

# In the Center of Immensities

Is the best inference from the cosmos the remoteness of an impersonal Creator?  
Or do the heavens reveal the majesty and power of a Redeemer's eye for detail, and the Triune God's personal attention to the very least aspects of our lives?

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Does the One who made the stars know your name?

"He counts the number of the stars; He calls them all by name." (Psalm 147:4)

"But now, this is what the LORD says—  
he who created you, Jacob, he who formed you, Israel:  
'Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine.'"  
(Isaiah 43:1)

"'To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?' says the Holy One.  
Lift your eyes and look to the heavens; Who created all these?  
He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name.  
Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing."  
(Isaiah 40:25–26)

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## Old Testament

"When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers,  
the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,  
What is man that you are mindful of him,  
the son of man that you care for him?" (Psalm 8:3–4)

"Can you bind the beautiful Pleiades?  
Can you loose the cords of Orion?  
Can you bring forth the constellations in their seasons  
or lead out the Bear with its cubs?  
Do you know the laws of the heavens?" (Job 38:31–33)

"As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Isaiah 55:9)

"For this is what the high and exalted One says— he who lives forever, whose name is holy: 'I live in a high and holy place, but also with the one who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.'" (Isaiah 57:15)

Solomon's dedication of the Temple in Jerusalem:

"But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!" (1 Kings 8:27)

“For this is what the Lord says – he who created the heavens, he is God; he who fashioned and made the Earth, he founded it; he did not create it to be empty, but formed it to be inhabited – he says, ‘I am the Lord, and there is no other.’” (Isaiah 45.18)

“Blessed be your glorious name, and may it be exalted above all blessing and praise. You alone are the Lord. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you. You are the Lord God, who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur....” (Nehemiah 9.6)

“As high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him.” (Psalm 103.11)

“If I go up to the heavens, you are there....” (Psalm 139.8)

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## Antiquity

Ptolemy, Book I, *Almagest* (ca. 150 AD)

“Moreover, the Earth has, to the senses, the ratio of a point to the distance of the sphere of the so-called fixed stars.”

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## Middle Ages

Typical medieval estimate of closest star: 20,000 earth radii.

Goutier of Metz, *Image du Monde* (ca. 1245).

If a man could travel upward at a rate of “forty mile and yet som del mo” a day, he would not have reached the Stellatum (“the highest heaven that ye alday seeth”) in 8000 years.

Dante Alighieri (ca. 1265 - 1321)

“the love that moves the Sun and others stars...” [final line of *Paradiso*]

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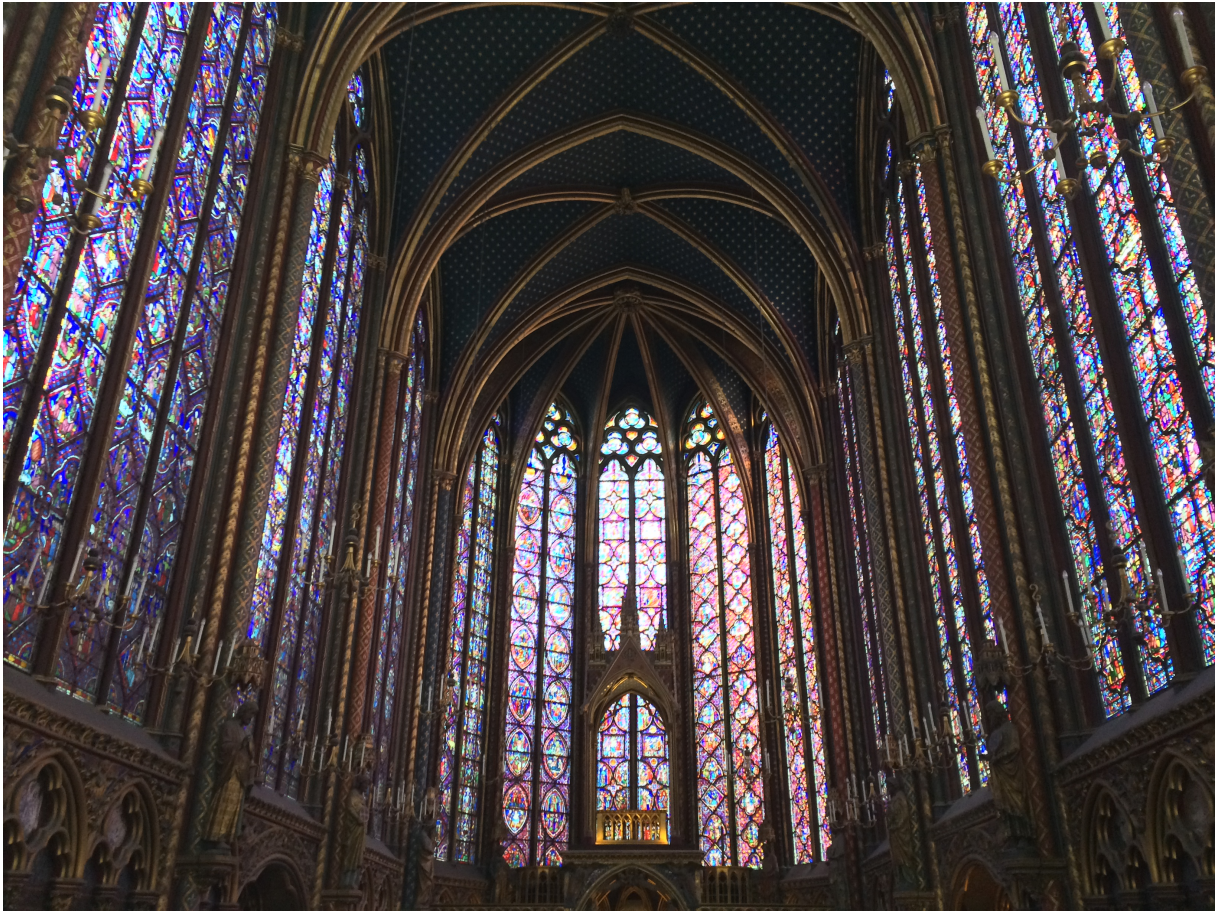
## Modern

Consider the whole universe as “an infinite sphere whose centre is everywhere, whose circumference is nowhere. In short, it is the most sensible sign of the omnipotence of God – let our imagination lose itself in this thought.” (Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*)

Some people don’t comprehend the greatness of God. Their god is too small. We don’t believe in that god either, for it’s not the biblical God or the Triune God the Church has proclaimed through history. The Church proclaims that *Love moves the Sun and other stars*. You are worth more than many stars. He cares for you. His power is not in doubt.

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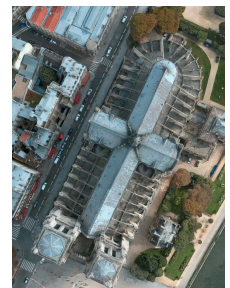
## Christ the Center



Saint Chapelle cathedral, Paris  
Photo by Stephen Folmar

Medieval cathedrals held Creation and Redemption together. In many cultures, sacred buildings are emblems of the cosmos. To appreciate the medieval sensibility of the cosmos, stand inside a cathedral and experience the sensation of space as a vertical dimension, towering high above us, filled with light and beauty. This is the cosmos.

Yet the floorpan of a medieval cathedral is a cross (see the aerial photo of Notre Dame, right). Thus a cathedral holds creation and redemption together. The cross of Christ is the key to the cosmos.



Paul held Creation and Redemption together: [Creation:] “The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. [Redemption:] And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.” (Colossians 1:15–20)





Saint Chapelle cathedral, Paris  
Photo by Stephen Folmar

“For thought and imagination, ten million miles and a thousand million are much the same. Both can be conceived (that is, we can do sums with both) and neither can be imagined; and the more imagination we have the better we shall know this. The really important difference is that the medieval universe, while, unimaginably large, was also unambiguously finite. And one unexpected result of this is to make the smallness of earth more vividly felt. In our universe she is small, no doubt; but so are the galaxies, so is everything—and so what? But in theirs there was an absolute standard of comparison. The furthest sphere, Dante’s *maggior corpo* is, quite simply and finally, the largest object in existence. The word ‘small’ as applied to earth thus takes on a far more absolute significance... Again, because the medieval universe is finite, it has a shape.... to look out on the night sky with modern eyes is like looking out over a sea that fades into mist, or looking about one in a trackless forest—trees forever and no horizon. To look up at the towering medieval universe is much more like looking at a great building. The ‘space’ of modern astronomy may arouse terror, or bewilderment or vague reverie; the spheres of the old present us with an object in which the mind can rest, overwhelming in its greatness but satisfying in its harmony... You must go out on a starry night and walk about for half an hour trying to see the sky in terms of the old cosmology... As a modern, you located the stars at a great distance. For distance you must now substitute that very special, and far less abstract, sort of distance which we call height.... the Medieval Model is vertiginous.”

C. S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image*