

We Were Not There; And it Matters Not

"[God] stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to dwell in." (Isaiah 40:22, and ten other passages)

In his article, "What About Atheism & Agnosticism?" ([The Lutheran Layman](#), (July-August 2014), p.3), Rev. Peter Kirby wrote with respect to the details of God's creation, "*No one was around at the beginning of the universe...to report on what happened.*" Kirby's entire article can be read online at <http://www.lhm.org/layman/default.asp>. The implication of his statement is that the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod interpretation of Genesis need not be reconsidered because science has nothing to say about beginnings. Yet for not only biblical reasons, but also scientific ones, he is wrong. Although his statement is obviously true, that fact is utterly irrelevant to his assertion that modern science is ignorant about the history of the cosmos. As we shall see, God has so constructed the laws of His universe (specifically light-travel speed) that we have the capacity to view virtually the entire history of the cosmos from the vantage point of our time. Consequently, we don't need to have been present at its very beginning in order to observe what happened then. For example, although I have never actually crossed the border from Israel *into* Syria, a few decades ago I had a broad unrestricted view across miles of its territory as I looked out from its boundary with Israel at the Golan Heights. Similarly, the *finite* aspect of the speed of light makes it possible for us to look beyond the boundary of the present time, out into the past. I invite your initial skepticism on this matter provided you follow me on these things. I assure you that this is no trick.

We can only see the moon as it *was*; never as it actually is. That is how our perceptions must always be *except* when we are viewing local objects. For example, when we see either a friend sitting across the table or Mount Rainier on the horizon, we effectively observe these two objects in the present moment for the reason that they are nearby. On the other hand, when we look upwards into the heavens we are always looking into the past. The reason for this is that light does not travel at infinite speed. Instead, it races away at 186,000 miles per second (which *seems* like infinite speed compared to a Corvette)! Indeed such a velocity is the equivalent of 7 times around the world every second. But, again, that journey is not instantaneous. With respect to our view of planets, stars, and galaxies, light-travel realities mean we are only able to see these individual celestial objects after light from their surfaces has traveled the entire distance between us in order to finally reach our eyes. Except from within our solar system, astronomical distances in "light years" are the measured lapse of TIME in years taken for the light to complete the respective journeys because, again, light travel takes time.

According to the above considerations, in round figures (pun intended) we see our moon as it was 1.25 seconds back in time, the Sun is likewise 8 minutes so, Jupiter 40 minutes, and our image of every star in the Big Dipper involves seeing them between 80 and 100 years back in the past (before most of us were born). Peering out to the edge of our own galaxy (we are half-way out from the center) entails looking back to 25 thousand years ago, while the view of our nearest neighboring galaxy (Andromeda) involves seeing it as it was 2.3 million years ago, and so forth and so on. Indeed the Hubble Extreme Deep Field photo (henceforth HEDF) reveals the primitive state of those galaxies at a much, much, younger universe 13.2 billion years back into the past (gaze at the image at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hubble_Extreme_Deep_Field).

Some people judge this delimiting reality (of only being able to see into the past) to be either a hindrance to overcome, or a nuisance that must be explained away. There are those for example who believe the 13.7-billion-year age of the universe that is implied by these light-travel times conflicts with the teaching of Genesis 1. In order to maintain their conviction that the cosmos is really just a few thousand years old, they believe that God must have created the

very *beams* of light *in passage* from all the galaxies that are radiating across the cosmos. This proposal by certain Christians (in contradiction to Romans 1:18-20) suggests that God is deceptive with nature's testimony as to the actual age of His creation. Yet in fact such an *ad hoc* interpretation is utterly unnecessary. In my essay, "The Biblical Demand to Take Another Look" (found at www.christianityontheoffense.com) I make the case that Genesis makes no such demand on readers to believe that the universe is 6,000 +/- years young.

Yet the point of this posting is to make a very different point from the attempt to reconcile astronomical realities with Genesis 1. I argue to the contrary that light-travel distances and the history that that reality implies, provide us with a privileged and exciting opportunity for confidently observing the unfolding wonders of God's creation in a manner that is entirely compatible with a very high view of the opening verse (and chapter) of the Holy Bible.

I love fireworks (except after 11 when I'm trying to sleep)! I prefer watching them *live* as opposed to as still photographs. I enjoy both experiencing the booming and a bit of lingering smell of the gunpowder. But what I enjoy most is the observing the entire *process* from the initial launch all the way to its ultimate expansive burst of glowing petals against the dark sky.

The implications following from paragraphs 2 and 3, above, are tremendous with respect to the reality of humanity's non-presence at creation's beginning. Precisely because light photons take time to cross distances, radiation from objects much farther away from us (the HEDF above) take much longer to reach the lenses of our telescopes than did nearby objects such as Polaris (the North Star) or Jupiter. This means that as modern scientific instruments detect the range of celestial objects in between the oldest objects visible (HEDF) and our own moon, we are observing the history of the universe all the way back to its beginning. "Observing" is the key word to this posting. Unlike the Darwinian claim alleging to tell the history of the development of life (which demands surmising on the basis of very imperfect evidence), when we look out across the entire universe we are able to *document* its entire history. We are like historians chronicling the development of the cosmos from its birth (and infancy all the way to the present moment. So agrees the *Commission on Theology and Church Relations* (CTCR) publication of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, *The Natural Knowledge of God*, (April 2013): "*Advances in astronomy during the twentieth century...led to the discovery that the universe is not static, but is expanding. This and related discoveries thus suggest (by projecting backwards) the now generally accepted conclusion that the universe of space and time had a beginning in the finite past*" (p.59, note 215).

God could freely have chosen to create the universe any way He wished. He has the power to have brought it into being in an instant if He so desired. Yet even young-earth (6,000 years old) Christians understand Genesis to state that creation involved time (6 days). But following the Apostle Paul's injunction that we read nature for what it tells us (Romans 1:18-20) we encounter the kind of data that tells us that following its absolute beginning out of nothing in the Big Bang, it has taken 13.7 +/- billion years to reach its present stage. By the way, nothing in this data affirms Darwinism and its atheistic agenda. Christians, in my studied opinion, make a serious mistake by resisting the time frame highlighted by cosmology. We ought instead to thank God deeply for such a powerful "visual" demonstration of His creative handiwork that has its analogy in the beauty we observe from the display of a firework. Though we weren't present for His "launching," we can still detect the entire unfolding of His artistry from our present vantage point. Indeed, "*The heavens declare the glory of God*" (Psalm 19:1f).