

**“BE FRUITFUL AND MULTIPLY”—  
DIVINE CREATION AND THE MOTIVATION TO COLONIZE MARS**

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**ABSTRACT**

Given the resources that will be required to explore and colonize Mars, it will be necessary to explain the need for such colonization in terms that appeal to the broadest feasible segments of society. Approximately four out of five Americans identify themselves as Christians; therefore efforts should be made to address their potential motivations for supporting Mars exploration and colonization.

Some of the current ‘popular’ motivations for colonization of other worlds are likely to be less effective with a Christian audience. The ‘threat’ of universal destruction (due to collision of the earth with a comet, for example) is one line of argumentation that would be unlikely to be effective with Christians, particularly Evangelicals, conservative mainline Protestant churches, and Roman Catholics, in light of traditional Christian eschatology.

Outreach to Christians must engage the doctrine of creation; that is, the belief that “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” (Gen. 1:1) The issue here is not so much an argument over a ‘young-earth’ (the earth is only a few thousand years old) versus ‘old-earth’ (the earth is billions of years old) Creationism; this is a dialog that can only be concluded within the Church. Rather, what is needed is an appeal rooted in a two-fold understanding of creation as (1) giving testimony to its Creator (“The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork.” Psa. 19), and (2) a requirement of careful stewardship of the creation (Gen. 1). Such appeals should be based in the Scriptures, the Church fathers and later significant theologians—preferably theologians representing as broad a historical perspective as possible. Toward this end, the Mars Society should focus on involving representatives of various denominations to present such appeals to members of their own communities.

**I. THE NEED FOR CHRISTIAN INVOLVEMENT**

The recent thirtieth anniversary of the Apollo 11 mission provided a wonderful opportunity to reflect on the exercise of public commitment, which was needed to reach the Moon. Of course, the program did not enjoy universal support, but it drew support for many different reasons. However, as the attention of the media (and, presumably, a significant portion of the public) found their initial fascination wearing off, interest in the later Moon landings began

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to wane.

There is an obvious lesson for us in the fickle reaction to the Apollo program. Given the resources that will be required to explore and colonize Mars, it will be necessary to explain the need for such endeavors in terms that will be acceptable to the broadest feasible segments of society. It is one thing to generate the degree of support needed for what some refer to as a “flags and footprints” mission; it is quite a different matter to keep up *and increase* the level of spiritual commitment needed to commit to, and accomplish, the creation of a Mars colony.

The choice of describing our difficulty as one of “spiritual commitment” was not accidental. The Founding Declaration of the Mars Society declares, “Civilizations, like people, thrive on challenge and decay without it. ... As the world moves toward unity, we must join together, not in mutual passivity, but in common enterprise, facing outward to embrace a greater and *nobler* challenge than that which we previously posed to each other.” Again: “The settling of the Martian New World is an opportunity for a *noble* experiment in which humanity has another chance to shed old baggage and begin the world anew; carrying forward as much of the best of our heritage as possible and leaving the worst behind.” (Emphasis added) To speak of something as “noble” is to proclaim that it shows high moral qualities, or a greatness of character. Nobility is a matter of the spirit. Yes, we may speak of noble metals and noble gases (both of which will be of great value to any Mars colony), but nobility of character—nobility of spirit—is of greater value to any society than platinum. Contrary to the views of some, mind and spirit are not some accidental quirks of evolutionary development, nor is the character of our spirit merely the expression of biological needs (Darwin) or economic forces (Marx). It is often the occasions of spirit denying the needs or desires of the flesh that we call virtues. There is more than a *quantitative* difference between a swarming, dividing hive of bees and the act of colonizing another world; the difference is *qualitative* as well. In the one situation, there is no choice—instinct, not choice or conscience, determines action. In the other situation, the decision is made to act in a way deemed to be noble or moral, despite the personal cost. If nothing more than a supposed biological mandate for perpetuation of the species drives our efforts, then one could no more declare it to be “noble” than to call breathing and eating “noble”—such acts are necessary, not noble.

Science is important—but we are not proposing to go to Mars only for scientific knowledge. Prosperity can be a great blessing—but we are not proposing a Martian colony simply for the acquisition of wealth. We are not going as a demonstration of national might. And let us hope that we will not focus now and in the years to come simply on the questions of “how”—questions of technology and finances—but that we will also direct ourselves even more to questions of “why”—why we should go, or not go; why we should colonize or not colonize; why we should terraform or not terraform, and so on. An action is neither “good” nor “noble” simply because we are capable of the action—certainly the twentieth century should have taught mankind this lesson. Just as man is both body and spirit, and neglecting the needs of either parts damages the whole, so neglecting questions either of “how” or “why” will damage what we propose to accomplish.

A year ago the author was privileged with the opportunity of addressing the society on the topic, “A Shining City on a Higher Hill: Lessons from the Last Colonization of a ‘New

World’.” Working from the model of the early seventeenth century colonization of North America, I endeavored to weigh the importance of three motivations to colonization: (1) military expansion or competition between colonizing nations, (2) economic growth or exploitation, and (3) pursuit of political and religious freedom. The precise role of Christianity in the various aspects of the formation and development of the American culture will almost certainly continue to be a matter of great debate long after we have all become dust. The matter is certainly complicated because the religion has exerted influence beyond its overt manifestations, to shape philosophy, to filter the influence of the classical age, indeed to shape language itself. Nevertheless, as we demonstrated a year ago, neither competition between colonizing nations nor economic exploitation proved as definitive to the opening of the “New World” as the emigration of the Pilgrims and Puritans from England. In the words of the historian Paul Johnson, it was “the single most important formative event in early American history, which would ultimately have an important bearing on the crisis of the American Republic.”<sup>1</sup> As the present writer observed in a recent article,

*The Pilgrims (and the Puritans who followed) were, therefore, different from those who came before: They did not come as individuals, but as a community. They did not come as adventurers, but as “planters” (colonists). They came with a specific vision motivating their settlement—a revitalization of their Christian faith—and understood themselves bound up in a covenant with God in this task.*<sup>2</sup>

A legacy of the foundational role of Christianity in American society is the continued high level of Church affiliation. Public opinion polls regularly find that 95 percent of Americans believe in God and four in five describe themselves as “Christian.”<sup>3</sup> Even those describing themselves as “non-Christian” often subscribe to uniquely Christian teachings, such as the Resurrection (52%) and the virgin birth (49%).<sup>4</sup> Indeed, over 120 million Americans are members of the ten largest denominations in the United States, and approximately 246,319,000 of all North Americans are Christians.<sup>5</sup> Globally, over 1.9 billion people are members of various Christian denominations, accounting for 33.6% of the world’s population.<sup>6</sup>

Given the role believing communities played in opening the last “New World,” and given the number and influence of such believers today, it seems logical that an effort should be made to address their potential motivations for supporting Mars exploration and colonization. This paper is less concerned with motivations common to all people (such as a desire for economic prosperity); rather, we will endeavor to examine specifically Christian motivations for Mars colonization, especially those related to the doctrine of creation.

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Johnson, *A History of the American People*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1998) p. 28.

<sup>2</sup> “Pilgrims Redux—Will Religious Communities Be Involved in Space Colonization?,” *Ad Astra*, November/December 1998 (10:6), p. 22.

<sup>3</sup> “Poll finds Christians questioning religion’s principles,” *The Indianapolis Star*, 12 September 1994, p. A5.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Charles L. Manske and Daniel N. Harmelink, *World Religions Today*, (Irvine, CA: Institute of World Religions, 1996), p. 34 and p. C.

<sup>6</sup> *World Religions Today*, p. B.

## II. MOTIVATION FOR CHRISTIAN INVOLVEMENT

Aside from some of the common, secular “positive” motivations (motivations which would draw people to Mars) such as potential economic gain, there are also “negative” motivations having to do less with getting into space than they have to do with getting off Earth. Most prominent among these motivations is what could be called the “don’t have all your eggs in one basket” theory. This theory postulates a global threat—a comet, massive asteroid, or uncontrollable plague—that threatens all of mankind on earth. It makes sense not to “keep all our eggs in one basket,” the argument goes, “so we’ll establish a Mars colony, Moon base, etc. to guarantee that mankind goes on, no matter what happens to Earth.”

The supposed “threat” of doomsday scenarios is a motivation unlikely to be effective with traditional Christians, whether Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Lutheran, or conservative (especially Evangelical) Protestant if one is seeking to justify space colonization. Christian eschatology<sup>7</sup> doesn’t find, frankly, much to fear in such scenarios. Christians have always lived in the conviction that the world will end suddenly at Jesus’ return. As St. Peter wrote in his Second Epistle: “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of person ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.” (3:10-13 NKJV<sup>8</sup>) That some outside the Church deprecate this teaching, pointing out that nearly 2,000 years have passed without Christ’s return, doesn’t shake this eschatological expectation, for St. Peter also declared, “scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, ‘Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning.’” (2 Ptr. 3:3-4)

This eschatological expectation is far from a depressing aspect of Christianity; rather, belief in the resurrection is a central hope of the faith. Christians, in the words of the Nicene Creed, “look for the resurrection of the dead, And the life of the world to come.” As St. Paul wrote, “And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. ... But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” (1 Cor. 15:14, 20) Thus, trying to alarm Christians with threats of the death of mankind have very limited appeal; we knew the clock was ticking down long before anyone realized there were rocks out there just waiting to “do us in.”

More probable motivations are those that might be categorized as “negative” motivations (those which might push Christians away from Earth) or “positive” motivations (those which might draw them toward colonization) for Christian involvement in Mars colonization. One

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<sup>7</sup> The articles of doctrine concerned with “last things,” i.e., the Second Coming, the Judgment, eternal death and eternal life.

<sup>8</sup> All biblical citations are taken from The New King James Version, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982).

“negative” motivation is that of flight from oppression, one of the most powerful motivations in the seventeenth century colonies. Granted that religious freedom was a significant motivation for the successful colonization of the New World, is it possible this motivation would be operative in a future colonization of Mars? The stark reality is that Western Christians are probably experiencing a greater sense of cultural isolation and alienation than their seventeenth century forefathers. As John Lewis observes in *Mining the Sky*, “It was the search for freedom of religion that brought most of our ancestors here, and it will be the search for freedom from religious, political, and ethnic persecution that will send the first colonists forth into space.”<sup>9</sup>

If one is to positively engage Christians with the aim of gaining their support of Mars exploration and colonization, one must speak in terms of the doctrine of creation; that is, the belief that “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” (Gen. 1:1) Again, faith in the Triune God as Creator is fundamental to all Christians, as finds expression in the Nicene Creed, “I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible.” Christians universally hold this to be a doctrine rooted in the Holy Scriptures. It is important to note that we are *not* discussing the contended matter of the manner in which God created the cosmos; that is, whether Genesis 1 and 2 are to be read figuratively or literally. Christians have differed on this question and will probably continue to do so. The issue here is not so much an argument between ‘young-earth’<sup>10</sup> versus ‘old-earth’<sup>11</sup> Creationism. Rather, what is needed is an appeal to Christians rooted in a two-fold understanding of creation as (1) giving testimony to its Creator, and (2) God placing a requirement on mankind for careful stewardship of the creation.

The Church has long drawn comfort from the creation giving testimony to its Creator. Creation gives testimony both to the infinite power of the Creator and His love for His creation, especially those whom He created in His own image. As King David wrote in the eighth Psalm, “When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him? For You have made him a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and honor.” (v. 3–5) Again, we hear in Psalm 19, “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.” (v. 1–4) This belief that God reveals Himself in the creation is a powerful motivation for Christians to study that good creation. It is the pagan Gnostics—whether of the first century or the twentieth—who show contempt for the creation. The Christian knows he beholds the good handiwork of God when he studies nature. In the words of John Calvin, “When a person, from beholding and contemplating the heavens, has been brought to acknowledge God, he will learn also to reflect upon and admire his wisdom and power displayed on the face of the earth, not only in general, but even in the minutest plants.”<sup>12</sup> As the seventeenth century astronomer (and Lutheran) Johannes Kepler

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<sup>9</sup> (New York: Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1996), p. 240. For a more comprehensive examination of “negative” or “flight” motivations, readers are referred to author’s articles in the proceedings of the first Mars Society convention and in the November/December 1998 issue of *Ad Astra* magazine.

<sup>10</sup> The contention that the earth is only a few thousand years old.

<sup>11</sup> The contention that the earth is billions of years old.

<sup>12</sup> quoted in “The Universe as the Living Image of God: Calvin’s Doctrine of Creation Reconsidered,” by

declared:

*I implore my reader not to forget the divine goodness conferred on mankind, and which the psalmist urges him especially to consider. When he has returned from church and entered on the study of astronomy, may he praise and glorify the wisdom and greatness of the Creator. ... Let him not only extol the bounty of God in the preservation of living creatures of all kinds by the strength and stability of the earth, but also let him acknowledge the wisdom of the Creator in its motion, so abstruse, so admirable.<sup>13</sup>*

Or in the words of Dr. Herbert Uhlig, Professor Emeritus in the Department of Materials Science and Engineering, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, “Faith in the concept of a God who is concerned with His creation is essential to human hope, an optimistic world view, and ultimate survival of the human race. Any contrary view aligns humanity with the frustration of a drifting, meaningless universe facing a despondent future.”<sup>14</sup>

Just as importantly, the Christian believes mankind is responsible for exercising a divinely mandated stewardship over the creation. As we read in Genesis 1, “Then God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’” (Gen. 1:28) Even after the Fall into sin, this stewardship continues, but in a more troubled state: “Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return.” (Gen. 3:17b–19) The creation is understood to be a good gift of God, which must be cared for, nurtured, and, because of man’s fall into sin, restored. Misuse of the creation is not simply imprudent; it is wicked. To again quote Calvin,

*Let him who possesses a field, so partake of its yearly fruits, that he may not suffer the ground to be injured by his negligence; but let him endeavor to hand it down to posterity as he received it, or even better cultivated. Let him so feed on its fruits, that he neither dissipates it by luxury, nor permits it to be marred or ruined by neglect. Moreover, that this economy and this diligence, with respect to those good things which God has given us to enjoy, may flourish among us; let everyone regard himself as the steward of God in all things which he possesses. Then he will neither conduct himself dissolutely, nor corrupt by abuse those things which God requires to be preserved.<sup>15</sup>*

In all man’s stewardship endeavors, however, the Christian lives with the understanding that the completion of the restoration must await the fulfillment of the ages. As St. Paul writes

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Randall C. Zachmann, *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, October 1997 (61:4), p. 308.

<sup>13</sup> quoted by Owen Gingerich, “Dare a Scientist Believe in Design?,” in *Evidence of Purpose—Scientists Discover the Creator*, ed. by John Marks Templeton, (New York: Continuum, 1994) p. 28.

<sup>14</sup> quoted in *Cosmos, Bios, Theos—Scientists Reflect on Science, God, and the Origins of the Universe, Life, and Homo sapiens*, ed. by Henry Margenau and Roy Abraham Varghese, (Le Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1992) p. 126.

<sup>15</sup> quoted in Zachmann, p. 311-312.

in Romans 8, “For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.” (v. 19–23)

The zeal both for the study of nature, and for its preservation and cultivation, are noble traits which Christians would bring to Mars colonization (and, I suspect, will lead to a “Red” versus “Green” debate—my apologies to Kim Stanley Robinson—all our own). What can be learned to the glory of the Creator, and the work that can be done by way of careful stewardship of His creation, can be powerful motivations for Christians. In the words of Dr. Schawlow (recipient of the Nobel Prize for Physics and a professor of Physics at Stanford University),

*Science cannot either prove or disprove religion. Religion is founded on faith. It seems to me that when confronted with the marvels of life and the universe, one must ask why and not just how. The only possible answers are religious. For me that means Protestant Christianity, to which I was introduced as a child and which has withstood the tests of a lifetime.*

*But the context of religion is a great background for doing science. In the words of Psalm 19, “The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth his handiwork”. Thus scientific research is a worshipful act, in that it reveals more of the wonders of God’s creation.<sup>16</sup>*

## CONCLUSION

We have sketched in broad outline some of the positive motivations for Christians to take an active interest in Mars exploration and colonization. Much more needs to be said, of course, and this paper is only intended to be a brief introduction to this entire topic.

When seeking to reach out to Christians to solicit their support for Mars colonization, arguments should take their worldview into account. Appeals should center in (1) learning what we can of the Creator through the creation, as well as (2) the cultivation of creation and its benefits to mankind on Earth. Such appeals should be based in the Scriptures, the Church fathers and later significant theologians—preferably theologians representing as broad a historical perspective as possible. Representative members of the various denominations should enter into dialog with each other and members of their own Church bodies to assess what efforts can be made for outreach. Toward this end, the Mars Society should focus on involving representatives of various denominations to present such appeals to members of their own communities.

As I noted at the beginning of this paper, the challenge before us is one of spiritual

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<sup>16</sup> quoted in *Cosmos, Bios, Theos—Scientists Reflect on Science, God, and the Origins of the Universe, Life, and Homo sapiens*, p. 105-106.

commitment. Certainly the world does not seem to lack either the resources or the technological prowess to accomplish both the exploration and colonization of Mars, God-willing. The prospect of colonizing another planet is arguably a noble one, but it is also one which should evoke another virtue—humility; humility that it is granted to us to live in this generation, and humility in order that hubris not pervert or doom our efforts. If the years ahead of us do not lead us to seek answers to “why,” and not just “how,” if we do not seek to better know both ourselves and our Creator, then we will have missed a rare opportunity for growth in spirit. In this labor, as in all others, our cry is “Soli Deo gloria!” As Kepler prayed:

*If I have been allured into brashness by the wonderful beauty of Thy works, or if I have loved my own glory among men, while advancing in work destined for Thy glory, gently and mercifully pardon me: and finally, deign graciously to cause that these demonstrations may lead to Thy glory and to the salvation of souls, and nowhere be an obstacle to that. Amen.<sup>17</sup>*

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<sup>17</sup> quoted in “Dare a Scientist Believe in Design?,” p. 32.