

Space and the Art of Staying Human

By Lawrence G. Downing, DMin

The desire to travel beyond the confines of Earth has long been part of the human story. In ancient times writers reported conversations, arguments, sexual escapades, and violence that occurred among the beings that populated these undefined places outside our world. An examination of these ancient works provides context for current discussions relating to space travel and the possibility of populating these far-away places with Earth people.

When humans inhabit Space it is not reasonable to assume that the ills and frailties that plague us now will cease. Evil is an insidious and persistent force! It is therefore essential that those who inhabit Space make an intentional and determined effort to implement and perpetuate morals and values that assure a peaceful and productive society.

From time beyond time the thought of what lies beyond Earth has captivated human imagination. In both the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures the writers describe places and events that take the reader beyond Earth. The ancient writers record events that occurred in worlds far removed from ours with the same ease as we describe events next door. The inhabitants of these heavenly places, as described by the writers, were often, but not always, divine beings plagued by the same insecurities, jealousies, and frailties that afflict human kind.

In the *Book of Job* the author describes a time when the heavenly beings, or sons of God, came to present themselves before the Lord (Job 1:6). In the course of the Job narrative, Eliphaz, one of Job's interlocutors, asks, "Is not God high in the heavens? See the highest stars how lofty they are! Therefore you say, 'What does God know? Can he judge through the deep darkness? Thick clouds enwrap him, so that he does not see, and he walks on the dome of heaven'" (Job 22:12-14, NRSV). The Book of Job concludes with God as interlocutor asking Job a series of questions, including: "Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades, or loose the cords of Orion?" (Job 38:31, NRSV).

The second chapter of 2 Kings contains the account of the prophet Elijah ascending up to heaven by whirlwind aboard a chariot of fire and horses of fire (2 Kings 2:1-12). In the *Gospel of Mark*, the writer reports that Jesus, while speaking with his disciples after his resurrection from the dead, was taken up into heaven where he sat down at the right hand of God (Mark 16:19).

The author of New Testament book *The Acts of the Apostles* adds that as the disciples and Jesus talked, he was lifted up and a cloud took him out of their sight. Two men in white robes stood by them and assured the watching disciples that Jesus, the one who was taken from them up into heaven, would come in the same way as they had seen him go into heaven (Acts 1:9-11).

In the *Book of Revelation*, also known as *The Apocalypse of St. John*, the last book of the Christian Scriptures, the writer is transported into the heavens where he is shown events and given information that, on his return to Earth, he is to share with fellow believers.

These are but a few of the numerous writings from ancient times that document that we are not the first to be fascinated with the possibilities of what may lie beyond the observable universe. However, we are the first of our kind to create an intentional delivery system that allows us to touch the fringes of space and contemplate exploring that which is beyond. The challenges and questions associated with such ventures stagger the imagination! Not the least part of the puzzle relates to the question: how can those who journey beyond Earth create a society that will benefit all and how will that society be maintained? These questions and others like them transport us from the realms of science and verification into the fuzzy venues of philosophy, epistemology, morals, ethics, faith, and anthropology.

The *Journal of Space Philosophy* will, over time, address the above questions and others like them and will provide a venue for scholars, scientists, writers, theologians, and thinkers from all disciplines to address these and like questions. Dr. Bob Krone's article *Philosophy for Space: Lessons from the Past, Visions for the Future* is an example. In his article, published in this journal, can be found the Kepler Space Institute's Board of Directors' consensus statement that sets forth a fundamental premise for those who venture beyond Earth: Those who inhabit space will be responsible to implement, preserve, and perpetuate a value system and code of ethics consistent with the highest ideals espoused by the various faith traditions and others who seek good.

Dr. Krone and I have collaborated on teaching and publications since 1993. In 2009, Dr. Krone created a Think Tank with theologians representing diverse faith traditions. That Think Tank functioned for two years and resulted in an intellectually stimulating and exciting exchange of ideas. One assignment given the group was to create a written response to the question, "*How might one design a religious Faith acceptable and appropriate for humans settling in Space?*" The group's response reads:

There is within the human frame a powerful presence that we cannot measure, precisely define or empirically examine, but we recognize its existence and influence on our lives from the beginning of time. Numerous terms have been created in an attempt to identify this existence. The ancient religious traditions speak of soul, spirit, space and breath. Some suggest that by whatever term one may select to identify the presence that is an essence of our humanity, we confront a mystery. This Journal of Space Philosophy will simulate an Academy to reflect upon this power, explore how this understanding inspires, guides and challenges us as we set our minds on places beyond Earth.

It is not possible to predict with accuracy what life will be like for those who first establish a self-perpetuating presence outside our solar system. What we can predict,

with some degree of accuracy, is that challenges will continue; some expected, others not. Likewise, we can expect human nature to evidence itself in the far-off places in a similar manner to that which we see on Earth. It is reasonable to assume that all of the emotional, physical, and spiritual aspects that are part of our humanity will transport intact with the first far-distant space travelers. There will be situations where greed dominates, violence breaks forth, and other maladies that impact our lives here will take place there. Likewise, we can expect to find acts of extreme kindness, unselfishness, care, and other positive human responses. We will continue to search our inner universe, as well as that which lies beyond. The existential questions will continue, perhaps even intensify: Why am I here? What is the meaning of my life? Why do I behave as I do? What happens when I die? The response to these questions, and others like them, will provide the framework upon which our ethical and moral value systems rest.

These components of our humanity serve to remind us of why it is essential that those who venture forth from Earth demonstrate a firm conviction and allegiance to a code of ethics and adhere to a value system that will assure that good triumphs over evil. There will be respect for those who practice a faith system that meets their spiritual and emotional needs and an assurance that people can live in accordance with their conscience, in so far as that belief promotes the good. These principles will not assure a successful sojourn, but without them, one can expect eventual failure.

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About the Author: Lawrence Downing, DMin, has been a pastor for the Seventh-day Adventist churches in the United States for more than forty years. He was an Adjunct Professor for both the School of Business and the School of Religion at La Sierra University, Riverside, California, 1990 to 2006. His DMin is from Lancaster Theological Seminary. He is a co-author of 2006, *Beyond Earth: The Future of Humans in Space*. Access www.bobkrone.com/vcat_details/24 to see the video interviews of Dr. Downing and Dr. Krone at the 2005 International Space Development Conference in Los Angeles.



Editor's Note: Dr. Lawrence Downing is a pioneer for the complex field of Space Faith. Our relationship since 1993 has been especially rewarding for me. My learning from Larry about Moral and Ethical Leadership continues. He walks his talk. It is an honor to

include his article in this Issue #1 of *THE JOURNAL OF SPACE PHILOSOPHY*. *Bob Krone, PhD*.
