

An Intimate Communion

One could hear reports about the groundbreaking Pathfinder mission to Mars. One could see reports on television or the Internet. One could even see normal photographs from the mission, in stark monochrome, printed in magazines or on the Web. But the 1997 mission, with its unique six-wheeled rover named Sojourner, really comes to life when viewed through the 3-D glasses included in the August 1998 issue of the *National Geographic* magazine.

Right there on the cover, revealed as soon as the bland brown wrapper is removed, is a dramatic portrait of the little scooter sitting in the ochre dust of the fourth planet from the sun, alongside the off ramp of its mother ship. The coloring of the photograph is odd, with reds and greens separated and curiously shifted. But once the cardboard glasses (inserted right before the Nissan truck advertisement) are cut out and balanced precariously upon one's nose, the image springs to life, and the little vehicle lifts off the page in crisp three-dimensional relief.

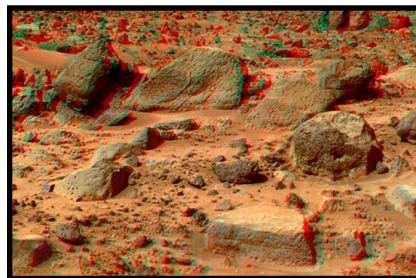
Suddenly the idea of an earth-sent vehicle landing on the "Red Planet," to be remotely steered via computer from Pasadena, California, to photograph and physically sample various types of Martian rocks and soils—suddenly it all becomes perfectly believable. Seen in three dimensions, the rover and its rock-studded pathway become real, understandable. One can almost reach out and touch the objects portrayed on the printed page.

I Am that I Am

There seem to be two predominant conceptions of the Almighty, or God the Father. One concept might be termed "God the Pal," or the "God made of Silly Putty." This idea is particularly popular today, in this age of relativism. People feel more comfortable worshipping a God who isn't much better than themselves, so they take the God of the Bible and carefully mold and reshape Him into their own image. When at last He reaches a pleasing, compatible form, they then declare Him right, and hence worthy of their time and, as it is, adoration.

A second popular concept might be termed the "Unapproachable," or "The Silent One." The more spiritual of the two, this idea nevertheless describes a distant God painted in only two dimensions. Like an old Russian Orthodox icon, He stares out unblinkingly, unfocused upon worshippers who know Him as little more than a hand-painted figure: height and width, but no depth.

The first is heresy. The second is a lot like loving a *picture* of your wife, instead of the real person who shares your bed. Both do a disservice to God. What good is it to worship a false image of the Almighty? One may as well go fishing on the Sabbath as worship something conjured from the imagination. He *is* God precisely because He is eternally, unchangeably who He is. A god who could be refashioned into the twisted image of modern man would be worthless, even less than the sum of its parts.



The God of heaven—the one God, the only God—is a spirit, so He is, admittedly, somewhat mysterious to flesh and blood. Since He is, one can only truly know Him through the work of another spirit: the Holy Spirit. That gentle Friend illumines the word, thus opening for us the portals

of understanding into His printed text.

But God is also fully three-dimensional. The God of Scripture is no mere paper cutout stuck on a wall, distant, unfeeling, detached from His creation. He's not made of cold plastic, with a hard surface impervious to weather, erosion, and prayers. We may not know the material of His construct—being spirit, He may have none beyond pure thought—but the Father has revealed Himself to us using words and imagery comfortable to our senses. We need not remake Him into

something He is not, something we can more readily understand, for He has already made Himself understandable for us.

Old Enough

There can be many regrets between father and son, and one of mine is that it took me so long to really get to know my dad. One of the great inconveniences of life is that a child must pass through stages of arrogance and rebellion when growing up, thus distancing himself from those best equipped to help him mature. Were we to come prepackaged from the womb with the reason and maturity of our adult years, we could then put them to use in those critical formative years, and be the better for it. But no, we are destined to stumble forth, being persistently stupid, learning slowly more from our mistakes, rather than through our infrequent victories.

Some of my best memories of my dad (who went home to the Lord in 1979) are from our few times together during his final years. Linda and I would travel from California, Mom and Dad would travel from Iowa, and we would meet to camp together at some midpoint, such as Colorado or Wyoming. There we would see the sights, take pictures of the mountains, eat Dad's pancakes for breakfast, and play games inside the canvas-topped camper when the rain poured down.

It was only then, as adult son and adult father, that we could talk about important things: feelings, past joys and yesterday's regrets, life experience and memories of growing up. It was only then that I could truly commune with him, not as an equal, but as someone old enough to understand. Only then could we walk side by side, eye to eye, sharing the lessons of life that every father hopes to share with his sons. Only then was I ready to receive what he had to give.

God the Father, too, likes to spend time with His children, to have them commune with Him—not as equals, but as those old enough to understand. Just as He did in those early days in the Garden. In those days, God revealed Himself to man, enjoying—in the days before The Fall—a more intimate communion with all of His creation.

Then the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him." Out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name.

Genesis 2:18-19

Here was a God who subscribed to the hands-on approach to management. He didn't just send the animals in the general direction of Adam, but actually *brought them to him*. Then, when the beasts of the field proved to be insufficient companionship for the man, God personally did surgery, to create a true companion for the first man.

The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took

one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. The Lord God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man.

Genesis 2:20-22

Again God came near to the lives of these two, but Adam and Eve ultimately rejected that sweet communion. Over quiet intimacy with their Maker they chose the brightly painted promises of the serpent. And, as a result of their choice, God never again enjoyed such close familiarity with His creation.

"Where Are You?"

The first garden, nestled in the beginnings of four rivers, becomes for us the symbol for any place of serenity in which we can most easily

find and commune with God. And in that garden, He waits for us, indeed, moves about looking for us. (Then the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" Genesis 3:9)

It is too easy to say "Well, He's an angry God looking to punish and hurt people, so I won't have anything to do with Him." How convenient that is; how easy then to excuse the absence of a relationship. Or we say that God—if there *is* a God—is simply irrelevant.

But we need not wonder about God's personality. And we need not wonder whether He is paying attention to our lives.

They have said, "The Lord does not see,
Nor does the God of Jacob pay heed."
Pay heed, you senseless among the people;
And when will you understand, stupid ones?
He who planted the ear, does He not hear?
He who formed the eye, does He not see?
He who chastens the nations, will He not rebuke,
Even He who teaches man knowledge?
The Lord knows the thoughts of man,
That they are a mere breath.
Blessed is the man whom You chasten, O Lord,
And whom You teach out of Your law;
That You may grant him relief from the days of adversity,
Until a pit is dug for the wicked.
For the Lord will not abandon His people,
Nor will He forsake His inheritance.
For judgment will again be righteous,
And all the upright in heart will follow it.

Psalms 94:7-15

God the Father welcomes us into His garden to spend quality time with Him. He *wants* to be our Father. He wants us to walk with Him in His garden, to bring Him our sorrows and joys, our anger and questions. And, as a loving dad who can now speak openly with an adult son or daughter, He eagerly takes the opportunity to share from His own life, and the immense wealth of His wisdom. dsl