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Contemporary Arts Practice and Outer Space: A Multi-Disciplinary Approach (4)

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LORD OF ROCKET, LORD OF FLIGHT: REPRESENTATIONS OF SPACEFLIGHT IN CHURCH
HYMNS

Abstract

This paper will examine the relationship between space exploration and hymnody in the context of the cultural lag between the material and non-material culture as defined by William Ogburn. This work continues my previous analysis – recently published in the *Astropolitics* journal – between space exploration and visual sacred arts and architecture, where I examined the way in which the latter managed to assimilate humankind's entry into the physical heavens as a living parable. The main question asked in that paper and in the proposed one is whether the cultural lag theory is valid in the space technology / spirituality reference frame. For the current paper I will move from the visual iconography into the realm of hymnody, examining the presence or absence of space and space-age images in church hymns of various religious traditions, their frequency, their orthodoxy within the mainstream worship and their reception by the worshippers. Hymns such as “And Have the Bright Immensities”, “God of Earth and Outer Space” (1970), the “Space Stanza” of the Navy Hymn “Eternal Father Strong to Save”, “Declare, O Heavens, the Lord of Space” (1962), “Bless Thou the Astronauts”, “God of Concrete, God of Steel” and many others will be thoroughly examined, with the aim of finding the meaning behind the use of spaceflight imagery thereby.