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Vasquez, Bianca Alexis

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Aimee Semple McPherson: An Astronomical Stage Built by Devilish Tools

THESIS

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in History

by

Bianca Alexis Vasquez

Thesis Committee:
Professor Roland Betancourt, Chair
Assistant Professor Roberta Wue
Assistant Professor James Nisbet

2022

DEDICATION

To

my family, my friends, my professors, and my past self

in recognition of their worth and work that led me here

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Aimee Semple McPherson: An Astronomical Stage Built by Devilish Tools by

Bianca Alexis Vasquez

Master of Arts in History

University of California, Irvine, 2022

Professor Roland Betancourt, Chair

This thesis seeks to discuss the inclusion of space and technology in Aimee Semple McPherson's illustrated sermons and work. Throughout the 1930s, McPherson was able to blur the lines between religion, science, pop-culture, and performance to create a spectacle for those in attendance at the Angelus Temple in Echo Park. Her theatrical and pop-cultural elements not only gave her preaching more credibility, but also made them more relatable to a wider audience across Los Angeles County, and even the world. After receiving permission to access the Heritage Center Archives, I cross-referenced my research with materials from the Pentecostal Archives. I investigated different newspaper articles to gather more information on both the illustrated sermons and the church's interest in outer space and the great beyond. I then explored other online records of newspapers from the period to discover the intrigue in space outside of the church. Through my comparison of the articles by McPherson, the Foursquare Crusader, and other California-based publications, I gathered a better picture of technological and astronomical appreciation. Alongside the images from the Heritage Center Archives, I was able to discover

where McPherson drew her inspiration from in order to create such entertaining and thought-provoking sermons rooted in science, technology, and religion.

Introduction

In 1918, Hollywood was introduced to a charismatic Pentecostal evangelist known as Aimee Semple McPherson.¹ Sister Aimee, as she was commonly known, was one of the earliest celebrity preachers, having gathered a large following in her short time living in the United States. She sensationalized religion in a new modern way during her time. Instead of just preaching, she transformed her sermons into a performance on par with theater productions. These productions are known as her illustrated sermons. Her style was so infectious that she grew not only followers but also fans at an impressive rate. The focus of my thesis will be exploring the visual representation of Biblical narratives and their coexistence with pop culture and modern science within the theatrical performance that was an illustrated sermon. Her sermons covered several religious teachings and themes, rooted in both reality and fantasy, but for my thesis I will be addressing those which dealt with time, space, technology, and the stars. McPherson had a unique talent for weaving in what was popular and new into her sermons. In fact, it was her relationship with media and pop culture that led to the inclusion of scientific findings within the confines of her church the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel in 1927. Today there is still a hesitation to discuss science and religion together, but for McPherson these fields supported one another and helped ground the work of God in reality. Furthermore, the inclusion of science and technology contributed to the size of her audience and support.

The purpose of my research is to analyze her sermons and understand how she visually transformed biblical narratives to gain the interest of the L.A. populace that included both the

¹On Aimee Semple McPherson, see Matthew A. Sutton, *Aimee Semple McPherson and the Resurrection of Christian America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009)

skeptic and the curious. Her work was rooted in making a spectacle. The “spectacle” would capture the attention of the non-believer, intriguing them to learn more. I will analyze her sermons focusing on clocks, time, space, and the stars; moreover, I will discuss why McPherson decided to utilize these themes in her work and their effect on her church’s audience. I will first investigate her history as a Pentecostal Evangelist in Los Angeles. Afterwards, I will dive into specific illustrated sermons and inspiration relating to radio, clocks, and observatories. I will visually interpret photos and artwork of these sermons and contextualize them with written accounts of McPherson’s personal experiences that led her to design these sermons in this way. As the paper continues, I will discuss the effects astronomy had on Aimee McPherson as well as the Los Angeles pop culture scene as well. By doing so I hope to elaborate on Aimee McPherson’s interest in technology and space and portray how visually she implemented these elements to appeal to her followers, new and old. McPherson had an interest in spreading Pentecostalism through acts on stage, but she also simultaneously weaving her love for space and technology in her work. Not only did she bridge the gap between religion and science, but also translate Biblical narratives to the stage that utilized the growing modern excitement for stars, space discovery, and the heavens. It was this merging of narrative and science that grounded her preachings in reality, and showcased how astrology, astronomy, and religion could coexist and expand on one another.

Birth of the Hollywood Preacher

Aimee Semple McPherson, originally Aimee Kenedy, was born and raised in Salford, Ontario, Canada. At the age of seventeen she is said to have wandered into a Pentecostal church

in the middle of a revival in the year 1907.² Pentecostalism, as a branch of Christianity, primarily differed itself by focusing on personal relationships and experiences with God and the value of self-baptism. In that instant she was inspired by those there and devoted herself to the religion. At the same time, she met Irish preacher Robert J. Semple, who enraptured her with his words. He inspired her with his preaching, and soon they were married. Together they traveled to spread the word of Pentecostalism as self-appointed missionaries. They made their way to China while on their mission to spread Pentecostalism, but unfortunately Robert Semple would pass away two years into their marriage. After returning from missionary work, Aimee Semple went on to marry Harold S. McPherson in 1912. She attempted to find a home in domestic life but became depressed and ill.³ One night, she claimed to have heard a voice beckoning her to go on and continue to do missionary work. This moved her to return to preaching, and she was said to have healed immediately.⁴ She went on to preach by herself in Canada and New York for a period before settling down in Los Angeles in 1918. This is where she began to gain a larger following. With a desire to spread Pentecostalism to as many as she could, she went on to create the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel.

Pentecostalism was not invented by Aimee McPherson, but her illustrated sermons did bring a new wave of the religion to Los Angeles. In *Heaven Below*, Grant Wacker traces how Pentecostalism was experiencing a new Holy Ghost revival in 1911, a movement in which many new individual denominations of Pentecostalism were formed in tandem with an increased

² *American Experience-Sister Aimee*, directed by Linda Garmon, and Caroline Toth. (2007; Public Broadcasting Service, 2007), DVD.

³ *American Experience-Sister Aimee*

⁴ Sutton, *Resurrection of Christian America*, 12.

interest in the religion.⁵ There were several small groups of minorities who organized new and local congregations within the United States. These group organizations then became different radical branches of the religion which later became new denominations of Pentecostalism. McPherson broke away to make her own following, and it would eventually become the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel in 1927.⁶ A main difference between the older Pentecostal bodies and the newer wave that McPherson was a part of was their focus on a Reformed origin. Sister Aimee's Pentecostalism stipulated conversion-sanctification and Holy Ghost baptism for salvation. The older form had a different process. In the original branch of Pentecostalism, it required conversion, sanctification, and then Holy Ghost baptism to be eligible for salvation.⁷ McPherson's on the other was a shorter and simpler process. Besides the differing practices, this new era of Pentecostalism was reaching a new generation. In *Pentecostalism in America*, R. G. Robins claims that McPherson was able to spellbind a crowd with her words.⁸ Her denomination of the religion was new and effective, and by breaking the mold she set the new one for the later Pentecostals that would come after.⁹ She made a name for herself in Los Angeles by presenting herself as a preacher that had been called upon by God himself to preach the Gospel.¹⁰ As a participant of the new wave of change for Pentecostalism, McPherson would have had the liberty to experiment and preach as she saw fit. This chance for experimentation

⁵ G. Wacker, *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture* (Harvard University Press, 2009), 6.

⁶ Wacker, *Heaven Below*, 6.

⁷ Wacker, *Heaven Below*, 6.

⁸ R. G. Robins, *Pentecostalism in America* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2010), 47.

⁹ Robins, *Pentecostalism in America*, 60.

¹⁰ Robins, *Pentecostalism in America*, 60.

encouraged McPherson to find a new way to give a sermon, which would then evolve into what made her work so famous in the first place.

In a space of newfound Pentecostal traditions, what set Aimee Semple McPherson apart and heightened her impact was her ability to recontextualize and redefine Pentecostalism in a new era of technological and scientific innovation, as we shall see further. She brought a new form of Pentecostalism to the masses of Los Angeles, and she knew how to gain their attention. For McPherson the process was simple: recontextualize and redefine religion in tandem with scientific study.

By this point in time, Sister Aimee had gathered a following of devout worshippers. Technology was on her side as it helped spread her voice to the public quickly, and in turn gave the Foursquare Church more attention. The technology to thank for her success was the radio, and its utilization would have a long-standing impact on Foursquare as I shall dive into later. McPherson already had a way with words and a following, but with the help of the radio the word of her gospel began to travel even faster than before. With each sermon her following grew, and eventually Aimee decided to build a place that could house the thousands of people who were eager to listen. And so, the Angelus Temple was born. Constructed in 1923 in Echo Park Los Angeles, California, the temple was designed to hold up to 8,975 people. The temple was so grand in fact that it was acclaimed to be one of the city of Los Angeles's Seven Wonders. To witness a sermon in the temple was as spectacular as being invited to a red-carpet premiere. While McPherson did enjoy seeing so many interested in her work, she found herself unsatisfied with the number of people that wanted to convert to Pentecostalism. While her sermons were

high in attendance, in the early days many would show up but never return for another.¹¹ Many would be intrigued to hear Sister Aimee at least once but would not gravitate to the religion. McPherson found herself trying to rework her sermon style so that she could motivate people to stay. With her wit and love for the stage she found her answer: the illustrated sermon.

On the day that she originally encountered Pentecostalism for the first time, the young Aimee was on her way to school for a school performance.¹² McPherson had always had an interest in performing and the arts. Her daughter, Roberta Semple Salter, noted that her mother McPherson had always had a love for the stage and wanted to be an actor since her high school years.¹³ McPherson grew up thinking the theater would be her life. Even after she focused her entirety on Pentecostalism, her love for performing didn't go away. McPherson took that love for the stage and brought it to her sermons and realized that joy of performing was the very key to inspiring people to return to the Angelus Temple. Her appreciation for theatrics and investment in Pentecostalism combined to create a new style of sermon. Furthermore, McPherson and the Angelus Temple resided in Los Angeles, where starlets and theater thrived. The atmosphere was geared towards entertainment, which in turn would propel McPherson to shape her sermons to this mold.

Sister Aimee had a way of merging religion with entertainment. Her illustrated sermons were in summary a theatrical performance that had music, costumes, and elaborate and decorative sets that set the stage for McPherson to preach on. By designing elaborate stage productions, she enraptured her audience to stay and join the church. She planned out every

¹¹ *Excerpts from "Aimee" on Illustrated Sermons*, ASM Collection Illustrated Sermons. Heritage Archives, The Foursquare Church, Los Angeles, CA.

¹² *American Experience-Sister Aimee*

¹³ Sutton, *Resurrection of Christian America*, 74.

detail in her sermons and kept tight control over the creative process.¹⁴ Sister Aimee was able to produce an industry around the creation of her illustrated sermons. She mobilized designers, carpenters, illustrators, painters, and other production crew workers to create new set designs, costumes, and lighting for her weekly sermons. The work that went into these sermons was not very different from an elaborate Broadway production; the only real difference was the amount of time to rehearse. Most of the time there wasn't any rehearsing at all, or even a script. If there was a script, it was often completed just hours before the sermon premiered. If there was special music needed, McPherson took it upon herself to write it. She was the creative director of the whole operation. She had a vision and a team ready to help bring it to reality. McPherson claimed the purpose of these sermons was to help convert new followers. She wanted to leave an impact on those who came to visit her sermons. Her first illustrated sermons were very subpar in her mind compared to her later work, but anyone attending the temple could see all the work she put into each display.

“Such spectacular sermons captured the attention of the press and the nation, drawing thousands of men and women through the Angelus Temple doors, where visitors and members alike encountered a preacher unlike anything their generation had witnessed before. Building on a long evangelical tradition, McPherson employed drama and the latest technology to market herself and her message to the public. She embodied faith before her constituency's very eyes in these illustrated sermons, which were the key to her success mere blocks from Hollywood. Just as important, however, was the content of her messages, which never deviated from classic revivalist themes. Hollywood spectacle blended seamlessly with traditional Protestantism on the Angelus Temple stage.”¹⁵

Matthew Sutton states that McPherson's knowledge of the technology market, along with the interest of the average Hollywood enthusiast, came together to create a name for Sister Aimee

¹⁴ Sutton, *Resurrection of Christian America*, 75.

¹⁵ Sutton, *Resurrection of Christian America*, 69.

and the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel. Her efforts gained a lot of attention, which in turn drew more curiosity from more people. The fame of her illustrated sermon spread fast in Los Angeles, so much so that it was declared to be a go-to tourist destination. This hype and sensationalization only drew more and more people with each performance. Whether they came back for another sermon was up to them; however, it was difficult to not to want to become a devout follower after seeing Aimee in her element. The Foursquare Church saw an increase in people converting to Pentecostalism, but while there were many singing praises, there were also a fair number of critics. In his work, Sutton claimed that there were those who looked down upon her usage of modern technology and eccentric Hollywood performances.¹⁶ Was she truly a devout if she utilized the sinful entertainment and performative tactics of the Hollywood scene? To Sister Aimee, there was no contradiction between her business tactics and the engagement of Hollywood-esque programming.

The Devil's Tools

If there was a piece of technology or form of entertainment that could help her with spreading the word, Aimee was invested. In every sense of the word, Aimee McPherson was a businesswoman. She knew how to use what was available to her to further her work, including theatrical technology. Though business practices were looked down upon within Pentecostalism, Aimee saw them as a tool to further religious gospel. Business actions and better technology were what caught people's attention and were what would bring people to the temple. She believed that she could use "the devil's tools to tear down the devil's house."¹⁷ These tools included, but were not limited to, stage equipment, lighting equipment, costumes, and backdrops.

¹⁶ Sutton, *Resurrection of Christian America*, 70.

¹⁷ Sutton, *Resurrection of Christian America*, 70.

The majority of the written accounts on the creative process of these sermons come from Thomas Eade. Eade was a friend of McPherson who helped design the illustrated sermons every week at the temple. All of these are vital within theater production, and they were what made the illustrated sermons so impactful. Without these tools, the enticement and performative elements would not have been the same. The “devil’s tools” were necessary to further emphasize her telling of the word of God.

Aimee McPherson gave several illustrated sermons in her time as a preacher, preaching every Sunday from 1915 to 1944. Each one had a different set design or theme ranging from fairy tales to military life. Their messages varied from the value of a soul to retelling of Biblical parables. They were a spectacle that drew many crowds from all over. While Aimee had some recurring themes in her sermons, each one was unique in its own way. Each set design that followed the other was unique in its grandeur and design. One particularly influential sermon was dedicated to the radio itself.

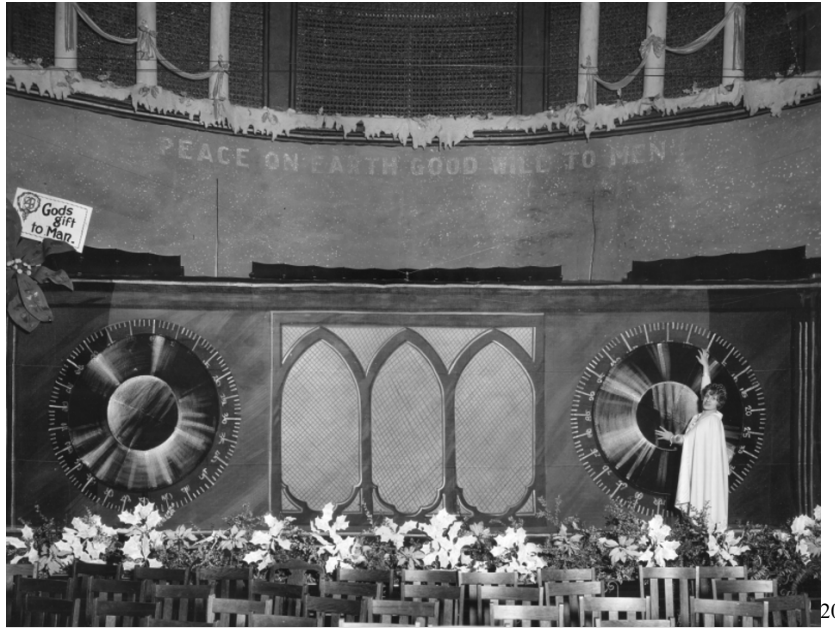
The radio was the focus of the “Tuning In, the Voice of the Ages” sermon.¹⁸ In the archival collection there were two images of the sermon: an illustrated copy and a photograph. In the illustrated copy, we see Aimee standing in front of a radio as tall as she is, and inside the speakers we see a procession of people in the desert. This image could allude to the crossing of the desert by Moses or to other Biblical pilgrimages. In published records from the Heritage Archive, the large radio filled the entire length of the stage. In comparison to an actual photo of the sermon, we see that the illustration doesn’t differ that much from the set on stage. The only visible difference is that the speakers in the photo appear flat with a painted texture while the

¹⁸ Sermon Synopsis by Thomas Eade. ASM Collection Illustrated Sermons. Heritage Archives, The Foursquare Church, Los Angeles, CA.

illustration depicts the speakers as windows to a desert scene. Going back to the written accounts of the sermon from the archive, we learn that while the console was made of cardboard, the audience viewed the surface as being made from real wood. In the *Foursquare Crusader*, it is difficult to see whether the newspaper would publish an illustrated copy of the sermon or a photograph. Even so, the illustrated copy appears to be similar in replication to the stage version so that the newspaper could use them interchangeably to reference. This insinuates that some details will disappear in replications. For example, the center section was transparent. During the sermon, Aimee would turn the dials of the radio, which would rotate when she touched them, and a light would shine behind the large cardboard prop. The light would then reveal different religious scenes, including a scene from Noah's Ark. Unfortunately, the other scenes from this sermon have not been recorded, but we know that they were painted on a long panorama that ended in the second coming of Christ. These images portray messages of rebirth and renewal, leading up to an era of judgment.



¹⁹ *Figure 1*



This illustrated sermon was a visual representation of the power of the radio. The panoramic scenes are all drawn from Biblical stories, with them painted in the speaker portion of the console, it is a visual representation of the different religious narratives that followers can listen to and learn about. This is not to deter people from coming to the temple; rather, it presents another option. The listeners of this sermon learn that they can continue to listen to Aimee's teachings outside the temple's walls. The sermon depicts the radio as not to be looked down upon, but rather utilized. All people had to do was turn the dial to find the proper channel.

As I mentioned before, Aimee's love for the radio stretched beyond her Sunday night preachings. That intrigue for the radio found its way into her everyday work. In the *Foursquare Crusader*, Aimee wrote about why the radio was so important for her work. The *Foursquare Crusader* was a newspaper published by the church which announced upcoming events, news within the Angelus Temple, religious advice, and several passages from or about McPherson regarding her work and sermons. In February 1927, the *Foursquare Crusader* devoted an entire

²⁰ *Figure 2*

section that championed the radio within the sphere of religion and the church. This article was entitled "Radio the Marvel of the Air."²¹



**THE VOICE WITH TEN
MILLION TONGUES
SAVES LIFE**

**Hope—Healing—Comes
Over the Air**



CONGRATULATIONS, KFSG!

Thro' my window each night, I see
As by my bed I kneel to pray
Blazing red letters KFSG
Just over across the way.

The Word as it comes from their
tower,
Is a blessing to thousands we know.
God bless the anointed who shower
These prayers as over the air they go.

The sick, the afflicted and blind
Alike have been cured thro' its Word
While also the sinner will find
Salvation thro' it from the Lord.

God bless our radio station
With its blazing letters of red
On this its third celebration
And long may the hurry be fed!
—LILLIAN MARTIN.

RADIO THE MARVEL OF THE AIR

PENETRATING the thickest walls, scaling the highest heights and descending to the deepest depths, wherever there is a sufferer or a shut-in, comes the message of Radio KFSG, the missionary station of Angelus Temple, with its message of hope, salvation and healing. Never since the history of the world has there been such a marvelous opportunity for preaching the Gospel. While over two other stations they hear jazz, revelry and amusement, this station is devoted exclusively to the promulgation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Friends that are interested in spreading the Gospel cannot do better than support this station. Week days the upkeep is \$25.00; Sundays and holidays \$50.00. Multiplied souls saved will reward the donors.

**DYING WOMAN HEALED
OVER KFSG RADIO**

Hovered Between Life and Death for six months; kept alive by hypodermics and whiskey. Radio Prayer Wins Victory over Death.

Twenty-one months ago Sister Essie Tremble was raised from her deathbed and given abundant life and strength after having suffered for 33 years with tuberculosis of the hip. The glorious thing about this strange story is, it is true.

For six months Sister Tremble had laid in bed, hovering between life and death, her anxious loved ones fearing every moment to hear of her departure to the Land Beyond. Efficient medical men had done all they could do for her. She had six running sores on her hip which refused to heal. The poison from these had gone through her entire body and from a human standpoint there was no hope for her recovery.



The case is hopeless
I can do nothing for you

Given Up to Die!
DOCTORS had done all they could for me. The last six months I had been there they had kept me alive with hypodermics and whiskey. The poison from those running sores had gone to every part of my body. I knew I would never get up. My heart was so weak that I would hover for hours between life and death. My family was expecting to hear of my death any minute.



KFSG

WE HAD a radio in our home. Thank God for the radio! As I heard the message that Jesus Christ could save me and heal my body I looked up and cried, "O Lord, have mercy on me."

As they prayed for me over the Sunshine Hour, He remembered me.

Nurse and Sister Dismayed
AS SOON as the hour was over I stepped out on faith. When I called for my clothes they thought that the end had indeed come. My nurse was astonished and my sister very much surprised, but as they helped me put my clothes on I praised Him for deliverance.

What Shall It Profit?
A MAN who lived back east was a great man for earning money and getting arceage. He heard that by going west he could get twice as much land as he had in the east. Then

Step Out in Faith

AS I STARTED to walk about the room my strength came to me and I went all over the house praising the Lord. I ate a large dinner, came to the church and testified for the Master, dismissed my nurse and have never been in bed a day since.

Sores Disappear
THE Lord has healed all those six sores, what no earthly doctor could do for me. The Lord has filled me to overflowing with His love, baptized me with the Holy Spirit. I promised I would give my life to Him. I gave Him my heart, my life, my all and He has been so wonderful to me and He has given me strength every day to come out here to this Temple to testify for Him. I mean to go all the way through with Him and serve Him as long as He gives me strength. Bless His Holy Name!—MRS. ESSIE TREMBLE.

REQUESTS FOR PRAYER

"With Thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God."

To ask is to receive. The Christian "ask" should be spelled "take." God's supply is sufficient for our every need; He is able and willing to do vastly more than we can even think of. In our daily life we need only make our requests known, with joy and thanksgiving, to the ones who love us, and if they are able, they immediately grant the request. To make a request known unto God is to have it immediately granted. God's supply is sufficient for every need, physical, mental and spiritual. That "He is able" is evidenced by the answers that come as a result of constant prayer in the Watch Tower of Angelus Temple.

"Pray on for another that ye may be healed."

Mrs. W. P. Smith, salvation and healing, she is nearly blind.

Mrs. Gray Forsling, Nebraska, her mother needs healing.

Daughter and her husband and grand-daughter, backsliding.

Mr. and Mrs. C. R. Smith that the way will be opened for them to come to Angelus Temple.

Pray earnestly for a disabled soldier to find work.

Mrs. Lillie LaBreck of Houston, been

**WHY PRAYER WAS
UNANSWERED**

By A. G. GARR

If you are not walking with the Lord, and something in your life is displeasing the Lord, you can naturally suppose God isn't going to hear your prayer. In the first place, clean up your own life as far as possible. If you have some hidden sins, some old scores, some old grudges hanging on, get them out of the way.

I remember a man I prayed for in Tulare who had a cancer in his mouth. It had affected the glands in his neck until they were larger than his head. He was suffering something terrible, and they sent for me to come out and pray for him. I drove out there one afternoon and prayed for him. I asked him the usual questions, if he thought the Lord was able to heal him and if he would give himself to the Lord. He agreed to all of them. I prayed for him and the pain left.

He came to the meeting and testified in a wonderful way. In twenty-four hours he was in as much pain as ever and sent for me to come out, which I did and again the pain left him. I think it must have been half a dozen times that I went out and prayed for him, for it seemed to relieve him so much and I wanted to do all I could for the poor man.

We finished the meetings and left. Six months afterward I went back through there and asked about the man and they told me he had died two months before. The doctors said he was hopeless and the last man had given him his money back and he might as well go home for he was beyond all human help.

He died. I was so puzzled, so bothered, that I didn't know what in the world to do. I felt ashamed of

Accompanied by illustrations, this article describes how a woman named Essie Tremble rose from her deathbed after hearing McPherson's sermon over the radio in the hospital. According to the article, Tremble was in the hospital for six months and doctors were unable to help her recover from her tuberculosis. Tremble asked the nurse to call the Angelus Temple, requesting prayers. Allegedly, Aimee McPherson prayed for her over the radio, and within the hour

²¹ International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, "Radio the Marvel of the Air," *Foursquare Crusader*, February 12, 1927, 5.

²² Figure 3

Tremble was up from her bed. The Lord had done what the nurses could not: He had healed her. The article closes with a reminder to readers that they can request prayers as well. This publication corroborates the power of the radio that McPherson glorified, staging this here as the ability to help those that were not able to make it to the temple due to their ailments. This idea of healing through preaching was a critical belief in the early twentieth century, especially in Pentecostalism. Part of what drew Sister Aimee to the religion that day she wandered into the church was the powerful usage of words and the exclamation of speaking in tongues.²³ McPherson claimed that this technological deliverance of her voice made the Word of the Lord more accessible.²⁴ While the radio may have been a symbol of the new technological age, the Foursquare Church promoted it as technology that benefited those in the most need and served as a crucial tool for McPherson's evangelical work. Before she died, McPherson was even in the process of getting her license to become a television performer to help people beyond the limitations of the radio.²⁵

Sister Aimee dedicated another one of her sermons to a clock. The sermon was called "It's Later than You Think," and was given on September 25, 1941. Similar to "Tuning In," this sermon centered around another giant set piece. A giant clock was placed center stage, the hands of the clock about to strike twelve.

²³ *American Experience-Sister Aimee*

²⁴ International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, "Radio the Marvel of the Air," 5.

²⁵ *American Experience-Sister Aimee*



It's Later Than You Think

26

This sermon differs from “Tuning In” mostly because of the landscape painted behind it. In “Tuning In,” the radio is placed in front of closed curtains on the stage. Here, there has been an effort to place the clock outside of the realm of the Angelus Temple. A bright blue sky backdrop covers the back of the stage, with green hills painted on the horizon. This visually conveys that this giant clock is out in the open. It is so out of place in the lush green as to suggest that if a passerby would see such a sight in person, it would be hard to miss. McPherson is trying to express to her audience that the day of judgment is approaching. This was one of her favorite topics: the second coming of Christ. The public and those of the church needed to be aware of the major signs. The clock itself displays the hands about to strike twelve indicating that not much time is remaining. At the same time, the clock acts as a metaphor, stating that the new technological age is on its way. This industrial wave is hard to ignore due to its large impact;

²⁶ *Figure 4*

furthermore, people should not act as if it doesn't exist. A new age of preaching and Pentecostalism was fast approaching, and Aimee was at the front leading the way. Along with these sermons, McPherson gave several other sermons that had a similar theme centered on technology, time, and the railroad. Some of these were "The Clock Strikes One," "Eternity Express," "Clear the Track," and "On Borrowed Time" to name a few. While we do not have information on each of these sermons, they do share the same ideas of impending time and arrival. For McPherson, it was about expressing the scheduled second coming of God, arriving as if like clockwork.

These "devil's tools," as McPherson called them, along with the other production elements, were seen by critics as an odd way to teach the word of God. Props were overly exaggerated in size, and so much detail went into the stage elements that it seemed more fitting for a theater production than a Sunday night sermon. Sister Aimee acknowledged the oddity of it all but embraced it. These tools were what gained the attention of the public, and they allowed her to relate her teachings to everyday life. For these particular sermons, the overly exaggerated props were the attention grabber. This in turn prompted people to stay and listen; they wanted to know what these exaggerated and technology-focused props meant. The technology also allowed her to help more people; the radio allowed her to reach more people than other preachers were able to before. Technology, as well as the coming of the Lord, were an imminent and unavoidable wave approaching the present. In McPherson's hands, the "devilish tools" constructed a new style of preaching. This style was born through both her acute understanding of the radio's ability to galvanize mass audiences and the stage's ability to visualize what the radio could only do through sound and word. If the new wave of entertainment technology could resonate with so many people, then the mysteries of space do the same.

God's Observatory

Clocks and radios were not the only inspiration for Aimee McPherson. Common recurring themes within her sermons related to stars, space, and the voice of God from beyond the galaxy. Just as she used the reach of the radio, McPherson was drawn to the affective allure of astronomy, to how new discoveries within the field and new technologies of observation, like the telescope, could produce other modes of accessing the divine. One of McPherson's most notable sermons on space was entitled "God's Observatory."²⁷ It was given on the Sunday evening of April 22, 1928. An illustrated miniature image details the design behind the performance.



The Heavens Declare The Glory

28

²⁷ In Thomas Eade's Slides from the Archive, this sermon is also known as "The Heavens Declare the Glory"

²⁸ *Figure 5*

The backdrop was painted to mimic the starry night sky, a blue galaxy shimmering above Sister Aimee. As the *Foursquare Crusader* goes on to describe, under the heading “The Coming of the Lord”:

“So next Sunday night amid swinging stars and turning satellites and swinging telescopes Sister McPherson will tell an absorbingly interested audience about the signs of the times and the coming of the Lord.”²⁹

The painted stars simultaneously represent the heavens above. In front of the sky and lining the bottom of the stage were a collection of bushes. The foliage suggests the location of the scene. There are also painted mountain peaks behind the shrubbery. It is very reminiscent of the shrubbery and hills of California; furthermore, it similar to the locations of observatories near the temple. In the newspaper article prior to the sermon, it notes that this fictional observatory was on Mount Zion. Mount Zion, the highest point in Jerusalem, features prominently in Christianity and its branches. Furthermore, there was a Mount Zion hiking trail located in Los Angeles. This trail is relatively close and converges with the Mount Wilson trail. Whether this inspired McPherson or not, this grounds the fictional observatory, as its location is linked to two trails and mountainous terrain that the audience could visit outside the Angelus Temple.

The main set piece was a dome structure that was cut in half so that the inside could be seen by the audience. Little antennas popped up from the top of the dome, with McPherson standing up on a stool to reach the viewing lens. The construction team apparently were puzzled for some time; how were they going to make a large observatory dome on the stage and still have

²⁹ International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, "Busy Week Ahead for Pastor, People," *Foursquare Crusader*, April 18, 1928, 8.

McPherson visible to the audience? They came up with the solution to make the cross section of the dome, so that it could still be grand in size and not hide her from the audience of the temple.

In the *Foursquare Crusader*, McPherson often made references to astronomy. For instance, she references telescopes several times, often using them as metaphors for looking up to the heavens. To McPherson, the stars seemed to speak another language. They were lights in the heavens, but now McPherson argued, according to science the stars were vocalizing.

McPherson repeatedly deployed this idea in her sermons and teachings. As one account of her sermons tells us,

“When he spoke of the time when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of god shouted for joy”. Scientists now tell us that it is true the stars are actually vocal. Their powerful radio telescopes can penetrate beyond the range of light thus enabling them to listen to the stars as well as see them. With their giant dish antennas they catch radio waves emitted by the stars- although the human ear is not sensitive enough to catch the sound waves yet scientists now tell us that it is true. Stars are actually vocal.”³⁰

Located in Echo Park, the Angelus Temple was situated amongst the key observatories of its time, including the Griffith, Mount Wilson, and Lowe Observatories. McPherson wrote about visiting these observatories when not working at the temple, a fact documented across the pages of the *Foursquare Crusader*. After her visits, McPherson would use the church’s newsletters to detail what she saw and tie it into her exegetical teachings. In 1923 for example the *Angelus Temple at Echo Park Bulletin*, another weekly publication by Foursquare, posted a story entitled “The Mt. Lowe Outing,” written by Sister Aimee herself.³¹ This bulletin post narrates how a group outing was scheduled for Crusaders to meet up at the observatory for a prayer meeting and Bible study. Around two hundred people showed up to participate, and after a long day of prayer

³⁰ Slide descriptions by Thomas Eade, ASM Collection Illustrated Sermons. Heritage Archives, The Foursquare Church, Los Angeles, CA.

³¹ A. S. McPherson, "The Mt. Lowe Outing," *Angelus Temple Bulletin*, 1923.

they sat and observed the sky. McPherson discussed how thrilled she felt as she used the telescope to view the planet Jupiter. She enjoyed the sensation of witnessing the Earth turn and learn how stars were balls of fire in the sky. At the end of the bulletin, McPherson comments on how they were told that many stars were even larger than the Earth. After learning this, she asked the question “What is man, O Lord, that Thou art mindful of him?” directly referencing the New King James Version of Psalm 8:4.³² If space was full of so much that made mankind seem so little in comparison, why did God care for man? By posing these questions to her readers, McPherson invites them to do the same. Critically here, she is not discrediting or villainizing astronomy as somehow oppositional to Biblical teaching. Instead, the outing invited people to visit the observatory as a site for contemplation and prayer. McPherson actively wanted her congregation to engage with astronomy, turning to the cutting-edge new technologies of astronomical study as implements for the contemplation of God. The 1900s saw a construction period of observatories in California. Within a thirty-mile radius of Echo Park the Lowe Observatory in 1894, the Mount Wilson Observatory in 1904, and the Griffith Observatory in 1935 sprung up amongst a number of small and private observatories throughout the 1900s.³³ These observatories were there and close by for a family vacation, and McPherson wanted to encourage her followers to engage with the blooming interest of the galaxy that was in their backyards. Even beyond the *Foursquare Crusader's* repeated usage of space as a discursive tool and metaphor for divine marvel and contemplation, the newsletter would also report new

³² McPherson, "The Mt. Lowe Outing."

³³ For more on Lowe Observatory, see "The Mount Lowe Observatory," |, last modified April 23, 2012, <https://www.mountlowe.org/mount-lowe-history/the-mount-lowe-observatory/>.

astronomical discoveries. These included the birth of new stars and observations from scientists on the mounts in Los Angeles and the rest of California.

In the 1900s, newspapers in California began to report on new space observations, as well as astronomy-based research grants and tourism. This meant Echo Park, and more importantly Aimee McPherson, was surrounded by space news. In Southern California, many newspapers featured reports on Mount Wilson Observatory. In 1904, the *Californian* included an article entitled "Scientists to Study the Sun."³⁴ This article spectacularly announced the construction of the observatory on Mount Wilson, funded by a sensational grant from the Carnegie Institute of about \$150,000 for the solar observatory and its maintenance. The observatory was finished in 1908; McPherson would move to Los Angeles ten years later. In the *Daily News* from 1933, Arthur B. Tebbets reported on Mount Wilson Observatory.³⁵ He described the 100-inch telescope and how it was the largest telescope in the world. He invited people to come and witness this telescope and the observatory. To stir up interest, he mentions that there are more forms of accommodations and amusement beyond the observatory proper, detailing how Mount Wilson is a beautiful place to hike and see wildlife. The location, telescope, and outing were translated into McPherson's sermon in 1928.

The interest in space and astronomy in America often stemmed from an interest in entertainment. In *Space and the American Imagination*, Howard E. McCurdy argues that to many Americans, space was not meant to be real.³⁶ Space was seen as a fantasy setting for fiction and

³⁴ "Scientists to Study the Sun," *The Californian*, December 22, 1904, 1.

³⁵ A. B. Tebbets, "World's Largest Telescope Seen on Mount Wilson," *Daily News*, April 27, 1933, 8.

³⁶ Howard E. McCurdy, "Making Space and Flight Seem Real," in *Space and the American Imagination* (Baltimore: JHU Press, 2011), 35.

fictional stories, such as *From the Earth to the Moon* and *War of the Worlds*.³⁷ Before the construction of Los Angeles's observatories, Americans had already been fascinated by space. By the early 1900s there had been a plethora of different science fiction books published, and while America was not the origin of the genre it was home to a wave of new science fiction material.³⁸ These included stories of people exploring the moon to find extraterrestrials and other monsters such as unicorns or bat people. Several magazines published adventure stories of space exploration, and many more magazines started to compete for public interest. These writers did not represent space based on contemporary scientific studies or known facts, but rather they used space as a backdrop for epic fantasy tales that captivated the imagination. This all amounted to a golden age of science fiction, which peaked in the 1930s upon the announcement of the first wave of T.V space reports.³⁹ While rockets carrying humans did not come until the 1960s, these reports discussed developments in aerospace engineering and how that could potentially lead to human space travel in the future.

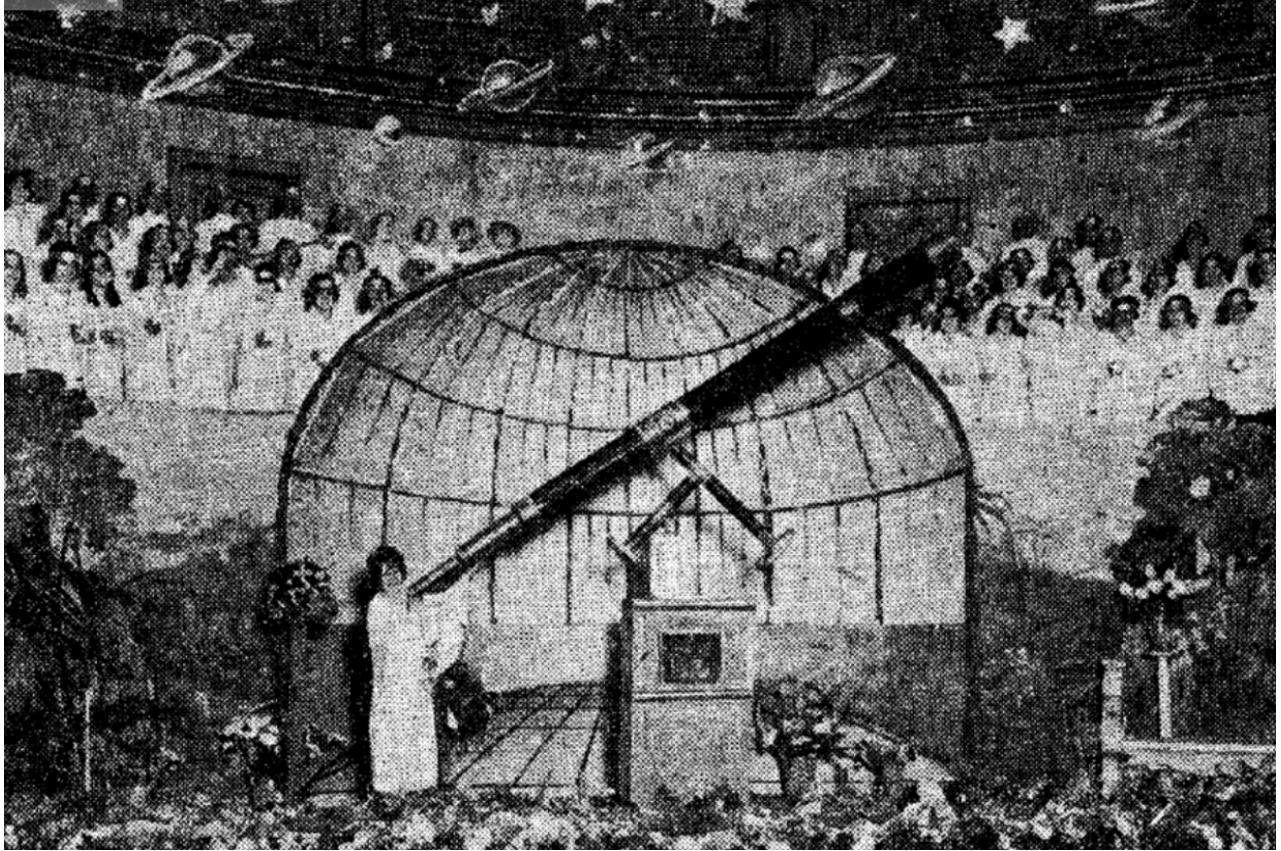
This is not to say that science fiction and these hypotheticals based in science weren't met without skepticism or its critics. In fact, people were reluctant to engage with astronomy and science. There were even those who tried to not associate themselves with the new genre.⁴⁰ Regardless, human space travel began to make its way into popular culture outside the box of science fiction fanatics. If rockets were able to make it to space, people wanted to know about it. Rockets were not fictional now; they were concrete items that were based in real world mechanics and engineering.

³⁷ McCurdy, *Space and the American Imagination*, 34.

³⁸ McCurdy, *Space and the American Imagination*, 34.

³⁹ McCurdy, *Space and the American Imagination*, 35.

⁴⁰ McCurdy, *Space and the American Imagination*, 37.



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During this period, whether it was science fiction, newsprint, or tourism, Californians and McPherson were living in the height of local astronomy. Just as she took inspiration from entertainment and technology, the realm of astronomy was a huge inspiration for her work. In her illustrated sermons McPherson was also ready to use the vastness of space as her backdrop. This time the stage was inside of the Angelus Temple. According to the *Foursquare Crusader*, this sermon came at the end of a long and busy week for Sister Aimee.⁴² The newspaper states that she had planned to preach every day of that week, leading up to the grand illustrated sermon

⁴¹ *Figure 6*

⁴² International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, "Busy Week Ahead for Pastor, People," *Foursquare Crusader*, April 18, 1928, 8.

on Sunday night. By detailing the plans of the fabulous preacher, the article seeks to garner interest and excitement for the sermon about to be described.

“Record crowds will throng the streets and clamor for admission as usual. The musical program will be spirited and evangelistic as ever. But the workers who are assisting the pastor in the preparation of the illustrations for her messages, predict a greater cloudburst of blessing and power and soul winning than ever before.”⁴³

Regarding “God’s Observatory,” Thomas Eade recounts McPherson asking her stage crew to construct a giant telescope.⁴⁴ She wanted this telescope to be approximately twelve to fifteen feet long. The setting was an observatory, but the sermon was focused on the recurring theme of the second coming of Christ. Prior to this, McPherson had taken several trips to many observatories, including the Mount Wilson Observatory. At the time, Wilson Observatory was the largest observatory on the West Coast. However, even more significantly, when McPherson composed her sermon in 1928, the 100-inch Hooker Telescope was under the leadership of the famed astronomer Edwin Hubble. During this period, Hubble’s research was demonstrating that the universe expanded beyond the confines of the Milky Way Galaxy, first publishing these results in the *New York Times* in 1924 and eventually in a scientific journal in 1929. Thus, McPherson’s sermon appears amidst some of the most critical developments in modern astronomy, being undertaken by Hubble at Mount Wilson. With science fiction, observatory tourism, and technological space reports gaining traction, McPherson and her followers were surrounded in an atmosphere full of astronomical interest. This interest gave McPherson the perfect opportunity to weave her sermon with the growing space curiosity in Los Angeles.

⁴³ International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, "Busy Week Ahead for Pastor, People," 8.

⁴⁴ Slide descriptions by Thomas Eade, ASM Collection Illustrated Sermons. Heritage Archives, The Foursquare Church, Los Angeles, CA.

In the *Foursquare Crusader* leading up to the sermon, the newspaper details that the construction team were explicitly told to create an observatory on the stage just like the one on Mount Wilson, describing with bombastic excitement:

“Sister had announced that she desired them to build an observatory like the one on Mount Wilson, telescope, stars and all. From the midst of this lofty and inspiring setting she was to preach a sermon on the second coming of Jesus Christ and the sign of the times. How were they to build an observatory that would permit the speaker to be seen and yet permit the use of the telescopes which she would desire to use?”⁴⁵

We can see this influence in the final details, mostly due to the height and intensity of the telescope design. In many newspapers from the time, Wilson’s telescope was listed as the largest in the world. If Sister Aimee wanted a telescope as big as the stage in her sermon, the choice was far more than just to shock the audience. There was a plethora of observatories near Echo Park, but she told her team to take influence from Mount Wilson. The observatory was constructed in 1904 and was the oldest out of the others in the area. There is a powerful meaning for McPherson to use the most powerful and largest telescope as reference in her sermon focused on the future second coming of God. As mentioned earlier Thomas Eade was a close acquaintance of McPherson, and he was left in charge to handle the set design and construction. He recounts that McPherson would tell him her ideas for the next sermon following the previous Sunday. After hearing about her vision for the illustrated sermon, he would then draw up sketches.

Typically, McPherson would wear a white dress with a blue cape during the regular sermons for the week, but on Sunday she would wear a costume befitting the theme.⁴⁶ There are no notes on her attire during “God’s Observatory,” so we can assume that she was dressed in her iconic attire. If she was, it would imply to the audience that there is no fictional aspect to this

⁴⁵ International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, "Busy Week Ahead for Pastor, People"

⁴⁶ Lr. Luarte’s letter response on Gospel Techniques by Aimee McPherson. Heritage Archives, The Foursquare Church, Los Angeles, CA.

illustration. This outfit was her everyday wear in the temple, so her wearing it on the observatory stage suggests that her normal attire is suitable to traverse this fictional building. It once again helps persuade the audience to visit observatories themselves.

In the following week after the sermon, Foursquare reported on the crowd's reaction on Sunday night. The audience that night found the setting very beautiful and once again a spectacle in the Angelus Temple.

“This was Angelus Temple’s platform last Sunday night. Inspiring! Beautiful! Artistic! Sister McPherson is looking through the glass, while the observatory looms up behind. Surrounding is the lovely settings so characteristic of these famous illustrated sermons.”⁴⁷

In this article we see a photo version of the sermon. It is very similar to the illustration version, but now we see some differences. The sky of the stage is filled with people sitting in a choir with shooting stars above them. The illusion of the night sky is not as strong as in the illustration version, but it is still there.

While the sermon was given in 1928, McPherson did not stop discussing observatories or telescopes in her writings. In an article from *Foursquare Crusader* entitled “The Book of Books” from 1938, McPherson discusses another visit to Wilson observatory. She tells her readers about the scientists hard at work behind giant telescopes as they study the heavens above.

“Have you ever visited the observatory at Mount Wilson? Just a few miles from our City of the Angels, Los Angeles, there is a fascinating observatory where scientists stand beside huge telescopes that sweep the sky and mark down their findings as they study the heavens. Very recently it was my pleasure to visit the observatory there, and it was quite interesting to see the various instruments thus employed.”⁴⁸

⁴⁷ International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, "God's Observatory! Look Through this Telescope!," *Foursquare Crusader*, April 25, 1928, 3.

⁴⁸ International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, ""The Book of Books"," *Foursquare Crusader*, March 16, 1938, 5.

McPherson notes how she was given a tour of the facilities, marveling at the instruments inside. She makes several analogies in this section of the *Foursquare Crusader* between the cosmos and the Bible. She claims that the language of the Bible is like a mirror, reflecting back the word of God. This mirror creates the telescope of faith, allowing us to see it. McPherson claims that this parallel to science looking into the sky, as people look up to the sky for God's guidance. We have the telescope of faith in our hands, we just need to turn it Heaven-ward to read the answer.

In the extant list of sermons documented in the Foursquare Heritage Archive, many of the titles included references to the heavens, the stars, and telescopes. One of these sermons was "Shaking Down the Stars" which was a reference to a popular song by the name "Shake Down the Stars." The song's lyrics subtly reference religious themes:

I gave you my arms, my lips, my heart,
My love, my life, my all;
But the best that I had to offer you
I found was all too small.

Crush every rose,
Hush every prayer,
Break every vow,
Do it now!
I know I cannot live without you,
Shake down the stars.⁴⁹

This is once again a prime example of how Sister Aimee used popular culture to better relate her work to her audience. Written in 1940 by Eddie De Lange and Jimmy Van Heusen, the song speaks the words of an enthralled lover wishing to give their everything to their partner. For Eddie De Lange, his lover is their whole world, and he would do everything for them.

McPherson takes this song and transforms it to the love for God. We do not have a transcript for

⁴⁹ De Lange, Eddie and Van Heusen, Jimmy. "Shake Down the Stars."1940.

this sermon; however, much can be inferred from its title. By naming the sermon “Shaking Down the Stars,” McPherson expresses to the audience that the sermon would follow a similar thematic script to that of the song that shares the name. McPherson transformed the song’s meaning, using it in a more religious context in the Angelus Temple. McPherson had notably done other sermons about love, one time even depicting herself as a “bride of God.”⁵⁰ With this love song in the title for her sermon, she is subtly expressing to her followers to act out the lyrics and give their all to God. The lines “hush every prayer, break every vow, “depict a lover whose desire causes them to cross the bounds of religious propriety. Prayers are hushed and vows, either religious or marital, are urged to be broken. The lyrics are an inversion of piety in the face of amorous attraction. McPherson chooses to invest the song’s logic by transforming this attraction into love for God. While this song advocates for breaking vows, McPherson once again took what would be frowned upon and subverted the meaning. The song, and perhaps the sermon as well, appears to reference the Book of Ephesians Chapter 5. Ephesians 5:22 states “Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord.”⁵¹ Verse 25 goes on to say “Husbands, love your wives, in the same way Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” Just as she did with the radio, she recontextualizes “Shake Down the Stars” so that more people can relate to her sermons. This sermon was given in the 1940s, but McPherson’s fascination with space occurred long before this sermon and many times after.

McPherson's visits to the observatories and understanding of astronomy reports were heavily sprinkled in this sermon. With her telescope she was looking into space, but she also peered into the heavens of God’s Glory. This observatory was a metaphor for looking at God’s

⁵⁰ Sutton, *Resurrection of Christian America*, 57.

⁵¹ Eph 5:22-33

work and his miracles. The main take away was that astronomy was not the enemy of Pentecostalism. Science and religion have clashed numerous times throughout history, but McPherson is once again embracing something that is normally looked down upon. Just as with the radio, she utilizes the science of astronomy in her sermons. The observatory in this sermon is allowing her to better look at God's heavens up above, just as the radio helped her spread the word. She is encouraging her followers to take an interest in astronomy, to look to the stars which light the word of God.

Astrology: Messages from the Stars

Sister Aimee's fascination with the stars extended beyond the realm of astronomy. She was also greatly intrigued by pseudoscience astrology as well. Similar to astronomy, astrology focuses on stars, planets, and their movements. The difference is astrology asks how celestial body positions influence human actions. Aimee McPherson mentioned astrology several times in the *Foursquare Crusader* just as she did with observatory discoveries. There was one article in the *Crusader* that focused on astrology entitled "Astrology and God."⁵² This article was not written by McPherson herself. Instead, it was written by an unknown figure named "Prince Marthandun of India."

"A great many people would wonder why a preacher should speak on the subject of Astrology, and there are various reasons. In California there are more fortune tellers than preachers, and, somehow or other, this fortune telling business is very promising and flourishing."⁵³

The article asks if astrology is akin more to fortune telling, a series of work that is so frowned upon. For example, we see this in Leviticus 19:3. "You must not turn to mediums or to

⁵² Prince Marthandun, "Astrology and God," *Foursquare Crusader*, October 1940, 10.

⁵³ Prince Marthandun, "Astrology and God," 10.

spiritists and so become unclean through them.”⁵⁴ Marthandun, however, presents the argument that astrology has more roots in God’s work. In the article, astrology is “the science of reading destiny in terms of the positions of the heavenly bodies.”⁵⁵ While he states there are many arguments against the usage of astrology, he presents how it has already been utilized. In ancient times man was able to look up at the stars, and some even worshiped or looked for guidance from them. In the Bible many followed stars, such as the wise men on their way to find baby Jesus. Marthandun states that there are several types of astrology: American, Babylonian, Indian, and Egyptian. Just as there are various types, there are also different interpretations. In ancient times astrology and astronomy were even synonymous. Some astrologists claim to predict everything accurately, others claim that astrology can only state so much. In the end, when someone is desperate or in trouble, they look up to the stars.

“In ancient times, astrology and astronomy were synonymous. When the wise men came from the east, was it astrology or astronomy they practiced?”⁵⁶

These heavenly bodies were created by God. When people are in distress and look up to space for some type of guidance, how different is it from looking to God? Just as astrologists were able to reveal the future, so were prophets. So now how are astrology and certain religious actions so different? Marthandun claims there are good and bad aspects to astrology. People shouldn’t be afraid to engage in it, they only need to be careful. McPherson advocates with the same logic when it comes to her sermons and the utilization of frowned upon Hollywood tactics. She believed there needs to be an acknowledgement of the dangers, but that there is also a way to implement the abnormal and “evil.” Astrology, as the article suggests, can be a mere money

⁵⁴ Lev 19:3

⁵⁵ Prince Marthandun, "Astrology and God," 10.

⁵⁶ Prince Marthandun, "Astrology and God," 12.

grab, but it is up to each individual to realize when they may be on the brink of a scam or a true reading. The same goes for the spectacle of her illustrated sermon. McPherson didn't hide the fact she was using "devil's tools," but she was fully aware of their place in the Angelus Temple and what they could add to her preachings.

Interestingly, there are other articles in the *Foursquare Crusader* on astrology, which is not to say that McPherson did not express her understanding of the stars as a site for prognostication and divine communication, just as we have already witnessed in the case of the telescope. In "Road to Service, How to Choose a Sermon," for example, McPherson expresses an interest in reading the stars to select a topic for her sermons. The piece is focused on giving advice on how to pick a sermon to preach, but part of the advice is to listen and watch the heavens. While choosing a timely and relevant sermon, McPherson suggests, one must be very aware of the environment. An important environmental consideration is the placement of stars in the sky. Similar to Marthandun's article, McPherson brings up how the Wise Men too were guided by the stars.

"These exponents of the Heavenly message, used as vivid object lessons, that which was nearest at hand, most familiar and comprehensible. Would God speak to the Wise Men and Astrologers, then He used as a medium of speech that which they were most conversant... a star."⁵⁷

The stars are a point of guidance. They help point people in the right direction, but others may have different ways of interpreting them. If God used the stars to communicate to the wise men, what is the work of astrologers if not as translators for God's messages? Furthermore, if God created these heavenly bodies, astrologers are looking to the work of God to understand the world and his plan. Astrology is a pseudoscience, but still pertains to studying celestial bodies as

⁵⁷ A. S. McPherson, "The Road to Service," *Foursquare Crusader*, May 20, 1936, 2.

opposed to religious entities for guidance. McPherson did not want her followers to reject astrology; rather, she invited them to explore it. She did so with astronomy and technology, but it was all to further her own principles and teachings. The implementation of astrology grounded her work in reality and made it concrete, but it also gave McPherson more credibility. She asks that her followers engage in discussion about the stars and what they mean, but she doesn't force a rejection or an acceptance of astrology. She wants people to try it and then contextualize it for themselves and their place in religion. The stars are shown to be vocal and project certain aspects of human life. In the context of Pentecostalism, it is not so far-fetched to say these could be different ways of communication from God. McPherson encourages people of the church to try astrology and ask questions. This grounds her work in what was relevant and new, but also introduces the idea that new advancements or different methods of understanding the world are not dangerous or something to be afraid of. There are new discoveries, new forms of understanding the world, but through the lens of God and religion they are just new ways to learn and appreciate God's word. McPherson understood this, and through her work she showcased the power and the voices of the stars for Pentecostalism.

Space, Time, and Sister Aimee's Imagination

Aimee Semple McPherson had an appreciation for astronomy, astrology, and technology. As Los Angeles transformed in the 1930s under these spheres of space and science, Sister Aimee was gathering inspiration that she brought to the Angelus Temple stage every Sunday night. She sensationalized religion in a new modern way, and the people in Southern California recognized her affinity for words and creativity. Her translation of Bible narratives to the stage came in many forms, whether it be set in modern life or fantasy. Simultaneously, McPherson took the skepticism of her followers and advocated an alternative lens of viewing the radio, observatories,

and astronomical discoveries. These were not enemies of Pentecostalism, but a new way to better understand their religion and the benefits of the modern age. The voices of the radio and the stars presented new opportunities for Pentecostalism and spreading the word of God; they were to be welcomed and studied. Through her sermons and preachings, McPherson bridged the gap between religion and science on a shimmering stage. A star herself in the temple, McPherson was determined to build radios and observatories so her followers could relate and understand her work through a new light. If it meant using “devil tools” in the process, so be it.

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