



LOOKING TO THE SKY

No matter who we are, where we are, or wherever we go, we have two remarkable presences in our lives: the sun and the moon. How familiar they are to us, yet mysterious; how distant, yet ever present; how humongous, yet dots; and how silent, yet impactful. (Photo: www.stcatharinesstandard.ca.)

Think about it: we circle the sun every $365\frac{1}{4}$ days, a mammoth 584,088,918 miles (940 million km), at a speed of 66,600 mph (108,000 km/h), and without the slightest vibration, jolt, turbulence, or breeze in our faces! The moon, one fourth of the size of the earth, orbits around us every 29.53 days, in synchronous rotation, endlessly cycling from new moon to full moon, in an average orbital distance of 238,607m (384,748 km), and at a speed of 2,286 mph (3219 km/h)!

Whatever our worldview, such phenomena blow our minds. Indeed, we would think this all fanciful but for the visibility of the sun and moon to the naked eye, and scientific measurements of spacial distance and speed.

LOOKING DOWN

Clearly, familiarity with the sun and moon has bred contempt, as the saying goes. It wasn't always like this. Ancient communities placed great importance on the sun and moon, sometimes too much (as we shall see), but there is a barren contradiction within modern man.

On the one hand, the eighteenth-century industrial revolution laid the basis for the rapid technological advance that has so empowered the observance and exploration of space. On the other hand, the late eighteenth-century Enlightenment so undercut the authority of Holy Scripture (the Bible) that outside of the ranks of astronomers and astronauts (and their space agencies), many, in the West at least, have turned in on themselves. Previously, God or the gods had been the center of human thought—the sun and

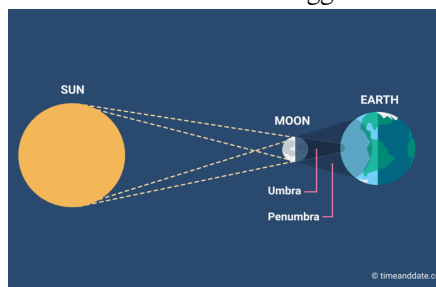
moon representing what we know but cannot comprehend—but the Enlightenment made man the center of all things. Whereas two centuries earlier the Copernican revolution had discovered that the earth revolves around the sun, the Enlightenment's philosophical revolution taught that all revolves around us: what we think (rationalism) and feel (Romanticism). We prefer, then, to look at ourselves rather than at the wonders of God's universe.

LOOKING UP

Periodically, a God-inspired sense of wonder returns to us. The crewed moon landing of 1969 obviously comes to mind. Even then, Neil Armstrong's first ever words on landing were, "That's one small step for [a] *man*, one giant leap for *mankind*." The best the rest of us terrestrials can do, is to don our solar eclipse glasses, crick our necks, and ponder the untouchable physics of the moon, a quarter of the size of the earth, obscuring the sun 400 times the moon's diameter.

There are two to five varying eclipses a year, witnessed from different locations on earth. On April 8, "the Great North American eclipse" was seen along a trajectory running northeast from Mexico, through fifteen American states, and into eastern Canada. This first total solar eclipse viewable from North America since 1918 grabbed the attention of the public, spawning "the eclipse-chasing bug," and leading to warnings of traffic buildup along the length of the active region in which the eclipse was total.

Yet, what would make so many chase after a sighting a staggering 222,979 miles (358,850 km) away, lasting only 2 to 4 minutes? Is it not the deeply embedded awareness that as much as we have bought into the idea that man is the center of all things, we are but tiny observers of celestial elements so much bigger and higher than us? Do not



eclipses remind us of the profound mystery and wonder that only God surpasses, for he made the sun and the moon, and set them in motion?

(www.timeanddate.com)

LOOKING TO THE SCIENTISTS

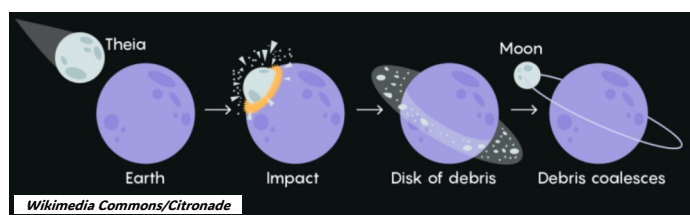
Obviously, to see God in the coordination of the sun, moon, and earth is widely disputed today. Yet, atheism has always been but a minority faith, one unable to muster a majority globally, even in this so-called age of reason. Eclipses offer us an opportunity to reflect on science and belief in God. Here we have space but for two premises:

I. SCIENCE DOES NOT REQUIRE SCIENTISM

Christians embrace science. They always have, for it entails the study of God's book of nature. Hence, the list of Christians in the scientific hall of fame: Isaac Newton, Johannes Kepler, Leonard Euler, James Clerk Maxwell, Arthur Compton, Bernhard Riemann, and many more (www.famousscientists.org/great-scientists-christians/ and www.denisonforum.org/current-events/science-technology/8-modern-day-christian-scientists-you-need-to-know/).

Christians, though, don't embrace the religion of Scientism. Contrary to true science—humble, investigative, open-minded (following the evidence where it leads), limited, and conscious of its fallibility (that some theories don't hold up)—Scientism is agenda-driven, fanciful, and propagandist. Against creation's testimonies to God, Scientism shuts out all consideration of his creative and providential powers. In their place, it constructs far-fetched narratives putting forth uncorroborated round figures of millions and billions of years suffused with such qualifiers as "likely," "probably," "it could have been." Scientists embroiled in Scientism expect such alternative narratives to the creation to be taken as fact, and, yet, flying in the face of Scientism's claim to be purely rational and materialistic, the posits of Scientism require more faith than theism.

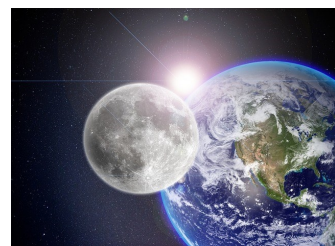
Consider, the origin of the moon. Most commonly held today is the Giant-impact Theory, namely, that the moon formed from a collision between the earth and another small planet. This is entirely conjecture:



Beside the slim chances of this happening, there is the vague dating of the occurrence: "about 95 million years after the formation of the solar system, give or take 32 million years. (The solar system is roughly 4.6 billion years old.)" (Charles Q. Choi, "The moon: Everything you need to know about Earth's companion" [Space.com]).

Since this most widely held theory is hardly evidence,

Scientism offers other theories. According to the Capture Theory, a wandering asteroid was lassoed by the earth's gravity and pulled into our solar system. The Fission Theory claims that such was the speed of the earth's rotation that a piece broke off (now 2,159.2 m./3,475 km wide) and began orbiting earth (Photo: Pixabay.com).



II. SCIENTISM DOES NOT REQUIRE SUBSTANTIATION

Since Scientism speaks of theories—substantiated explanations for an occurrence—we may ask why, given the substantiation, there are multiple theories of singular events, in this case the origin of the moon. Why cannot one be picked and called a fact? Thus, Scientism inadvertently admits that it is less certain than scientists would like the masses to believe. True science sticks to the facts (e.g., size of the moon, distance from earth, etc.), but Scientism seeks to ensure a God-less and creation-less view of the universe.

Surprisingly, London's Natural History Museum offers a chink of light for those open to God and believing he created the moon in the same week as the earth. Among the proposed origins of the moon, mention is made of The Accretion Hypothesis. This is very daring yet skittish, for while it allows back in the pre-Enlightenment conviction that the moon was "created along with earth at its formation" (<https://www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/how-did-the-moon-form.html>), it categorizes this option as but an hypothesis. Whereas a theory is supposedly substantiated, an hypothesis is but a suggestion, albeit one in which God is ignored.

Given the magnitude of the universe, the divine creation of the moon is the most straightforward explanation to those willing to believe. Indeed, about 3,500 years ago, Moses narrated that the earth and moon (and sun and stars) were created on the first and fourth days of creation. Explicit in the narrative are their abiding purposes: to separate day from night, to serve as signs and for seasons (cf., Psalm 104:19), to give light on the earth. Far from forming out of a clash of planets—the earth revealing no evidence of a chip off it a quarter of its size, nor the spherical moon any evidence of having once being a chuff off the earth—"God saw," says Moses, "that it [the resultant sequence of day and night] was good" (Genesis 1:14-19). The unrelenting orbital harmonization of the earth (in relation to the sun) and the moon (in relation to the earth) indicate that during eclipses we are witnessing not a freak spin-off from an undocumented collision but the wondrous intent of a gracious God. The arrangement brings him glory and us our ability to live. We stand, then, in grateful awe of God.

LOOKING TO THE SCRIPTURES

God, though, speaks to us through nature not so that we may just be wowed by his awesome power and evident greatness, but that we may be drawn to him by his love. Notice in this regard the relevance of the moon.

ECLIPSES CAUSE US TO STOP AND THINK

One of the great enemies of our souls today is the want of space and time. Life is incredibly busy, we ignore the rest on each Lord's Day, and otherwise fill our spare time with distractions. We have squeezed out opportunities to meditate on God and his ways, and are the poorer for it.

Not so, in the ancient world. As busy as was David, King of Israel, he made time to ponder God, learning of him from his works of creation. Looking up from his work, he put his thoughts to song: *"When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?"* (Psalm 8:3-4).

Eclipses, then, give us pause to look up from ourselves and from the immediacy of our lives, to the great expanse above. The cricking of our necks ought not to be momentary, but the start of a lifelong transformation of our lives. Only, though, if we gaze up aright.

ECLIPSES CHALLENGE OUR IDOLATRY

We gaze up not to make gods out of God's works, but to discern God through his works. It is important to understand the difference, for ever since the fall of man idolatry has captured our hearts. Thus, Moses, describing the creation to the Israelites after 430 years in Egyptian slavery, cautioned them against worshipping the sun, the moon, and the stars. He subtly makes the point that such elements are not divine but created, not eternal but temporal. To downplay them, he opted to describe them rather than to name them, calling them *"the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night,"* dismissively adding that God also made the stars



(Genesis 1:16). (Photo: King Akhenaten and his wife Nefertiti praying to the sun-god Aten for his rays to fall on them [Pinterest.com/Shereen Badr].)

We don't worship the elements as did the ancients. Nevertheless, how many prioritized during "The Great North American Eclipse" the greatness of man in getting to the moon rather than God who made the universe, holds it in being, and has granted man the ability to reach the moon and to investigate space?

ECLIPSES CALL US TO REPENTANCE

Man has gotten above himself, yet God uses eclipses to humble us. They entice us to look away from ourselves, implicitly rebuking our egotism and self-absorption. For a few moments at least, we are reminded that we, as individuals, are not the center of the universe.

Furthermore, the sun (the greater light), the moon (reflecting the light of the sun), and the stars twinkling as they emit gamma radiation, contrast with the darkness not only of the night sky, but of that sin-influenced darkness which dims the light of our lives. For this reason the inspired sage in the Book of Ecclesiastes encourages his young readers to remember their Creator in the days of their youth *"before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return after the rain"* (Ecclesiastes 12:1-2). This remembrance is not just intellectual but one that shapes conduct, and is best embarked on before our Creator's favor is dimmed by the dysfunction and darkness of our sin.

ECLIPSES CONJURE MEMORIES OF CHRIST

All our lives we are warned not to look directly at the sun, yet we wisely rush out for eclipse glasses to ensure we see the event without burning our precious retinas. (www.washingtonpost.com)



There is a parallel here. No one has ever seen God (John 1:18), yet he shines his light everywhere. We cannot look at him nor approach him. Yet, unlike the sun, God yearns to introduce himself to us, to pardon us, and to relate to us. To this end, writes John, *"the only God [namely, the Son of God], who is at the Father's side, has made him known."* Since we cannot look directly at God, we must look at Christ. His clothing in our humanity is the eclipse of Deity—not to hide God from us nor to deny Christ's deity, but so that, accommodated to our weakness and limitations, we may see God yet without being consumed (Hebrews 12:29). States the theological axiom: "In God there is no unchristlikeness at all." As regards Christ's divinity, the Son of God *"is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power"* (Hebrews 1:3); yet, to quote John, *"the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father full of grace and truth."* (John 1:14).

In other words, if you wish to see God, you must look at Christ. Creation can teach us about God, but only Christ, God's unique pair of eclipse glasses, can shelter us from God's wrath against our sin. Do, then, consider Christ. God invites you to do so. Do read on!

LOOKING TO THE SAVIOR

Looking into space reminds us of the great chasm there is between God and ourselves, seismically and ethically. He is just and holy, but we break his law and offend his holiness, and we know it. Hence the greatest question that has faced man since the dawn of time. Interestingly, Job ties it in with the elements: *“How can man be in the right before God? How can he who is born of woman be pure? Behold, even the moon is not bright, and the stars are not pure in his eyes, how much less man, who is a maggot, and the son of man who is a worm?”* (Job 25:4-6). Obviously, then, it is so much more important that we prepare to meet God than for a momentary eclipse.

The bottom line is this: We dare not appear before God as we are! Yet God offers us in Christ what we need to do so: a righteousness acceptable to him and pardon for our sins. Christ procured the former for us by his perfect life, and the latter by his atoning sacrifice on the cross.

While he hung there, the sun was darkened for three hours. Luke tells us that the sun was eclipsed (*eklipontos* [23:44-45]). He refers not to a regular eclipse, for it was the time of the new moon (Passover) and the darkness lasted three hours. Rather, he alludes to a divine miracle, visibly indicating the judgment falling on Christ instead of the sinner. Significantly, no sooner does Luke mention the eclipse than he tells us that *“the curtain of the temple was torn in two.”* We thus learn that Christ, bearing hell for sinners, has gained them access to our most holy God.

The question for us, then, is not *how* a person can be right with God, but *whether* we have turned from our sins unto God, and are resting in Christ for access to him. Don't delay! Christ has borne for sinners the heat of God's wrath, to eclipse his judgment against us, so that we may enter his eternal embrace.



“MY GOD, HOW GREAT THOU ART”



God has given Christians such cause to sing. We make melody in our hearts as also on our tongues. A favorite for many, and relevant here is that of the Swede Carl Gustav Boberg (1859–1940), “O Store Gud” (1885). It is better known as “How Great Thou Art” (translator, Stuart K. Hine [1949]), and is based on

Psalms 48:1 *“Great is the LORD, and most worthy of praise.”*

O Lord my God, When I in awesome wonder,
Consider all the worlds Thy Hands have made;
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder,
Thy power throughout the universe displayed.

*Then sings my soul, My Saviour God, to Thee,
How great Thou art, How great Thou art.
Then sings my soul, My Saviour God, to Thee,
How great Thou art, How great Thou art!*

When through the woods, and forest glades I wander,
And hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees.
When I look down, from lofty mountain grandeur
And see the brook, and feel the gentle breeze.

And when I think, that God, His Son not sparing;
Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in;
That on the Cross, my burden gladly bearing,
He bled and died to take away my sin.

When Christ shall come, with shout of acclamation,
And take me home, what joy shall fill my heart.
Then I shall bow, in humble adoration,
And then proclaim: “My God, how great Thou art!”

Tune: “How Great Thou Art,” Stuart K. Hine (1899–1989).

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