

To touch the face of God

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Thirty years ago this morning, the space shuttle Challenger exploded. I happened to be in a car and heard the news on the radio. It wasn't until hours later that I saw the footage.

I was not a fan of President Reagan, but he had some leadership skills that I've come to admire. The man knew how to deliver a speech, as we might expect from someone who made his living as an actor before becoming a politician. He was also blessed with some wonderful speech writers, like Peggy Noonan, who wrote the speech that he delivered after the loss of the Challenger.

The whole text of the speech can be found [here](#). It's a masterful work from the beginning to the end. He talks directly to the family members of the crew and the other NASA workers. He talks to the nation's schoolchildren, who would have been watching when the first civilian teacher in space was lost. He talks to the nation, with stirring words about exploration and the continuation of what's been started.

I continue to be in awe of the conclusion of the speech:

The crew of the space shuttle Challenger honored us by the manner in which they lived their lives. We will never forget them, nor the last time we saw them, this morning, as they prepared for their journey and waved goodbye and 'slipped the surly bonds of earth' to 'touch the face of God.'

I find that image of astronauts touching the face of God to be a profound one, and I'm not sure why. Astronauts go where most of us won't, so that's an aspect. But I must also confess that I don't spend much time thinking about God as having a face. What would it look like?

It's also a very intimate image, an image of love and comfort. It's the perfect way to end the speech that struck the perfect notes in the perfect combination, notes of comfort and courage and inspiration.

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