

Exploring the heavens, Christian astronauts reflect on their Creator



“They say there’s no atheists in foxholes, but there’s probably no atheists in rockets,” said Catholic astronaut Col. Mike Good, who believes his faith in God was solidified by the awe-inspiring views he saw from space

From the famous astronauts who pioneered space exploration to the crews on the final space shuttle missions, faith has been a driving force in NASA history.

NASA employees fill pews in churches surrounding Johnson Space Center, including Webster Presbyterian Church, called the “church of the astronauts” when John Glenn, Buzz Aldrin, Jerry Carr, Charlie Bassett and Roger Chaffee were active members of the congregation. Later this month, the church will honor the anniversary of Aldrin’s Holy Communion on the moon, the first meal ever eaten on its surface.



“The Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston has a special appreciation for all the people who work in the space program,” said Cardinal Daniel DiNardo regarding the papal call to space in May. “As the space shuttle program comes to a close, the archdiocese is appreciative of the opportunity to join our Holy Father in commending the tireless work of NASA employees and affirming, as St. Paul says, ‘Christ fills all the heavens.’ ” In the picture: _____

Although NASA does not provide spiritual resources religious objects—crosses, Bibles, icons, prayer cards—are among the most common personal items taken into space, said Johnson Space Center spokesman James Hartsfield.

Mike Massimino, who traveled on two spaceflights, carried a small Vatican flag and a Mass card with Benedict’s photo, which he later presented to the pope.

“I prayed a lot. I just prayed for everything to work out,” said Massimino, a parishioner at St. Clare of Assisi Catholic Church in Clear Lake. “It made me feel closer to God.”

Fellow astronauts have brought up Christian music, crucifixes, relics and icons of saints.

“NASA people are more faith-filled, and this is their vocation,” said Matt Walden, a worship leader who has worked at St. Paul’s. “They have a position that pastors don’t have and can talk about the glory of God’s creation as seen from space,” noting that a number of NASA’s Christians have used their careers as vehicles for ministry.

Its shakeup with Galileo aside, the Catholic Church has historically affirmed astronomy and space exploration as a means to better know the universe, believed to be wholly good, majestic and made by God.

The church recognizes scientific research on the age and expanse of the universe, and Catholic teachings often prompt believers to learn more about the mysteries of creation, theologians say.

“The church is very open to scientific discoveries, and the Bible gives us a guide to interpret whatever science discovers,” said the Rev. Brendan Cahill, former rector of St. Mary’s Seminary in Houston. “God has created the human person with the knowledge and curiosity to do this, to go to space. It affirms our Catholic faith.”

As Houston and the rest of the country reflects on the space shuttle program, I thought I'd share once again the perspectives of Catholics on space exploration, originally from my story in May about the first-ever papal call to space, which can be read [here](#).

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