose-Croix brethren, speak all languages. Furthermore, the author of the *Alchemical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreutz*, Johan Valentin Andraea, is also the author of a work that is almost a copy of the City of the Sun. This is the *Description of the Republic of Christianopolis*, published in Strasbourg in 1619, that is, before Campanella's book. There can be little doubt that Andraea had access to a manuscript of the Italian's book, and this indicates the close relations existing among diverse European intellectuals of the time, all of them driven by a common ideal of reformation and universal fraternity. Frances Yates, the English historian, believes that Campanella was aware of the hermetic and cabalistic traditions. We cannot exclude the possibility that alchemists and cabalists of the 16th and 17th centuries were connected by a secret brotherhood, whose organization may have been informal, but allowing them to maintain contact and exchange ideas and discoveries, sometimes running against prevailing religious dogma. Such a development may be discerned in the Rosicrucian manifestos.

To conclude, let us place Campanella within the history of ideas. Campanella is numbered among the Renaissance thinkers who came under the influence of the Jewish Kabbalah and adapted it to Christian doctrines. This Christian Cabala, exemplified by Pico della Mirandola and Francesco Giorgi, also incorporated elements of hermetic philosophy (that is, based on the writing attributed to Hermes Trismegistus), magic and alchemy. This philosophy received new impulse under the form of the Rose-Croix at the beginning of the 17th century. The Rosicrucians disappeared in the European continent, but some refugees found asylum in England, where the Rosicrucian manifestos were translated into English at the time of Cromwell (1599-1658). Later, a violent reaction broke out against the Hermetic-Cabalistic magic and then, in my opinion, a movement was produced for the integration of Rosicrucians and magicians-cabalists into the lodges of operative masons, who had started to accept non-operative members. The hermetic philosophers found in Masonic lodges the protection of secret and silence that enabled them to continue their research.

Bibliography

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