THE PHOTOGRAPHS

The attached photographs of the human soul (Figs. 1 and 2), taken by Pioneer 10, the first spacecraft to navigate the outer solar system, were made on December 14, 1973, as the craft was leaving the magnetic field of Jupiter. The "photographs" (actually coded radio signals from the device's nine-foot dish antenna beamed back to Earth) were, of course, incidental to the photographing of Jupiter itself, one of the mission's chief aims. They were made by Dr. Reginald Hobson, FRS, of Britain's Cavendish Laboratory, using Kodak spectroscopic plates type IIIa-J baked for five hours at 65°C. under dry N₂ before exposure. Dr. Hobson very shortly afterward brought the resulting images to his friend and colleague Dr. Winston Watnick-Mealie, FRS.

"Uh, Winnie—"
"Yes, Reggie?"
"I have something to show you."
"More shots from 10?"
"Right, Winnie. But these... There's something rather special about them."

"What's that, Reggie?"

"Well, Winnie, I have reason to believe that they are photographs of the human soul on its way to Heaven."

"Oh, really. That's interesting. Photographs of the human soul on its way to Heaven. I suppose you've, uh, checked this out, have you, Reggie? I mean—"

"Uh—rather thoroughly, Winnie. I did a computer search of all extant images from space, and, uh, these photographs are sui generis, you might say. They are like nothing previously photographed. Nothing. I also did a worm-path study of the possibilities, and the result of the worm-path study was that, uh, these can only be photographs of the human soul on its way to Heaven."

"Any other tests?"

"Fourier analysis. Critical-band masking. Continuous smearing grids."

"Um. Well, then, I suppose that's that, isn't it? You're quite sure it's the soul—the human soul?"

"Worm-path studies don't lie, Winnie. I ran the program four times."

"The human soul... on its way to, ah, Heaven."

"One assumes. It was definitely outward bound."

"I see. Well, then, let's have a look at them."

"Right here, Winnie."

"God. Ugly little bugger, isn't it?"

"Not precisely pretty. I wouldn't, for example, call it gorgeous."

"Definitely not gorgeous. Rather unattractive, actually."

"I remarked that myself."

"Looks rather like a frying pan."

"Yes, it does, rather."

"A heavily, uh, corroded frying pan. You see that handle sort of part, over to the right."

"Yes, I noticed that. Looks rather like a, ah, handle."

"A bit used-looking, the whole thing."

"Quite."

"And then there's that, ah, knuckle sort of thing there at the top. What d'you make of that, Reggie?"

"Haven't the faintest, Winnie. What you might call an anomaly."

"Yes, definitely anomalous. I mean, one doesn't like to think of souls, the human soul, as having... knuckle-shaped things sticking out the top, does one?"

"Much prefer not, Winnie. It bothered me, too."

"Yes. It's disturbing."

"Yes. Definitely disturbing."

"I always thought of the soul as being more symmetrical, don't you know."

"Right. Sort of... beautiful. Like that stuff one puts on the Christmas tree at Christmas. What's it called?"

"Angel hair."

"Right. Sort of like angel hair. Ethereal."

"Ethereal, that's the ticket. And now to see it looking very much like something someone's been frying eggs and kidneys and God knows what all in for just ages and ages—well it sort of takes the wind out of one's sails, as it were."

"Very disturbing, I agree, Winnie."

"I wonder what that little nipple-shaped business is, in the middle there."

"Yes, I was curious, too. Probably should be looked into."

"Why couldn't it have been, you know, beautiful? If you follow me?"

"Well, there is sin and all that, of course."

"Yes. Sin. I was afraid you were going to mention that."

"I don't quite follow."

"Well, the thing is, Reggie, I have something to confess. Something in the sin line, actually."

"Something to confess?"

"Yes, I don't know quite how to put it, but it's something that's been rather on my mind, these past weeks."

"What ever are you talking about?"

"Well, it's about Dorothea."

"Dorothea?"

"Yes, Dorothea. The thing is, I ran into Dorothea a few months ago. At Marks & Spencer. She was looking for some orange thread."

"Yes, for her tatting."
"Yes. She was tatting a bedspread, I believe. An orange bedspread."
"Yes, she's finished it. It's on the bed now, in the bedroom."
"Quite. Well, Dorothea was looking for some orange thread—a particular shade of orange—"
"Yes. It's called burnt orange, Winnie. A sort of burnt-looking orange."
"Right. Well, she, as I say, was looking for this special shade of orange thread, and I was looking for a thimble."
"You were looking for a thimble."
"Right. Margaret had asked me to stop off at Marks & Spencer and fetch her home a thimble. She'd lost her thimble."
"I see."
"I bought two, actually. In case she misplaced one, she'd have the other, you see. Sort of a backup system."
"Um."
"Well, as it happens the thimble department is quite close to the thread department, at Marks & Spencer. They're adjacent."
"I should think they'd be pretty well the same department."
"One would think that, but as it happens they're separate departments. Separate, but adjacent. So I sort of ran into Dorothea that afternoon, and in the ordinary way asked her if she'd like to pop out for a drink."
"She accepted."
"Ah, yes. So we popped out and had a drink. Several, in fact."
"I see."
"And, uh, one thing sort of led to another, and the fact is that I've been seeing quite a bit of Dorothea in the past weeks. Illicitly."
"Illicitly."
"Yes. Behavior which is, strictly speaking, non-licit."
"Um. And you've been feeling a bit uneasy about it?"
"Yes. Horrid, in fact."
"Well, I can understand that, Winnie. It is a bit sticky, given the fact that we've been friends and colleagues all these years. Since the fifties, really."
"The late fifties, yes. I came here in 1956."
"But I don't quite see, Winnie, what this has to do with these photographs. Of the human soul on its way to Heaven. The first ever. I would say that the immediate problem is not your little flutter with my wife, Dorothea, but the photographs. I mean, business before pleasure, Winnie."
"Right, Reggie. I couldn't agree more. You always were one for getting on with it."
"The question is, in my view, what are we to do with the bloody things?"
"Burn them."
"Burn them? But they are of some scientific interest, wouldn't you say? I mean, if the soul exists, and we have the snaps to prove it, it would have quite a lot of relevance, wouldn't it? To everything?"
"Well, yes, I suppose it would have some relevance. Give the theologians a hell of a fright, for one thing. Maybe be worth publishing, just for that reason."
"Yes, I can see that."
"Of course, on the other hand, a great many people—decent, serious people—are probably very interested in this sort of thing. The existence of the human soul. I mean, it's not like the tooth fairy, right?"
"Much more relevance, I'd say, Winnie. To things in general."
"Well, Reggie, it's what you might call a nice question. There's our responsibility to science and truth and all that. But aren't we sort of in the position of those chaps who made the atom bomb and then were sorry afterward?"
"Yes, I'd say we were, actually. Rather."
"It seems to me to boil down to this: are we better off with souls, or just possibly without them?"
"Yes, I see what you mean. You prefer the uncertainty."
"Exactly. It's more creative. Take for example my, ah, arrangement with your wife, Dorothea. Stippled with uncertainty. At moments, we are absolutely quaking with nonspecific anxiety. I enjoy it. Dorothea enjoys it. The humdrum is defeated. Momentarily, of course."
"Yes, I can understand that. Gives the thing a bit of zest."
"Yes. You'd be taking away people's zest. They'd all have to go around being good and all that. You'd get the Nobel Prize, and no one, repeat no one, would ever speak to you again. People do like their zest, Reggie."
"But still—"
"There's just one more item, Reggie. One more item to be con-
sidered. I am absolutely persuaded that you have succeeded in capturing the first hard evidence for the existence of the human soul. But it's flawed."

"The thing is a bit on the homely side."

"Downright ugly, to be perfectly frank."

"God knows what a life it must have led."

"Yes, but don't you see, Reggie, that these snaps, if they are published, will come to stand for, in the public mind, all souls?"

"I suppose there's something in that."

"Some things it's better not to know about. That's what I'm suggesting."

"Your affair with Dorothea would be an example."

"An excellent example, Reggie."

"Of course there is some fallout from all this. The affair, I mean."

"What is that, Reggie?"

"I don't like you anymore, Winnie."