SCRIPTURE:
"The heavens proclaim his righteousness; and all the peoples behold his glory." –Psalm 97:6

MEDITATION:
In what way do the heavens proclaim the righteousness of God? I think natural science has some insight into this question. It is not just that the heavens proclaim the Glory of God, though they do, and their voice goes out through all Earth, as Psalm 19 declares. But beyond the speechless majesty of day and night, of the sun running his course with joy, and regularity, Psalm 97 says the righteousness of God is proclaimed by the heavens. That seems, at first glance, a strange aspect of God's character to derive from meditating on the heavens. And yet, what is righteousness? It is the property of being in accord with what is true and justified. The Psalmist, considering the heavens, I believe gained a sense of the fitness of the heavens from their predictable regularity as much as from their beauty and majesty. He saw that reliability as a sign of the rightness of the creation. And he sensed that it reflected the character of the Creator, putting to shame the puny fabrications, the manmade idols, we so often make the focus of our attention.

Modern science knows an astonishing amount now about how the heavens actually work. There are mysteries still, and many more wonders than ancient philosophers (or maybe even Victorian philosophers) could have imagined. But the underlying laws of physics are now matters of justified confidence, and they enable us to understand with amazing consistency distant astrophysical phenomena as well as laboratory experiment. We have come to know "how the heavens go" which Galileo contrasted with the revelatory purpose of the Bible as to tell "how to go to heaven." The scientific knowledge we have gained is, however, not just technique; it is something to marvel at. It possesses an extraordinary intellectual coherence, a sense of wonder, of righteousness, even of justice, that reflects God himself. Even the most secular of natural scientists experience this rightness, wonder, and awe. And for some, perhaps, it is a gateway by which they can sense the possibility of a spiritual reality. They belong perhaps to the other "peoples" beholding the glory, and sensing the righteousness, but not yet ready to "Rejoice in the Lord" with those for whom God's righteousness is the example for their own.

REFLECTION:
How can I reflect more of God's righteousness in my scientific endeavor? How can I make the righteousness of the heavens and of all the natural world a more present and active part of my thinking, speaking, and doing? Are there secular scientific colleagues who, like me, sense the righteousness, and glory of the natural world, for whom my friendship and fellowship might help open the gateway into a perception of God? Are there Christian brothers and sisters who could be blessed and encouraged by my perception of the righteousness of God in creation?

PRAYER:
Lord Jesus Christ, image of the invisible God, first-born of all creation, for whom and in whom all things were created, in heaven and on Earth, grant us to see your righteousness in our understanding of the natural world. Give us eyes to see you and rejoice in your righteousness as creator and as redeemer. Make us people who reflect that righteousness in our thought, word, and deed. Grant us grace to live out our spiritual understanding as well as our scientific understanding, in ways that reveal your love to the world. We give thanks to your holy name.
ABOUT THE AUTHOR:
Ian Hutchinson is Professor of Nuclear Science and Engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), where he has taught for 38 years. An international expert on the physics of plasmas, and for many years director a key national experimental facility at MIT, his research into ionized gases at temperatures up to a hundred million degrees underlies the effort to generate practical energy from fusion reactions, the power source of the stars. He is also a widely respected speaker and author on the relationship between science and Christianity. In his latest book entitled Can a Scientist Believe in Miracles? (IVP 2018), he tackles hundreds of the varied and tough questions that believing and unbelieving students have asked him at his many public Veritas Forum presentations. He and his wife, Fran live in the suburbs of Boston; they have two children and four grandchildren.

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