

Apollo 12...and the Religious View of Space Exploration

With the upcoming Apollo 12 moon walk following upon the success of the Apollo 11 mission, theological discussions on space exploration have centered on a theme summarized in Psalm 8 on the role and responsibility of mankind in the created order.

Other interesting questions arise — the religious significance of life forms, if any are discovered, on other planets and the impact on church authority and doctrines. Still the stress is falling on man's abilities as he relates to God, the universe and the human realm itself.

A quotation from Psalm 8 was in the message Pope Paul sent to the moon with Apollo 11 along with those of other leaders. It was from the sons, attributed to King David, that Astronaut Edwin Aldrin read in the last Apollo 11 telecast to Earth:

"When I look at Thy heavens, the works of Thy fingers, The moon and stars which Thou hast established;

What is man that Thou art mindful of him...

Yet Thou has made him less than God, And dost crown him with glory and honor.

Thou hast given him dominion over the works of Thy hands; And hast put all things under his feet...

It is the question of human nature — capabilities, self-understanding and will — which arises as a major theological motif because of the individual and corporate achievement within the space program.

Once, men on the moon could have shattered some Jewish and Christian outlooks. In the centuries before Columbus demonstrated the planet's roundness and before astronomy was refined, the Earth was thought to jut out of seas with edges. Overarching, the vault of heaven was seen as punctured with holes through which God sent the rain. Sun, moon and stars were assumed to be attached to the roof. Underneath was water and the pit of hell.

Beginning in the Middle Ages, the "three-story universe" became harder to accept as science expanded its horizons. Yet religions were able to make relatively easy transition to the reality that the Earth is not the pivot point in a universe of immense span. The infinitude of God por-



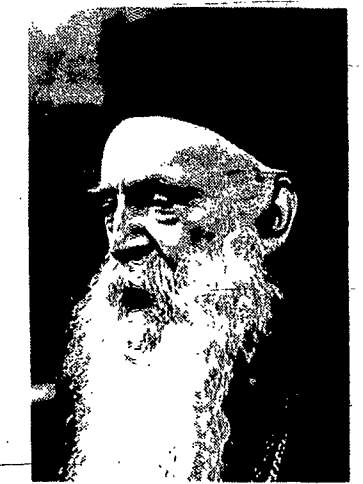
PRESIDENT NIXON
"greatest week since Creation"



NEIL ARMSTRONG
"giant leap for mankind"



FATHER BURGHARDT
"tempered joy"



PATRIARCH ATHENAGORAS
"eve of a new wisdom"

trayed in Genesis 1 was Scriptural preparation for space's boundlessness for Jews and Christians.

The first chapter of Genesis — dealing with creation and the origin of mankind — also gives support to those who argue that voyages to the moon, and perhaps farther, are God-ordained. This involves the creation of man in God's likeness and, as the psalmist phrased it, the giving to man of dominion over the works of God.

In response to those bothered on religious principles to human probes outside the Earth's atmosphere, advocates of the space program often cite the use of technological ability as good stewardship of God's gifts. Says Dr. Werner Von Braun, the German-born American who developed the Saturn V launch rocket:

"God has built man with curiosity.

God expects man to use this gift. Now we have the tools available to explore space and I believe if it were not the Creator's intent for us to explore the celestial bodies, He would not have permitted us to have acquired the tools.

Scarcely anyone has opposed space exploration on doctrinal grounds. Most have lauded the accomplishments.

Weighing the pros and cons of U.S. expenditures on space as against social and economic needs on Earth, a segment of the religious world holds that further inter-planetary ventures are unjustified at the moment.

Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr, famed Protestant theologian; Father Walter Burghardt, S.J., Catholic theologian; Dr. Robert McAfee Brown, professor

at Stanford University, and the Rev. Ralph David Abernathy, president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, are of this opinion.

"The gut question is," said Father Burghardt, "what do we — the government and people with power and people with money — what do we consider important? Are things more important than people? I simply do not believe that a program comparable to the moon landing cannot be projected around poverty, the war, crime and so on. So, when the first man walks on the moon, my joy will be tempered by sadness. For I shall be thinking of men who still walk on this Earth."

Still another point to ponder as men utilize technical resources was voiced by Pope Paul shortly before

Astronauts Neil Armstrong and Edwin Aldrin set down on the moon. Rejoicing in the greatness of the event, the pontiff cautioned that enthusiasm for technological achievement might "fascinate us perhaps even to madness. Here is the danger. We must guard ourselves from this possible idolatry."

"It is true that the machine multiplies man's efficiency beyond every limit. But is this efficiency always to his advantage? Does it make him any better, more a man?"

Practically every opinion agrees that a fundamental human priority must be for peace. Again and again statesmen and churchmen have urged that all exploration into the universe leave the plagues of violence and war behind. The global excitement

and unity of interest caused by Apollo 11 heralded the possibility of "peace on earth, good will among men."

Humanity may be on "the eve of the vision of a new wisdom, of a new understanding of the revelation of God and his creation," said Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras I of the moon landing. A part of that vision may be how to realize the ancient hope for peace and justice.

"One small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind." Astronaut Armstrong said as his foot touched the lunar surface. The religious constituency is in substantial agreement in wanting the scientific leap symbolized by a footprint in moon dust to become a concrete impression in the soul and soil of the Earth.

ON THE RIGHT SIDE

Are Long-Hairs Short-Sighted?

By Father Paul J. Cuddy

People ask me many questions about current trends (as well as religion and other items which clergymen are expected to have opinions about). Here's how one conversation went recently:

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF YOUNG MEN WEARING LONG HAIR AND BEARDS?

It makes for interesting speculation. It strikes me as a kind of substitute for Latin American machismo.

WHAT IS THAT, MACHISMO?

Unfortunately for the women, machismo is a mentality among many Latin American men that, to prove his virility, a man must sire as many children as he can. The more children, the greater proof of his manhood. And this does not necessitate children within marriage. The girl down the street does just as well.

BUT WHAT DOES MACHISMO HAVE TO DO WITH LONG HAIR AND BEARDS?

I don't relate the problem to sex but to self-doubt among the oddly coiffured. The self-assured man doesn't feel the need of exhibitionism. He's content to be what he is and to do what he should. The "uncertain" seem forever trying to prove a point, revolving around their own ego. They frequently protest without offering rational solutions.

The beatnik has a great affinity for publicity. Remember the Chicago riots, where the police were harassed by dirty tongues from dirty minds and dirty mores and dirty bodies of the militantly disheveled? To the beatniks, the police were "pigs, fascists, oppressors."

I believe most of these youngsters were manipulated by a core of well-

organized purveyors of disruption. The purveyors wore long hair, not from their lack of self-assurance, but because this was a uniform of disruption as clearly as the police uniform was the uniform of civil order.

BUT CHRIST WORE LONG HAIR AND A BEARD—WHAT DO YOU SAY OF THAT?

So did the Apostles. We might add that they didn't bathe much, didn't use deodorants, and probably had body odors which were pretty bad according to our American norms. They wore sandals and didn't wear socks. But that was the custom of the day. It was not a protest nor a sign of insecurity.

The protest of Jesus and His Apostles was in the heart, not in bizarre externalism. It is true Our Lord did sometimes act violently against great abuses, e.g. the expulsion of the money-changers in the temple. But these were exceptional rather than the rule. The rule was persistent persecution. The protest of the Apostles against evil was a lifelong dedication. Do you think the beatniks will persevere in personal suffering?

WHY DO YOU EMPHASIZE "LIFE-LONG" DEDICATION?

Because it was for life, just like the vows of the married or the celibacy commitment of the priest. I think the beatnik protest manifestations are only temporary. How many of these will be working for the underprivileged 10 years from now? Or even five? I hope dedicated Christians and non-Christians will continue to work with the suffering poor in increasing numbers.

Dorothy Day has been working for the underprivileged for four decades.



She has been in and out of jail. She continues to espouse extreme causes, including absolute pacifism. Yet I consider her a saint. She's not interested in blowing up her own ego. Have you seen her rip-snorting on the TV? No. Furthermore, Dorothy Day, the activist par excellence, is a woman of prayer par excellence. How many activists consider prayer essential?

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF LONG-HAIRED AND BEARDED-PRIESTS?

I don't know any long-haired priests personally. I have seen some on TV, but they always seem such agitated souls with groups of similarly agitated people, they give the suggestion of suffering from serious neuroses. Neuroses are a sickness, not a sin. The Capuchins sometimes wear beards as a reminder of Christ.

WELL, WHAT ARE YOUR CONCLUSIONS?

Some women suffer a longer menopause than others. Some adults have a longer adolescent period than others.

In adolescence the developing youngster is full of uncertainties, childishness, hostilities; but at the same time he has great ideals and unpredictable nobility. The TV and newspapers super-impress us with the number and nature of beatniks. Most post-adolescents act their age. And most of those who are slower developing, unless they are hopelessly sick emotionally, will level off to normal. It is good for us oldsters to remember the follies of our own youth. Remember the goldfish swallowing rage a generation ago? Memory should help us to sympathize with the follies of our present youth — and even to enjoy them.

COMMENTARY

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ALL IN THE FAMILY

Pushbutton World and Its Backlash

By Sarah Child

Every so often a flash of insight concerning human nature hits me over the head.

The latest such communication centers around the deprivation we mortals have experienced and are experiencing due to our pushbutton era.

Like others before me I didn't really see the problem until the solution presented itself for inspection.

I had spent the morning chasing around the city first to a cooking supply house in search of cookie cutters with no tops or bottoms, just sides.

They were the latest requisite in my crafts class where we were making ornaments out of plastic cooking crystals.

From the cooking supply house, braving city traffic I wove in and out of one-way streets until I arrived in the neighborhood where I had visited a crafts center a few months before.

But the old crumbling Victorian house which had five or six rooms on its first floor filled with such crotch as wooden beads, chair caning, ear ring kits and decoupage art was gone.

Instead in the empty lot, which had stood next to it was a brand new, brick-faced structure. All that remained from the old building was its

sign of business. This now stood before the gleaming new house of crafts.

Looking about inside I was filled with wonderment at the new cutch and all the space given over to it. I knew that the ground that the building stood on was fairly valuable real estate.

If the owners had gone to this expense for what a lot of people, including my husband, are inclined to term "junk" then arts and crafts must be a big business.

In fact, it must be a booming business just as the business sells fabrics, patterns and threads to women who want to sew is booming.

From there my mind leaped to the men in our neighborhood who have remodeled basement rooms, built stereo and television cabinets.

Driving home in the power-steered car, operated merely by the twist of a key and the merest touch of a wheel and a brake, it dawned on me that the pushbutton era was the cause of all this extra-curricular activity.

The idea that man works with his hands to free himself of frustration and tension and to gain pride in seeing actual completed achievement is nothing new. But, I had had no idea of the extent to which it had spread.

A man I know who now earns enough that he can afford to call an expert for any work that needs doing in his home or place of business has taken to tying his own flies for trout fishing.

His wife tailors her own coats. Their older son recently took off a couple of days from his unrelated job to install wiring in the new home they are having built. When it passed inspection, pride of both son and parents was overwhelming and not merely for the fact that he had saved them a couple of thousand dollars.

Those of us who can't tie flies, or tailor coats, wire houses, build stereo cabinets or create cozy rooms out of dreary basement quarters head for the craft shops.

Sometimes, of course, a wife's source of pride can be a husband's source of frustration. When my breadwinner opened the oven door the other night to find ersatz stained glass baking instead of chocolate cake, however, I merely pointed out that the art would be around a long time whereas the cake would have disappeared by tomorrow.

His expression indicated he has some adjustment to make before achieving full appreciation for my new self-expression.

RACL VIEWPOINTS

Father Cuddy Revisited

By J. E. Koller

At least twice in the past few months, Father Paul Cuddy in his weekly column has painted a picture of today's American Catholic which deserves a little attention from the other side of the Commentary page.

On April 11 he wrote, "What do the masses of People of God really want? While allowing that there are a few exceptions, he answered, "They want to go to ball games, to bowling alleys

Women like to run rummage sales and bake sales. Men are little interested even in reading a light novel or a sports story, let alone studying a scriptural thesis"

He returned to this theme when interviewed for the issue of Oct. 27. In a comment, the general tone of which was somewhat more flattering according to my standards — Father Cuddy didn't state his standards — he still saw fit to observe with respect to today's Catholics that "They are more interested in the Mets and the Buffalo Bills in improving their jobs in their family vacations than they are in the intellectual implications of Vatican II."

At first reading it is rather easy to forget to make an important dis-

inction: Father Cuddy is describing what he believes to be the Church which exists, not the Church which ought to exist. And unfortunately it must be admitted that in another "scriptural thesis" Christ related the story of the Good Samaritan and then urged each of us to be a neighbor to all who are in need. There is usually little opportunity to follow this teaching in a bowling alley.

I was probably knee-high to a catechism teacher when I heard a sermon (in those days) which I can still remember. Our pastor related many events from Christian history to illustrate his thesis that those we now honor as saints were Christians who saw the need for a change in the Church, or at least in their corners of it, and proceeded to do what they could to bring about the needed adjustments. We know they are saints because of the divine assistance they received.

Anyone who questions that changes are called for today need only read the gospels and Father Cuddy's description of the People of God in close proximity. Most of us are not going to be formally canonized, saints but what ever happened to the idea that we are all supposed to try?

It is well to remember, too, that after testing His disciples with the question, "Can you drink of the cup of which I drink?" Christ reminded them that "The Son of Man also has not come to be served but to serve."

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