

THE SPACE CRUSADES:
CARL MCINTIRE AND THE RELIGIOUS COLD WAR 1950-1975

A Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

The Space Crusade explores a unique relationship between scientific and evangelical history. The twentieth-century crusades stem from fundamentalist movements in Christian America led by prominent evangelical figures such as Carl McIntire, Billy Graham, and Billy James Hargis. Their campaign through radio, television, and protest fought to preserve evangelical-fundamentalist values against the threat of communism and atheism. Their ideology greatly rooted itself in biblical End Times theology during the Cold War. Evangelical theologians considered themselves at the frontlines of battle against the Soviet Union. But the war on communism would take to new heights in 1957, when the Soviet Union pushed the Cold War into the heavens, launching the Space Race. This essay explores the challenges of Soviet science and technology faced by evangelicals, the fundamentalist war on communism, and the peculiar plans of Carl McIntire's space ministry at Cape Canaveral.

CONTRIBUTORS AND FUNDING SOURCES

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1. INTRODUCTION

The atomic era opened with a prayer:

“Almighty Father, who wilt hear the prayers of them who love Thee, we pray Thee to be with those who brave the heights of Thy heavens and who carry the battle to our enemies. Guard and protect them, we pray Thee, as they fly their appointed rounds. May they bring this war to a rapid end. We pray Thee that the end of war may come soon, and that once more we may know peace on earth. May the men who fly this night be kept safe in Thy care, and may they be returned safely to us. We shall go forward in trusting Thee, knowing we are in Thy care now and forever. Amen.¹”

In the early morning, seconds before the plane carrying the atomic bomb embarked for its destination, United States Army Chaplain William B. Downey blessed the anxious crew of the Enola Gay. On August 6 and 9, 1945, the United States dropped two atomic bombs on Japanese land. The first bomb fell on Hiroshima and the other on Nagasaki. According to the evangelical church, a growing Christian religious movement in the United States, humanity now held the power of the apocalypse in the form of a small nuclear device.² The atomic bomb brought forth a new age, one that changed the very soul of America.³ Bishop John Walker of Episcopal Diocese of Atlanta declared that the atomic bomb revealed “the primeval forces of nature [were] now at the sole disposal of man, depending upon the nature of man himself, these forces may become either good or

¹ Cited in William L. Laurence, *Dawn Over Zero: The Story of the Atomic Bomb* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1946), 209.

² Frank Newport, “Five Key Findings on Religion in the U.S.,” *Gallup*, December 23, 2016. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/200186/five-key-findings-religion.aspx>. By the late 1940s, Gallup Daily measured religious identity in the United States finding nine in ten American adults identified as Christian.

³ “Atom Bomb Brought New Age of Soul Truman Message Tells Churchman Here,” *New York Times*, May 19, 1946. <https://searchproquestcom.srvproxy1.library.tamu.edu/hnpnewyorktimes/docview/107722023/80169720A51242C6PQ/1?accountid=7082>

evil.”⁴ Meanwhile, America’s political regime declared that the “bomb destroyed selfish nationalism.”⁵ According to President Harry S. Truman, “it was the end of an era shaped by catastrophe and desolation,” only to witness a great coming reformation.⁶ Rev. Robert S. Trenbath of Trinity Episcopal Church in Washington D.C. agreed with Truman’s decision to manufacture the bomb and believed it would benefit America scientifically and militarily, as well as religiously.⁷ President Truman believed that America’s union of religion and democracy would strengthen each other in the new era, and in many ways that is precisely what it did.

Over the next two decades, a crusade of politically charged evangelical-fundamentalists built their churches on the bones and debris created by the war. Christian fundamentalism seemed to unify the American people on the basis of faith, freedom, and fear.⁸ According to many fundamentalists, World War II (1939-1945) signaled the End Times, otherwise known as the “Great Tribulation” mentioned in the biblical New Testament.⁹ The tragic events of World War II and the rise and fall of Nazi

⁴ Wright Wellington, “Moral Responsibility is Imposed by Atomic Bomb,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, August 12, 1945.

<https://searchproquestcom.srvproxy1.library.tamu.edu/hnpatlantaconstitution/docview/504537483/1218BF D85DE54463PQ/1?accountid=7082>

⁵ “Atom Bomb Brought New Age of Soul,” *New York Times*, 1946.

⁶ A reformation is defined as a religious revolution that not only impacts society, but the political and economic regime as well. A reformation can be defined as a mass religious change generally instigated by a particular denomination in order to turn the public toward specific ideological views or to turn away from secularism in repentance.

⁷ “Pastor Urges Bomb Moral Responsibility,” *The Washington Post*, February 20, 1950.

<https://searchproquestcom.srvproxy2.library.tamu.edu/hnpwashingtonpost/docview/152322239/1658CBA 92F6A4E1DPQ/1?accountid=7082>

⁸ Christian fundamentalism has always had a close relationship with nationalism and the political far-right. Faith and freedom are often weaponized by evangelicals through the motivation of fear. I.e., Fear of communism is often associated with the biblical apocalypse in Revelation.

⁹ The End Times, similar to Apocalypticism is a religious belief that there will be the apocalypse predicted by the Bible in Revelation. This belief is generally accompanied by the idea that civilization will cease to

Germany supplied evangelical preachers with Sunday sermon topics to last a lifetime. Many theologians expressed anxiety and anticipation that a second coming of Christ would occur at the end of the decade. Christian fundamentalism capitalized on this fear and war memory, and promoted politicized Christ-centered propaganda disguised as conservative nationalism.¹⁰ Though the teachings of the Holy Bible often discourage a resort to violence, American evangelicalism tended to view the atomic bomb as God's instrument. They compared the bomb and the outcome of the war to the biblical flood of Genesis that cleansed the earth of sin. Historian Richard Bauckham referred to this as the modern failure of the evangelical church in that "too often evangelicals tried to see the world in a biblical perspective," only to end up forcing the modern world into the biblical world.¹¹ Embracing the atomic bomb as a theological doomsday promoted mainstream fear masquerading as faith and Christian principle. For some the nuclear device offered the birth of the world, "present at the moment of creation when the Lord said, "let there be light."¹² President Truman echoed similar thoughts, stating he thanked

exist due to a large disaster or global catastrophe. World War II saw this global catastrophe. Cities collapsed in air raids. The Holocaust ended six-million Jewish lives. Over fifty-million civilians and soldiers died and the war left many homeless, starving, impoverished, orphaned, and jobless. This left many with the impression that the war was a sign of tribulation and the catalyst for the return of Jesus Christ according to the resurgence of militant fundamentalism after WWII. This would later pave the way for evangelists such as Carl McIntire and Billy James Hargis to use the Second Coming of Christ as a means of justifying their efforts to suppress communism and pave the way for the Religious Right.

¹⁰ Billy James Hargis' *Christian Crusade* provides an excellent example of conservative disseminated pamphlets, books, and media against the threat of communism and other political and cultural issues. This will be explored later in the essay.

¹¹ Richard Bauckham, "Nuclear Holocaust: A Hermeneutical Reflection," *Churchman*, 99.2, 1985, 146-155.

https://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/churchman/099-02_146.pdf

¹² William L. Laurence, "Drama of the Atomic Bomb Found Climax in July 16 Test" *New York Times*, September 26, 1945.

God that the bomb came to the United States, and later prayed that God would guide Americans to use the bomb for His ways and purposes.¹³ Nationalism lies at the heart of American fundamentalism, therefore it is not surprising that when America turned to fight its next enemy, radical evangelicals picked up their “iron rod” in defense of the nation and to fight in the next great war.¹⁴

American evangelical-fundamentalism found itself at the frontlines of the Cold War. Soviet communism terrified the church perhaps more than the events of World War II. The threat of communism, socialism, and Marxism challenged the foundations of Christian principal and theology. The Cold War turned traditional Christian ministry into America’s next great evangelical crusade against communism. Many evangelicals defined communism as un-Christian and un-American, and proclaimed that a mass American revival must take place as the first “step in defense of American safety and the preservation of a Constitutional Government.”¹⁵ The fear of communism seemed to fuel a hysteria justified as communist resistance.¹⁶ As the nuclear threat of Soviet Russia grew and hostilities intensified between the United States and the Soviet Union, fear of the apocalypse slowly found its way back into fundamentalist-evangelical ministry; after all, “the communist vision was a vision of Man without God,” and that was the ultimate

¹³ “On this Day: 10 August 1945: Britain and US to keep atomic bomb secret,” *The Guardian*, August 10, 2009.

<https://advancelexiscom.srvproxy2.library.tamu.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:7WBW-6PC1-2R54-202B-00000-00&context=1516831>

¹⁴ The “iron rod” in Revelation is often highly associated with Christ’s strict rule of the nations.

¹⁵ Billy James Hargis, *The Far Left*, (Tulsa, OK: Christian Crusade, 1964,) 6.

¹⁶ This is later explored in the essay with the introduction of Carl McIntire and Billy James Hargis’ crusade against communism.

catalyst for Armageddon.¹⁷ Evangelicalism entered this ideology war as a liberator and defender of American faith and freedom. Evangelicals considered the Cold War one of history's great religious wars, according Christian propaganda that drew heavily on images from the eleventh-century crusades. For many conservatives, fundamentalists, and anti-communists, a crusade meant much more than relying on faith in God, but a literal fight against the ultimate threat to religion, communism and other political and cultural issues.¹⁸ This Christian crusade is best summarized in a quote from former evangelical pastor of Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church, George Grant:

“But it is dominion we are after. Not just a voice. It is dominion we are after. Not just influence. It is dominion we are after. Not just equal time. It is dominion we are after. World conquest. That's what Christ has commissioned us to accomplish. We must win the world with the power of the Gospel. And we must never settle for anything less... Thus, Christian politics has as its primary intent the conquest of the land—of men, families, institutions, bureaucracies, courts, and governments for the Kingdom of Christ.”¹⁹

Though this response is written in the 1980s, it still perfectly provides insight into the ideology that motivated many fundamentalist-evangelical pastors and supporters. Grant urged that there must be a call for Biblical principles to once again reform the American nation and its people. This nationalist, politically-driven theological group called for complete Christian reconstructionism according to bible-based fundamentalism.²⁰ The

¹⁷Carl McIntire, “20th Century Reformation Hour,” WXUR, Media, Penn: WXUR, no date. McIntire's daily radio program (1955-1977) often encourages a real crusade of Christian fundamentalists against communism.

¹⁸ Carl McIntire, “20th Century Reformation Hour,” WXUR, Media, Penn: WXUR, no date.

¹⁹ George Grant, *The Changing of the Guard: Biblical Principles for Political Action*, (Location Unknown: Dominion Press, February 1, 1987).

²⁰ Christian Reconstruction calls upon the theological reconstruction of society (family, education, law, politics, entertainment, art, etc. according to fundamentalists.)

literal-spiritual fight against communism would first begin with a public declaration of faith. In other words, the name of God or religious language would be used on consumer products, promoted in magazines, employed in education or political settings and elsewhere, all as a means of promoting anti-communism against the Soviet Union.²¹ The crusade against communism often promoted imagery of a crumbling America, reminiscent of World War II, and evoked nuclear destruction and the coming apocalypse.²² The justification of a nuclear deterrent concluded that Christians could go to war as long as it aligned with God's divine plan. This divine plan to Christianize the United States motivated many radical fundamentalists to join the fight against communism.²³ But this so-called divine plan masquerading as "God's will" initially originated from the fundamentalist right-wing's desire for control and power. Just as evangelicals embraced the atomic bomb, they later embraced the idea of a physical war with the Soviet Union in order to protect faith from further persecution. The Cold War evangelical crusade considered itself one of the most potent arrows in the quiver of domestic security.²⁴

But who would lead such a radical crusade? How did this crusade of cold warriors take the fight against communism into space?

²¹ President Eisenhower approved adding the phrase, "under God," be added to the Pledge of Allegiance in 1956.

²² Again, evoking imagery of the End Times.

²³ Christianizing the United States also largely came into effect in part by western ideology.

²⁴ Jonathan Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 6.

2. CARL MCINTIRE AND THE FIGHT AGAINST COMMUNISM

Carl McIntire was one of America's most profound and active cold warriors. Often known as the "founding father of American fundamentalism" according to historian Markku Ruostila, McIntire's crusading began as early as the 1930s. McIntire was no ordinary evangelical preacher, but a militant-antimodernist-anticommunist evangelical-fundamentalist. His extreme far-right views set him even further apart from his more liberal contemporaries such as Billy Graham. Graduating from Park College in 1927, he attended Westminster Seminary in 1929, before graduating as an ordained minister of the Presbyterian Church in the United States. In February 1936, McIntire launched a weekly newspaper *The Christian Beacon*, often known for its commentary on politics, education, and the general concerns of the Christian right. This press would be his legacy, printing a flood of pamphlets, newsletters, and tracts often against liberalism and communism.²⁵

McIntire soon established a rigidly fundamentalist Bible Presbyterian Church in 1937, adopting strict Christian eschatology such as dispensational premillennialism.²⁶ He later formed the International Council of Christian Churches in 1948, refusing to join both the National Association of Evangelicals and the National Council of Churches. McIntire's extremism took new heights starting in 1955 with a daily thirty-minute radio program, "The Twentieth Century Reformation Hour," featuring commentary on

²⁵ The *Christian Beacon* would print from 1936 to the 1990s.

²⁶ The belief that the rapture of the faithful will occur before the return of Jesus (Second Coming) or after the Great Tribulation or End Times.

religious and political affairs from a purely fundamentalist predisposition. McIntire's motivation originated from more than a desire to fight for a Christian America, but a central aim to fight communism.

According to McIntire, by the 1950s, the satanic conspiracy of communism undermined the United States.²⁷ The right-wing called for evangelicals in the churches to take a stand against the communist threat.²⁸ McIntire demanded Christians keep the forces of darkness at bay, stating that "a man who does not use his freedom to defend his freedom, does not deserve his freedom."²⁹ He discouraged any form of peaceful negotiations between the two superpowers, and instead encouraged that the United States militarily destroy all communist nations. He alleged that communists had infiltrated the National Council of Churches to confuse and indoctrinate many fundamentalist congregations and preach leftist ideology. "The anticommunist movement needs to be strengthened," he said, "we must rise up and say that every single American ought to stand on his own two feet," and fight against Satan himself.³⁰ The motivations for the twentieth-century crusades were loosely based on apocalyptic mythology and biblical ideology. McIntire's ministry focused on a literal interpretation of the Bible and sought to bring forth mythical and literary figures, stories, and events into modern existence. Using these methods, McIntire gained a multitude of followers.

²⁷ Carl McIntire often referred to the threat of communism as a "satanic conspiracy" or a "force of darkness."

²⁸ Beginning in the early 1950s evangelical leadership such as Carl McIntire, Billy James Hargis, and even that of crusade leader Billy Graham called for Christian men and women to fight against communism.

²⁹ Carl McIntire, "20th Century Reformation Hour," WXUR, Media, Penn: WXUR, no date.

³⁰ Carl McIntire, "20th Century Reformation Hour," WXUR, Media, Penn: WXUR, no date. Again, McIntire frames the Soviet Union as Satan.

Modern disciples of McIntire followed similar media marketing and strategy based off a literal interpretation of biblical analysis. Billy James Hargis and his “Christian Crusade” ministry broadcast on nearly 500 radio stations and 250 television stations by the mid-1950s. Hargis believed his Christian Crusade held back the anti-Christ stating:

“We are keeping the world government and world church objectives of the anti-Christ from being fulfilled by our constant exposure of satanic Communism and all of its allies. If we were not in the process of holding back the anti-Christ with a bombardment of Gospel and truth, the Antichrist would have already achieved world Communist control.”³¹

The ministry of Hargis was remarkably similar to Carl McIntire: both ministries preached a literal interpretation of the Bible with a contemporary evil serpent, communism. Their understanding of biblical scripture was fundamentally obscured by the current state of world affairs. According to many fundamentalists, communism itself was destined to bring about the great tribulation, the anti-Christ, and the destruction of humanity. Hargis stated that the anti-Christ and communism were virtually identical in two ways:

1. “The establishment of a world government would bring every nation under totalitarian rule.
2. The establishment of a world church which would claim to be Christian, but will in actuality deny Jesus Christ and subvert the influence of the church to promote a godless world government whose purpose is to stamp out freedom and enslave humanity.”³²

³¹ Billy Hargis, *Why I Fight for a Christian America*, (Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1974), 150.

³² Hargis, *Why I Fight for a Christian America*, 151.

Hargis stated in his popular 1974 book, *Why I Fight for Christian America*, that Christians must turn their attention to prophetic scripture and instructed his readers to wait for the rapture. The evangelical crusade against communism changed the fundamental meaning of faith. Faith in itself was no longer defined as limited to “faith in God,” but rather a faith primarily used as weaponry against communism by Christians to justify radical-right ideology.

American culture witnessed a mass promotion of “visible faith” by politicians and Christian leaders, serving as an inoculation against the communist epidemic. Historian Jonathan Herzog noted that Americans mounted “Decalogue monuments in public areas as if they were military installations.”³³ The crusade rallied its cold warriors behind a new American identity, shaped by the mythologies of Revelation and reinforced by conservative patriotism.

Many evangelicals listened to the ministries of Hargis and McIntire, setting record numbers of fundamentalist listeners. The post-war radio industry saw a rapid growth of McIntire’s radio program and the expansion of conservative radio shows.³⁴ As McIntire’s radio show grew more popular, his discussion of anti-communism largely dominated the radio program generally demanding that his listeners stand firm against the Soviets and their communism. This new form of radio ministry soon spread to that of television. Media promptly expanded the growth of the twentieth-century crusade, as

³³ Herzog, “The Spiritual Industrial Complex,” 7.

³⁴ Paul Matzko, *The Radio Right: How a Band of Broadcasters Took on the Federal Government and Built the Modern Conservative Movement*, (New York: Oxford, 2020), 3-5.

well-known tele-evangelist Billy Graham prepared his own crusade, like that of Hargis and McIntire. Billy Graham's crusade encouraged people to join their campaign by turning away from sin and accept Christ as their Savior. Though his fight against communism was nothing like McIntire's battle, he often framed the Cold War as a moral conflict between political good and evil. Much like Billy Graham, many evangelicals gradually drew on modern politics as a basis of demonstrating faith. But this faith would be challenged again, and this time not by communism. Sputnik 1 launched into space on October 4 1957, pushing many evangelicals into a different kind of hysteria. They were now at the mercy of a profane heaven.

3. AMERICAN EVANGELICALISM AND THE SPACE RACE

On the 2nd Sunday after the launch of the silver satellite, nearly every pulpit in America remarked on Sputnik 1. For some evangelicals it was again the End Times, as Sputnik represented a dangerous threat to the United States. One minister proclaimed, “Don’t be surprised if He comes today!”³⁵ Even the Vatican stated that Sputnik was “a frightening toy in the hands of childlike men who are without religion and morals.”³⁶ A poem printed in the Russian magazine *Krokodil* reminded the world that the country that created Sputnik refuted the Christian creation myth:

And here we have our Sputnik
No secret: the newborn planet
Is modest about its size
But this symbol of intellect and light
Is made by us, and not by the God
Of the Old Testament.³⁷

By the late 1950s, several evangelical-fundamentalist crusaders favored establishing an American space program, one that would replace the Soviet Sputnik and aid their fight against communism.³⁸ “Faith should not be shaken because of a rocket ship to the moon or to Mars,” claimed radio-evangelist, Charles Halff. His book, *The Bible and Space Travel*, trusted that space and all of creation remained the handiwork of

³⁵ Paul Dickson, *Sputnik: The Shock of the Century*, (London: Walker Publishing Company, 2001), 115. Some churches hoped that Christ would return soon with the launching of Sputnik 1.

³⁶ Paul Dickson, *Sputnik*, 115.

³⁷ “Religion: Not by God,” *Time Magazine* 87, no.14, 1975.

<http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,868040,00.html> English version printed later than original Russian *Krokodil*.

³⁸ The first American satellite, Explorer 1 launched on January 31, 1958. NASA established on July 29, 1958.

God; therefore, Christians should embrace American spaceflight as the will of God as “these things were clearly prophesied in the Word of God thousands of years ago.”³⁹ The twentieth-century crusade though heavily wounded by the Soviet accomplishments, sought to redeem itself by taking the fight to space.⁴⁰ Carl McIntire had quickly responded to Soviet space travel in the *Christian Beacon* stating, “The West has been embarrassed by her enemy, now Christians must see what an anti-God, atheistic, Christ-hating nation has thrown into the sky.”⁴¹ He believed the Soviet Union’s alliance with satanic forces would play a key role in the second coming of Christ, stating that the “book of Revelation speaks with a fresh impact, even the splitting of the atom did not have quite the apocalyptic ingredient of this man-made satellite.”⁴² For Carl McIntire and close disciple Billy James Hargis, the Soviets perfectly fit the description of Revelation 13 and the tale of the false prophet who “doeth great wonders so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on earth in the sight of men.”⁴³ Dr. Martin Heinecken, Professor of Systematic Theology at Lutheran Theological Seminary, endorsed the opportunities presented by the prospect of American space travel. He strongly believed that humanity’s newfound spaceflight power “could lead men closer to God and strengthen their faith.”⁴⁴ He saw no disrespect to God in this new manifestation of power, as long as this power was used to glorify God. He emphasized that preachers

³⁹ Charles Halff, *The Bible and Space Travel* (San Antonio, TX: The Christian Jew Hour Inc., 1959), 5.

⁴⁰ By the late 1950s, Christian belief faced considerably backlash by the growing atheism.

⁴¹ Carl McIntire, “Russia’s Baby Moon Turns Christians to Apocalypse, *Christian Beacon*, October 1957, 1.

⁴² Carl McIntire, “Russia’s Baby Moon” *CB*, 1957, 1.

⁴³ Carl McIntire, “Russia’s Baby Moon” *CB*, 1957, 1.

⁴⁴ Heinecken, *God in the Space Age*, 11.

and scientists should work together in coexistence. Heinecken preached that an American space program would remind the world of God's place in space exploration and "lead to many blessings for the human race along with the other advances of science."⁴⁵ He recognized that man's desire for knowledge was divinely given and should be used to explore the cosmos.⁴⁶

The twentieth-century crusade, though led largely by modern evangelicals, received contribution from German-born American aerospace engineer, Wernher von Braun.⁴⁷ He was famously nicknamed the "Space Age Prophet," well known for his admirable promotion of faith and science. He advocated that there was spiritual significance in space flight and implied that faith required man to "travel to other worlds, even other galaxies."⁴⁸ Throughout his career he insisted that science and technology were compatible, if not essential to faith.

"Science tries to learn more about the Creation, religion tries to better understand the Creator. Speaking for myself, I can only say that the grandeur of the cosmos serves only to confirm my belief in the certainty of a Creator... My experience with science, then, led me to God, it was as if I was putting a face on God."⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Heinecken, *God in the Space Age*, 194-207.

⁴⁶ Heinecken, *God in the Space Age*, 194-207.

⁴⁷ Before his time in the American space program, scientist Wernher von Braun led Nazi Germany's rocket developmental program in the early 1930s and 1940s. Following his transition to the US Army during Operation Paperclip, he served as NASA's chief rocket architect that propelled the Apollo mission to the moon. He later converted to Christianity during his time at Fort Bliss in Texas.

⁴⁸ "Wernher von Braun: NASA HDC," *Christian Century*, December 23, 1959, 20.

<https://www.christiancentury.org>

⁴⁹ David F. Nobel, "The Ascent of the Saints: Space Exploration," *Science & Religion*. 1997.

<http://inters.org/noble-religion-of-technology>

Wernher von Braun was not alone in his religious convictions. Some believed that rockets and satellites could serve to broadcast the gospel and other Christian messages to the American people and the world.⁵⁰ American space travel could glorify God and uncover the wonders of God. The evangelical crusade prepared to support the American space program, but their fight against communism would face another loss as cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin launched into space.

⁵⁰ Carl McIntire, “20th Century Reformation Hour,” WXUR, Media, Penn: WXUR, no date. Carl McIntire and many other evangelical supporters felt NASA’s space exploration could be used to broadcast biblical messages.

4. THE SPACE CRUSADES

After the launch of the Soviet Vostok 1, the first human spaceflight in history, President John F. Kennedy admitted, “We are behind, and it will be some time before we catch up.”⁵¹ The United States suffered another epic loss to the Soviets, greater than the defeat of Sputnik. This time, a Soviet man entered heaven.⁵² Upon return to Earth, Gagarin was welcomed as a hero to all, with the exception of many in the evangelical community.⁵³ The attack on religious and spiritual belief launched quickly after Vostok 1, perhaps even greater than the evangelicals’ initial threat, Sputnik. Many theologians took issue with Gagarin’s flight primarily because of his Soviet citizenship. Such a divine experience would go completely unrecognized by the Soviets because the Soviet Union emphasized humanity over divinity. Some Christians believed that an invasion of sacred space by a Soviet atheist signaled a sign of Christ’s return. Shortly following Gagarin’s spaceflight, Nikita Khrushchev, the Soviet Premier, declared that the cosmonaut investigating the heavenly paradise had not found such divine being.⁵⁴ “We

⁵¹ "Race in Space: Rockets and Men." *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Feb 25, 1962.

<http://proxy.library.tamu.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/116000727?accountid=7082>.

⁵² On April 12, 1961 at 9:07am, Moscow time, Vostok 1 launched into space. Over the course of 108 minutes, Vostok 1 traveled around the earth. Vostok 1 had no engines to slow its re-entry. With no potential way to land safely, Soviet engineers installed a device that would successfully eject Gagarin from the craft and he would simply parachute to Earth.

⁵³ For many Americans of faith, this event could damage the fundamental belief in God. It was a modern Tower of Babel built by a Soviet architect. The cosmonaut became idolized as an ascending god and would remain forever apart of a mythical faith in science that Soviet technology truly had no need for a divine being. Gagarin’s epic flight would remain forever preserved in titanium in Moscow, Russia by sculptor Pavel Bondarko. The sculpture featured the ascending cosmonaut rocketing to the heavens similar to Rio De Janerios’s Christ the Redeemer.

⁵⁴ C. L. Sulzberger, “Foreign Affairs: Paradise and Old Noah Khrushchev,” *New York Times*, September 9, 1961, 18.

<http://proxy.library.tamu.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/115487472?accountid=7082>.

had made it to the stars and, as the saying went, there was no bearded old God there. Only science. Only the Soviet system!”⁵⁵ A year later, many evangelicals felt mocked by the communist space invaders. Cosmonaut Gherman S. Titov became the second human to orbit the Earth aboard Vostok 2. Upon his successful spaceflight, Titov returned safely to earth and declared that he observed, “no God or angels” during his seventeen orbits.⁵⁶ “Up to our first original flight by Yuri Gagarin, no god helped build our rocket,” he stated. “The rocket was made by our people. I don’t believe in God. I believe in man, his strength, his possibilities and his reason.” This statement caused fundamentalist retaliation. Carl McIntire proclaimed:

“We are fighting for our lives, I believe we are fighting for our existence, I believe we are fighting for our churches, I believe we are fighting for our homes, I believe we are fighting for our children, all that you and I hold dear and precious, and time is running out on us. We are losing the cold war, very rapidly, and the communists are gaining in strength in almost every section of the world today. They would not be doing it, if we were resisting communism as it should be resisted.”⁵⁷

Carl McIntire believed that technology was crucial to the survival of the church. McIntire’s twentieth-century crusade against communism turned toward the hope offered by American space technology and science, forming the Space Crusade.⁵⁸

In a 1961 address to Congress following Yuri Gagarin’s flight, President John F. Kennedy exclaimed that America had set its sights on the moon, “We set sail on this new

⁵⁵ Pavel P. Klushantsev, *Luna*, Leningrad Popular Science Film Studio, 1965.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aT1s5s2LurM>

⁵⁶ Titov, Denying God, Puts His Faith in the People, *New York Times*. May 7, 1962.

<http://proxy.library.tamu.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/116049713?accountid=7082>.

⁵⁷ Carl McIntire, “20th Century Reformation Hour,” WXUR, Media, Penn: WXUR, no date.

⁵⁸ Though not McIntire’s official title for his crusade, “the Space Crusade” is an idea derived from McIntire’s focus on a space themed ministry dedicated to bringing people to Christ at Cape Canaveral.

sea because there is new knowledge to be gained, and new rights to be won, they must be won and used for the progress of all.”⁵⁹ He declared that the space race officially commenced. “No single space project...will be more exciting, or more impressive to mankind, or more important...and none will be so difficult or expensive to accomplish.”⁶⁰ His speech concluded with a request that the American people pray for God’s blessing on the most hazardous and greatest adventure on which man had ever embarked.

By the early 1960s, evangelical-fundamentalists believed mankind could use the moon landing as a unique way to exalt God by the accomplishments of science and technology. Billy Graham claimed to have no difficulty in accepting the space program. When asked about the lunar NASA mission, Graham replied that God commanded men “be fruitful” and to “replenish the earth and subdue it.” He stated, “For thousands of years man has been at this task, subduing the earth. Now with the products of thousands of years of our labor we are beginning to reach the heavens. It is clear that whatever God created is man’s heritage and that includes the universe.”⁶¹ NASA’s space program could benefit the world spiritually. Evangelicalism looked forward to a sacred experience they could encounter in space, unlike the cosmonauts who ignored God’s creation. McIntire’s space crusade promoted perhaps the greatest anti-communist space

⁵⁹ Marina Koren, “Mike Pence’s Outer Space Gospel” *The Atlantic*, August 23, 2018
<https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2018/08/mike-pence-nasa-faith-religion/568255/>

⁶⁰ “Race in Space: Rockets and Men.” *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Feb 25, 1962. <http://proxy.library.tamu.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/116000727?accountid=7082>.

⁶¹ James Kloss, “Little religious impact seen in Space Probes” *The Minneapolis Star*, July 19, 1969.
<https://img3.newspapers.com/clip/17661463/another-july-1969-article-featuring/>

movement for American fundamentalists. The most significant part of this anti-communist space crusade, was not that it was not actively carried out by evangelicals, but rather framed in such a way that McIntire received credit for the religious beliefs of some NASA scientists, engineers, and astronauts.⁶² In other words, McIntire claimed credit for his ministry service inspiring NASA's personnel and astronaut's individual belief systems.⁶³

What are the space crusades? Essentially, they are inherently similar to that of their original anti-communist campaigns. If there was opportunity for any religious symbolism or mention of God within NASA, the evangelical church could claim credit for it. As many of NASA's astronauts and employees regularly attended informal Bible studies or joined prayer groups, there seemed to be a renewal of religious spirit in the space community. Only a few miles from NASA's mission control, Webster Presbyterian Church in Clear Lake, Texas became known as the "Church of the Astronauts," for its long history with some of NASA's most famous astronauts including John Glenn and Buzz Aldrin. The presence of the space age filled mainstream worship services with hymns such as "Declare, O Heavens, the Lord of Space," (1962) and the later famous "Bless Thou the Astronauts" (1969). Sermons ended with optimistic words such as:

⁶² Evangelicalism sought the opportunity to exploit the beliefs of ordinary workers and Apollo astronauts in order to proselytize.

⁶³ This is later discussed in the essay during McIntire's reaction to the Genesis reading on Apollo 8.

“When first upon the moon man trod, How excellent thy name, O God.
The heavens thy glory doth declare; Where-e’r we are, Lo! Thou are
there.”⁶⁴

Several churches around NASA developed a more celestial conception of faith. Many raised new theological questions such as: “Do astronauts travel through heaven? Are angels’ extraterrestrial beings? What could the discovery of alien life mean for Christianity? Did Jesus Christ die to save life on other worlds? Could space travel be a sign of the approaching end times?”⁶⁵ The slightest indication of God’s name or biblical reference at NASA could be easily fit into any Sunday sermon of how God would send man to the moon and destroy communism. Fundamentalists saw the American space program as a Christian education tool “that allowed the full glory and cosmic breadth of God’s creation to be revealed to man.”⁶⁶ More importantly, it offered the gratification of symbolic success against the atheist-communist Soviet Union. Christian principle remained at the center of the Apollo 8’s Genesis reading in 1968. Billy Graham’s *Christianity Today* commented that Apollo 8’s “modern magi” gave “credit to the living God” at the request of Carl McIntire and his campaign to establish regular spaceflight sermons.⁶⁷ The reading of Genesis left many impacted by such a revelation of faith. Carl McIntire responded, “Never again will it be the same moon—not for me... As long as I live every time, I look up I will think of Genesis, Genesis coming down from that

⁶⁴ David Bradstreet and Steve Rabey, “Bless Thou the Astronauts” *The Behemoth*. *Christianity Today*. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/behemoth/2016/issue-52-july-7-2016/bless-thou-astronauts.html>

⁶⁵ “Modern Magi Put Moon Flight into Scriptural Perspective,” *Christianity Today*, January 17, 1969. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1969/january-17/modern-magi-put-moon-flight-into-scriptural-perspective>.

⁶⁶ Kendrick Oliver, *To Touch the Face of God*, 142.

⁶⁷ “Modern Magi Put Moon Flight into Scriptural Perspective,” *Christianity Today*, January 17, 1969.

moon.”⁶⁸ McIntire remembered this biblical reading as one of mankind’s greatest achievements. To him, the scriptural reading overshadowed the actual lunar mission; indeed, fundamentalists everywhere regarded the Genesis reading as a monumental accomplishment. Evangelist Billy Graham praised it as “a tremendous thing, showing to the world that man is more than a product of technology and is a spiritual being.”⁶⁹ Soviet radio responded to the reading of Genesis stating, “It would be interesting to know what this means. Is it a joke or a space attempt to strengthen the authority of religion which has been shaken by the flight itself?”⁷⁰

Apollo 11 brought together millions around the world in prayer and hope as American astronauts with Christian upbringing landed safely on the Sea of Tranquility. *Christianity Today* affirmed that Apollo 11 was quite possibly the most prayed-for event in human history, as astronauts traveled from the earth to the lunar surface. From an evangelical perspective the lunar landing did not quite satisfy fundamentalists listening to or watching the lunar broadcast on July 20, 1969. There was no immediate recognition of God, but rather the humanistic statement, “One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind,” famously stated by Neil Armstrong.⁷¹ This phrase grew to disappoint Carl McIntire as he later stated that Neil Armstrong’s statement “glorified

⁶⁸ Carl McIntire, “The Moon and the Day of the Lord,” *Christian Beacon*, December 19, 1968, 1.

⁶⁹ “Modern Magi Put Moon Flight into Scriptural Perspective,” *Christianity Today*, January 17, 1969.

⁷⁰ “Modern Magi Put Moon Flight into Scriptural Perspective,” *Christianity Today*, 1969.

⁷¹ Quoted by Neil Armstrong in James R. Hansen, *First Man: The Life of Neil A. Armstrong*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005), 268. Neil Armstrong’s famous phrase when he first stepped onto the moon in 1969. This phrase would be debated in churches around the United States for years to come on whether or not the phrase praised mankind or God for such an historical achievement.

man [and only] offered the basis of humanism for man's accomplishment."⁷² Despite McIntire's discontent, several astronauts carried out a religious ceremony on the moon in the form of communion.⁷³ Buzz Aldrin later reflected that "it was interesting to think that the very first liquid ever poured on the moon, and the first food eaten there, were Communion elements."⁷⁴

The 'Lunar Bible' or the first microform copy of the Bible flew on Apollo 12, but never reached the moon's surface.⁷⁵ Astronaut James Irwin of Apollo 15 stated that his experience while exploring the moon's rocky surface moved him to dedicate the rest of his life to "spreading the good news of Jesus Christ."⁷⁶ Irwin later resigned from the astronaut corps and founded the High Flight Foundation, an interdenominational-evangelical organization in Colorado Springs, CO. He claimed his lunar "overview effect" greatly influenced his mission in the form of epiphany.⁷⁷ Irwin entered the ministry and led several expeditions to Mt. Ararat in Turkey in search of Noah's Ark in the early 1980s. Though Irwin's ministry experience remains unconnected to that of McIntire, his transformation from NASA to later epiphany, certainly seems to hold a deep connection to the evangelical's desire to link science and Christian faith.

⁷² "First Word from Moon-A Disappointment," *Christian Beacon*, July 24, 1969, 1.

⁷³ This information would be later divulged to the public and to NASA.

⁷⁴ Jerry Newcombe, "Buzz Aldrin's Moment with God on the Moon," *Christianity Today*, July 20, 2019.

⁷⁵ Later a second attempt was made during the Apollo 13 mission, carrying roughly around 512 copies of the microform Bible. Unfortunately, these Bibles never made it to the moon. Edgar Mitchell of Apollo 14 would go on to carry 100 microform Bibles to the surface of the moon in 1971.

⁷⁶ "Rev. Carl McIntire, 95," *Chicago Tribune*, March 2, 2002.

<https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-2002-03-23-0203230096-story.html>

⁷⁷ Epiphany or religious epiphany is often referred to as a moment of faith or when a person first realizes their faith in God.

Carl McIntire concluded that America's space program and the testimony of Christian astronauts proved faith in God.⁷⁸ Although his request for space sermons on the moon never came to fruition, the space crusade seemed to fuel itself without a steady active participation from evangelical fundamentalists, as they had in past anti-communist campaigns. The achievement and successful win of the space race proved that space exploration should be welcomed by Christians as "a blessing and an opportunity."⁷⁹ After the Apollo 11 lunar landing, McIntire's space crusade led him to purchase three-hundred acres of land in Cape Canaveral, Florida near the Apollo launch site in January 1971. The land acquisition included the original Cape Kennedy Hilton where many astronauts had stayed before their scheduled launch.⁸⁰ McIntire's purchase left many local Floridians fearing the area would turn into a hub of ultra-conservatism; others hoped his contribution would stimulate revenue and promote tourism.⁸¹ McIntire renamed the Hilton, "Gateway to the Stars" and later delivered a sermon of that same title to a live audience at the Cape Canaveral facility. The hotel was marketed as a traditional vacation destination, but a beacon of light to the evangelistic community. McIntire stated that the location of Cape Canaveral was "a clear uncompromising ministry and a work performed which will glorify His name right where He opened 'the window to the moon.'"⁸²

⁷⁸ Carl McIntire, "The Moon and the Day of the Lord," *Christian Beacon*, December 19, 1968.

⁷⁹ "Man on the Moon," *Christianity Today*, July 19, 1969.

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1969/july-18/man-on-moon.html>

⁸⁰ "Fundamentalist Rev. McIntire: Preacher Has Plans for Cape Canaveral" *Chicago Tribune*, March 15, 1971, 11.

⁸¹ "Preacher Has Plans for Cape Canaveral," *Chicago Tribune*, 11.

⁸² "Creation and Revelation Command Cape Canaveral," *Christian Beacon*, October 24, 1974, 1.

Space had a miraculous way of preserving and inspiring faith in the American people. McIntire believed that Cape Canaveral brought the earth closer to the heavens. He deemed it an “outstretched arm to other planets...” a spiritual place where man “defied the law of gravity and divided to walk about on the moon.”⁸³ He planned to restore and remodel the hotel similar to his Bible Conference Center in Cape May, New Jersey. The promotional “Gateway to the Stars” pamphlet states that “Cape May and Cape Canaveral became twin bases for the promotion of the Gospel and the cause of freedom.”⁸⁴ McIntire stated that there was no greater place than the hotel and conference center in Cape Canaveral to hold a bible conference “that exalts God’s word and deals with the revelation that God has given of the last days – the return of the Lord Jesus Christ as promised and the consummation of a new heaven and earth.”⁸⁵ McIntire’s pamphlet described the launch site in such a way that the science and technology behind Apollo had completely absolved itself into full religiosity. The site would be presented as holy ground:

“As unbelieve and apostasy, compromise and confusion abound everywhere, the spectacle of nature’s God honoring strict obedience to his laws in the heavens offers a sense of security. Here a soul-saving station. Here is a sense akin to dwelling in the skies. Here is a constant up-look into the heavens. The flaming rockets have passed this way. The sputtering chariots of spacemen have left their flame and smoke. Somehow it all seems to point to the promise of a glorious Return. The rockets have vanished behind the clouds. Yet, the Scriptures announce, “Behold he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him” (Rev. 1:7). Millions have come to the Space Center to see the rockets disappear

⁸³ “Creation and Revelation Command Cape Canaveral,” 1.

⁸⁴ “Gateway to the Stars Pamphlet” Cape Canaveral Bible Conference, Florida, no date, 17.
https://ptsem.summon.serialssolutions.com/search?s.q=Carl+McIntire+&spellcheck=true&keep_r=true#!/search?ho=t&l=en&q=Carl%20McIntire%20bible%20conference

⁸⁵ “Gateway to the Stars Pamphlet” Cape Canaveral Bible Conference, Florida, no date, 3.

beyond the blue or between the clouds. Cape Canaveral seems to lift the earth closer to the heavens.”⁸⁶

Cape Canaveral was thought to inspire the Word of God, declaring His handiwork. A Cape Canaveral bible conference consisted of daily events arranged around bible studies and prophetic messages from notable Christian speakers. Outside the hotel crowds could sightsee and explore the Cape and space center. Buses could shuttle guests to popular recreation such as Walt Disney World or Sea World in Orlando, FL. Aside from daily church services, Carl McIntire’s biblical convention center offered anti-communist seminars and conferences on foreign and domestic policy. Perhaps McIntire’s oddest addition to the hotel was a museum dedicated entirely to biblical religious replicas and reconstructed faux architecture.⁸⁷ The museum housed replicas such as a full-scale sanctuary model of King Solomon’s Temple, the Ark of the Covenant, the Susa Gate, and other models of religious relics. McIntire also planned to build a 26-story replica of Solomon’s Temple of Jerusalem adjacent to the museum.⁸⁸ Eventually, McIntire’s fundamentalist followers grew tired of his eccentricities and slowly left the congregation. He faced eviction in 1974 as “Gateway to the Stars” enterprises headed for bankruptcy. But Carl McIntire did not take responsibility for the failures of the space ministry; instead, he blamed “sinister forces” and a governmental plot to “remove his presence,” from Cape Canaveral in order to avoid embarrassment from NASA when

⁸⁶ Carl McIntire, “Gateway to the Stars Pamphlet” Cape Canaveral Bible Conference, Florida, no date, 4.

⁸⁷ Carl McIntire, “Gateway to the Stars Pamphlet,” Cape Canaveral Bible Conference, Cape Canaveral, Florida, no date.

⁸⁸ “Preacher Has Plans for Cape Canaveral,” *Chicago Tribune*, March 15, 1971, 11.

Russian space experts were scheduled to arrive later in next year to participate in “the joint United States-Soviet space docking mission.”⁸⁹

As Cold War tensions slowly dwindled and the space race came to a close, the space crusade to defeat communism faded with it. The evangelical work of Carl McIntire would go on, but his eccentric desire for space ministry ultimately drove away most of his congregation. Still, evangelicalism continued to promote NASA’s space missions as a spiritual experience continuing the tradition of Christianizing the Apollo program. Even as NASA’s Skylab and Shuttle missions replaced Apollo, fundamentalists still celebrated space exploration in the name of God.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Donald Janson, “Right-Wing Cleric May Face Eviction,” *New York Times*, August 23, 1974.

⁹⁰ Lianne Hart, “Church Establishes Link Between Faith and Space,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 8, 2003.

<https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2003-feb-08-me-reignasa8-story.html>

5. CONCLUSION

The space crusade was ultimately founded on the fundamentalist End Times teachings of the atomic era and grounded on previous anti-communist campaigns by evangelical-fundamentalists. Carl McIntire held firm to his anti-communist convictions and deemed war the only possible resolution to communist terrorism and infiltration. But McIntire's definition of war is roughly loose and unpredictable, while he at times justifies a literal meaning of war, he also attributes much of the Cold War to a spiritual battle for the soul of America. His crusade against communism is anything but a physical fight, instead it is a conservative campaign centered on often fear-based ministry and leftist-communist conspiracy theory. Though McIntire's somewhat unorthodox space ministry is somewhat impractical, it is perhaps one of the most remarkable evangelical crusades of the twentieth century. The commitment to evangelical faith in an effort to combat the threat of communism through a space-themed ministry truly sets McIntire's campaign apart from that of Graham or Hargis. In an effort to defend faith from the threat of communism and atheism, Carl McIntire built his ministry on the secular grounds of Cape Canaveral and publicly endorsed a Christian space program. Though his space crusade and ministry service failed, it certainly represents just how far evangelicals were willing to go in the war against communism to protect faith from its Soviet rival.

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