

To the Stars



On Sunday 28 November Patriarch Kyrill consecrated the new church of the Transfiguration in 'Star City' (Zviodny Gorodok), the Russian space centre. Built in a traditional Russian style, the church soars into the air, clearly a symbol of space flight. And on 1 December at Baikonour in Kazakhstan, the Russian launch site for satellites and spacecraft, it was announced that the crew of Soyuz TMA-20 will take the Gospel with them on their flight to the International Space Station. The commander of the crew, Dmitri Kondratiev said that it had been given to them by the priest at the new church in Star City after a service of intercession there, before they set off for a six-month stay in the Station.



Russia's reconversion to Christ may only be partial and superficial and purists and puritans may criticise it and still stubbornly claim in self-justification for their separation that 'nothing has changed there'. Nevertheless, what was once the greatest militant atheist country in the world, where they planned to televise the last priest as a museum curiosity thirty years ago, now sends cosmonauts into space with the words of the carpenter's son, crucified and risen from the dead.

It compares with the United States, gripped by a financial crisis and internet leaks from US embassies, which are not news but merely confirm all our worst suspicions, and where the Gospel is more and more banned in public places as politically incorrect. It compares with atheistic and near-bankrupt Western Europe, gripped by the near collapse of its once much-vaunted euro, symbol of unity become symbol of disunity. However many the problems of contemporary Russia may be and we have no illusions about them, the news that the heirs to the Soviet Union prepare themselves for space flight with a church service and take the Gospel into space can only give hope.

See: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OcEUt_1MacA&feature=player_embedded