

Mary Baker Eddy Goes to the Moon: The Century 21 Expo, Apollo 14, and The Christian Science Monitor Microfilm

CESNUR 2019 - Turin, Italy
Re-Enchanting the World: Spiritualities and
Religions of the Third Millennium

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This paper relates to the spiritual life of an astronaut. Timely because of the 50th anniversary of the first lunar landing and the third millennium theme of the CESNUR 2019 conference, these events during the space race of the 1960s, which I recently learned of while researching the history of Christian Science branch churches in Seattle, Washington, USA, involve the Century 21 Exposition world's fair, the Apollo 14 lunar mission, and *The Christian Science Monitor* international daily newspaper. In my study of the Christian Science movement I have come to see this event of Mary Baker Eddy, its founder, going (symbolically) to the moon as a triumphant achievement at the movement's peak, and to the Christian Science world view, reason for affirming their belief in the relevance of Christian Science to a new space-faring era, affirmation of the prophetic vision of Mary Baker Eddy, and evidence of the potential for increased individual and collective human capacity through practice of the spiritual teachings of Christian Science.

Reverend Mary Baker Eddy (1821-1910) founded The First Church of Christ, Scientist, in 1879 in Boston, Massachusetts. Eddy wrote of discovering Christian Science in 1866. Her revelation was that so-called miracles like those recorded in the Bible are the operation of divine law—that there is a science to Christian healing and salvation, principles that can be understood, taught, and practiced. She described her discovery as a falling apple moment comparable to Isaac Newton's discovery of the law of gravity. Just as Newton explained his scientific theories in his revolutionary work called *The Principia*, Eddy explained hers in her Christian Science text book, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, which she likewise gave revolutionary significance. Eddy also founded an international daily newspaper, called *The Christian Science Monitor*, which has operated continuously from 1908 to the present. The Christian Science movement spread rapidly throughout the United States and the world, and by 1962, where my focus for this paper begins, just shy of one century after Eddy's discovery, there were 3,200 active church congregations, in all 50 US states and about 50 countries.

In 1962, the United States was focused on its new space program, and Alan B Shepard, Jr. (1923-1998) was front and center in that focus. It was just after Shepard's successful suborbital flight May 5, 1961, that President John F. Kennedy set the American goal of putting a man on the moon. Shepard was mentioned in Kennedy's famous speech to Congress. According to biographer Neal Thompson, Shepard considered his greatest life accomplishment to have been selected to be America's first astronaut. It proved what Thompson also concluded, that Shepard was "the best of the best of the best." Shepard's long astronaut career began with the first Mercury flight in 1961, it ended with his lunar walk with

Apollo 14 in 1971. He was one of only twelve people to ever walk on the moon, the only one of the original Mercury 7. In between his space flights, he instructed astronauts during their orbital flights, oversaw Gemini and Apollo astronaut training, including Neil Armstrong, and when Apollo 13 was in jeopardy, he oversaw the flight simulations that helped find solutions for the crews safe return. Mission Control flight director Chris Kraft later said, “Anyplace you put Alan Shepard he was going to do a perfect job.”

Shepard’s association with Christian Science was widely known during his astronaut career. At the first NASA press conference to introduce the first astronauts, when asked about faith, Shepard responded simply that he was not a member of any church but he attended the Christian Science church regularly. The first Shepard biography, published in 1962, was written by a Christian Scientist, Jewel Spangler Smaus, who at that time lived in Bow, New Hampshire, where Mary Baker Eddy was born and raised. The 1962 book included Shepard’s religious background. Smaus’ only other book was a 1966 biography on Mary Baker Eddy.

Growing up, Shepard was very close to his mother, who was a dedicated Christian Scientist. He attended Sunday School at the small Christian Science church in his hometown of Derry, New Hampshire – near Mary Baker Eddy’s birthplace and not far from Boston, Massachusetts, where Reverend Eddy established The First Church of Christ, Scientist. His wife Louise had been a classmate of his sister Polly at a boarding school and college for Christian Scientists, called The Principia. He married into a family of dedicated Christian Scientists, and during his years as an astronaut he and his wife had a close friendship with a Christian Science Teacher, one of the highest offices in the Christian Science church structure. The Shepard family moved all over the country throughout Alan’s career in the military and NASA. With every move, Louise found the nearest Christian Science church, which became her surrogate family. One of their daughters also attended The Principia, and shortly after Shepard’s first space flight, when his daughter Laura was a high school Junior, he came to speak to the Principia student body.

In 1962, a big focus for Christian Scientists everywhere was the Seattle World’s Fair, which had a futuristic “Century 21” theme, dedicated to “Man in the Space Age.” Those at the fair had the opportunity to envision life in a spacefaring civilization. The City of Seattle’s representative on the Commission that oversaw the World’s Fair project, Dorm Braman, was a Christian Scientist. He was then a city council member, and after the fair he became the next city mayor. In Seattle in 1962 there were 16 Churches of Christ Scientist, a church in essentially every district in the city, the peak number of Christian Science churches in Seattle. Between the Space Needle observation tower, which was the symbol of the world’s fair and subsequently became the symbol of Seattle, and the United States Science Pavilion, where NASA made its public debut and John Glenn’s space capsule was on display, was a two-story pavilion for Christian Science. There were 500,000 visitors to the pavilion. Shepard had been scheduled to come to the Seattle Fair to participate in a conference on peaceful uses of space, but at the last minute he was needed by NASA at Mission Control. His parents came to the fair, and they almost certainly would have made an appearance at the Christian Science pavilion. The pavilion, which was similar in architectural style to the US Science Pavilion, had exhibits focused on Mary Baker Eddy’s career, the Science of Christian healing, showing the relevance of this new religion to a scientific era,

and *The Christian Science Monitor*. The Christian Science pavilion was commemorated through a 24-page booklet advertised in *The Christian Science Monitor*.

A month before the launch date for the Apollo 14 mission, following services at Third Church of Christ, Scientist, in Houston, Texas, Shepard was approached by his wife's friend Joyce Becker. Mrs. Becker was an advertising representative for *The Christian Science Monitor*. She asked if he would take the newspaper on his moon shot. He agreed, and was given microfilm of the first issue, from 1908, in a 35 mm film can. Inside was the entire first issue, plus as many copies of the front page as could fit: 100.

Shepard valued his privacy. To my knowledge he did not publicly write or speak publicly about his spiritual views or practice, but I found a second-hand account in the June 2005 *Christian Science Sentinel* from Rick Lipsey. Lipsey gave Shepard golf lessons, played with him at a 1996 PGA golf event at Pebble Beach, and became a golf writer for *Sports Illustrated*. Here's what Lipsey said Shepard shared with him:

He said that during his Apollo 14 lunar mission in 1971, the onboard computer that gave telemetry measurements began to malfunction just as the lunar module was approaching the moon. That could have caused a disaster, because the craft was supposed to land backwards, and the astronauts needed the measurements because they couldn't see where they were going. As they approached the point of no return—the time when they had to decide whether to land on the moon or turn around—Alan thought about a phrase that he told me he often relied on in difficult situations: "When things go wrong, God will put them right." That sounds really simple, but the way Alan said it to me, I could see the phrase wasn't just words. It was a childlike prayer full of faith and trust. Back in space, the astronauts got a call from the control center in Houston just after Alan thought about that idea. An engineer had figured out the computer glitch, it was corrected, and the spacecraft landed harmoniously.

A Christian Scientist would likely interpret this statement as a testimony of the sort of healing characteristic of the practice of Christian Science.

On the lunar surface, after the landing team completed their planned assignments, Shepard attached a 6-iron to this core sample tool to create a make-shift golf club. He became the first and only astronaut to hit a golf ball on the moon, his swing captured on live video. His lunar golf swing is what he is perhaps best known for today.

The lunar landing of Apollo 14 was front page news for *The Christian Science Monitor*. And just under the main headline, a sidebar "Monitor on Moon" announced the arrival of the first issue of the paper with Apollo 14 mission commander Shepard. Although it was not specifically mentioned in the article, the first issue of *The Christian Science Monitor*, dated November 25, 1908, included an editorial by Mary Baker Eddy in which she explained the mission for this international daily newspaper.

I have given the name...[*Christian Science*] *Monitor*, to spread undivided the Science that operates unspent. The object of the *Monitor* is to injure no man, but to bless all mankind.

The first issue also included an advertisement for Eddy's primary work, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*. If any readers of the *Monitor* did not then realize that Eddy's name and words were in the first issue, they would when they received their commemorative reprint, which was actively advertised in the paper, "for all to read and treasure as a memento of special significance."

I happened to come across one of these reprints in a pile of old Christian Science literature being given away in Seattle, and this is what put me on the trail of this "Monitor on Moon" research. I'm finding to my surprise that the *Monitor's* lunar visit is not common knowledge among this generation of Christian Scientists. In fact, I have yet to find a Christian Scientist who was aware of it prior to me sharing about it. But at the time, it was a triumph for Christian Science. *The Christian Science Monitor* advertised that it had made history. The *Monitor* advertisements for the reprint suggested that even the 1908 first issue was ahead of its time.

When Shepard returned to Earth, they encapsulated the 100 copies of microfilm in Lucite, and produced special mementos. One is in the collection of The Mary Baker Eddy Library in Boston, which is in the same building as *The Christian Science Monitor* headquarters.

Ask a group of Christian Scientist if Christian Science is a religion of the third millennium, and they would enthusiastically say, yes, it is, and they might point to Christian Scientists involved in astrophysics and space exploration. Relevant to the theme of CESNUR 2019 conference, "Re-Enchanting the World: Spiritualities and Religions of the Third Millennium," I will conclude with a few quotes by Mary Baker Eddy:

The term Science, properly understood, refers only to the laws of God and to His government of the universe, inclusive of man.... A knowledge of the Science of being develops the latent abilities and possibilities of man. It extends the atmosphere of thought, giving mortals access to broader and higher realms. (*Science and Health*, 128)

From this it follows that... Christian Science enhances their endurance and mental powers, enlarges their perception of character, gives them...an ability to exceed their ordinary capacity. The human mind, imbued with this spiritual understanding, ...is capable of greater endurance, ...and requires less repose. (*Science and Health*, 128)

As human thought changes...from fear to hope and from faith to understanding...the visible manifestations will at last be man governed by Soul, not by material sense.... The mariner will have dominion over the atmosphere and the great deep, over the fish of the sea and the fowls of the air. The astronomer will no longer look up to the stars,--he will look out from them upon the universe... (*Science and Health*, 125)

Neither philosophy nor skepticism can hinder the march of the Science which reveals the supremacy of Mind. The immanent sense of Mind-power enhances the glory of Mind. Nearness, not distance, lends enchantment to this view. (*Science and Health*, 209)