When I entered a major seminary back in 1949 I was advised to acquire a confessor to guide me morally and spiritually. One senior seminarian recommended I contact a Father Replier at the old Marist seminary nearby. So I climbed some rickety stairs to his third floor door and entered his high-ceilinged room. I braced for a moment because the walls were lined with tall bookshelves that seemed to bend inward as if about to collapse. But they didn't and I was able to introduce myself to this retired Cajun priest, born during the Civil War – ninety years old, aquiline features, untidy white hair and a far away look in his eyes. He welcomed me, agreed to counsel me, and heard my confession. But then as our visit went on he didn't place heavy emphasis on virtue and vice but upon things like how far was the planet Jupiter from the earth! I had never thought much of such things before. But that was the subject of his conversations.

For instance he drew a circle -O- on a piece of paper and said, "Let that be the earth" the way God says in *Genesis*: "Let there be light." Then opposite that circle -O- he drew ten more circles: OOOOOOOOO. "What does that represent?" he asked. "Ten earths?" I replied. "No, it's the width of the planet Jupiter compared to the earth. Jupiter is ten times larger than the earth." Then he said, "Let's stretch out this Jupiter by multiplying its width by ten adding up to one hundred circles OO.

"Know what that is?" he asked. "That's the width of the Sun – its ten times Jupiter's width. What does that say about this planet on which we live?" I thought: "Could this be spiritual direction?" But he didn't stop. He laid out a model of the distances between our solar system's planets. For instance, if you place the Sun (ten grapefruits wide) at Agua Caliente Road and the earth (a grape) two blocks up Highway 12, you'd have to place Neptune, the farthest planet (a lemon) near Kenwood. And the nearest star? Distant by 4.25 light years! (A light year is the distance covered by light travelling at 186000 miles per second – I repeat: per second)! At such a speed you could circle the earth 7.5 times per second and cover six trillion miles in one year. And then he mentioned a bright star in the constellation Orion that is 640 light years away. I went to have Father Replier hear my confession and guide my spiritual life. I left too astonished to ever sin again!

Initially Israel saw the trace of God in *historical* events like God's call to Abraham to leave his homeland and a famine that later drove the tribes of Israel to migrate to Egypt and later in Israel's inspired Exodus from Egypt . . . But as she grew in wisdom Israel became more alert to God's presence in nature itself – as in today's early readings, as in our psalm: *When I behold your heavens* . . . the moon and stars . . . what is man that you should be mindful of him? And yet we remain so taken up with petty things. We deny ourselves the wonder awaiting us – that turns people into poets, saints.

Samuel Coleridge (quoted by George Steiner) once mused: Hast thou ever raised thy mind to the consideration of Existence... Hast thou ever said to thyself, thoughtfully, IT IS! Heedless in that moment, whether it were a man before thee, or a flower, or a

grain of sand . . . If thou hast indeed attained to this, thou wilt have felt the presence of a mystery, which must have fixed thy spirit in awe and wonder.