

## SUMMARY

### *Quae supra nos, nihil ad nos: The Attitude of Church Fathers toward Astronomy*

The positivist historiography of science used to depict the attitude of early Christianity toward scientific knowledge as an authoritative rejection of reason and experience. Contemporary historians of science are aware of greater complexity in the relationship between Christianity and scientific knowledge; the accounts of the Church Fathers' attitude toward scientific knowledge are, nevertheless, still somewhat superficial even today. In particular, the Church Fathers' attitude toward astronomy is usually reduced, in the common history of science surveys, to the problem of the roundness of the Earth. Indeed, some representatives of the Antiochian school, and particularly the monk Cosmas Indicopleustes rejected the spherical image of the world and established a different cosmology, based on the biblical description of the Tabernacle. However, these proposals of an authentically biblical cosmology never gained a widespread following and the spherical shape was

never seriously disputed in the West. The often cited passages from Lactantius and Augustine on the spherical shape of the Earth and the existence of antipodes do not have the character of alternative cosmological views in that they are concerned with a problematic entirely different from cosmology. There are far more interesting features of the Church Fathers' attitude toward astronomy. First of all, the Church Fathers opposed astronomy as a certain kind of theoretical activity that should not be a part of the Christian life because it is in no way beneficial to salvation. Fairly often, astronomy represented an excellent example of contemptible curiosity (*curiositas*) that distracts a Christian from what is really important: the knowledge of God and one's self. Another interesting factor in the Church Fathers' attitude towards astronomy is the discrepancy between the Pagan faith in the regularity of cosmos, which formed the basis of Greek astronomy, and the Christian faith in God's omnipotence: God can change the order of the world whenever he so decides, and it is therefore impossible to consider knowledge that would make predictions of natural phenomena with absolute certainty. Besides critical objections to astronomy, we can encounter means to legitimize the place astronomy has in the system of Christian knowledge: the practical importance of astronomy (calendar), the propaedeutic importance of astronomy on the road to higher learning (*artes liberales*), and finally the significance of astronomy for understanding the majesty of the Creator. All of these features used to have a significant influence on the debates about the value and purpose of the knowledge of nature up to the early Enlightenment, and in order to understand these debates, it is sometimes crucial to know the original problem situation that produced them. An analysis of the Church Fathers' attitudes at the epistemological, moral and ontological level can perhaps help support the methodological rule that the relationship of science and Christianity cannot be interpreted in the simplistic categories of harmony or conflict.