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In August 1989, *Voyager 2* swooped low over the north pole of Neptune. It was four planets and more than 2.8 billion miles from Earth. Hurling along at more than 61,000 mph, it passed within a mere 3,000 miles of Neptune's surface. By *Newsweek's* reckoning, this accomplishment was about the same as sinking a 2,260-mile putt on a cosmic golf course.

For 14 years, the faithful unmanned spacecraft sent back spectacular color photographs of the scenery along the way. It showed new views of the universe from a close-up vantage point—the rings of Saturn, Jupiter and its moons, Uranus, and Neptune. Meantime it also signaled five trillion bits of scientific information for scientists to catalog and analyze. By the time the latest batch of data came in from Neptune, the radio signal was so weak—a 10-quadrillionth of a watt—that it took 38 giant radio antennas on four continents to catch it.

Weighing a little less than a ton,

NO EXCUSE FOR MELTDOWN

Voyager 2 has since escaped the pull of Neptune's gravity. Now it is continuing on its odyssey into infinity. Scientists say that by the year 2020 its generators will no longer be able to power communications so far back to Earth. After that it will never be heard from again but it will continue on. Thirty-eight centuries from now it is supposed to pass within 1.7 light-years of Ross 248, a cool, red, twinkling star. In nearly 300 centuries it will pass within 4.3 light-years of Sirius.

The mission of *Voyager 2* has been described by scientists and the media as humanity's most successful achievement in space exploration. Yet as exciting as this accomplishment was, it could never compare to the awesome vastness of the cosmos and of what that vastness has to say about God's unfathomable creative power. "The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork" (Ps. 19:1, NKJV).

On board the *Voyager 2* is a recording of greetings in 60 Earth

languages and one whale dialect. Scientists sent along this recording with the hope that sooner or later someone or something out in the infinity of space will happen upon the spacecraft and will be able to understand one or more of the recorded messages. Then maybe someone will return our call. This may seem to be a little odd when you think about it, considering that God has always been out there and that He has been trying to communicate with humanity since Creation itself.

The psalmist must have been quite a stargazer. It's easy to imagine him on a cold winter's night completely enraptured by the glittering universe over his head. Several psalms refer to the starry heavens and to the fact that they should be a suggestion to us of God's great creativity. "Of old You laid the foundation of the earth, And the heavens are the work of Your hands" (102:25, NKJV).

He also described the awestruck feeling of human inconsequence in the vastness of the universe: "When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained; What is man that You are mindful of him, And the son of man that You visit him" (8:3, 4, NKJV). Apparently the psalmist didn't need 38 giant radio antennas on four continents to pick up messages from outer space.

Alas, it is not so for everyone.

In 1927 Wilbur Daniel Steele

published a short story entitled "The Man Who Saw Through Heaven." The central character, Hubert Diana, visited an observatory on the eve of his departure by ship as a Christian missionary assigned to Africa. The narrator of the story described him in the following way: "Curiously impervious to little questionings, he had never been aware that his faith was anywhere attacked."

So when Hubert Diana peered through a telescope for the first time in his life and realized the utter vastness of the universe, he was struck with his own inconsequence. When a cynical astronomer commented that in such a vast universe there was no way of knowing with certainty whether our lowly Earth was anything more than the jewel in the finger ring of one of countless organisms a million times greater than we, Hubert Diana's faith suffered a meltdown. He boarded the ship the next day in a daze, and by the time he reached Africa, he apparently lost his mind completely. Rather than reporting for his assignment, he disappeared.

The rest of the story recounts the efforts four years later of a search party for Hubert Diana, led by his intrepid wife and a representative of the mission society who had assigned him to Africa. In his wanderings, like a wild-eyed pagan prophet, he had harangued anyone who would listen about the infinite

inconsequence of humankind. Curiously, in every village he had visited, he had created small mud sculptures of creatures of all shapes and forms. He had terrorized the superstitious villagers and had come to be known as “Father Witch.”

As the search party grew ever closer to catching up with him, however, they noticed that the mud sculptures appeared to be growing increasingly complex, more and more humanlike. At last they reached the place where, five weeks before, he had died apparently of tropical illnesses and been buried by nervous villagers. Nearby, in a low hut, they came upon his last sculpture: it appeared to be formed much like a human seated on a crude throne, its head inclined toward its hand, on one finger of which Hubert Diana had slipped his own finger ring. And, in response to queries from the search party, one of the villagers unknowingly revealed the derivation of the name “Father Witch”: they had misunderstood his meaning when they’d heard him pray, “Our *Father*, which art in heaven . . .”

Before his death, he had returned to his faith.

What do we do when we peer through the telescope of scientific “knowledge”? How do we respond

when faith and science apparently contradict one another? These are questions that we must address, or someday our faith will be at risk of meltdown.

The question of Earth’s origin, for example, has polarized our society, and, unfortunately, it has become a political issue. It is the flashpoint for much debate—especially in public education. One of the key questions in this issue is: How do we interpret the information that we observe from nature? Christians would phrase it this way: How do we interpret the information that God has revealed to us through nature?

The psalmist had no doubt. Neither did the prophets: “The one who forms the mountains, creates the wind, reveals his thoughts to mortals, makes the morning darkness, and treads on the heights of the earth—the Lord, the God of hosts, is his name!” (Amos 4:13, NKJV).

And the apostle Paul stated it even more assertively: “From the time the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky and all that God made. They can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse whatsoever for not knowing God” (Rom. 1:20, NLT). No excuse for meltdown!

