

Why does space exploration need to be a religious endeavour?

Imagine you are aboard the boat of Christopher Columbus sailing across the Atlantic Ocean, fixed on reaching the shores of Japan, yet mystified by the discovery of a new land. Imagine you are one of the architects of the Florence cathedral, your vision for one of Italy's great houses of God being completed before your very eyes. Finally, imagine you are Galileo; you are facing the might of the Catholic Church for your claims of support for the works of Copernicus and you would sacrifice your own freedom for the facts regarding our place in the universe to be revealed to the world.

Throughout history, endeavours of all kinds have taken place and although they have varied greatly in nature and scope, there is a single commonality amongst them; faith. It is the zeal afforded by faith in whatever the goal of one's endeavour that acts as our principal motivator. Every great journey has required at least an ounce of faith for it to have been completed. But from what source can we derive this faith? We receive faith from within ourselves, in what we believe rather than in what we know for faith is all about the unknown, unseen, and unknowable.

By now, and from the question raised in the title, you will have understood the connection I am going to make between religious zeal and the need for this in the context of space exploration. But before I dive head-first into my core message, I must say that scientific zeal is not only alive and very much well, but it is one half of the same coin, the other half of which is religious zeal. In the present context, scientific zeal is dominant in the field of space exploration. With astronomy as a branch of science, it is no wonder that space exploration is driven by the industry and discipline of science.

Science is taking us so far in the field of space exploration, but it alone will not get us to where we truly could and are destined to be. The reason for this, as I said, is that scientific zeal is just one half of the metaphorical coin. I have found a discreet difference between the way that I see space and the way that astronomers see space. I, as an Astronist, view space through the scope of faith, belief, existential purpose, logic, rationality, identity, and destiny while others see space through the scope of knowledge, experiment, proof, and empiricism. No one type of view is superior over the other as both perspectives hold different functions and satisfy different parts of ourselves; the Astronist view satisfies the heart while the scientific view satisfies the mind.

I propose that science provides the ability to explore space, but it does not alone provide the rationality for our discovery of the universe. It tells us a small proportion of what is really out there, but it doesn't answer why we should want to know about what is out there. For hundreds of years, science and religion have been placed against one another, but in the context of Astronism, we see no such divide. Instead, a unity in a single endeavour with both parts exploring the same questions, just using different tools. Each side may come up with different answers, but it isn't the answers that truly matter; it is the endeavour itself; the search for meaning, for identity, for knowledge, and for understanding is what really counts.

We must not forget that humanity's exploration of space will inevitably reveal to us some truths that will constantly make us question our own existential value and purpose. Space exploration is just as much an exploration of ourselves as it is an exploration of the universe. We, as individuals and as a species, will change; we will no longer be trapped on a single planet, but we will have the entire galaxy to explore; remember that freedom is simultaneously alleviating and terrifying. It is my belief as an Astronist that we will all require that same religious zeal of the Christians when they were being persecuted by the Romans, of the Jews throughout their history of persecution, and of the Muslims when they were being persecuted by the pagans of ancient Mecca. That same zeal that came from within them to fight for their cause and to overcome their greatest obstacles is the same zeal that we will need to employ in the context of space exploration. This zeal will be fuelled by an equal balance of religion and science; two vehicles powerful, influential, and focused on a grand goal; the former providing purpose and the latter providing practicality.

You may say, "but look at all the terrible things people have done in the name of religion." You would be right to say this, but you should also balance your point by casting your mind upon the wonders in architecture, thought and philosophy, huge institutions that have stood for hundreds if

not thousands of years, diverse forms of culture, and most importantly, our core identities that religion has provided each civilisation throughout history. If we are to speak honestly, then we must do so in equal measure so as not to allow the discourse to descend as it has in the political arena in recent years. We cannot change the history of religion, but we do have the opportunity to change the future of religion for the next great civilisation that is about to begin beyond The Earth. And what a brilliant page in history it will be when the world knows that a religion lead humanity in its ultimate cosmic journey.

To end, what I essentially propose is that for the greatest journey of all time to be a success — the most arduous, terrifying, and extensive of journeys to which there will be no end — we will no doubt require two kinds of fuel; one that powers the rocket and the other that powers our spirit to press on, even in the face of the most petrifying discoveries that will make us question who we really are.

by Cometan, 28th Dec. 2019