

Looking Back at “The Missing Orientation”: One Year Later

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ABSTRACT

Space tourism has received three literal liftoffs in the past year, and science fiction about space travel is flourishing, with new Star Trek seasons and Isaac Asimov’s Foundation series streaming this fall. All of these both kindle and express our sense of wonder, but the pathways to space are still expensive and dangerous, and they need to be connected to the taproots of our sense of wonder In religion and science fiction, so those pathways stay open and strong.

Keywords: Space tourism; Science fiction; Religion; Sense of wonder; Star trek; Eco Tourism; NASA; Isaac Asimov’s Foundation

DESCRIPTION

It’s been nearly a year since I wrote “The Missing Orientation” [1], and its call for enlisting our religious or spiritual sense of wonder about our place in the universe in our continuing efforts to expand our existence off this planet and out into space.

Billionaires Richard Branson Chang [2], and Jeff Bezos Rincon [3], touched space in July, albeit briefly, kissing the cosmos in their spaceships and laying the equivalent of groundwork for tourism off this planet, and Elon Musk’s Space X literally brought four civilian tourists into space for three days in September [4]. But Branson’s Virgin Galactic apparently had a problematic re-entry [5], showing how dangerous space flight still is, and seats on the Space X’s Inspiration 4 are estimated as costing some \$50 million per seat, putting that flight beyond the reach of most tourists [6].

Meanwhile, the sense of wonder intrinsic in science fiction has been firing on all cylinders. Paramount+ will be streaming new seasons of Star Trek: Discovery and Picard in the months ahead, and Isaac Asimov’s Foundation series at long last found expression on the screen when Apple TV+ began streaming Foundation in September. As I mentioned in “The Missing Orientation,” it was the original Star Trek series in the 1960s that ignited my interest in space travel, and the Foundation trilogy got me thinking about humanity in galactic terms when I was a boy in the 1950s.

Star Trek always emphasized the inherently international nature of space travel and exploration. In 2021 and the years ahead, China is promising a robust space program [7]. But there are limits to where we can find, marshal, and satisfy more sense of wonderment. And U.S. President Joe Biden’s 2022 budget request for NASA is the “2nd-best budget proposal for the space agency in 25 years,” supporting projects on the Moon, Mars, and Jupiter’s moon Europa [8].

But, as the vacuum in the American space program for decades after humans walked on the Moon in 1969 and a few years after so vividly shows, budgeting for space exploration, especially in democracies, is unreliable. And space tourism needs to drastically lower its price before it becomes a part of our lives. Tourism is rooted in our sense of wonder, and as long as that sense remains strong, and connected to space *via* the ancient and more modern channels of religion and science fiction, our path to space will remain open and expand.

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