

RELIGIOUS VALUES & THE MARTIAN VENTURE

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INTRODUCTION

The challenge of exploring and developing human habitation on the planet Mars is an exciting proposition for a space-faring nation such as ours. As we celebrate the 30th anniversary of the success of our first lunar landing by the manned crew of Apollo 11, we are challenged to be conscious of the importance of religious values in the development and implementation of a strategy which will ensure the success of such a Martian venture.

While we live in an age of continuing scientific discovery and technological marvels, as humans we must never forget that our human nature is not limited to the physical plane. Humans are by nature spiritual creatures designed by a loving Creator with a higher purpose in mind. The world's religious traditions that have emerged over thousands of years articulate the perspective that humanity is called to understand its relationship to the natural world by acknowledging the Creator and Sustainer of all of life.

As persons who hunger to discover more about our wonderful planet earth and its solar system, and as people committed to the permanent establishment of a human presence on Mars, we must not neglect our spiritual side, our religious values, which have shaped our earthbound activities and our first tentative steps into outer space. Our failure to acknowledge, indeed to embrace and espouse religious values in this proposition would ensure the failure to achieve our purposes as they have been outlined in the tenets of the Founding Declaration of the Mars Society that was composed and signed last year.

I would propose that if we are to properly identify ourselves as *“life’s messenger”*, then we must affirm that life has a Source, a Creator, who has been described by some within the scientific community as the *“Prime Mover”* and by certain theologians as the *“Ground of Our Being”*. These modern terms for the Divine are evidence of our struggle to acknowledge the reality of our Maker and the Maker of the Cosmos as we re-define our understanding of life, humanity, and the cosmos as we discover more about the nature and organization of the universe through space exploration, thus re-defining our cosmological and theological paradigms.

If we are to declare that humans are indeed *“life’s messenger”*, then we must ask what kind of message will we declare as we leave this planet in pursuit of taking up permanent residence on the Red Planet. Those who are adventurous enough to leave the “home planet” and dedicated enough to be **“bringing life to Mars – and Mars to life”** will be guided by some ethical construct, some theological principles which will under-gird their personal lives and that of the Martian

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community which is to be established. The question must be considered, “If we are to become Martians, what kind of Martians shall we become? “

Throughout recorded human history, whenever men and women have undertaken such new challenges of exploration and development beyond their own cultural boundaries they have carried within them and transferred their values and morality as they have been shaped by their theological and cosmological models. As the Christian apologist and author C. S. Lewis had noted early on in the Space Age, our tendency towards subjection through the use of violent means has been the hallmark of human discovery. Even if we do not immediately encounter life forms other than humans that we must relate to in our pilgrimage into the reaches of outer space, we will be confounded with the problems of developing an organized society in a remote region far beyond the Earth’s gravitational field.

The Founding Declaration of the Mars Society acknowledges the *“precious worth of the human race”*. One presumes that this valuation of human life, both individually and collectively, comes from some foundational value – more than likely, a religious value from at least one if not more of our world’s religious traditions. As we prepare to blast off to Mars, it is a good thing that we are aware of and espouse the worth of humans – indeed of all life – based not upon any assigned value which we as humans may ascribe but rather a significance due to the intrinsic value due to the divine creative activity which brought and continues to bring forth the diversity of life in the cosmos. The biblical creation story as described in Genesis defines the value of the whole created order including the human race as being innately “good” by the Creator.

Yet, we must be mindful that the whole of creation is considered worthy of respect. In our pursuits, on Mars and elsewhere throughout the universe as humanity reaches beyond Earth, we will indeed be writing a *“new history...in a New World”*. How shall we write this history other than through the values as expressed in our actions and with the technology available to us? How shall this *“New World”* take shape other than by our religious definitions and understanding of ourselves and our divinely inspired purpose(s)?

Yes, we wisely observe and declare that civilizations *“thrive on challenge and decay without it...The time is past for human societies to use war as a driving stress for technological progress.”* Now, at the commencement of this challenge to establish human habitation on Mars, we need to confess that if we do not acknowledge the importance of religious values in our Martian venture we shall build a society which will be unstable and eventually collapse on its own due to spiritual decay. This Martian venture calls for the highest of human ideals to be brought to the forefront – the best of the world’s religious values in the establishment. A word of scriptural truth reminds us that *“Unless the Lord builds the house, the laborers labor in vain.”*

RELIGIOUS VALUES & SPACE EXPLORATION

***“No longer will man be able to see himself unrelated to mankind,
neither will be able to see mankind unrelated to life, nor life
unrelated to the universe.” Teilhard De Chardin,***

Phenomenon of Man

From the earliest days of the Space Race, while the Union Soviet Socialist Republic and the United States of America sought to be the first in launching space probes and reaching the moon with unmanned and human explorers, political ideals and religious values played a significant role in defining the atmosphere of, as Martin Caiden called it the, ***“War for the Moon”***. The successful technological achievement of the USSR to place the first artificial satellite into orbit was followed shortly thereafter with the accomplishment of their cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin orbiting the world in Vostok I. Gagarin’s declaration upon his recovery that he did not see God while above the Earth demonstrated the atheist perspective of his totalitarian state. By comparison when America’s first Mercury Project astronauts orbited the globe many of them offered both personal prayers and comments of a theological nature which espoused Judeo-Christian values.

One example of such reflection of religious values comes from the writing of the pilot of the Endeavour, command module for the Apollo 15 lunar-landing mission in 1971, Al Worden. While his crewmates, Scott and Irwin, were on the surface of the moon for 67 hours, Worden was by himself circling overhead. Worden had plenty of time to consider the human condition, space exploration, the cosmos and the Creator.

240,000 Miles From Home

**Sliding silvery wings
Through day night light
Barely turning
Edging on to new worlds
Tranquility on the surface**

**Anxiety within;
Conquering the mountain of space
Is not for the weak-hearted.
Spinning earth in view
Home-plate port
Calls forth the question:
Why climb this hill?
Because it’s there is not enough
Compelled by forces
Inexorable, yet comprehensible
Like the tick of a clock;
Study the history in rocks
And we learn more
About our own planet
And all the others.**

**One thing becomes clear
When floating
240,000 miles from home –
God did it all.**

As long as humans hold political ideals and religious values as part of their intra-personal makeup and societies they will carry them wherever they travel, to Mars and the stars beyond.

While the space programs of both superpowers have been predominantly manned by personnel from a military background, in recent years both the USSR (now, Russia) and USA have included civilian scientists and other specialists. This is a positive and welcome evolution as we consider one of the primary religious values and the Martian venture: peace. Those who are involved with the Martian endeavor will need to be carrying with them as one of the highest priorities the religious value of peace. Space advocates, planners, explorers, and eventually colonizers need to embrace the religious teachings of the world by their personal and corporate commitment to peace. Building and enlarging upon such efforts as the United Nations commitment to the peaceful uses of Outer Space, those involved in the Martian venture will need to emphasize the peaceful nature of colonizing Mars.

One of the key “seeds” of the world’s religious traditions is the importance of adherents seeking to be at peace with their Creator, their neighbor, and themselves. Peacemaking is an active process by which all decisions are weighed. Consideration of others and their needs, respect for differences in regard to race, sex, and species and a desire to seek the good for all will be signs of the peacemaking human colonizer on Mars and beyond. When humans first land on Mars they must not only speak of peace, but also be seekers of peace, lest their actions reveal other intentions and values that are less honorable.

An interesting historical example is worthy of mention on the 30th anniversary of Apollo 11. A great deal of thought went into the placing of a historic marker on the surface of the moon by the all-American crew. Finally it was decided to leave a somewhat simply worded plaque with two views of our globe which stated:

**HERE MEN FROM THE PLANET EARTH
FIRST SET FOOT UPON THE MOON
JULY 1969 A.D.
WE CAME IN PEACE FOR ALL MANKIND**

The placement and wording of the moon plaque caused almost as much consternation as the installment of an American flag by the crew. While “Old Glory” rigidly constructed to appear to be flying in the breezeless atmosphere of the lunar surface, raised the ire of many around the world, it was the wording of the plaque signed by the astronauts and the President of the United States. Sharing the thoughts of many, political commentator and social critic, I.F. Stone suggested an alternative to the wording on the plaque. He thought that a more truthful description of the historic event and human nature should instead read:

HERE MEN FIRST SET FOOT OUTSIDE THE EARTH

**ON THEIR WAY TO THE FAR STARS. THEY SPEAK OF
PEACE BUT WHEREVER THEY GO THEY BRING WAR.
THE ROCKETS ON WHICH THEY ARRIVED WERE
DEVELOPED TO CARRY INSTANT DEATH AND CAN
WITHIN A FEW MINUTES TURN THEIR GREEN PLANET
INTO ANOTHER LIFELESS MOON. THEIR DESTRUCTIVE
INGENUITY KNOWS NO LIMITS AND THEIR WANTON
POLLUTION NO RESTRAINT.
LET THE REST OF THE UNIVERSE
BEWARE**

Humans who embark on this Martian venture would be wise to keep in mind two “windows of revelation” - the world’s religious scriptures which describe the pathways of humanity echoing the divine on the walk of peace and also importantly, the historical reality of the human experience of warfare and the misery and unimaginable suffering it has cost in the lives of humans, non-human creatures, and, of course, the environmental damage to earth.

For those leaving Earth for the Red Planet need to forego the language and mentality of the “conquest of Mars” for as the eminent astronomer and educator A.C.B. Lovell observed: “...*conquest has so often meant destruction.*” Therefore, let our Martian explorers affirm not with glib words but by worthy deeds that the purpose for their arrival on Mars is that they came in peace for all. Period.

I.F. Stone’s plaque reminds us of the history of human space flight. As Martian explorers we must admit that the technology we utilize is the result of war making. The rockets that Martian explorers will arrive on have a family heritage that is in part dysfunctional and schizophrenic at best! It is the responsibility of future space-travelers to recognize this historical reality and so act that that which has been desecrated can be restored for the holy purposes of space exploration and colonization by humanity.

A second religious value, which is critical for the successful migration of humanity to the Red Planet, is that of **community**. Due to economic and time constraints the first cosmonauts and astronauts traveled alone. Gradually as the manned space programs of both the USSR and the USA developed the missions developed from carrying one human into crews of two, three, and more. This development was important as a community of space-explorers lived and worked together in a totally different environment. From the earliest crewed missions in both the East and West cosmonauts and astronauts learned the importance of communication and co-operation with one another. Finally in July 1975 with the Apollo-Soyuz Test Project (ASTP) the two competing countries met together above the earth and celebrated the first international space rendezvous. The five crewmembers of ASTP, three Americans and two Soviets, conducted the first international docking in space having launched from two different countries.

The development of community – seen as a religious value and upheld in the tradition of unity of purpose of peaceful exploration and development – will determine the quality of life for those who make the Martian venture a reality. There are numerous scriptures in the world’s

religious teachings that emphasize the importance of building community – and the inclusive nature of God. Such revealed truths and wisdom will greatly assist those who are committed to the Martian venture.

Community of purpose for this venture is already made evident through the mission and work of the Mars Society. The commitment of many towards the continuation of community-building for the purpose of exploring and developing human habitation on Mars will be necessary here on earth and later at the developing community on the Red Planet.

Another religious value that will be essential for the Martian venture is that of **sacrifice**. The importance of individual and corporate sacrifice cannot be overemphasized for those who are committed to one of the greatest human endeavors in our history as a species. I am not referring to that old concept of offering living sacrifices to appease the gods, in order to achieve favor or desired ends. Rather, I am referring to costs in such areas as cultural, economic, political, security concerns and social arenas where individuals, nations, and transnational corporations have vested interests. Give and take, negotiation, and intentional discovery of self and larger interests will need to be utilized if the Martian venture is to overcome humanity's past failures at social development where the mass of those participating directly or indirectly are to be affected.

Certainly those aware of the history of space flight are conscious of the sacrifices which have already been made by humanity in the discovery of our cosmos and in the evolutionary process of re-defining our place in the cosmic order. There have been sacrifices by those who did not volunteer and would never know what the fruits of their labor would eventually produce such as the slave laborers who constructed the V-2 rockets for their German warlords during the Second World War.

Others have willingly given their lives through tragic accidents such as the three astronauts of Apollo 1 who were killed in a fire in the capsule during a routine training exercise on the pad, the Soviet cosmonauts of Soyuz 11 who died upon re-entry into the earth's atmosphere, and the seven crewmembers of the space shuttle "Challenger" which malfunctioned and exploded just after liftoff. All of these individuals knew the possible cost of their lives and by necessity placed themselves in harms way, as willing sacrifices for the greater purpose of space exploration.

To seek peace, to be part of a community, to be willing to sacrifice for a higher goal or purpose, these are religious values that should guide the Martian venture. Beyond the difficulties of developing the necessary technology, garnering the political will, and the financing of such a great effort as developing a program to establish a suitable human habitation on Mars is the greater problem of humanity: itself. For while humans have been created with intelligence and spirit, a spark of the divine in stardust, too often we fail to seek peace, to establish and maintain community, and to make the required sacrifices for the greater good for future generations. As Walt Kelley noted in the comic strip Pogo, "We have met the enemy. It is us!"

The world's religious traditions are in agreement with that assessment – humans are their own worst enemy. While many around the world used to be fearful of an attack by aliens, particularly Martians after the release of H.G. Wells' The War of the Worlds, we now understand that the only Martians we need worry about destroying us would be transplanted humanity which

refuses to practice the higher ideals and religious values of peace, community, and sacrifice. Another religious value must therefore be considered: humility. Perhaps the Old Testament Psalm 8 is a good place to begin to consider the reason for our humility: God, who created the cosmos and humanity, is infinite. Our human species has the great honor and responsibility of being stewards of the created order.

A *“Theology of Humility”* is described by John Marks Templeton which places emphasis on the following four points:

- 1. It is centered on an infinite God***
- 2. It encourages creativity and progress.***
- 3. It recognized diversity and constant change as hallmarks of our universe.***
- 4. It encourages research into spiritual subjects such as love, prayer, and thanksgiving, in what might be seen as a kind of “experimental theology”***

A theology of humility espouses religious values which encourages people involved in such an intellectual and practical pursuit such as the Martian venture and provides a spiritual basis for recognizing the realities of discovery as we move beyond the limited theological and cosmological models which we have operated out of for generations. Even with the advent of the “New Physics” and the on-going dialogue between those involved in the areas of faith and theology with those involved in scientific fields, there is growing awareness of the need for humility on the part of all those participating in the discussion. Neither scientists nor theologians alone can provide us with all the answers or that one great truth for which we are seeking. Those committed to the Martian venture will need to be open to discussing intelligently and with sensitivity the purpose of humanity’s movement to Mars and the larger picture of human migration beyond our solar system as a part of the unfolding design of the Creator, who is infinite.

Large portions of the world’s population are people of faith. They will need to be shown, through their religious traditions and holy writings and by the writing of contemporary theologians, how the Martian venture can be a fulfillment of the divine initiative in human and cosmic history. If people of faith are not only to accept but to embrace the concept of human migration to Mars and the stars beyond they will need to be convinced that such a project is undertaken with religious values which are similar, if not the same, as their own.

The exploration of scripture, religious writing, and the prophetic tradition will all be significant contributing factors in persuading people of faith so that they may offer the resources and support necessary for the success of the Martian venture. This educational process will cause a spiritual evolutionary development to occur as old models of cosmology are laid aside with the evidence of scientific discovery through such tools as Chandra, the Hubble Telescope, other unmanned and manned space flights. Humanity’s attention will need to be directed to look through the two different “windows of faith and science “ if we are to draw closer to achieving our purpose.

Members of the Mars Society, the National Space Society, the Planetary Society, SETI, and other pro-space organizations would be wise to consider the importance of religious values in creating a diverse, solid base of support for the Martian Venture. If we do not explore, grapple with, comprehend, and commit ourselves to utilizing religious values in the Martian venture we

might just as well stay on Earth! If we do explore, grapple with, comprehend and commit ourselves to the religious values of peace, community, sacrifice and humility then we will shall certainly fulfill those words which are inscribed on the Astronomical Clock which is located at the York Cathedral, in York, England:

**THEY WENT THROUGH THE AIR AND SPACE WITHOUT FEAR
AND THE SHINING STARS MARKED THEIR SHINING DEEDS.**

Ad Astra!

APPENDIX 1

GOD OF EARTH AND OUTER SPACE

Thad Roberts

God of earth and outer space,
God of love and God of grace,
Bless the astronauts who fly
As they soar beyond the sky.
God who flung the stars in space,
God who set the sun ablaze,
Fling the spacecraft thro' the air,
Let man know your presence there.

God of atmosphere and air,
God of life and planets bare,
Use man's courage and his skill
As he seeks your holy will.
God of depth and God of height,
God of darkness, God of light,
As man walks in outer space,
Teach him how to walk in grace.

God of man's exploring mind,
God of wisdom, God of time,
Launch us from complacency
To a world in need of thee.
God of power, God of might,
God of rockets firing bright.
Hearts ignite and thrust within,
Love for Christ to share with men.

God of earth and outer space,
God who guides the human race,
Guide the lives of seeking youth
In search for heav'nly truth.
God who reigns below, above,
God of universal love,
Love that gave Nativity, Love that gave us Calvary. Amen.

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