



# Look Up to the Skies and See The vocation of stargazing

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*They made their way three-quarters up the dock and lay down on their backs looking up . . . Mack revelled in seeing the stars in such numbers and clarity. Jesus suggested that they close their eyes for a few minutes, allowing the last effects of dusk to disappear for the night. Mack complied, and when he finally opened his eyes, the sight was so powerful that he experienced vertigo for a few seconds. It almost felt like he was falling up into space, the stars racing towards him as if to embrace him. He lifted his hands imagining that he could reach out and pluck diamonds, one by one, off of a velvet-black sky.*

*“Wow!” he whispered.*

*“Incredible!” whispered Jesus, his head near Mack’s in the darkness. “I never get tired of this.”*

*“Even though you created it?” Mack asked.*

*“I created it as the Word, before the Word became flesh. So even though I created this, I see it now as a human. And I must say, it is impressive!”*

*“It certainly is.” Mack was not sure how to describe what he felt, but as they continued to lie in silence, gazing into the celestial display, watching and listening, he knew in his heart that this too was holy. As they both watched in awestruck wonder, shooting stars would occasionally blaze a brief trail across the night blackness . . .*

—William P. Young, *The Shack*, ch. 7

# Throwing a bone or two

- Stargazing Live, Series Two, three episodes, 22-24 May 2018
  - <http://www.abc.net.au/tv/programs/stargazing-live/>
  - <http://www.abc.net.au/ourfocus/stargazing/>
- “Open your eyes, look up to the skies and see” (Queen, ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’)

# The status quo

- Astronomy, cosmology, what are they good for?
  - Some people make a living out of them
  - Other people make a hobby out of them
  - Most people believe that they are a waste of time

# But is that so?

- Namely, are astronomy and cosmology a waste of time?
- When astronomy, cosmology and related were part of everyone's everyday life
  - existence made sense
  - faith, spirituality, religion flourished
  - people were mentally and emotionally healthier

# So what?

- Currently, astronomy and cosmology having become the profession or pastime of very few, we are no better off
  - existence makes no sense
  - faith, spirituality, religion become secondary concerns
  - people are mentally and emotionally less healthy

# Christian contributions to the current state

- Christian contributions
  - Growing obsessed with certainty and efficiency: we want instant salvation and cheap grace, secured by systems that function like vending machines
  - No more narratives of everything
  - Narrowing down our focus: salvation of the soul, salvation of humankind (or just the elect), ethical concerns, historicist/anthropocentric narratives

# Traditional Christianity

- Traditional Christianity
  - Broad narratives: Christ as Creator, Provident and Saviour of the universe; humankind as part of the creation
  - Encompassing consciousness: salvation as a corporate or ecclesial event, a divine fellowship across humankind and the creation

# Stargazing

- What the Scriptures teach
  - *The heavens are telling the glory of God and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. (Psalm 18/19:1)*
  - *Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you shining stars! Praise him, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens! Let them praise the name of the Lord, for he commanded and they were created. (Psalm 148:3-5)*
  - *...what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse, for though they knew God, they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened. (Romans 1:19-21)*

# Stargazing

- What the ecclesial tradition teaches
  - *...raised above the earth by astronomy, [the seeker] is noetically elevated as high as the sky and circles alongside its revolution, ever studying things divine and their reciprocal convergence. It is from this [point] that Abraham began to ascend towards the knowledge of the maker... (Clement the Alexandrian, Stromateis 6.10.80.3)*
  - *[Moses] devoted forty full years for the contemplation of [created] beings. Only when he was eighty years of age has he seen God, as much as a human being can see... (Basil the Great, Hexaemeron 1.1)*

# Stargazing

- What the ecclesial tradition teaches
  - *Praised be You my Lord with all Your creations, / especially Sir Brother Sun, / who is the day through whom You give us light. / And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendour. / Of You, Most High, he bears the likeness. / Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars; / In the heavens you have made them bright, precious and fair. (Francis of Assisi, Canticle of Brother Sun and Sister Moon 3-9)*

# Stargazing

- Maybe a profession for some, perhaps a hobby for others, but stargazing should be at the centre of everyone's Christian experience
- Faith = “something that only makes sense if you can see a bigger picture of reality” (William P. Young, *The Shack*, ch. 5)

# The speaker

- <https://scd.academia.edu/DoruCostache>
- <https://aiocs.net/>