

Dear Mary Lou Reitler:

The President has asked me to reply to your letter asking why the United States expends so much time and energy in exploring space, and suggesting that God would have provided man with the necessary space implements had he wanted man to explore space.

A significant feature of our society is the right of each individual to determine the nature of God's intent in accordance with his own conscience. I would not, therefore, presume to suggest how you should resolve the issue you pose in your letter. Yet it would appear that among the most common characteristics of man is a desire to impose change on nature in order to mollify the hardships of life. This, combined with an endowed natural intelligence and curiosity, has allowed man to progress through increased knowledge from the most primitive past when the only tools utilized were those rocks and sticks found lying on the ground, to the present day, when disease-controlling drugs, efficient food production, and labor-saving machinery have combined to permit man, if he wishes, to pursue a far richer and more humane life.

It is impossible to determine in advance, moreover, those benefits which will eventually result from a given advance in human knowledge. History is replete with examples of man pursuing knowledge with no expectation of any practical use, which later serve as the basis for developments making significant contributions to mankind. Janssen's work on lenses, without his realising it, provided the breakthrough required to understand and control disease-causing microbes; also, Horts predicted that his academic experimentation with electromagnetic waves would have no practical or useful results, but he had in fact helped to lay the groundwork for the modern electronic industry.

Astronaut John H. Glenn briefly summed this up recently when he explained his views on the importance of space research before a joint session of Congress. He in part said, "But exploration and the pursuit of knowledge have always paid dividends in the long run—usually far greater than anything expected at the outset... Any major effort such as this results in research by so many different specialities that it is hard to even envision the benefits that will accrue in many fields. Knowledge begets knowledge. The more I see, the more impressed I am—not with how much we know—but with how tremendous the areas are that are as yet unexplored."

Thank you very much for advising the President of your views on this important matter. It is encouraging to find someone of your age showing such interest and concern in public affairs.

Sincerely,
Myer Fieldman
Deputy Special Counsel to the President