

Jim McDivitt... A New Kind of Catholic



The Apollo 9 astronauts relax with their families in their homes near the Manned Spacecraft Center in Houston before their flight. Top left: Col. James A. McDivitt, a Catholic, with his wife, Patricia, and their children, clockwise, Michael, 12; Patrick, 9; Ann, 11; and Katie, 3; (top right) Col. David R. Scott, an Episcopalian, and his wife, Lurton, and their children, Tracy, 8; and Douglas, 6; (bottom) civilian Russell L. Schweickart, an Episcopalian, and his wife, Claire, and their children, left to right, Vickie, 10; Diana, 5; Russell, 9; and Elin, 8; and Russell's twin, Randolph. (RNS)

By FATHER CLIFFORD STEVENS
NC News Service

My first assignment as an Air Force chaplain in 1961 was at Edwards Air Force Base, Calif., the home of the X-15, the plane where Chuck Yeager streaked through the sound barrier for the first time in 1947, and a base where fantastic new developments were taking place in space technology.

It was an amazing base, peopled by the inhabitants of another century, and I soon found that the members of my parish were as remarkable as the base.

One of my parishioners was Maj. Robert M. White, who flew the X-15 and brought it to the very edge of space. There were physicists, engineers, chemists, jet pilots, mathematicians, highly educated men and women, filled with the excitement of the new dimension they were opening for the human race.

One of them, too, was a young captain, the senior student in the Aerospace Research Test Pilots School at Edwards, named Jim McDivitt.

He looked unbelievably young for a man of his experience. He had been a fighter pilot in Korea, had logged thousands of hours flying time, had a degree from the University of Michigan and was just about the most brilliant young man in the whole Edwards complex.

He had a ready smile, and a ready wit. Every Sunday, he and his wife, Pat, with their three children were in one of the front rows for Mass.

At that time, Capt. Jim McDivitt was destined to become part of the X-15 program, at least that was the feeling of

everyone at Edwards. He had been trained in the most advanced technological school in the world, and it seemed natural that he would step into Bob White's shoes, taking the prodigious X-15 even closer to the edge of space.

In conversation with him, I learned about the quality of his mind and the intensity of his dedication. He was constantly amazed at the fast pace of development in the space sciences and the constant need for an entirely new kind of man to tackle the jobs to be done.

After I left Edwards in 1962, Jim McDivitt was accepted for the astronaut program.

My last visit with him was at Holloman Air Force Base, N.M., where I was chaplain and he had flown in for a look at the Apollo capsule which was being tested at the nearby White Sands Missile Range. This was before his Gemini flight and he had come with a young civilian who had just joined the astronaut program, Rusty Schweickart. I don't imagine either of them suspected at that time they would be making a flight together in Apollo 9.

I remember, too, one evening at Edwards, just after Maj. White's flight to 59,600 miles which won him astronaut wings. At a party in honor of a departing officer, we sat in a corner, Bob White, Jim McDivitt, Jack Alavie, the pilot of the B-52 mother-ship of the X-15, a number of other technological giants, and myself on the edge of the conversation, talking about God, St. Thomas Aquinas, Einstein and the

myriad of subjects in which minds are interested.

Jim McDivitt talked and listened with eyes shining, as we talked about the God that space research revealed and about the achievements of man pointing the way to the glory of God. Maj. White had made the statement that when he was zooming through space in the X-15, he thought about the vastness of God's knowledge and how the knowledge we are gathering is but a tiny glimpse of God's knowledge.

"When I think," he said, "that in eternity He will be sharing this knowledge with us, I really begin to see the hugeness of this whole business."

Jim McDivitt was silent for a moment as he took in the conversation. "Man," he said, "what a moment in history to be alive."

Jim McDivitt, the man and the astronaut, is a new kind of Catholic and by his very achievement adds new dimension to Catholicism. He took part last year in a Congress of the Lay Apostolate in Rome and presented a model of his Gemini capsule to Pope Paul VI. He is not only an exemplary husband and father, but he is a man of his time, deeply committed to the Catholic vision of life, but just as committed to the tasks of his own generation. By the very magnitude of his achievement he is helping to pioneer a new age of Faith, an age which will bring the Faith face to face with a new era of human civilization.



Miss Joan Howard

Fashion Show Set at McQuaid

McQuaid Mothers, McCurdy's and Glamour Magazine are combining efforts for an evening of entertainment at McQuaid Jesuit High School on Wednesday, March 19, at 8 p.m.

McCurdy's will present their latest spring fashions, while Joan Howard, eastern merchandising editor of Glamour Magazine, will be on hand for a discussion of accessories.

The proceeds of the fashion show will be used to purchase carpeting for the students' chapel. Tickets may be purchased at the door.

Mrs. Alphonse Lucas is chairman, with Mrs. William Christensen serving as co-chairman. They will be assisted by Mmes. Theodore MacDonald, Richard Moss, Edwin Bashaw, Herbert Schaeffer, Earl O'Connor, Joseph Cluo, William LaFleur and Joseph Long.

Mothers' Club Schedules Meeting

Parents of Corpus Christi Church, particularly those of children in second, third and fourth grades, have been invited to a Mothers' Club meeting at 7:45 p.m. Monday, March 17, in the school hall.

Sister Marie, religious instruction director at St. Paul's Church, Webster, will speak on "The Sacrament of Confession for Elementary School Children."

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The Church in India

Bishops Assail Anti-Conversion Law

By LEO A. PANAKAL
NC News Service

Bhopal, India—The bishops of Madhya Pradesh have again protested to the state government against an enactment that virtually bans conversions to Christianity.

The renewed protest, signed by seven prelates headed by Archbishop Genes D'Souza, M.S.F.S., of Bhopal, followed official publication of rules enforcing a Freedom of Religion Act that outlaws conversions brought about "by the use of force or by allurement or by any fraudulent means."

The protest, sent in an "open letter" to chief minister Govind Narayan Singh, said the Church found it impossible to accept the Act as "morally binding," since it is discriminatory and opens a wide door to abuse and apprehensions which in fact restrict religious freedom.

The bishops said the act opens the way to false charges and the application of all kinds of pressure on people who live in abject fear of the police and government officials.

They added that the clause making it obligatory to inform the magistrate of all conversions, opens the way to the same abuses and also provides virulent sectarianism with continuous subject matter for whipping up sectarian feelings.

It pointed out that no special laws have been enacted to counteract political pressure, fraud and allurement, although a secular state's only concern is with changes that harry people socially, economically and politically, not with purely religious change.

"There are also no special provisions of law to stop people from inducing others by allurements and other unethical means to give up religion altogether and adopt, for example, atheism, or atheistic communism, though from a religious standpoint such change is far worse than the change from one religion to another," the letter notes.

Our missionary workers, the prelates went on, are threatened by fines and jail if they do not report conversions.

"They have no money to pay fines," they said.

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Infiltrate Reds - Priest

New Delhi, India—(NC)—A Catholic priest has declared that the Church should cooperate with communism in order to infiltrate its ranks and destroy it.

In an interview here, Father Joseph Vadakkan of Kerala state said the Church should play the same game that Communists played long ago—infiltration into Christian ranks.

Father Vadakkan spoke against the background of experience in his state, where he lent strong backing two years ago to the birth of a Communist-dominated coalition government in which his Peasants and Workers' party was made a partner.

The party's nominee, B. Wellington, a Catholic, has functioned since then as health minister under Communist chief minister E. M. S. Namboodripad.

Father Vadakkan himself

The bishops also criticized the act's classification of women and the "proletariat of scheduled castes and tribes" along with minors.

The statement declared, "The Act treats them as equal to minors and as unable to make their own decisions or guard their own interests."

participates, along with Mr. Namboodripad and other Red leaders in a coordination committee that meets at intervals to set policy guidelines for the government.

He said that so far only dialogue and coexistence have been the accepted methods of dealing with communism.

Pointing out that cooperation with communism is still the subject of controversy, Father Vadakkan said one reason for this is that many Christians are pessimistic and diffident about communism.

They think, he said, that Communists are too clever to be beaten by their own method.

In India itself, Father Vadakkan went on, cooperation is likely to be more effective because Communists can not breathe well in a democracy.

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