

# SEARCHING THE STARS

Annie Crawford on the Modern Difference  
between Quality and Quantity

Last weekend, my youngest daughter and I attended a "Sky Party" offered at the Guadalupe Mountains National Park campground. Beneath the dark and wonderfully star-studded sky, we fleeced-clad campers sat clustered on rows of benches while the host shared why he found astronomy so exciting.

As we prepared to look into the two large telescopes, Mr. Astronomer instructed us to be mindful of how amazing these sights were going to be. We weren't about to look at just photographs of Saturn or the Andromeda galaxy; we were looking at the real Saturn with our own eyes! Saturn itself! And why is this amazing? Because the things we were seeing are so far away and so old. These astronomical sights are amazing because they represent big numbers. That's it. That was the only reason he had to give. Abstraction. Quantity. Size. But what is so meaningful or amazing about a big number? It's just

more of the same measurement repeated over and over again. In and of themselves, big numbers actually mean very little.

Yet this astronomer and all the people gathered at the star party were made to be worshipers. They have in them the insuppressible faculty of worship. They must breathe, they must worship. They must awe at something. Yet, as C.S. Lewis prophesied in *The Abolition of Man*, naturalism has reduced nature to “the world of quantity as against the world of quality.”<sup>1</sup> For modern man, nature cannot possess the qualities that are truly awesome: transcendent meaning, eternal value, and divine purpose. “The stars lost their divinity as astronomy developed,”<sup>2</sup> and so all our star-gazers have left to worship is quantity, things being really big or really far away or really old. But such quantities are just meaningless numbers unless you have a story to tell.

I was hoping this astronomer would show us the constellations and tell us their names and their myths. I was hoping to look up into the sky and see some meaning, some signs of something beyond the world. I was hoping to join what the poet Malcolm Guite calls “the long tradition in which human

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<sup>1</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (1944; repr., New York: HarperOne, 1974), 69.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

beings, amidst the struggles and sufferings of their life on earth, [have] looked up to the heavens and found in the stars emblems of hope and glory.”<sup>3</sup> But the priests of scientism have stripped the world of its qualitative properties, stripped it of the sacramental meaning which God has poured into the heavens so they might declare His glory, and now all we have to admire and worship are some big numbers. The sky is no longer a sacred sign of the heavens; it has become a hauntingly old and spacious tomb.

There was another moment this weekend when I did look into the sky and see qualitative properties. Each morning I made a cup of coffee as the sun rose over the eastern desert and lit up the limestone cliffs behind me. The fiery edge of the sun peeked over the purple-orange horizon. It shone molten and blazing like the forges of Hephaestus. As it crept its way over the rim of the world, I recited my favorite Psalm. "Like a bridegroom coming out from his chamber, like a champion running his course . . ." That great star was telling me about the glory of God; it was rising to tell me about the joy that our Lord has over his people, over his Bride. He rejoices over us with a blazing love, an ecstatic love like that of a bridegroom on his wedding night. This is what the sunrise means, this and many more glorious things. I

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<sup>3</sup> Malcolm Guite, *Faith, Hope, and Poetry: Theology and the Poetic Imagination* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 151.

do not want to look at the sun and only think about numbers, about how big it is, how far away it is, or how much energy it makes. I want to look at the sun and see the glory of the risen Lord, coming to light our darkness and dispel the night and gather up His people into the glory of everlasting day.

# Bibliography

"Searching the Stars"

Guite, Malcolm. *Faith, Hope, and Poetry: Theology and the Poetic Imagination*. New York. Routledge, 2012.

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