

SPACE EDUCATION AND OUTREACH SYMPOSIUM (E1)
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ADDRESSING RELIGIOUS OPPOSITION TO HUMAN SPACE EXPLORATION.

Abstract

The history of religion in human spaceflight shows that religious authorities will support the idea of space-exploration if their rules and traditions are compatible with it. When return to Earth is part of the mission, artifacts from or in space and stories of religious experiences can show the traditions adaptability. But what happens when humans leave Earth for other planets on one way missions?

Mars One is currently advertising a hypothetical one-way trip to Mars. A return mission is not planned. The General Authority of Islamic Affairs and Endowment of the United Arab Emirates has compared this mission to suicide and issued a fatwa against it, because suicide is forbidden in Islam. An analysis of the fatwa will show its theological bias toward Earth as the place for humanity in the Cosmos, although different theological views could be just as plausible.

A similar example can be found in Christianity as shown by Joshua Ambrosius in his research on religious support for human spaceflight. Evangelical Christians are indeed less knowledgeable (...), interested, and supportive of space/space policy than the population as a whole and/or other religious traditions. "he points out. The theological reasons for this and the specific religious groups Ambrosius' findings apply to will be discussed in the paper. Basically these Christian opposition to spaceflight also argues from a theology that is also Earth-centered.

The paper will conclude with a look at the theological problem of human origins as the common denominator for religious opposition to human spaceflight. Both examples show a theology with a strong bias toward Earth as the place for human life. The paper will argue for theological analysis as an analytical tool needed to understand the connection between religion and spaceflight and reach out to the respective religious communities in their own words. The paper will close with a way to address religious opposition to space-exploration. This should be done in a way that approaches the religious groups on their own terms, as an outreach initiative that addresses their structure and beliefs to further support for human space-exploration within the religious community.