

Early Modern Circle, Monday 21 May 2012

## **“AN ANGEL'S VIEW OF HEAVEN: THE MYSTICAL COSMOLOGY OF PINTORICCHIO'S 1503 *CORONATION OF THE VIRGIN*”**

Keith Hutchison (SHAPS)

Although Galileo's defence of Copernican heliocentricity is one of the classic loci for illustrating the tension that sometimes arises between science and religion, it is a strange (but relatively unknown) fact the heliocentricity emerges in religious contexts before it is popularised by early modern astronomers. It can often be found in the background to religious paintings, like Botticelli's late 15c depiction of Dante's arrival in heaven, or Pintoricchio's early 16c *Coronation of the Virgin* (both below). After demonstrating this rather trivial fact; my talk will sketch a tentative answer to the obvious question: What is going on in these depictions? I will be observing that the cosmology at issue is very different from that revived by Copernicus. The sun in these pictures is not the material sun, but its immaterial prototype -- something far grander, and a traditional figure for God. Its centrality is in heaven (itself the prototype of the material world) and modelled on that of the celestial pole, another traditional location for the seat of divinity. Yet the depictions may well be revealing a belief that the material universe

had a heliocentric design, even if that design was not achieved, perhaps as a consequence of some ancient catastrophe (like the Fall).

