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THE LUNAR "COMMUNITY CHURCH": CONTRIBUTIONS TO LUNAR LIVING AND TO EVOLUTION OF ETHICAL AND SPIRITUAL THINKING

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Should religious institutions get interested in lunar settlement? Would their participation make positive contributions or would it discourage creative diversity and interfere with science and good technical judgement? Among the spacefaring nations of today, religion is distinctly separated from the governments that plan and pay for space exploration. However, as we move off the Earth, our art and philosophy will follow our science and technology. Spiritual thinking will follow as part of our culture. It is time to consider in what ways this can occur constructively. Transport of religious values to a lunar base may have positive effects in two ways. First, the social structure of a "community church," as found in today's United States, supports its members psychologically. Mutual psychological and social support will be needed in a lunar community. Second, our space pioneers will experience a unique view of the universe which may, in their philosophical discussions, forge new ideas in the spiritual realm.

SUPPORTIVE SOCIAL FUNCTIONS

The lunar base's physical environment is unforgiving. Every member must contribute to the success of the community. All lives depend upon each person performing well for lengthy periods. Learning to live in a lunar community means feeling at home with isolation, confinement, deprivation, and risk. Some social challenges of long-term space living suggested by *Connors et al.* (1985) include those with which the American-tradition "community of faith" have successful experience. Possibilities for positive contributions occur in these contexts:

1. *Withdrawal from the home community.* "People under normal circumstances are embedded in a complex social matrix that links them with family members, friendship groups, large-scale organizations and society." Lunar base dwellers are likely to be "separated from loved ones and friends, [with the] concomitant loss of reassurance, affection and respect that flow in such relationships" (*Connors et al.*, 1985). A lunar "community church" could provide a setting for the remembrance of spiritual roots and a sense of history. Performance of religious rituals and the celebration of religious festivals could reinforce the home link. This is an especially important link, for these roots are often associated with strength during stressful times, such as loss of a loved one. Apollo 11 astronaut Edwin Aldrin chose to celebrate Communion on the surface of the Sea of Tranquility as an extension of his home church's Communion service, recognizing the mutual spiritual support among church members. The community church has long been a reminder of family history by the recording of births, marriages, and deaths. Many faiths portray a deity with parental qualities—protecting, counseling, encouraging. These are useful psychological links to the family on Earth.

Another effect of withdrawal from the larger society is a loss in the variety of social relationships and lessened opportunity to exercise one's own social roles—teacher, daughter, student

(*Connors et al.*, 1985). Participation in a community church would add another role and allow relationships to develop in a spiritual context.

2. *Social tensions in a micro society.* Isolation and confinement impairs people's ability to get along with others. They may shun competitive activities or withdraw. Intense contact with very few people appears to magnify the effects of dissimilarities and annoying habits. Conversely, the group may ostracize an individual (*Connors et al.*, 1985). Weekly gatherings in a community church, in which focusing remarks by the group leader and "mood music" are preparatory to a period of quiet contemplation, may help annoyances to be put in proper perspective.

3. *Personal crises.* The reaction to personal crises, such as death of a family member or crewmate, could result in risk to the mission and crew. One reaction, which can be exacerbated by drugs, is heightened activity and increased hostility. One Antarctic polar resident, upon learning of the death of a family member, became drunk and destroyed property before he was subdued. Experiencing grief is essential to recovery. The strength of the grief reaction is related to the intensity of interaction. Interaction with crewmates may or may not be positive, but it is likely to be intense (*Connors et al.*, 1985). Death at a lunar base will be a traumatic event for surviving crew members. "Pastoral care" will be needed. Group training and emotional support for coping with grief, stress, illness, drug abuse, parenting, and marriage problems are ongoing programs in community churches. Further, the church is perceived by many to be a source of support in these areas.

4. *Personal mental resilience.* In prolonged isolation and confinement, many individuals, with intentions of working on creative projects, instead mark time by such activities as solitary. Feelings of helplessness and worthlessness may occur (*Connors et al.*, 1985). One cannot mark time until "end of mission" when one truly "lives" at a lunar base. Persons participating in a com-

munity of faith would gain reinforcement in their personal beliefs concerned with purpose in life, self-worth, sense of a better future, and reliance on a strength greater than themselves in emergencies.

These are only suggestions of some ways that lunar base living may benefit from lessons learned in the American-tradition community church. Other religions may have different concepts that would also be helpful. Each suggested concept needs to be evaluated for both beneficial and detrimental aspects, and perhaps modified or even discarded. This evaluation must be done with care and caution, for historical examples of conflict between and within religious groups are numerous. Scholars should prepare to make this evaluation by defining lunar community analogs in which to study the effect of religious beliefs. The main point is that religious institutions should get involved, for without them we may overlook some important ideas. "If large numbers of people are to spend extended periods of time isolated and confined in space, the goal must be to discover or to establish positive conditions under which psychological function and social life can prosper and flourish" (Connors et al., 1985).

CONTRIBUTIONS TO ETHICAL AND SPIRITUAL THINKING

Viewing the Earth from far above its surface has affected the way some space travelers feel about world peace, pollution, relationships with other people, and God (or gods). Changes in perception of "our world" and interactions among its inhabitants, due to the visual and emotional impact of seeing the Earth from farther away, perhaps entirely in the field of view, have been termed the "overview effect" by White (1987).

Past Space-Related Experience

This change in perception is evidenced in the oft repeated astronaut wish that the warring peoples could also see this view from space, for then surely they would see the insignificance of their differences. Another example comes from Russell Schweickart who, while viewing the rotating Earth beneath him, first identified "home" with Houston. As the orbiting continued, his concept of home enlarged to include Los Angeles, Phoenix, New Orleans, North Africa, and then, finally, the entire Earth. Apollo astronauts Edgar Mitchell, through his Institute for Noetic Sciences, and Russell Schweickart, through the Association of Space Explorers, both feel a responsibility to articulate the space flight experience so that many can share it (White, 1987).

Some emotional experiences in space were intense enough to qualify as a "peak experience." Apollo 15 astronaut James Irwin had a religious "peak experience." Upon spying a white rock matching the description of the long-sought-after "genesis rock," he felt deeply that he had been sent by God especially to find this rock that would greatly enlighten planetary scientists. This particular recognition was only part of a larger feeling of power and understanding Irwin felt on the Moon. The experience had lasting effects, for he subsequently dedicated his life to Christian evangelism. Social scientist B. J. Bluth acknowledged that many of the astronauts were deeply affected by their flight, and for some the experience radically changed their lives (Bluth, 1979).

Occurrences of peak experiences are not new space-related phenomena, but have long been discussed in many ways. Maslow (1970) has described the religious aspects of peak experiences thus: "the whole universe is perceived as an integrated and unified

whole . . . the universe is all of a piece and . . . one has his place in it . . . this of course, is a basic meaning of religious faith for many people." On a more popular level, the experience has also been celebrated in song, such as John Denver's "Rocky Mountain High" (Denver, 1972). Yet, the space experience has given more credibility to overview philosophies in the minds of many. Because someone has actually observed that the Earth is a spaceship and has taken photographs of it suspended in space, it becomes more real to us. Gene Cernan, who has stood in the dusty soil of the Taurus-Littrow valley powerfully expressed it: "What I saw was too beautiful to grasp. There was too much logic, too much purpose—it was just too beautiful to have happened by accident. It doesn't matter how you choose to worship God . . . He has to exist to have created what I was privileged to see" (White, 1987).

Prospects for the Future

White (1987) considers the experiencing of the overview effect an essential step in human evolution and speculates on significant social changes as a result of this experience becoming widespread.

Inhabitants of a lunar base will indeed have a unique view of the world and probably have strong needs to discuss, argue, and explore the feelings and ideas associated with this unique view. For those participants in a community of faith the "working through" of spiritual ideas together may result in new faiths. One of the great challenges of enclosing diverse spiritual beings inside the physical boundaries of a lunar base is evolving a faith flexible enough to be inclusive, yet more meaningful than psychology. Should this be accomplished, it would be of great benefit on Earth as well.

A "community church" provides an arena for discussions of ethics and religion among a technical population with unique knowledge. New ideas should blossom in this forum for refinement of spiritual thinking. This community then becomes the focal point for interchange of these ideas with Earth. Athens will have migrated to the Moon.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The American-tradition community church is experienced in many values that may be helpful in learning to live on the Moon. They and other religious groups should get interested in contributing to lunar base planning. Scholars should prepare to evaluate the effects of religious influence in a lunar community.

2. A lunar community will become the focal point for human discussions of religion, ethics, and philosophy.

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