COPYRIGHTING GOD

Copyrighting God provides the first detailed account of how American religious organizations used copyright in sacred texts not simply for economic gain but also for social organization and control. Including chapters on the angelic authorship of The Urantia Book, Mary Baker Eddy’s use of copyright to construct the Christian Science Church, inter-denominational disputes in the Worldwide Church of God, and the Church of Scientology’s landmark lawsuits against Internet service providers, this book examines how religious copyright owners mobilized the law in order to organize communities, protect sacred goods, produce new forms of spiritual identity, and even enchant the material world. In doing so, this book demonstrates that these organizations all engaged in complex efforts to harmonize legal arguments and theological rationales in order to care for and protect religious media, thereby coming to a nuanced understanding of secular law as a resource for, and obstacle to, their unique spiritual objectives.

Andrew Ventimiglia is a research fellow in the TC Beirne School of Law at the University of Queensland. He works in the areas of legal history, religious studies, and media studies, with a research focus on the history and cultural effects of intellectual property law. Ventimiglia was awarded a PhD in Cultural Studies from the University of California, Davis, in 2015. He also holds an MA in Cinema Studies and a certificate from the Culture and Media Program at New York University. Ventimiglia’s work has appeared and is forthcoming in Cultural Critique and the Journal of the American Academy of Religion.
Copyrighting God

OWNERSHIP OF THE SACRED
IN AMERICAN RELIGION

Andrew Ventimiglia

TC Beirne School of Law, University of Queensland
CONTENTS

Acknowledgments .......................................................... page vi

Introduction: Owning the Sacred ................................. 1

Part I  The Angelic Author and the Sacred Work ............... 41

1 Spirited Possessions: The Sacred Work of Copyright Law .... 47

2 The Angels’ Share: Divining Sacred Authorship in the Courtroom ........................................... 78

Part II  The Doctrines of Religion and Law ...................... 111

3 Authorship and Authority in Intellectual Property: The Copyright Activism of Mary Baker Eddy .............. 115


5 Digital Liability and the Church of Scientology: Copyright, Secrecy, and Human Agency Online .................. 178

Conclusion: The Afterlife of Intellectual Property ............. 211

References ........................................................................ 221

Index .............................................................................. 242
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book has benefited from the efforts of a number of people who helped shepherd this work to its completion over the course of nearly a decade of research and writing. First, I would like to thank in particular Mario Biagioli, Ari Kelman, and Brad Sherman, all of whom have read numerous drafts and worked incredibly hard in various capacities during my time as a graduate student at University of California, Davis and then as a postdoctoral research fellow at the University of Queensland. This book bears the significant intellectual traces of each of these interlocutors and to them I am incredibly grateful. I would also like to thank the many other individuals who have helped me develop this project in various ways. Mark Elmore, Allison Fish, and Kriss Ravetto-Biagioli have all been instrumental to the project’s development at key points. I would also like to thank Alden Adkins, Brian Britt, Sarah Barringer Gordon, Toni Lester, Kathryn Lofton, John Lardas Modern, Kurt Morris, Paul St. Amour, Carolyn Homer Thomas, and Amy Voorhees for substantive comments and conversations on sections or chapters of the book. Many thanks to the staff of the Mary Baker Eddy Library – including Sherry Darling, Jonathon Eder, Russel Fogg, and Judith Huennke – and its generous fellowship program which allowed me to conduct research on Christian Science and copyright in the summer of 2015. Thanks to the Davis Humanities Institute and the Woodrow Wilson Fellowship Foundation’s Charlotte W. Newcomb Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship for key funding support. Thanks also to Chuck Thurston and the San Francisco Urantia Book Study Group who welcomed me into their community well before I understood exactly what The Urantia Book was.
Acknowledgments

I also owe many thanks to the various venues, societies, and institutions that have given me the opportunity to present my work in various stages of completion. Thanks in particular to the Law and Humanities Junior Scholars Workshop, the International Society for the History and Theory of Intellectual Property, and the American Academy of Religion’s Religion and Media Workshop, all of which provided excellent fora in which to receive generous feedback from participants that helped enrich my project. Thanks also to the staff and faculty of the University of California, Davis Cultural Studies Program – particularly Robert Irwin, Caren Kaplan, and Eric Smoodin – for providing an open-ended yet intellectually rigorous interdisciplinary environment in which to develop an idiosyncratic project such as this one. Thanks also to colleagues and faculty at University of California – Davis including Tim Choy, Allison Coudert, Joe Dumit, Grace Wang, Meaghan O’Keefe, Mairaj Syed, and Archana Venkatasan for support and encouragement along the way. Thanks also to my Cultural Studies cohort (Team Structure of Feeling): Megan Bayles, Hilary Berwick, Andrea Dooley, Karl Zoller, and honorary member Sampada Aranke. Thanks as well to current colleagues and staff at the University of Queensland who have given me the space and opportunity to finish this book. And thanks to my editor at Cambridge University Press, Matt Gallaway, for setting the timelines that helped push the book to completion. Finally, and most importantly, thanks to Erin and Adrian: Erin for the strength, encouragement, and support to finish this work; Adrian for teaching me when to put it away.