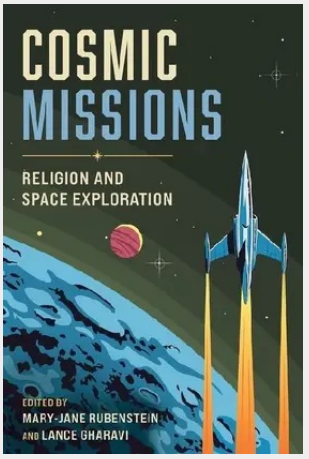
Rubenstein / Gharavi

Cosmic Missions

Religion and Space Exploration



Why are the planets named after gods? Why did Buzz Aldrin take communion on the lunar surface? And why did Soviet propaganda posters triumphantly declare that cosmonauts found no god in heaven? Cosmic Missions reveals the deep yet unacknowledged relationships between religion and the exploration of outer space. Bringing together cosmologists, historians, theologians, philosophers, the Vatican Astronomer, an Afrofuturist, and an Indigenous geographer, this book uncovers how space exploration has never been the purely technical and scientific enterprise we imagine it to be. As with politics and economics, religion operates within and across every dimension of our cosmic ambitions, shaping the stories that motivate them, the values that direct them, and the ethical questions they raise. The book’s twenty contributors examine these entanglements across numerous national contexts, a wide variety of religious traditions, and the new techno-utopian movements of Silicon Valley. Chapters range from the Cold War space race as rival salvation projects to feminist Islamic ethics of outer space, and from the spiritual history of UFO encounters to Buddhist arguments for and against leaving Earth. As humanity accelerates into what some are calling a “new golden age” of space exploration, Cosmic Missions argues that it is vital to understand which values are steering us toward the stars and whom those values serve.

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