

**OBSERVATIONS REGARDING THE INTELLECTUAL, ETHICAL AND SPIRITUAL
FORMATION OF FUTURE “MARTIANS”**

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ABSTRACT

If the purpose for going to Mars is for permanent colonization, the spiritual, ethical and intellectual formation of future ‘Martians’ should be a matter of intense interest. The focus of this paper is not on the scientific and/or technical training of potential first generation settlers, but concerns more fundamental aspects of their educational and spiritual formation.

The first generation of permanent settlers will have a defining role in shaping Martian culture for generations to come. Therefore, there are aspects of character beyond choice of vocation that are crucial in settlers. They must be more than simply intelligent; they must be virtuous. Settlers must be firmly established in their ethical standards because many of the challenges they will face will test their integrity. The colonization of Mars requires educated men and women capable of understanding our accumulated history and experience outside of narrow parochial perspectives.

In short, prospective settlers need to be ‘educated’ in the classic, liberal sense of the term. Such a liberal education is not in opposition to scientific training; rather, the first is foundational to the latter. Being truly educated is of service in any vocation and is of lasting benefit to the culture whether or not one goes to Mars. If a fruit of the Apollo program was numerous scientists and engineers, perhaps humanity will realize even greater gains from a generation that can revitalize Western culture.

Ultimately, culture arises from the *cultus*—a society’s foundational beliefs. The shared faith (or lack thereof) will profoundly shape a society. Many of the ills undermining present Western civilization are intimately linked to the decline of the sacred. Martian culture must witness a restoration of the role of the sacred within the lives of its people, or it will share the spiritual ills of our present culture.

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When Robert Zubrin's *The Case for Mars* was published back in 1996, the present author, along with many other readers, was struck by Dr. Zubrin's ability to see the 'big picture'; here was a vision where the goal of colonizing Mars is not just about technological accomplishment; it is a concern for the preservation of human civilization. As Zubrin observed in his epilogue, "The Significance of the Martian Frontier":

Currently we see around us an ever more apparent loss of vigor of our society: increasing fixity of the power structure and bureaucratization of all levels of life; impotence of political institutions to carry off great projects; the proliferation of regulations affecting all aspects of public, private, and commercial life; the spread of irrationalism; the banalization of popular culture; the loss of willingness by individuals to take risks, to fend for themselves or think for themselves; economic stagnation and decline; the deceleration of the rate of technological innovation. ... Everywhere you look, the writing is on the wall.

...
The creation of a new frontier thus presents itself as America's and humanity's greatest social need. Nothing is more important: Apply what palliatives you will, without a frontier to grow in, not only American society, but the entire global civilization based upon values of humanism, science, and progress will ultimately die. (Zubrin, 297)

For Zubrin and many others, opening the Martian frontier is seen as necessary for the preservation of Western civilization. Certainly the societal problems Zubrin identifies are among the signs of decadence and decay which are arising. However, when one searches for the *causes* of cultural decline, they are far more profound than the simple absence of a frontier. As important as a 'new frontier' might be, it is an inadequate solution to the problems that confront our civilization.

The great revival of knowledge and faith fueled by humanists and reformers began in the early fourteenth century—well before the re-discovery of the 'New World'—and commenced through much of its most fundamental development in seeming ignorance of the possibilities posed by an open frontier. Remarkable figures of the age, such as Petrarch, Erasmus of Rotterdam or Philipp Melanchthon of Wittenberg would have aided in the reshaping and revitalization of their culture regardless of the existence of a new frontier. Theology, philosophy, literature and the other arts, and science were all revitalized in the Old World and then exported to the New World. It is true that the Americas provided a virtual *tabula rasa* for exploring the renewed vigor of Western thought, but the frontier did not initiate the renewal of civilization; rather, it provided an outlet for its expression.

Thus, if the purpose for going to Mars is for permanent colonization, the spiritual, ethical and intellectual formation of future 'Martians' should be a matter of intense interest. A Martian frontier, like the frontiers that preceded it, will give birth to 'new' ideas to the extent that such ideas are only partially fulfilled already in the 'Old World.' In the words of Horace: "*Caelum non animum mutant qui trans mare current*"—"They change the sky, not the soul, who cross the

ocean.” (cited in Cahill 193) Utopian fantasies are useful insofar as they help a culture explore its core values; they are troublesome, even dangerous, if they give rise to the idea that men will suddenly be spiritually transformed simply by changing location. Different environments may be seen as opportunities for expressing interests or using knowledge, which previously lay dormant, but it does not fundamentally alter who you are. The sky changes, but not the soul.

This realization has profound implications for our endeavors. Our role here is not to in any way diminish the importance of the many fine papers, which have been, or will be, presented on crucial scientific and technical aspects of traveling to Mars and opening the new frontier. Instead, it is the aim of the author to sound a note of caution, lest we neglect the equally important matter of preparing men and women who are truly ready for such a task. The focus of this paper is not on the scientific and technical training of potential first generation settlers, but concerns more fundamental aspects of their educational and spiritual formation.

It is understandable why many may view settling Mars as an opportunity to “start over.” Certainly the realistic view Earth-side is bleak if one considers the future of civilization. Malcolm Muggeridge wrote in his essay, “The Great Liberal Death Wish,”

As the astronauts soar into the vast eternities of space, on earth the garbage piles higher; as the groves of academe extends their domain, their alumni’s arms reach lower; as the phallic cult spreads, so does impotence. In great wealth, great poverty; in health, sickness, in numbers, deception. Gorging, left hungry; sedated, left restless; telling all, hiding all; in flesh united, forever separated. So we press on through the valley of abundance that leads to the wasteland of satiety, passing through the gardens of fantasy; seeking happiness ever more ardently, and finding despair ever more surely. (cited in Kirk, 5)

Unlike the committed humanists and reformers whose efforts were the means by which our Western civilization rose to global prominence this last half millennium, there are many of their heirs who elect to squander their inheritance. Such atomized individuals have virtually ceased to exist as true members of society because they view their relationships in terms of personal advantage, rather than mutual obligation and responsibility. They have ceased to understand that they exist as individuals through their relationships with others.

What kind of Mars do we want? The first generation of permanent settlers will have a defining role in shaping Martian culture for generations to come. When you lay a foundation, you determine the future of the whole house. An inadequate foundation dooms the building before the structure is even finished. Therefore, there are aspects of character beyond choice of vocation which are crucial in settlers. More than simply technical competency is required. It is not enough that such settlers are the “best and the brightest”—they must be more than simply intelligent; they must be virtuous. St. Paul wrote to the Romans, “And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.” (Romans 13:2) If Mars is settled by individuals who care for nothing more than themselves, if they are loveless and self-obsessed,

then we would do just as well to stay home, for the endeavor will come to nothing. Indeed, in such a situation one cannot help but think of the failure of the Jamestown colony in seventeenth century Virginia, where self-obsessed fortune seekers did not gain fortune and even forfeited their lives.

Jesus declared, “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.” (St. John 15:13) Self-serving escapists lack the most crucial element of virtue: the willingness to sacrifice—whether in terms of comfort, wealth, or even life—for the benefit of others. Settlers must be firmly established in such a loving ethical standard because many of the challenges they will face will test their integrity. No one should suffer any utopian illusions as we contemplate the exploration and colonization of Mars—men and women will never have attempted to settle such a desperately hostile environment. In a crisis, they may need to be willing to die for one another; they must see beyond their narrow interests to embrace the needs of others. Such an environment does not allow for the morally bankrupt to continually put themselves and their personal gain before their society.

St. Augustine wrote: “In order to discover the character of any people we have only to observe what they love.” (cited in Codevilla, 28) Two great loves, therefore, must characterize those who will form the new civilization: love of neighbor and love of the truth. Both of these loves, however, are notably counter-culture today, for atomistic individualism and cultural relativism are formative influences of our times.

The self-centered individual is like the lawyer in St. Luke’s Gospel, who, “wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’” (10:29) And yet he had already admitted that the two great commandments of the law are “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” (St. Luke 10:27) The self-centered are unwilling to see each neighbor’s need as if it were his own need, and thus seeks to limit the circle of ‘neighbors’ as tightly as possible.

The blight of cultural relativism is equally damaging to civilization, for it assaults truth itself. As Allan Bloom observed, “Yet everyone likes cultural relativism but wants to exempt what concerns him. The physicist wants to save his atoms; the historian, his events; the moralist, his values. But they are all equally relative. If there is an escape for one truth from the flux, then there is in principle no reason why many truths are not beyond it; and then the flux, becoming, change, history or what have you is not what is fundamental, but rather, being, the immutable principle of science and philosophy.” (Bloom, 203) It is the heart of the cultural relativist that allows Pontius Pilate to look into the face of Him who is the Way, the Truth and the Life and ask, “What is truth?” (St. John 18:38) A cultural relativism which aims at attacking the universality of moral or ethical truth claims ends up eliminating *all* truth claims; this is the “spread of irrationalism” which Zubrin laments. (297)

The opening of the new frontier requires men and women who reflect a renewed ‘humanist’ spirit. (We mean by this the genuine Renaissance humanism which opened and expanded minds, not its banal secular ‘knock-off’ which closes minds and welds them shut.)

Ours is an age of narrow specialization in which men and women are expected to know a great deal about very little. The colonization of Mars requires educated men and women capable of understanding our accumulated history and experience outside of narrow parochial perspectives. Barzun describes the humanists as those whose “continuing enthusiasm for the ancients was reinforced by the feeling that the inherited culture was dissolving and here was a storehouse of ideas and attitudes with which to rebuild. It was like going up to the attic and polishing up semi-discarded treasures.” (Barzun, 46) We, too, must learn to treasure the experience of history; the ancient treasures must be brought out and polished again.

In short, prospective settlers need to be ‘educated’ in the classic, liberal sense of the term. Such a liberal education is not in opposition to scientific training; rather, the first is foundational to the latter. Unless one’s specialization is preceded by a grounding in the wealth of human knowledge, the spirit is blunted and dull. As Dean Briggs of Harvard College remarked a hundred years ago: “The new degree of Bachelor of Science does not guarantee that the holder knows any science. It does guarantee that he does not know any Latin.” (cited in Barzun, 45) Being truly educated is of service in any vocation and is of lasting benefit to the culture whether or not one goes to Mars. In the words of James Russell Lowell, the study of the classics “is fitly called a liberal education, because it emancipates the mind from every narrow provincialism, whether of egoism or tradition, and is the apprenticeship that every one must serve before becoming a free brother of the guild which passes the torch of life from age to age.” (cited in Kirk, 42) If a fruit of the Apollo program was numerous scientists and engineers, perhaps humanity will realize even greater gains from a generation that can revitalize Western culture. Again, in the words of Russell Kirk:

The more people who are humanely educated, the better. But the more people we have who are half-educated or quarter-educated, the worse for them and for the republic. Really educated people, rather than forming presumptuous elites, will permeate society, leavening the lump through their professions, their teaching, their preaching, their participation in commerce and industry, their public offices at every level of the commonwealth. And being educated, they will know that they do not know everything; and that there exists objects in life besides power and money and sensual gratification; they will take long views; they will look forward to posterity and backward toward their ancestors. (Kirk, 46–47)

It seems virtually indisputable that our age is one of decadence and decay in Western culture; for some, this is a cause for rejoicing, but for many it brings confusion and sadness—a sense of having lost something which is almost indescribable. In efforts to preserve that which is worth saving in our culture, we must remember that, ultimately, culture arises from the *cultus*—a society’s foundational beliefs. The shared faith (or lack thereof) will profoundly shape a society. Many of the ills undermining present Western civilization are intimately linked to the decline of the sacred. As Codevilla observes,

The most contentious and consequential issues touch religion. Modern government’s relationship with religion has been one of rivalry. Although there is

not now and never has been a better predictor of prosperity, family, and civility than the practice of Judaism and Christianity, modern Western governments have used their power over education to teach secularism at first, followed by various anti-religious dogmas and, most recently, lifestyles repugnant to religious morality. The fundamental Judeo-Christian teaching is that mankind lives under a single, objective set of laws equally binding on all. As governments drain Western societies of religious preferences, they introduce new beliefs based on relativism, that is, on the basis of power. Hence, nowadays nihilism does battle for Western souls with a thin, ill-fitting combination of self-worship and earth worship. (Codevilla, 14)

Any future Martian culture must witness a restoration of the role of the sacred within the lives of its people, or it will share the spiritual ills of our present culture. A renewed culture, rooted in love of neighbor and zeal for the truth—especially zeal for the One who is Truth—will be truly ready for the new frontier. Let us grow in our souls, first, and then set out upon the sea.

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