



To Touch the Face of God: The Sacred, the Profane, and the American Space Program, 1957-1975 (New Series in NASA History)

Kendrick Oliver

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"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth..."

In 1968 the world watched as Earth rose over the moonscape, televised from the orbiting *Apollo 8* mission capsule. Radioing back to Houston on Christmas Eve, astronauts recited the first ten verses from the book of Genesis. In fact, many of the astronauts found space flight to be a religious experience. *To Touch the Face of God* is the first book-length historical study of the relationship between religion and the U.S. space program.

Kendrick Oliver explores the role played by religious motivations in the formation of the space program and discusses the responses of religious thinkers such as Paul Tillich and C. S. Lewis. Examining the attitudes of religious Americans, Oliver finds that the space program was a source of anxiety as well as inspiration. It was not always easy for them to tell whether it was a godly or godless venture.

Grounded in original archival research and the study of participant testimonies, this book also explores one of the largest petition campaigns of the post-war era. Between 1969 and 1975, more than eight million Americans wrote to NASA expressing support for prayer and bible-reading in space. Oliver's study is rigorous and detailed but also contemplative in its approach, examining the larger meanings of mankind's first adventures in "the heavens."

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