



I knew by the time I got to the sixth grade that science was by far my least favorite subject. Photosynthesis and kingdom, phylum, class, order, family, genus, species; and the scientific method were all the bane of my existence when I walked into that room on the third floor of our middle school. High school wasn't much better with biology and chemistry and physics. And, of course, I had to attend a college that insisted on the nonsense of general education requirements, as if broadening our horizons was going to help us better appreciate the world or assist us in figuring out what we wanted to do with our lives or something. One of those requirements was some

physics-related class, but I noticed astronomy was one of the options. I figured that might be, at least, half-interesting, so I quickly signed up for it. Evidently, I was not the only one with that idea as the lecture hall was full of non-science major students on a relatively small campus.

I still remember the first day of class when our professor, Dr. Voytas, walked in. He had this long blond ponytail, wore socks with sandals, which was supposed to be a big no-no on any college campus at the time. It was as if he was straight out of some rock band from the 1970's without a care in the entire world, but he was most certainly brilliant, specializing in sub-atomic physics. Nevertheless, he was more than fully aware that plenty of non-physics late teenagers were sitting in his classroom, just to hopefully get this gen. ed. requirement over with as easily as possible.

However, it was because of those wretched general education requirements that I also had to take a religion-based class, and so I immediately signed up for Introduction to the Bible with the mindset that half-paying attention in Sunday school over the years would make that semester a breeze. Instead, those several weeks drastically opened my eyes to reading Scripture in a different way, to even more appreciating the world around me, and perhaps, even the dreaded sciences, as if they were more than just about photosynthesis and scientific methods. That it's possible they were best describing the beautiful inner-workings of God's most majestic masterpiece.

Of course, science and religion didn't always have the best of relationships over history, paving the way for the stereotype that all scientists, including the college professors and doctors and anyone else in the field, were devout atheists. But as much as I remember my first day of astronomy class in that large lecture hall filled with plenty of us desperately searching for the easiest way out of an expectation, I remember just as much being in the campus chapel for a worship that had even more people in the pews than that science classroom, and there he was walking down that side aisle: his blond ponytail, his socks and sandals. Dr. Voytas, the renowned physics professor, took his seat, as if he was one of the very magi from long ago. Except, he wasn't following one of the stars he expected us to memorize on a test. He must have been following an even brighter, more contagious light within him. A college professor with so much intelligence and brilliance was still in awe of what also might be rather unexplainable, not only in the sense of the unknowns with body chemistry or the natural world, but of never-ending grace, boundless love, and how the sheer vastness of an almighty God would want to join our humble humanity in the form of a tiny baby.

One part to our astronomy class was a few visits to the campus observatory at night, observing a more in-depth view of those far-off distant stars. Who knows if one of them guided the magi long ago, or if it was a perfect lining up of planets or a comet or whatever it was? Yes, I am thankful for the light within us: the light that shines in the depths of our soul throughout our life no matter where

our mortal journey takes us. But still, to this day, because of Dr. Voytas, I am thankful for the lights from afar, too. I'm thankful for their beauty, for their own Gospel proclamation to us children of God, reminding us that light will indeed shine all hours of the day and night, no matter what.

Now, I may not remember much from what he said inside that lecture hall, but I don't necessarily need to, because what I needed from that class was a deeper appreciation of God's work not only in my life, but throughout the universe. I needed to know that God's love can reach just that far, and will insist on including scientists that the church has not always welcomed throughout its history. Instead, God will usher them in from a far, so that they may do their part in proclaiming the Gospel of new life not just with those magi long ago, but even today. As if God can be at work inside science labs and college classrooms and observatories and even in the most distant, but breathtaking, night sky. Evidently, there are no limits to where this God will continue to amaze us now and forevermore. For that Greatest News of all, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!