

UFOS: WHAT DOES CHRIST REQUIRE OF US?



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INTRODUCTION

It has been 40 years since my book The Bible and Flying Saucers was first published, which is how long it took the people of Israel to travel from Egypt to the Promised Land. I had first sent the manuscript to my own Presbyterian Publishing house—Westminster Press—but they rejected it, and suggested sending the book to J.B. Lippincott, which had a secular religious books division. Lippincott published the book, but it was not received with joy by any division of the Christian Church, as far as I know. When reviewed in Christianity Today the writer said my book “could be judged worthless but harmless were it not for the distortions it contains and the credentials of the author.” (June 21, 1968) In other words, for having such a good education, I wrote a lot of stupid things. To this day, I know of no major religious leaders who have suggested the questions I am raising should be addressed, at least other than to ignore or discount my questions. It may be that I am so far out in left field, right field, outer space, or wherever, that it would do disservice to Christ to even acknowledge that my views exist. Perhaps those Christians who suggest that I am a “wolf in sheep’s clothing” are right. The UFO field is so full of wild speculation that seems to spin into other things like crystals and channeling, not to mention “research” suggesting that UFOs have a base on the Moon or Mars, or that the Moon, or even the Earth, is hollow, the place where space aliens hang out, that one cannot blame sober Christian publications for staying as far away from UFOs as possible. Fools rush in, and all that.

I rushed in anyway, and have stayed in. If my rejection by the Christian Church has been so complete, from the conservative side, the liberal side, and in between, why is it that I “don’t get the message?” That is, the message of the church to me: my point of view is worthless.

Part of my persistence is due to the fact that I believe UFOs are real, I find the evidence compelling. But at the same time, I understand that when the average citizen hears our government deny, year after year, that UFOs are anything other than misidentified natural phenomena, the majority of Christians are inclined to believe our government (even though they know political and military leaders lie frequently, from Pharaoh in Egypt up to the present day, usually in the name of national security). So I have persisted in my UFO work, in spite of rejection by the Christian Church, because I am sure that if all Christians knew UFOs represent some kind of intelligent reality from another world, then the whole church would have to face this reality, and my point of view would no longer be a joke. Perhaps the church would still reject my point of view—many conservative Christian writers are now taking UFO seriously, and consider them demonic—a possibility I admit—but a point of view I consider still open to debate. The reason it is open to debate is that we do not know the whole truth about UFOs—I doubt that the governments of the world know. Furthermore we do not understand in our culture the strange way in which the Satanic and Angelic blend in biblical theology, nor are we clear about the relation between the Satanic and the Demonic. Furthermore, few today understand the way in which the God of the Bible reveals his identity to us, while staying basically hidden.

Although my rejection by leaders of the institutional church has been painful, I did receive validation from the secular UFO community. In 1972, Walter Andrus Jr., then Director of MUFON (Mutual UFO Network), invited me to become a theological consultant to this scientific UFO group. Later I was invited to join the Board of Directors of FUFOR (Fund for UFO Research). There was professional risk on the part of the scientists who were part of those research groups who took UFOs seriously, and inviting a person with a religious perspective into these organizations put their reputations at greater risk. Scientists like Carl Sagan of Cornell University, and Donald Menzel of Harvard, argued that UFOs were nothing but a modern religious myth disguised as science. (Carl Sagan and Thornton Page, ed., UFO’s: A Scientific Debate; Menzel, pp. 123 ff. Sagan, pp. 265 ff.) Letting me publish in the MUFON UFO Journal only added weight to the arguments of Sagan and Menzel. Independent UFO researchers were trying to prove that UFOs were a real scientific challenge, and my point of

view did not always help. But at the same time, many members of MUFON had seen UFOs personally, they knew our government was lying, and therefore, UFOs could not just be laughed off, as those like Sagan and Menzel preferred. MUFON understood this: once you realize UFOs are real, the kind of issues I have raised about UFOs in the Bible have to be taken seriously. Although I was discouraged by the rejection of my work by the Christian Church, I was encouraged by those who understood the reality of, and seriousness of, the UFO challenge.

What I did in my MUFON publications was argue for parallels in the way modern UFOs, and their occupants behave, and the description and behavior of UFOs and angels in the Bible. My basic question was this: Are biblical UFOs and modern UFOs from the same reality, and if so, how do we decide on the nature of proof that this proposition is true? If UFOs do not land on the White House lawn, and announce at a press conference, "We represent Jesus and his angels," how are we to know the truth? And if such a landing were to happen, how would we know this is not part of what the Bible calls the "Strong Delusion" (2 Thess. 2:11) being carried out by evil cosmic forces? In other words, how do we really Identify the Divine when we meet that reality? This is no small issue, as every Christian understands. Our Christian story is: Jesus, the Son of God, walked on earth, and hardly anyone could recognize his Divine Identity, least of all, the religious leaders of his day. What this means is, the Divine often comes to us in Disguise, or at least, in a way we are not ready, as individuals, or as a culture, perhaps even as a church, to recognize. The very name "Unidentified Flying Objects" clearly sets out the challenge: how do we identify any reality that is usually, but not always, hidden? This is the most basic theological problem we face: how do we identify, and properly recognize, the invisible God in our midst? That "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn. 1:14, RSV) is the basic theological statement that God became somewhat more easy to identify, because in Jesus God was in a human body.

Yet, it was a huge problem to identify God in human form. The question of Jesus to his disciples was, "Who do men say that the Son of man is?" And then, "But who do you say that I am?" (Mt 16:13-15)

If we name Jesus as the Christ, what have we really done, what is his "inner identity" that the outward name signifies?

What I am going to do in this article is explain my understanding of the God of the Universe, the God of the Bible, and explain why the Christian Church needs to face the UFO mystery more seriously. I believe UFOs have implications for other world religions, but it is not my task here to understand what those implications are. At the same time, it is clear that some UFO researchers see any religion (Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist etc) as too tribal, too narrow, and they hope UFOs can bring about a more universal religion, and bring an end to religious warfare. It is this hope that is behind many "New Age" religions, and it is this universal New Age gospel that "God is everywhere and in everybody" that causes great distress in Christian Conservatives, and causes them to link UFOs with demonic deception. I know Conservative Christians will wonder how I will affirm that "there is no other name" but Jesus by which we may be saved. (Acts 4:12) From the point of view of my faith, the uniqueness of the Jewish tradition, and the uniqueness of Christ—crucified and raised from the dead—has no parallel in human history. At the same time, the call of the church to preach the gospel to all nations makes it clear that all humans on earth are sought in love by the God of Jesus Christ. (Mt. 28:19) Likewise, we should suppose that the Spirit of God often arrives in the hearts of people before they are baptized.

(Acts 11:1-18) Furthermore, sometimes the children of darkness are wiser than the children of light.

(Luke 16:8) The UFO mystery calls us to be faithful to Christ, but warns us to avoid arrogance toward those multitudes who do not see life through the eyes of our Christian faith.

WHAT KIND OF GOD HAVE WE GOT?

If we have a God, a Being who created the Universe, and all that is in it, that Being is invisible. This makes identification very difficult. In fact, identification will not be based on scientific proof, but rather on “faith.” Faith is a conviction about invisible things, about the invisible power behind what we see.

“By faith we understand that the world was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made out of things which do not appear.” (Heb. 11:3)

The eleventh chapter of Hebrews goes on to site by example many biblical people of faith, including Abraham, who trusted God, following God “not knowing where he was to go.” (v. 8) Faith involves risk, it involves ambiguity, and we do not like ambiguity. Investing in the stock market requires faith, because you may make money, or you may lose money (as we are now finding out). Jesus says the kingdom of God is like a sower who goes out and sows seed in a field. Some seed falls on hard ground. Some is choked by weeds. The birds eat some of the seed. But some seed bears fruit. (Mt. 13:1–23) Faith involves risk, whether it is being a farmer, a stock broker, or one who follows the God of the Bible. Faith involves ambiguity, lack of certainty. We certainly have lots of ambiguity in our modern UFO story. Who is telling the truth, and who is lying? Are UFOs real, or not? Are they from heaven, another planet, are they angels, demons, both, who knows?

The ambiguity of faith is stressful, and is dealt with in different ways by Christians. Let us take as an example the story of the parting of the Red Sea in Exodus, chapter 14. How do we understand this story? Are the details—high walls of water, Egyptians drowned—to be taken literally? Conservatives say “Yes,” they say every detail is true, because the Bible is infallible. It would not be in the Bible if it were not true. Therefore there is no ambiguity.

Liberals, on the other hand, do not accept the idea of the infallibility of the Bible. And many liberals are sure the details could not be true, therefore the parting of the Red Sea story is a myth, like the story of Santa Claus, made up to make it sound like God is powerful. So liberal Christians, who pride themselves more on wisdom than on faith, decide the Red Sea parting never happened. And away goes the ambiguity, away goes the risk of being thought stupid in our scientific culture.

In The Bible and Flying Saucers I argue that the “pillar of cloud and fire” of the Exodus may have been a UFO which used its propulsion system to part the waters of the Red Sea. I cannot prove this is true, but I believe it is very possible. Suddenly, the certainty of Conservatives is shattered, not because I say the Bible is not true, but because I say the Bible is true in a way we have not understood. And the certainty of liberals is shattered—maybe the Red Sea did part, just as the Bible says. Liberals do not want to hear this. (Also see Barry Downing, “Did a UFO Part the Red Sea?” UFO Magazine, Vol. 5, No. 2, 1990.)

But this is what UFOs have done. They have pushed the Christian Church into a true faith situation—meaning a situation where like Abraham, we do not “know where we are to go.” This is especially difficult for some Conservative Christian preachers, who pay more attention to speaking with the loud voice of authority than they do to understanding with quiet humility that the true identity of God can only be known by faith and in faith—believing in the unseen power behind what we see. (Concerning faith see Mt. 17:20,21; Ro. 3–5; Gal. 3–5; Hebrews 11, etc.)

IDENTITY: VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE

We all have multiple levels of identity, visible and invisible. I am not sure how many levels of identity we have, but here are some of them.

First, I wear clothes, and they help establish my identity. But they also help hide my physical body, which is a more primary form of identity than my clothing. My clothing can be changed, my body stays the same. I sometimes wear a robe, especially when I am leading

worship. This outer garment says “pastor,” police often wear uniforms, as do soldiers, as means of identification. But this can be a “false” identity, anyone can put on a robe, or a police uniform.

Second, I know myself in some sense because of my body. My body stays the same, sort of, except of course, that I do not have the same body I had when I was five years old, or fifteen, or fifty. And if I were to lose an arm or a leg, I would still know I am “me,” even though my body would be deformed. But others usually identify me first because of my clothing, and because of my face, the part of my body that is visible. My human voice is also an identity sign, a strange combination of the physical and the invisible inner me.

Third, I have some level of consciousness in me that is invisible to me, and to everyone. I “reveal” my invisible self to others through my speech. I have the right to make choices about how much to reveal myself to others, and how much to keep hidden. As I write these sentences, I am making self revelation choices.

Fourth, there is part of myself that is unknown even to me, buried like the kingdom of heaven. It becomes partly revealed to me at night in my dreams, and if I remember my dream in the morning, then part of that unconscious self becomes known to me. Many Christian teachers believe that one task of prayer and fasting is to become more aware of that unknown self in us. All of the above identities have some mixture of good and evil in them. How is the self to be purified?

Fifth, for Christians there is also our ultimate identity, a new identity that begins at baptism, and is not complete until we are resurrected with Christ. “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come.” (2 Cor. 5:17) Paul sometimes refers to this identity change as the transition from Adam to Christ, from the old sinful man of the flesh to the new man raised from death in Christ. (1 Cor. 15) Paul understands that his outer nature is wasting away, while his inner nature is being renewed. (2 Cor. 4:16) Paul does not want to be unclothed, but to be further clothed. (2 Cor. 5:4) The Church is the fellowship of those who are in Christ, and have faith that they are under the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, yearning for the day of resurrection from the dead to be further clothed. Both the individual Christian, and the eternal identity of the church, are in some sense hidden until after death, or until the Second Coming of Christ. In some ultimate sense, who I am, my eternal identity, is not something I create. Rather, my ultimate identity is a creation and redemption of me, by God. This is the core of the Christian faith. We cannot prove this is our reality, we live this reality by faith.

The creation story in Genesis says that we have been made in the image of God. (Gen. 1:26) There has been much speculation about what this image is, but the New Testament says this image is to be completed when we become like Christ. “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.” (2 Cor. 3:18)

What then is God’s purpose for human life? It is to create us into Christ-like beings. That is God’s goal. We are planted on earth, eventually the angels come to harvest us, and take us to our eternal dwelling with Christ. Some will meet God’s heavenly standards, some will not. (Mt. 13:36-43) And here is a critical idea that is not easy to understand: **the very way in which God’s self revelation has taken place is meant to shape our image in Christ, and if UFOs are some modern form of God’s self revelation, we have to understand how this might further God’s redemptive purpose for humanity.**

Or to put it another way, how might the UFO revelation increase God’s ultimate human harvest?

God so loved the world that he gave his Son not to condemn the world, but to save it. (John 3:16, 17).

How might UFOs contribute to the salvation of the world God loves?

We live in a godless era. Best selling books by atheist writers like Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens mock religious faith, and the God of the Bible. Some of our best known scientific leaders, like Carl Sagan, have been atheists. What this means is, atheism is a best seller in 2008. Our scientific culture—it isn't true if you can't prove it—makes the whole idea of "justification by faith," the central concept of the gospel, a joke. The bad news of atheism is overlooked by our modern atheists—that if we believe we live in a Godless universe, then we have no purpose—we are at most some strange Darwinian accident. Here today, dead tomorrow. In many of our universities, this is the unwritten and in some ways invisible assumption about life. There is no ultimate purpose. (We are not made to become like Christ.) If we have no divine purpose, then we get to create our own purpose. Most go for: let's make a lot of money, become rich and famous, too bad about everybody else as we carry on a Darwinian struggle for an Identity—a name that is above every name—trying to become a worshipped god, since we have no God. And if we lose out in this Darwinian struggle—if we are a student who is mocked as a "loser," we may grab a gun, and kill a few fellow students, and teachers, so that in a moment of madness, we will at last "be somebody." We will make TV news. That is salvation in much of Godless Western culture in 2008. And the message in much of our "entertainment media" is: the one who kills best is the winner in life.

But if there is a God, why isn't it obvious to this God that if he would just show himself, give us a sign, atheism would go away? From an engineering point of view, it is a design issue. God has no God. Repeat: God has no God. This means, that if God is to create us in God's own image, we have to be Godless, like God. It is our sense of Godlessness that gives us the freedom to make choices that we would not make if God were standing, looking over our shoulder.

(In the Garden of Eden, God goes for a walk—goes out of sight—giving Adam and Eve the freedom to sin. [Gen. 3:8]) God's goal is that all of creation obtain "the glorious liberty of the children of God."

(Rom. 8:21) We are being moved toward freedom, freedom from the sinful laws of the flesh of the old Adam, and toward the godly freedom of Christ. "For freedom Christ has set us free."

(Gal. 5:1)

So we have freedom from God in order to be tested: will we use our freedom for sin, or for godly living? The parable in which a land owner builds a vineyard, and lets it out to tenants, is a creation parable. (Mt. 21:33-41) The tenants, all of us, are being tested, we are on trial. After "the system" is set up, the builder and owner leaves town. This is what I call "The Parable of the Out of Town God."

Everyone is kind of placing bets that the owner will never come back. Jesus says this is a bad bet.

But the other side of the story is this: after Jesus comes back to judge the earth, the game is over, the test is over, faith is no longer necessary. The hidden God will be revealed. And also, the hidden inner person of every one of us will be revealed. The Day of Judgment will be Identity Day, God's identity, and ours.

If God does not want to come back right away, and ruin the "test," bringing it to an end, what are God's choices? He can send servants, who demand that the rent be paid. He even goes to the desperate measure of sending his Son to collect the rent—and the tenants kill the Son.

Is that the last straw? Apparently not, for here we are, 2000 years later, and no Second Coming, no final once and for all revelation of Divine Identity.

Is God's only choice to hang out invisibly in his heavenly world, watching the world sin as if there were no God, having already done all that could be done to bring the tenants to repentance? What if?

What if God were to have his heavenly angels fly in our skies, play cat and mouse with the military jets of the world, making sport of the powers of the world the way God made sport of

Pharaoh in Egypt? (Ex. 10:2) Would the God of Jesus Christ do this, the Out of Town God, hoping that his remnant church in the vineyard, those hoping for signs of his angels, would recognize these signs, and cry out? That would keep the test going, keep God's game going, God could be revealed, and stay hidden at the same time. People could be called to believe, without proof, believe because they believed in a God who so loved the world. God's harvest would increase, if the church called out clearly to the world.

That is what I wondered, as I wrote The Bible and Flying Saucers. I am still wondering, and I am still amazed that UFOs are still there, people all over the world know about UFOs, but the Christian world is mostly silent, except for those who point at the UFOs and shout, "Demons." Or that Barry Downing is a wolf in sheep's clothing. What if we are in a situation like that in Acts chapter 2, where the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples. The witnessing crowd thought the disciples were drunk. Peter had to respond, "You have misidentified the phenomenon." What if the modern church should be saying to the world, "These are not just a bunch of aliens from space as you think, these are the angels of God."

GOD'S SELF REVELATION PROCESS

How do we convince the world God exists? It is not that easy. When we say "you have to have faith" much of our scientific world just laughs. The Apostle Paul believed the very existence of creation was enough to prove God exists. "For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse."

(Rom. 1:19,20) Maybe there is no excuse for atheism, but there is a lot of it, and in Paul's time, idolatry too. The pain of seeking after an invisible God is too hard for many, so they create idols of wood, stone, silver, gold. For Paul, it is absurd that humans would worship a god they made with their own hands. But this has been human history. We modern people suppose we do not believe in worshipping idols, of course, but how about money? Or technology? Or fame? Or military weapons? We live in a world where God is a non-power. The Hebrew root for God is el, meaning power. Our culture has long stopped believing the God of the Bible is a God of power. Concerning Christ, Scripture says "all things were made through him." (Jn. 1:3) Our culture believes in a big bang, but the one who lit the fuse is out of town.

Theologians like Karl Barth have declared their skepticism about Paul's argument that the nature of God is "obvious" from looking at creation alone, apart from God's Word. Fallen humanity cannot "see" God from nature alone, apart from grace, and our modern scientific atheists tend to confirm this view of Barth. [Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, trans. by G.W. Bromley and T.F. Torrance, Vol. IV, Part 1, (T & T. Clark), p. 394, 483.] Although Jesus would remark about the beauty of the lilies of the field, and we take comfort from the nature/human/divine partnership implied in Psalm 23, "The Lord is my shepherd," nevertheless, there are wolves, and there are sheep, this is all part of nature. There is something evil in creation, violent, a kind of futility that leads to death. (Rom. 18:21)

If we cannot know much about God from creation, what is left? We can know God through the history of God's chosen people—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David—on to that ultimate revelation when God's Word takes on human flesh in Jesus. "He who has seen me has seen the Father." (Jn. 14:9)

Now for us the Bible takes center stage, since Christ has ascended into heaven, we now have no visible form of God. In Trinitarian terms, God the Father has always been invisible. (Jn. 1:18) Jesus now sits, invisibly to us, on the right hand of God. (Acts 2:32-36) The church now lives under the power of the mainly invisible presence of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:1-21, Jn. 20: 22, 23)

In addition to the Holy Spirit, the Church has the Bible, a record of close encounters with the Divine, as we now have records of close encounters with UFOs. I believe we need to pay close attention to stories of biblical encounters with God, with God's angels, and with Christ. We need to pay attention to strange things in the sky reported in the Bible that seem to be connected to the angels.

Abraham is the founding father of the Jewish people, and the story is told concerning how his son Isaac becomes his heir in Genesis chapter 18. The Lord appears to Abraham—in the form of three men. They are strangers to him, but as a good Middle East host, Abraham invites them to dinner. They seem very human.

Later, after a strange series of predictions that come true, Abraham comes to understand their divine nature. What seems clear here is that the biblical people believed in an angelic reality that appeared very human. This mentality contributed to the passage in the New Testament, "Do not neglect to show hospitality to aliens, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." (Heb. 13:2) If angels went around wearing a set of wings, they would hardly catch us unawares.

On October 20, 2008 an MSNBC headline said, "U.S. Pilot Ordered to Shoot Down UFO." Retired pilot Milton Torres confirmed he was the pilot that was given the order to shoot down a UFO in 1957 in a British Ministry of Defense release. He did not get to pull the trigger on his deadly rockets, because the UFO suddenly flew away. If UFOs carry the angels of God, this is not a nice way to welcome them, as the Bible commands. If UFOs are demons, as some Christians have argued, then perhaps Air Force pilots are the good guys, gunning down the bad guys. The UFO flew away quickly. What does this mean? That the demons are too smart for our technology? Or that the angels of God are making sport of America, as they made sport of Pharaoh? (And perhaps making sport of an unbelieving church.)

Any Christian who believes UFOs are real is faced with a serious identity choice. What do men say UFOs are? What do you say UFOs are? Labeling the strange, the alien, the unknown as demonic is risky. Some of the people who heard Jesus talk said, "he has a demon, and he is mad; why listen to him?" (Jn. 10:20) I think we could all agree it is important to know the difference between a demon and Christ; I would add, to know the difference between demons and the angels of God.

The invisibility of God seems to have two roots, the first having been already mentioned. Since God is Godless, to make us in God's image, we need to experience Godlessness, therefore we have an Out of Town God. The second is that God is dangerous to humans. We cannot be in God's presence and live. Theologically it is as if the holiness of God, the glory of God, is too much for us to withstand. God hides behind a screen, to shade our eyes from his glory. We can only see God now through sun glasses, or in a "mirror" dimly. (1 Cor. 13:12) During the Exodus, Moses asks to see the face of God, and is told "man shall not see me and live." (Ex. 33:20) God hides Moses in the cleft of a rock, and is allowed only to see the back side of God.

I have sensed a similar principle at work in our modern UFO encounters. UFOs have not landed on the White House lawn and said, "Take me to your leader." Many UFO reports indicate that the beings in the UFOs are careful about "too much exposure" to humans. I have remarked on this biblical parallel in my article "The Rock of Ages Principle." (MUFON UFO Journal, May 1990) Even from a scientific point of view, some have argued that if a superior extraterrestrial culture were to land openly, the shock would destroy our culture. (See the internet article at Strong Delusion by Glenn Gould, "UFOs and the 'Post-Disclosure Worldview.'") Jesus frequently taught concerning "the kingdom of heaven," especially in his parables. We do not know where heaven is, or exactly what the kingdom of the angels is like, but we may suppose that in some sense, the kingdom of heaven needs to remain hidden from us for our own safety.

THE GOD WHO IS WHO HE IS

One of the most critical divine encounters in the Bible is the story of Moses and the Burning Bush. Moses is watching his sheep when “the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush; and he looked, and lo, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed.” Moses stopped to see the sight, and “God called to him out of the bush.” (Ex. 3:2-4)

God calls Moses to go back to Egypt to confront Pharaoh, and begin the Exodus process. During this divine encounter Moses says to God (or the angel of God), that if he goes back to his people and says he has met God, they will ask him, “What is his name?” (Ex. 3:13), and the response of God is “I am who I am.” (Ex. 3:14) I like to put this into the future tense, “I will be who I will be.” What is being affirmed here is both the power and freedom of God. The power of God will be exhibited with many signs through the Exodus, including the parting of the Red Sea. The freedom of God will be illustrated in many ways, including the kind of “give and take” that we see between God and Moses during the Exodus, and between Moses and the tribes of Israel.

We also see God’s determination to give to his chosen people his own freedom from slavery, his act of love is to make his children in his own image, “We will be who we will be.” This note is sounded clearly in the New Testament, with the promise that Christ is our ultimate freedom giver, “For freedom Christ has set us free.” (Gal. 5:1)

I have already written about the different levels of identity that we humans share—I listed five above, there may be more. How many layers of identity are part of God’s being? And how do we use the Bible to interpret these layers?

Nowhere in the Burning Bush (and Talking Bush) story does it say that Moses saw the face of God, or any face. What was seen was a burning bush. What was heard was the voice of God, or of an angel of God speaking for God, as Christ on earth spoke for God. As God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit represent different “levels of identity” of one God, so in the Burning Bush encounter, what is the level of Divine Identity that meets Moses? I am not sure. In one sense, the God who meets Moses, the God of the Exodus, seems to function theologically as the “God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” And this may be the same “level of Divine Identity” as the voice of God at the Baptism and Transfiguration of Jesus. (Mt. 3:17; 17:5) This revelation voice becomes the voice of Jesus in Acts 9:5.

But at the same time, we eventually discover that the Divine Presence of the Exodus is focused in “the pillar of cloud by day, and pillar of fire by night.” (Ex. 13:21,22) This object that was cloud-like in the day, and glowed in the dark, I call the main UFO of the Exodus. It became the main sign of divine presence. This presence is called many things during the Exodus, including the angel of God, the Lord, or just “the cloud,” or the “Presence” of God. What is the relation between the ultimate God of the universe, and this Exodus UFO? Are we to suppose it is God in his Ultimate Being, his Ultimate Identity? I do not think so, for that would confine God to a very specific form, it would be like confining God to a semi-graven image. He would not be able to “be what he will be.”

By the time we get to the New Testament, it seems clear that the biblical people did not think God was confined to the Burning Bush in any ultimate sense. When Stephen was making his last speech before being stoned, he said, “This Moses whom they refused, saying ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge?’ God sent as both ruler and deliverer by the hand of the angel that appeared to him in the bush.” (Acts 7:35) The God of the Bible delegates. In a sense God delegated the task of Exodus leadership to Moses, who delegated the press secretary position to his brother Aaron. The Ascension of Jesus delegates to the church the task of representing and speaking for Jesus on earth. (Mt. 28:18-20) I believe one reason Conservative Christians (like Gary Bates, Clifford Wilson, John Weldon) have been critical of my work is that they have not taken seriously enough the God who delegates, the God who is

One, but who has several layers of identity. My sense is that whenever we have a report of God being visible, we are dealing with some form of angels (messengers) who serve as God's clothing, his outer identity. When the Word became flesh, outward identity and inward identity became known in a radical new way. Given the earlier stress in Old Testament scripture that God is hidden, and needs to be hidden for our sake, it is not surprising that many would find it scandalous that Jesus would claim to be God in human form. Surprising, but only if we forget the radical freedom of God to "be what I will be." In Old Testament thinking, the Tabernacle was built with the "Holy of Holies" only accessible to the High Priest, once a year. But the coming of Christ is our assurance that he is the new High Priest that has made an eternal atonement for us. (Heb. 9:1-15) What this means is, the Inner Identity of God is being made more and more accessible to us. But we will only come into the perfect tent, and into God's inner presence, when our tent (body) will be one not made with hands. (Heb. 9:11)

What this signifies to me is we still live in the age when the angels serve as mediators for God, along with the Holy Spirit, and therefore, along with ourselves as the church serving as angels (messengers) of the gospel. That does not mean that UFOs might not be demons. But it does mean that the church should look for signs of angelic presence, and if we see those signs, it is our duty to announce these signs to the world. That is what I have been trying to do, for forty years.

SATAN, THE DEVIL, DEMONS, FALLEN ANGELS, AND THE POWER OF GOD

Liberal Christians have all but ignored the challenge that UFOs present to the Church. Ted Peters, who is also a theological consultant to MUFON as I am, authored the book UFOs: God's Chariots? So far as I know, he is the only "liberal" theologian to wonder about UFOs and theology, and he does not take a position on the reality of UFOs. Roman Catholic theologian Corrado Balducci has gone on record saying he believes UFOs are real, but they belong to the realm of the "natural," as opposed to the "supernatural." Thus for him UFOs are no serious challenge to the church. (See Barry Downing, "The Balducci Interview and Religious Certainty," MUFON UFO Journal, September 1998, p. 16 ff.) Neither Peters nor Balducci are likely to take seriously my argument that the pillar of cloud and fire was a UFO that used its propulsion to part the Red Sea.

My arguments have been seriously considered by those who believe UFOs are some kind of advanced technology, such as MUFON researchers, and also those who belong to the "Ancient Astronaut" research group, such as Eric von Daniken. This group, of course, is inclined to dismiss the angels in the Bible as "ancient astronauts," having no connection to God, but rather see them as just a bunch of aliens who were mistakenly worshipped as gods by primitive people who did not know better: therefore the title to von Daniken's book, Chariots of the Gods? Many Conservative Christians see me in the von Daniken camp, and therefore suppose I am dangerous to the Christian faith.

Although I have argued that UFOs may carry the angels of God, and that the angels may use advanced technology, seeking to be faithful to Scripture in the process, Conservative Christians by and large have either ignored my work, or rejected it. (I do not know any biblical basis for saying the angels do not use technology; as far as I know, this has never been discussed by formal theology.)

Nevertheless, it is Conservative Christians who have tried the most to understand what UFOs might be, and relate them to Scripture. When one examines modern UFO evidence, one of the challenges is to decide what kind of "reality" we are dealing with. UFOs land on the ground, leave indentations in the ground, can leave burn marks on the ground where they land, they appear to the human eye, and on radar. They seem very physical. There are many UFO researchers who believe UFOs have crashed, and the government has picked up the

pieces, and maybe the alien bodies. (Some suppose the alien bodies are biological, others that they are robotic.)

Yet, UFOs often change shape in mid-air, they sometimes do not “fly away,” but rather just disappear, “go out light a light.” And when humans have contact with aliens, strange things are reported such as time distortion, mental communication, beings “floating through doors and walls,” indicating we are not dealing with a physical reality as we understand the term. Thus, in terms of those who are trying to understand UFOs scientifically, the big question is: are UFOs real, or are they some kind of strange semi-physical, or even holographic, projection?

Conservative Christians have tried to deal with this strange mystery in UFO reports, and have come up with two different solutions. There are those who believe UFOs are not a physical reality, but rather a spiritual reality, and this reality is Satanic or demonic. UFOs seem to connect with the paranormal, with channeling, with Shirley MacLaine’s kind of “New Age” speculation, and thus represent current spiritual deception of a Satanic and demonic kind. Authors such as Timothy J. Dailey and Gary Bates see UFOs as a demonic spiritual reality, not sure how to handle the physical dimension of UFOs. I consider Dailey’s book, The Millennial Deception: Angels, Aliens & The Antichrist, to be one of the best from this point of view.

On the other hand, those who take the physicality of UFOs more seriously, suppose that UFOs might come from another planet, and that these beings are “fallen angels,” like those reported in Genesis. “The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men, and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men that were of old, the men of renown.” (Gen. 6:4) Those connecting UFOs and the Nephilim see the main sin as a genetic pollution of the human race due to some kind of extraterrestrial inter-breeding, and modern UFO reports of humans being abducted and examined sexually support this view. Biblical researchers such as Tom Horn, Chuck Misler, Lynn Marzulli and Stephen Yulish are more at ease with the physical nature of UFOs than those like Timothy Dailey and Gary Bates. Those presenting the Nephilim theory are more inclined toward concern for genetic, as opposed to spiritual, pollution of the human race. (They suppose that perhaps the flood of Noah served to restore the genetic purity of the race.) In the secular UFO field, Budd Hopkins (Intruders) has argued aliens may be using our DNA, and David Jacobs believes aliens are creating a human/alien hybrid race (The Threat). (I have spoken at UFO conferences that included both Hopkins and Jacobs.)

The weaknesses of the hybrid theory are: a) biblically, Genesis 6 is not a lot to go on, compared with the developing doctrine of the angels, and Satan, throughout both Testaments. Researchers usually turn to non-canonical works, like the Book of Enoch, to fill in a lot of blanks. It is not clear that it is a simple transition from the Nephilim of Genesis to the Satan of the New Testament, who seems to be spiritual, not physical. The Satan of the New Testament seeks to seduce Christ, not beautiful women. b) Secular researchers like Hopkins and Jacobs are basing their genetic theories on reports from abductees interviewed under hypnosis. This does not mean their data is false, but it does mean they are, to say the least, seeing the data “through a glass darkly.”

By and large what has not happened yet is for Conservative Christians to ask: What are the angels of God doing now, in relation to planet earth? Christ and his angels are always watching over the earth. “I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Mt. 28:20) Furthermore, it is not just demons that have paranormal powers, so does Christ, with his ability to see the future, to heal the sick, or to walk on water. Likewise we may suppose the angels have paranormal powers, as did the early disciples in their ability to heal the sick, or to make miraculous escapes from jail. So if modern UFOs appear to act with “paranormal powers,” this does not automatically identify them as demonic. Although the angels are invisible to us most of the time, that does not mean they have to remain invisible. And we do not know what the

possibilities are in regard to the Kingdom of God: where is it, how do you get there, and is there a transportation system? Is a transportation system implied in the term "clouds of heaven?"

(Mt. 24:30) (See Barry Downing, The Bible and Flying Saucers, chapter 5, "Where Is Heaven?"; also, see my two part article, "Wormholes, Heaven, and the God Hypothesis," MUFON UFO Journal, November 2001, pp 10-12; December 2001, pp. 11-14.)

I have explored the nature and identity of God as the Bible explains it, and I have outlined the function of angels to reveal God while allowing God to in some sense remain hidden. The biblical view is when angels act for God, it is an act of God's own self. Although the main focus of the Bible is on how humans oppose and rebel against the will of God, there are other forces that also oppose God.

These forces are not easy to understand, but they consist first of all in a power that seems to lead humans into temptation, to test us. In the book of Job, this power is named Satan. (Job 1:6-12) God gives to Satan the task of testing Job's faithfulness to God. In the New Testament, after his baptism, Jesus is led into the wilderness "to be tempted by the devil." (Mt. 4:1) (The Hebrew Satan means "adversary," and suggests "to lie in wait." The Greek diabolos means "devil, adversary, or accuser.")

The name of Satan first appears in the book of First Chronicles. "Satan stood up against Israel, and incited David to number Israel." (1 Chron. 21:1) But this passage in Chronicles is parallel to an earlier passage in 2 Samuel, which says, "Again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he incited David against them saying, 'Go, number Israel and Judah.'" (2 Sam. 24:1) In Samuel, God is given credit for "inciting" the census, which is seen as some kind of sin on David's part, perhaps a power grab to number his army. Samuel blames the whole thing on God being angry at Israel, and in this anger David is given some kind of inner spirit that says, "Go number all the tribes."

David's servant Joab resists, seeing this as unfaithfulness, but more or less follows orders. Then "the Lord spoke to Gad, David's seer" (1 Chron. 21:9), telling him David has sinned, and David has the choice of three different punishments, two at the hands of humans, the third at the hand of God. David picks God's punishment because God is more merciful than humans. The destroying angel of God kills many people in the land, and is about to destroy Jerusalem when God "repented of the evil" he was about to do to Jerusalem, and David is saved. (vs. 15)

We live in an age where this kind of thinking of the relation between good and evil is almost unknown. We always think of God as good and loving, and Satan and the Devil as evil. We thus split good and evil apart. But that is not how the Bible sees the relation between good and evil. For the Bible, both good and evil are under the control of God. The Bible teaches the sovereignty of God. In simplest form what this means is: however bad things may be, God is still in charge. Nothing can really challenge the power and rule of God. Bad things happen, and if they happen, it is because God wills it to happen, because in the end, evil can be used by God to further God's ultimate plans. Further, if God is to create humans as free beings in his own image, humans have to be free to sin. In the New Testament this means God allows the evil of the crucifixion of Jesus, because it opens the way for the resurrection, and the message of grace that is the greater good. God's sovereign power is even shown in God's weakness, as the Apostle Paul explains. (1 Cor. 1:18-31) John Calvin says "The Father has given all power to the Son that he may by the Son's hand govern, nourish, and sustain us, keep us in his care, and help us." (Institutes of the Christian Religion, Bk II, xv, 5)

The Exodus story illustrates the way in which both good and evil are under God's control. After the Burning Bush experience, Moses confronts Pharaoh, and a series of signs are given to Pharaoh, plagues of flies, locusts, blood in the water. Moses demands that Israel be set free, but Pharaoh does not want to endure the damage to the Egyptian economy. Pharaoh sees Moses as a national security threat. Eventually, "the angel of death" kills all the first-born

males of Egypt on Passover night. From our modern perspective, this is a very “ungodly” action. The arrow of death is very target specific: first-born, males, Egyptian, at midnight. Pharaoh gets the message, and Moses leads Israel up to the Red Sea, following the pillar of cloud and of fire, the angel of God. The pillar of cloud is clearly the source of power that parts the Red Sea, and then leads Israel on a 40 year journey, where Israel learns to obey God. During the journey there is a rebellion against Moses led by Korah, and God brought death on Korah and his followers as certainly as he did on the Egyptian first-born. (Num. 16) After a lot of trial and distress, the Jews arrive in the Promised Land.

What was the purpose of the Exodus? The book of Deuteronomy puts it this way saying that God “fed you in the wilderness with manna which your fathers and mothers did not know, that he might humble you and test you, to do you good in the end.” (Deut. 8:16) God is like a teacher, with two roles. One role is to teach, the other is to test the students on their knowledge. Many students see their teachers as the embodiment of good, until the teacher hands out a test. The God of the Bible seems to be like that, but sometimes an angel is given the job of punishment, or testing, which might “appear” to keep God’s hands clean of evil. But the Bible does not teach a dualism of God and Satan, as adversaries, with Satan or the Devil being the “second most powerful being in the universe,” in some kind of Super Bowl contest to dethrone God. The God of the Bible seems to have the universe under control. Such rebellion as there is—whether it be with Pharaoh or Korah during the Exodus, or with King David taking a census—God can handle it. Louis M. Sweet has said, “The Biblical doctrine of Satan is not dualistic. Satan’s empire had a beginning, it will have a definite and permanent end. Satan is God’s great enemy in the cosmic sphere, but he is God’s creation, exists by divine will, and his power is relatively no more commensurate with God’s than with that of men. Satan awaits his doom.” (“Satan,” The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Vol. 4, p. 2696)

When we get to the New Testament, we find that after his baptism, “Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.” (Mt. 4:1) He fasted 40 days and nights. The image of the Exodus is brought forth here, with the “pillar of cloud and fire” being called the Spirit of God. In any case, we see that God and the devil are working together here. It is the Spirit that has led Jesus to be tempted. And so Jesus taught us in the Lord’s Prayer to say, “lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” (Mt. 6:13) It is the same God, but God is free to make choices. God can lead us into temptation, or deliver us. God will be who God will be.

Was the devil visible to Jesus? If he was, the Bible does not say so. Popular art has sometimes pictured the Devil as a blend of a goat and a man, standing on hind legs, holding a pitch fork. But I know no biblical basis for this picture of the devil. I do not know of any time the Devil or Satan appears physically to a human in a biblical report. Even in a vision in Revelation, Satan is not described other than to say an angel “seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years.” (Rev. 20:2) My impression is that unlike biblical angels, Satan does not have either the power, or right, to become visible. A thorough biblical study of the Satanic is beyond what I want to do in this article, but there are two things I want to mention from a New Testament point of view.

First, the third temptation of Jesus is to bow down and worship Satan. Satan offers a reward to Jesus for this act. “Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; and he said to him, ‘All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.’” (Mt. 4:8,9) Notice the implication of this temptation: Satan controls all of the governments of the world, or he would not have the authority to give them away. Jesus says the devil is “a liar and the father of lies.” (Jn. 8:44) The reason this matters for our theology of UFOs is that the American government, and other world governments have consistently denied the UFO reality. I believe many Christians have been way too quick to believe government statements about UFOs. Whether it be Pharaoh, Caesar, or modern governments, we should expect lies, not truth, to be common. The view that Satan

controls the nations of the earth, and deceives them, is a strong note in Revelation, chapter 20. This does not mean government leaders are any more corrupt than the rest of us, or that we would be better off without government. The book of Judges makes it clear that lack of government leads to moral chaos. (Judg. 17:6) When Saul was appointed king of Israel, Samuel was opposed to the plan because God should be the king of Israel; a king would soon burden people with his own military-industrial complex. But God understood that corrupt though we may be, we need human leaders. (1 Sam. 8:1-22) Priests and religious leaders have been no less corrupt than political leaders in human history. Apostolic authority demands that we obey the governing authorities. (Ro. 13:1-7) But obedience does not mean we need to take the statements of any government on blind faith.

Second, in the very famous passage in Matthew where Jesus asks his disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter answers, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus responds, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven." (Mt. 16:15-17) Thus we find Peter as the voice of God in this situation. But then almost immediately, Jesus starts predicting he will go to Jerusalem and be crucified, and Peter responds, "God forbid Lord! This shall never happen to you!" And Jesus says to Peter, "Get behind me Satan!" (Mt. 16:21-23) My understanding of this passage is that all Christians can be the voice of God, or the voice of Satan, at almost any time. We hear "inner voices," sometimes these voices might be "natural voices," what Jesus calls flesh and blood voices. But other inner voices come from God, or the Holy Spirit. Still others come from Satan. This gets us back to the "inner identity" we all have, and sometimes that inner identity is the voice of the flesh (or ordinary human reason), sometimes it is Godly, sometimes it is Satanic. All of us who are studying scriptures, trying to understand the meaning of modern UFO reports in light of scripture, have to pray for discernment. We are being tested in the UFO wilderness. Who speaks for God, who speaks for Satan, and how do we avoid being like Peter, speaking for God one minute, and Satan the next?

The reason that I mention the above issues is that it seems to me a bit of a stretch to see how the biblical idea of Satan leads easily to the view that UFOs are Satanic. Satan already invisibly controls the nations of the earth. This is why Christ as savior needs to come. It is no small issue that Jesus was crucified "under Pontius Pilate." Satan worked through the religious and political powers of this world to kill Christ. The work of Satan is always "hidden," carried on out of sight, or worked out through human agents like Judas. For Satan to come out in the open, to be seen on radar, chased by human jets, seems very out of character for the conduct of the Satan that the Bible describes. It is possible UFOs are Satanic, it is possible we have a mixture of the angelic and Satanic in UFO encounters. Jesus certainly teaches that Satanic weeds can be sown in a field of good wheat. (Mt. 13:24-30) But a clear point of this parable is that the "enemy" comes by night, in the dark, to sow his weeds. No one sees him, although the results become visible. Likewise demons seem not to have a body of their own, but need either a human or an animal body to inhabit, as illustrated in the case of the demon possessed man, whom Jesus heals by sending the demons into a herd of pigs. (Lk. 8:26-39) In cases where Jesus confronts demons, they are clearly subject to his power.

If UFOs are Satanic or demonic, we need to affirm that they are subject to the power of Christ, they are only doing what they are doing because in some sense it furthers the ultimate will of God. But we need to be skeptical of the Satanic/demonic theory of UFOs because so far as I know neither Satan nor the demons are ever seen by human eyes, unless in a vision or some altered state of consciousness. Angels, however, visit Abraham, seem very human, as do the angels at the empty tomb of Jesus. (Mt. 28:2; Mk. 16:5; Lk. 24:4) Likewise the angel that sets Peter free from prison seems very human, and very visible. (Acts 12: 1-17)

I do not know any biblical situations where anything like the "pillar of cloud and fire" of the Exodus, the "chariot of fire" of Elijah, the "bright cloud" of the Transfiguration, or the "bright light"

in the sky on the road to Damascus (Paul's Conversion) are associated with Satan or Demons. All these objects seem to be from a Divine or angelic reality, not a Satanic reality. So, if modern UFOs are Satanic or demonic, it goes very much against the biblical pattern that 1) Satan and the demons are always invisible to human eyes, and the power of Darkness likes it that way, and 2) biblical UFOs are always associated with God and the angelic, not the demonic and Satanic. Yes, Satan can disguise himself as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14), although I think that the meaning here is that Satan offers his wisdom or "enlightenment" as an alternative to God's truth. (See the Serpent in the Garden, Gen. 3:1-7; also see the devil quote scripture to Jesus in Mt. 4:6.)

Here is how I see it: angels in the Bible can be visible, and often seem so human we do not recognize them; although Satan can take on a human voice, he never appears with his own body, nor do the demons. UFOs are reported in both the Old and New Testament, and when they are reported, they are of Divine origin, not Satanic or demonic. What about the Nephilim? I don't know. This is why we need the governments of the world to stop covering up the truth about UFOs. Perhaps UFOs are some kind of "fallen angel" from another world. And in a sense, they might be carrying out some kind of evil work, certainly Satanic or demonic in implications, not strictly speaking like the Satanic we find in the New Testament.

There are two issues that add to the complexity of the Satanic/demonic theory of UFOs, one being the way in which a Christian Satanic theory and a Hollywood "War of the Worlds" cultural mentality blend easily together. The other is that for much of the scientific and "unbelieving" world, the God of the Old Testament seems Satanic or demonic. First, the main cultural anxiety about UFOs—if they are real—asks: are they friendly, or dangerous? Although there has been an occasional film about the theme of extraterrestrials, such as "ET," in which the aliens are friendly, the majority of films see the aliens as the enemy, either in advanced space ships trying to destroy us as in the Will Smith film "Independence Day," or as some kind of human eating beast, as in the Sigourney Weaver "Alien" film series. One difficulty with the "Satanic" theory of UFOs is that it plays neatly into our human desire to be the "good guys," while the aliens are the "bad guys." The New Testament command to welcome aliens or strangers goes strongly against this grain, and theologians who proclaim the demonic theory of UFOs from a biblical perspective need to be able to answer the question: does this theory make it too easy for humans to project their own fear and evil onto the stranger?

An additional dimension of this problem is, how much right do UFOs have to defend themselves against human aggression without being labeled demonic? Lawrence Fawcett and Barry Greenwood, in their book Clear Intent: The Government Coverup of the UFO Experience, report a confrontation between two Cuban MIG jets and a UFO. The lead jet was ordered by Cuban ground radar operators to fire on and destroy a UFO they had located. (This event was overheard at an American military listening post in the Florida Keys.) As the lead jet was ready to fire, it exploded, much to the shock of the trailing MIG jet, which then returned to base as the UFO flew away. (p. 196) If the UFO did destroy the Cuban jet, was this a demonic act? What rights do we give to "alien UFOs" to defend themselves? And if modern UFOs have superior technology (or supernatural power), how do we know they are demonic, and not angelic?

Second, one of the difficulties of my own argument, put forth in The Bible and Flying Saucers, is that the Jewish Exodus from Egypt was brought about by a Divine power in a UFO which the Bible describes as a "pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night." The "angel of God" in this UFO selects Moses to speak to Pharaoh for the liberation of the Jews. After a series of plagues that Pharaoh ignores, finally all the Egyptian first-born males are killed on Passover night, while all the Jewish first-born males are spared. (Exodus 12) Lambs are killed by Jews, and the blood placed on their doorposts, to protect their first-born sons.

On one level, this can be seen as the central decisive act on the part of the God of the Bible to liberate his chosen people. Faithful Jews celebrate Passover to this day. Furthermore, the

Christian story is that at a Passover celebration Jesus instituted the “Last Supper,” as a prelude to his own crucifixion, when Jesus becomes the “lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.” Thus Passover and Christ are very much connected.

But from the point of view of the world, why isn’t this a demonic story? What kind of God would kill off all the innocent male children in Egypt because the king of Egypt was stubborn? If modern UFOs were to kill off all the first-born males in America some midnight, I suspect everyone would say UFOs are demonic. The Passover story represents the central part of our biblical theology that modern atheists like Richard Dawkins, in his book The God Delusion, cannot accept. He sees the God of the Old Testament as vindictive, destructive, prejudiced, more evil than any human. From the Jewish point of view, God’s mighty acts brought about their liberation and salvation. But from our modern Godless point of view, these acts seem more demonic than God-like. Our modern mind has trouble understanding the power of God, and the relation between suffering and redemption as the Bible understands it.

My point is this: it is one thing to argue within the Christian community whether UFOs are angelic or demonic. It is another thing to suppose that our point of view—either angelic or demonic—makes any sense to our secular scientific world view. What some Christians now see as supernatural signs in the sky, many moderns see as super technological. How do we tell the difference? How do we tell the difference between angels and ancient astronauts? We are in the midst of an identity game, which has always been God’s Game from the time of Moses to now: What shall we say is your name?

SIGNS AND THE CHALLENGE OF AMBIGUITY

When I was in college I pledged a fraternity. During my initiation week, my “brothers to be” took me and a fellow pledge for a midnight ride, blindfolded. We drove for quite a while, and then were dumped out in the dark on a dirt country road. Our blindfolds were removed, and the brothers drove away. There were no houses or lights in sight, so my fellow pledge and I started walking, east as it turned out, though we did not know it at the time. After a while we came out on a paved road which we recognized, found signs we recognized, found a restaurant we recognized, found a phone, and like ET, phoned home for a ride.

There are two current views of how the human race, and all life on earth, found itself on this dark dirt road we call planet earth. One view is we just “evolved” accidentally, the current scientific view. The other view is we were created by a higher intelligence, we were put here. Our task is to read the signs, to find our way home. The kingdom of heaven is like treasure buried in a field. We have to dig for the signs, and then we have to be wise enough to recognize treasure when we find it.

In some ways signs as a religious dimension have been discredited in our scientific age. We know that thousands of years ago, if primitive people witnessed an eclipse of the sun or moon, they might see this as a bad omen, that evil might soon come upon them. We now understand the scientific reason for an eclipse, and attach no religious meaning to one. The biblical prophets often attributed a drought or famine to the anger of God. Now we talk about “changing weather patterns.” Christians would still say all of creation works according to the will of God, but we tend to divide the “natural world” from the “supernatural world,” although the word “supernatural” is not a biblical word. [The Revised Standard Version of the Bible uses the word ‘supernatural’ three times (1 Cor. 10:3,4), in a passage in which Paul talks about the ‘supernatural food’ of the Exodus. But the Greek word here is translated as ‘spiritual’ everywhere else in the RSV. Interestingly, in the New Revised Standard Version, the translators eliminated ‘supernatural’ and correctly translated the Greek ‘spiritual.’] The Bible does believe, however, that there are divine spiritual powers that can rule nature, and Jesus used this power for his healing miracles. These miracles have always been considered by orthodox Christians to be “signs” of the divinity of Christ.

The Apostle Paul made the interesting observation that “For Jews demand signs, and Greeks seek wisdom.” (1 Cor. 1:22) What this means is, Jews seek signs of God’s power, while Greeks prefer wisdom as their form of power. We still have that division in the Christian Church. Conservative Christians seek signs, especially of the Second Coming of Christ. And Conservative Christians love the miracle stories in the Bible, and believe them all. Liberal Christians hardly pay any attention to miracle stories, and never think about the Second Coming. What liberal Christians worry about is whether professors in our secular universities will laugh at their beliefs, and their scholarship. Consequently, Conservatives have written most of the books on the Bible and UFOs; liberals would be too embarrassed to even admit they are interested.

The Jewish faith was founded on signs, the whole of the Exodus is a book of signs. The Burning Bush of Moses, all the plagues in Egypt, the killing of Egyptian first-born at Passover, the “pillar of cloud and of fire,” the Exodus UFO which led Israel for 40 years; the manna dropped from the sky; the Exodus UFO landing on Mt. Sinai, the Tabernacle. These signs founded the Old Testament, and after the Jews enter the promised land, the faith memory always goes back to Exodus, when God was with the Jews. And there was always hope that a new Moses would come, a new law giver, and in the Christian tradition, Jesus was that new law giver, and even more, a grace giver. The law came by Moses. Grace and truth came by Christ. (Jn. 1:17)

Jesus came with signs, the star to the wise men, angels to the shepherds, the “Spirit of God” and the voice of God at his baptism, as well as his Transfiguration. Lots of healing miracles, but wisdom too, especially in his parables. Then the final sign, opposite sides of the same coin, Christ crucified and raised from the dead. “[B]ut we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews, and folly to Gentiles.” (1 Cor. 1:23) Crucifixion is not a sign of divine power, it is a sign of weakness. What kind of sign is this? And what crazy kind of wisdom supposes that the cross can save anyone? (Our “wise” liberal theologians sometimes call the cross child abuse.) What this means is, God came to us in Christ in a way none of us were ready to accept—Jew or Gentile. And I suspect we have not changed, nor has God, meaning, that God can still find ways to come to us in a way we cannot accept. If I am right, UFOs are one of those ways, a stumbling block to Conservative Christians, and folly to Liberal Christians and our unbelieving scientific culture. The cross and resurrection are folly to many, but even in the time of Jesus, it was hard to believe. Jesus appeared to many in Galilee after his resurrection. “And when they saw him they worshiped him; but some doubted.” (Mt. 28:17) Even pretty good “signs” do not bring everyone to faith. The doubters said maybe it was just someone who looked like Jesus. Probably some kind of hoax, no need to fall for it, and be laughed at. His disciples were fishermen, hardly reliable religious witnesses. (With UFOs doubters mention swamp gas, Venus, or hoaxes.)

Even in good signs, there is ambiguity. Signs do not force belief, usually (Doubting Thomas, and Paul on the Damascus Road may be exceptions). Signs enable us to wonder about believing. The religious leaders of his day knew Jesus was conducting miracles of healing. They saw it. What was their explanation? “He casts out demons by the prince of demons.” (Mt. 9:34) When you don’t like the evidence, or the person who is doing a good deed, demonize him (or her). This is still popular among religious leaders.

Jesus developed a reputation as a prophet, and religious leaders came to test him. They asked to see a sign from heaven. Jesus answered, “When it is evening, you say, ‘It will be fair weather: for the sky is red.’ And in the morning, ‘It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.’ You know how to interpret the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah.” (Mt. 16:2-4) As Jonah would be in the belly of the fish three days, so would Jesus be in the earth three days.

What is interesting here is the strange paradox that Jesus had a reputation for creating signs of the kingdom, yet he would not do a miracle on demand for show. This seems likely to resonate with the temptation of Jesus to leap from the Temple, as a way to win the crowd. “An evil and adulterous generation seeks a sign.”

This might be good news to religious liberals, they have no interest in signs, although I do not see liberals too concerned about our adulterous generation. Religious Conservatives spend a lot of energy looking for “Late Great Planet Earth” signs, or “Left Behind” signs.

Why is Jesus anti-sign? I suspect there is a kind of corruption in our lust for signs. We do not really want to obey God freely, like Adam and Eve, we would be glad to munch on forbidden fruit if we could get away with it. But if we had a “sign” God was watching, then we would be good. Or if we saw a sign the master really was coming back to collect the rent on his vineyard, we would be good. Like a class of students who shape up when someone yells, “Here comes the teacher!”

In light of this, how do I dare say, “I believe UFOs may be a sign of the presence of the angels of God in our skies?” Aren’t I just feeding the “lust” for signs of our evil and adulterous generation? I may be guilty of that. But the ambiguity here is this. What if God is merciful? What if we are such an unbelieving, Godless generation, such an evil and adulterous generation, that God in God’s mercy has given us a fabulous powerful sign of the kingdom of heaven, and we are too blind, too faithless, too evil and adulterous to even recognize it?

The cross is a condemnation of our lust for power. Jesus threatened both the religious and political powers of his day, his love of the poor, his criticism of the religious leaders for their love of money, their “holier than thou” attitudes, his healing miracles all were a threat. That is why he was killed. The cross is a condemnation of our lust for power, and condemns our hate of those who threaten our power.

I believe UFOs have been engaged in a kind of psychological warfare on the governments of our world, that is why our governments have lied about UFOs. Our governments are dealing with a power that is greater than they. Like Pharaoh, they have lied about, and tried to keep the truth about UFOs from the public, all in the name of national security, all in the name of protecting their power. Protecting the power Satan has given them. Power controlled with their jets and bombs, except that UFOs can make sport of our technology. Pharaoh would understand.

CONSERVATIVE CONDEMNATION OF MY WORK

Liberal Christians have ignored my theology, but Conservative Christians have not. Rather Conservative Christians have condemned my work from the beginning. I would say the reason Conservatives have condemned me is 1) because they don’t want to believe Pharaoh or Caesar would lie to us, and 2) they do not really believe in wondering what the angelic world is about. When my book was reviewed in Christianity Today, the reviewer never even mentioned the word angel. Conservatives hug their Bibles to their chests, and close their eyes, and wait for the Second Coming. If an angel of God flies in front of their nose, a Conservative will never see it, because it would be sinful to rely on ‘experience.’ Conservatives shut their eyes in different ways.

One Conservative who has been critical of my work has been Clifford Wilson. In his book U.F.O.s and their Mission Impossible, is this quote from me, “It seems consistent to argue that if Jesus ‘ascended’ in some sort of U.F.O., the same vehicle brought him to Paul’s company on the Damascus Road.”

Wilson then goes on to comment, “Perhaps ‘it seems consistent’ but it certainly is not convincing. Jesus is the Son of God and He does not need a U.F.O.” (p. 198)

Notice what Wilson is not saying here. He is not saying I am denying the truth of the Bible. Conservatives often tell me I am not paying attention to what the Bible says. Wilson is not

saying that I am not looking to scripture to confirm scripture, which is a key interpretative principle. Why am I wrong then? Because Jesus does not “need” a U.F.O. What kind of argument is this? Did Jesus “need” to ride on a donkey on Palm Sunday? I don’t think so—he could have walked. He was free to ride a donkey. The issue here is not what Jesus “needs” or does not need, depending on our imagination of what he needs or does not need. Needless to say, I find this kind of Conservative response to my work frustrating. My own work is based on the assumption that one of the main ways we know God is by paying close attention to scripture. But then when I make a biblical argument, Wilson says in effect, “I know that what you say makes sense from the biblical point of view, but I have this secret knowledge about what Jesus ‘needs’ and does not need. I know Jesus does not need a UFO, and therefore it does not matter to me what the Bible says. So, keep in mind, if I say you are wrong, then you are wrong, no matter what the Bible says.” The proper way to interpret the Bible is to look at what the Bible says happened. Jesus was taken up into heaven in a “cloud,” (Acts 1:9), and then came back to the Damascus Road in a bright light (Acts 9:3), which sounds like the bright cloud of the Exodus and the Transfiguration. I have had the same argument used against my interpretation of the Parting of the Red Sea. “God didn’t need to use a UFO to part the Red Sea.” That is not biblical interpretation. Biblical interpretation is looking at the text, and seeing what it says. Do I know for sure that God used a UFO to take Jesus to heaven, or part the Red Sea? No. But this is what faith is. Faith is wondering, dealing with ambiguity, with possibilities. With God all things are possible. (Mt. 19:26) I think it is my duty to wonder if UFOs are connected with the angels of God (including testing angels, Satan).

Readers of Jim Cunningham’s “Strong Delusion” web site know that one of my strongest Christian critics has been Gary Bates, author of the book, Alien Intrusion: UFOs and the Evolution Connection.

(See the Strong Delusion archives for “Dr. Barry Downing’s Response to Gary Bates.”)

The Bates book is well written, and I thought the first chapters were especially well done. Likewise, he handled the Genesis 6 issues concerning the Nephilim well at the end of his book (pp. 350–369). It is important to understand that Bates’ whole argument hinges on his point of view in regard to the controversy between creationists and evolution. That is why the “Evolution Connection” is in the title.

Bates says that with careful calculations, we arrive at the conclusion “that the time of creation, as recorded in the Scriptures, was only about 6,000 years ago.” (p. 345) Bates is as afraid of Darwin as Roman Catholics were afraid of Galileo.

Here is a basic question, and its importance will become clear soon. Are the only true Christians in the world the ones who believe the universe was created 6,000 years ago? There are many Christians who believe God created through evolution—guided by the Holy Spirit. Other Christians, like Phillip Johnson, William Dembski and Michael Behe are “intelligent design” advocates. They believe the universe is billions of years old, as modern science says, but that God acted in direct miraculous ways at different times to create different species. Are these people real Christians, or are they unbelievers?

Bates does not believe UFOs come from other planets, because God only created life on earth, and since the universe is only 6,000 years old, obviously there was not time for life to “evolve” on other planets. Modern science believes the universe is about 13 billion years old, and our sun about 5 billion years old. Obviously, there is quite a gap between modern science and Gary Bates. This gap does not mean science is right and Bates is wrong. But it does mean we have a little ambiguity here. We have a right to ask, is it possible Bates is wrong, and if he is, why is he? We will attempt an answer as we go along.

But this means that before Bates even starts his book, he knows UFOs do not come from another planet, as many believe, because he knows without checking there is not life on other planets—the 6,000 year limit making it impossible. Why God could not create life on other planets, exactly the same time God created life on earth in the 6,000 year limit, I do not know.

But God did create demons, and Satanic powers, and they are the cause of our modern UFO sightings.

The early chapters of his book deal with how modern media and films have promoted the idea of life on other worlds, and how atheists like Carl Sagan have preached evolution and extraterrestrial life as part of the same package. I certainly agree with Bates that modern entertainment, the "Alien" film series, "Close Encounters of the Third Kind," and the "Star Wars" movies have all given us an openness to believing in life on other planets. UFO stories just feed off this cultural mythic imagination.

He is open to stories of abductions, sexual examination of abductees, strange "mind reading" and other paranormal dimensions of the UFO experience, because they point to a demonic supernatural reality, which apparently can become physical (which the biblical demons do not do), but not so physical as to crash their UFO at Roswell, New Mexico. He does not believe that story. "Historical documentation has shown the complete lack of physical evidence for a crashed UFO and alien bodies at Roswell." (p. 188)

UFO researchers such as Stanton Friedman would disagree. I do not know what the answer to Roswell is. But I do not rule out the possibility of a crashed UFO. Jewish people did not believe in the incarnation of Jesus because certainly God would not let his own Son to come to earth, in bodily form, and die. I think it is dangerous to claim certainty about what happened at Roswell, or about what the angels of God might do in our current situation. It is full of ambiguity.

Bates is fine in dealing with the paranormal dimension of UFOs, but he is weak on the physical dimension. Here are books that should be included in the thought and works of Bates and are not:

Timothy Good, Above Top Secret: The Worldwide UFO Cover-up; Richard M. Dolan, UFOs and the National Security State; Lawrence Fawcett and Barry Greenwood, Clear Intent: The Government Coverup of the UFO Experience; Lynn D. Kitei, The Phoenix Lights; Bates sees the media as promoting the idea of extraterrestrial life, but the news media probably helps keep the government lie about UFOs going. This is Terry Hansen's argument in The Missing Times: News Media Complicity in the UFO Cover-up.

In my article "The God Hypothesis," (MUFON UFO Journal, October 1988), I argue that UFOs seem to be doing some god-like things, such as challenging our nuclear armaments and ICBM's. It is as if UFOs are saying to the governments of the world, "Don't you dare use these." If I am right, then UFOs are attacking our military demons which threaten our existence. Jesus said, "if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you." (Mt. 12:28) We must remember that it is Satan who controls the kingdoms of this world. Why would Satan threaten our military powers? One thing I notice fairly consistently about Conservative Christians is they do not complain about the governments of the world lying about UFOs. Why is that? Satan is the father of lies. The governments of the world say "national security" and suddenly Conservatives see lying as saint-like.

As I have said, most Conservative Christians have opposed my work. Gary Bates provides an example of this. Bates introduces me by saying, "[Brad] Steiger is not the only former 'believer' to have been deceived and to have fallen away. The Rev. Dr. Barry H. Downing is the pastor of a Presbyterian Church in New York." (p. 327. Apparently Bates did not notify my Presbytery that I have 'fallen away,' since I am still ordained.)

Bates goes on to say that I am an advisor to MUFON (The Mutual UFO Network), and am on the board of FUFOR (The Fund for UFO Research). He mentions that I am author of the book The Bible and Flying Saucers. This is all true. _

Bates says, "The fact that Downing is well credentialed theologically does no harm to his cause among the UFO faithful. In fact, it seems to add credibility to his 'UFOs in the Bible' views. His book is revered as a benchmark text among the more religious UFO believers, who hail him as a UFO 'master.'" (p. 327)

Apparently one of my sins is that I am well liked by UFO research groups. Of course, I would not be writing as often for the MUFON UFO Journal if magazines like Christianity Today would print my articles. How do I see Bates? I suspect that if Bates had lived thousands of years ago as one of Joseph's ten brothers who sold Joseph into Egyptian slavery, that Bates would have complained about how awful it was that Joseph was so popular with the Egyptians.

Bates then goes on to say that in my book I explore events in the Exodus, like the burning bush and the parting of the Red Sea as possible UFO events, and in the New Testament, I even suggest that the "bright cloud" at the Transfiguration of Christ was a UFO, although Bates does not even mention that there was a bright cloud at the Transfiguration. (p. 328) But it couldn't have been a UFO, even if Bates had mentioned it. Why? "But on reading the Bible at face value, it clearly explains what occurred. Downing is relying on his own wishful notions when it comes to this, and he is imposing his view on the text, as so many others have done through the ages." He goes on to say, "Although Downing is influential and well liked among the UFO community, he resorts to cleverly invented stories. As a result, much of his work fails the 'Scripture test.' This is the straightforward, traditional method where Christians use Scripture to interpret Scripture as a safeguard, not allowing passages to be taken in isolation or out of context. Downing's doctrines, like the fallen angels whose stories he believes, are fulfilling a need that the world wants satisfied—a desire for a non-supernatural interpretation of the Bible. By definition, any intervention by a supernatural God would suggest that the Bible really is what it claims to be—the inspired Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16)." (p. 328; But what if UFOs are God's intervention?)

So I have failed the Scripture test. I have not used Scripture to interpret Scripture. How might I have done that? Let us look at the passage in Matthew 17. Peter, James, John and Jesus go to the top of a mountain. Moses and Elijah, who have been gone for centuries, meet with Jesus. A bright cloud hovers over them, and a voice comes from the cloud.

If I were to put this in scriptural context, I might say that the "bright cloud" seems similar to the "pillar of cloud and of fire" of the Exodus, and that biblical people knew this was no ordinary cloud, it was the sign of God's presence. It was called the angel of God, and Moses was guided by a voice from this cloud, and furthermore when Moses went to the top of Mt. Sinai to meet with God in the Exodus UFO, the face of Moses glowed in somewhat the same way the garments of Jesus glowed at his transfiguration. (Ex. 34:29)

And I might point out that Elijah left the earth in a chariot of fire (2 Kings 2:11), and that we might wonder if these strange biblical UFOs are not some kind of heavenly transportation system. Perhaps the Resurrection world, the kingdom of heaven from which Moses and Elijah returned to earth to meet Jesus, use some kind of heavenly transportation system. The "bright cloud" at the Transfiguration of Jesus might have carried him to heaven as described in Acts. (Acts 1:9) Perhaps that is what I should have done to pass the "Scripture test." And of course that is exactly how I dealt with the Transfiguration in The Bible and Flying Saucers (pp. 126-133) in a much more thorough way than I have done here. Yet Bates tells his readers none of this. Why? If I have not explained Scripture with Scripture, should he not explain why? All Bates has to say to prove I am wrong, and consign me to the place of the fallen angels is say, "But on reading the Bible at face value, it clearly explains what occurred." What I think the Transfiguration shows is that I may be right—UFOs may be chariots of the angels of God. Bates says nothing to show otherwise.

Imagine that Gary Bates and I attend the same seminary, a professor assigns the class to write a paper on the topic, "The Bright Cloud of the Transfiguration." I turn in a paper that is 7 pages long (it was this long in my book). Gary Bates turns in one sheet of paper that has one sentence nicely centered: "But on reading the Bible at face value, it clearly explains what occurred." If you were the professor, what grade would you give to Gary Bates?

One might suppose that I have said something that is so evil, that Bates has a right to send me to the place of the fallen angels. So he does, and here it is.

“The Judeo-Christian tradition can mostly be saved by going in the direction I have gone.” (p. 328)

That’s it. Those are the words by which Bates believes I have condemned myself forever. This is the only complete sentence of mine anywhere in the Bates book.

Did Bates get these words from The Bible and Flying Saucers? Well, no. They came from a speech I gave in Florida at a MUFON conference in 1990. (The title of my paper was, “ET Contact: The Religious Dimension,” 1990 MUFON Conference Proceedings, Pensacola, FL., p. 55) How did Bates happen to pick this quote out of my speech? Well, it happened to be in a book by William T. Alnor, UFOs In the New Age, who in turn got the quote from my paper. What else did Alnor say about me? I do not know, not having read Alnor’s book. There is no evidence that Bates read any of the rest of my speech.

I will “put the quote in context” in a minute. But here is another quote from the same MUFON paper. I was trying to explain to the largely scientific crowd where my UFO theories stand in the Christian community. I said, “Protestant fundamentalists, of course, think I am too stupid to know the difference between angels and demons. Liberal Protestants think I am too stupid to know the difference between myth and reality.” (p. 54) I had already discussed that one problem linking UFOs and the Bible is in changing our thinking about the angels, and their possible use of technology. R.L. Dione’s book, Is God Supernatural? The 4,000-Year Misunderstanding was mentioned in this regard. (p. 53) When I said that the biblical faith “can mostly be saved” what I meant was that we will have to revise—not the Bible, but our understanding of the angelic reality in the Bible, and the possible relation of advanced technology to the kingdom of heaven.

Should I spend eternity in hell for asking these kinds of questions? Is it that dangerous for me to wonder about what these lights in the sky mean? The shepherds were filled with wonder, why can’t I wonder without endangering my salvation? (Lk. 2:18) And by what authority does Gary Bates issue wondering permission slips?

Those of you who have followed my presentation so far may wonder: Where did Bates get his information, and his opinions? I cannot answer that for sure, but I present the following as a possibility.

One of Bates’ main sources of information for his book was the work edited by Ronald D. Story, The Mammoth Encyclopedia of Extraterrestrial Encounters, published in London in 2002. The same book was published in the United States with the more humble title of The Encyclopedia of Extraterrestrial Encounters. How main a source for Bates was this book? I counted at least 81 footnotes in the Bates book that used the Story document as his source. In chapter 5 in the Bates book, 29 out of 57 quotes or references are from the Story encyclopedia.

I do not object that Bates used this as a source. My point is, my biography is listed in the encyclopedia, along with several articles that I wrote at the request of editor Story. Bates does not say that he gained any of his information about me from the encyclopedia, so I do not have proof that was his source. Nor do I object that he gained information about me in that document. But as far as I can see, he could have gotten everything he said about me from the biography that is headed, “Downing, Barry H.” (p. 159 in the American edition. The page numbering is different in the British edition.)

The reason this troubles me is you might get the impression from what Bates says that he has read my book. But if he has not read my book, then some other things he says make sense. Concerning me Bates says, “Moreover, he believes that these extraterrestrial angels are aliens from another planet, and thus we should understand the Bible is a mythological document rather than an historical one.” (p. 328)

There are two issues here, first the mythological issue. Here Bates absolutely reverses what I said in The Bible and Flying Saucers. The “death of God” theology was just going public as I was publishing my book in 1968. The argument of this theology was many events in the Bible like the parting of the Red Sea, and the Resurrection of Jesus, were no longer believable in our

scientific world. These biblical stories have to be “demythologized,” so said these liberal theologians. I said, “Not true. I believe I know how the Red Sea parted, down to the last detail.” I was arguing that the Bible should be treated as history, not mythology, at exactly this point.

Beginning with the heading, “Honest to God—Is God Dead?” I deal with this issue in my book at great length. (pp. 24-44) How did Bates absolutely reverse my meaning? One possible explanation is that he did not read my book. In making the statement about demythologizing Bates makes reference to the William Alnor book as his source for this statement. Did Alnor get it wrong, and Bates get it wrong from Alnor? I leave it to others to check this out.

In regard to my saying, “extraterrestrial angels are aliens from another planet,” this is more complex. The basic question here is: Where Is Heaven? That happens to be the title of chapter 5 in my book. (pp. 163-189) I do not know where heaven is, and I do not believe Bates has mentioned that he knows either. I do not rule out that angels might come from another planet, but the central argument of my chapter on Heaven is that Heaven may be in a different dimension of space, not in our visible universe. And evidence from modern physics, suggesting that there may be many dimensions in space, have increased since my book was written. (Michio Kaku, “Parallel Universes, the Matrix, and the Superintelligence,” Kurzweil . AI.net, June 26, 2003. C. Kelleher, and G. Knapp, Hunt for the Skinwalker, chapter 29, ‘Other Worlds,’ pp. 242 ff.) Furthermore I expanded on this theme in a two part series published in the MUFON UFO Journal article “Wormholes, Heaven, and the God Hypothesis,” referenced above.

I would think that if Bates had read my book, he would say that although I think it possible heaven is on another planet, my preferred view, based both on the Bible and UFO evidence, is that heaven is in another dimension.

Even using the Story encyclopedia, and not my book, Bates could have done better. Bates is aware that I have written articles for the Story document. Bates refers to something I said about the “Ancient Astronaut” theory of UFOs (p. 202) and references an article I wrote in the Story encyclopedia, “Religion and UFOs,” an article that summarizes the different theories of UFOs and religion such as: the Ancient Astronaut Theory, the Mythological Theory, the New Age Theory, the Demonic Theory, and my own Angelic Theory. [This article is similar to the one now posted on Jim Cunningham’s Strong Delusion web site, under the heading “The Bible and Flying Saucers.” It is the introduction to the Marlowe edition of my book. (1997)] Bates could have used this article to explore the relation between the demonic theory, and the angelic theory as I see it. He obviously read my article, and referred to it. Or he might have gone to another article I published in the Story document, “Demonic Theory of UFOs,” and criticize, or approve, what I say about the demonic theory. All the articles in the encyclopedia are listed in alphabetical order in the Contents, and after the heading, Bible and Flying Saucers, The, comes “Biblical Miracles as Super-Technology,” and then “Biblical UFOs.” Both of these last two articles were written by me, and the article on Super-Technology would have given context, at least, to the whole issue of the supernatural, and how we deal with it in light of UFOs. That in turn would have given him greater understanding of what I meant when I spoke those terrible words at a MUFON conference in Florida, “The Judeo-Christian tradition can mostly be saved by going in the direction I have gone.” We do not have to change the Bible, but we have to expand and clarify our understanding of the Bible.

A summary of the Gary Bates case against me is this: 1) He is against my book, but does not quote a single sentence from it; 2) he totally reverses what I say in my book about demythologizing; 3) he is totally unaware of chapter 5 in my book, “Where Is Heaven?” where I suggest angels and UFOs come, not from another planet, but another dimension. The most likely explanation for the above facts is he has not read my book, but faked having read it by reading my biography in the Story encyclopedia; 4) his only direct quote of me comes from a speech I gave at a MUFON conference in Florida, a speech he has not read. He borrowed the quote from William Alnor. 5) He condemns my analysis of the “bright cloud” of the

Transfiguration by making his own inspired analysis clear with these words, "But on reading the Bible at face value, it clearly explains what occurred." Having amassed all this terrible evidence against me, he has no choice but to condemn me as a "former believer who has fallen away," and as a wolf in sheep's clothing who is in league with the "fallen angels."

Although Bates does mention my theory that a UFO parted the Red Sea, he does not deal with the biblical basis for my view at all, which seems strange since my main sin is not paying attention to the Bible. (But of course it makes sense if Bates has not read my book.) Bates says I rely on my own "wishful notions," rather than paying attention to what is in "the text." Let me show you my wishful notions.

Exodus says that God led the Exodus. "And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night." (Ex. 13:21) In reference to this Exodus UFO Bates says, "If God's Word says pillars of fire and cloud went before the Hebrew nation, then it was a pillar of cloud and the fire is not the exhaust of a jet engine." (See "Dr. Barry Downing's Response to Gary Bates," in the Strong Delusion web site, the section by Bates introducing my response.)

First, this is not just a cloud. It is a cloud in which is "the Lord," or the "angel of the Lord." A being in this UFO speaks to Moses, apparently during most of the 40 year Exodus journey. It appears that manna, food for Israel, drops from this "cloud" during the Exodus. If Bates wants to say it was just a cloud, that is his choice. But I see it as a UFO which is clearly under intelligent control, and the biblical people knew it was under intelligent, and divine control. Notice that the cloud was "pillar" shaped, throughout the wilderness journey. It seems to have a solid shape. This is not a "wishful notion," this is in the text. Modern UFOs are reported sometimes to be "cigar shaped," and as much as a mile in length. (An Associated Press article by Angela K. Brown, dated January 14, 2008, reported a UFO seen in Texas estimated to be a mile long. Similar reports were part of the Arizona sightings in 1997.)

These are not "wishful notions" on my part, these are eyewitness reports, as UFO researchers know.

"Then the angel of God who went before the host of Israel moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them, coming between them and the host of the Egyptians. And there was the cloud and the darkness, and the night passed without one coming near the other all night." (Ex. 14:19,20)

The Exodus UFO leads Israel up to the Red Sea on purpose. This is not wishful notion, this is text. (This looks like a bad idea with the Egyptians closing in on one side, the Red Sea on the other, unless the Exodus UFO has the power to part the Red Sea, and the whole thing has been planned ahead.)

The Exodus UFO then moved from in front of Israel to the rear, and kept the army of Israel, and the army of Egypt, apart until it was dark. This is not wishful notion, this is text.

"Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. And the people of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry ground, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left." (Ex. 14:21, 22)

The Lord drove the sea back, and the Lord is in the Exodus UFO. This is not wishful notion, this is text.

And there were walls of water, the Hebrew seems to be indicate these were smooth straight walls. This is very strange. The text understands this is strange—it is strange to this day. And I wonder about this.

The text does say that a strong east wind blew through the night. And the Lord—in the pillar of cloud—caused it. I wonder how. And when Israel crossed the Sea, the bed was dry ground. It was totally wet the night before, covered with water, and bone dry in the morning. I wonder how.

My theory—Gary Bates would say my wishful notion—is that the pillar of cloud hovered over the Red Sea, and used its power system—in my book I speculate that it is some kind of anti-gravitational force, to part the water. The idea of anti-gravitational propulsion is not something I made up—it has been a common point of discussion among scientific UFO researchers, who think this may explain the ability of UFOs to make sharp turns at high speed, to hover, and accelerate rapidly, with no noise. This type of propulsion system would probably give smooth walls of water as a result, and would have a baking affect on the sea bed. The strong east wind reported in the Bible would be the down draft caused by the force field, coming out the open end of the channel. The Jews were on the western shore of the Red Sea, facing east. During the night there was a strong east wind, caused by the Lord—in the Exodus UFO. I suspect—more wishful notion—that if the Jews had been on the eastern shore of the Red Sea, they would have reported a strong west wind. Wind would come out of each open end of the channel. Bates is certainly right to suppose I do not have proof of any of this.

But, one might ask, if some kind of force field pushes the water out of the way, why wouldn't this force field knock the Jews flat when they entered the channel? The answer is, it would. And so, once the walls of water were established, there would need to be an energy free center in the channel, with two walls of energy remaining to hold the water back on each side. Then the Jews could cross safely. Notice that while there was a "strong east wind" all night, in the morning no wind was reported. If the Jews were crossing in the face of a strong east wind, it would have been mentioned, or more likely, would have made crossing impossible.

So much for wild speculation. Now back to the text.

"The Egyptians pursued, and went in after them into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots and his horsemen. And in the morning watch the Lord in the pillar of fire and of cloud looked down upon the host of the Egyptians, and discomfited the host of the Egyptians, clogging their chariot wheels so that they drove heavily; and the Egyptians said, 'Let us flee from before Israel; for the Lord fights for them against the Egyptians.'" (Ex. 14:23-25)

Notice where the Exodus UFO now is—it is hovering over the open sea channel. When last reported, it was between the army of Egypt and the army of Israel, until it got dark. When did it move to its new position? The Bible does not say. My guess is it moved under cover of darkness—the pillar of fire turned off the light for the night—and moved above the sea channel. Power was turned on, the channel parted, the Jews noticed a strong east wind.

The people of Israel were now high and dry on the other side, and would have felt safe if it were not for the army of Egypt in hot pursuit in the sea channel. Had God saved them with this wonderful miracle, only to let them die anyway? What happened next? We remember that the walls of water fell in on the Egyptians, but that is not what comes next.

What comes next in the text is very interesting. The Lord in the pillar of fire and cloud "looked down upon the host of the Egyptians, clogging their chariot wheels so that they drove heavily."

The Egyptians were stopped dead in their tracks when the Lord "looked down" on the Egyptians.

A stunning glance came from the Exodus UFO. The Egyptians were discomfited, knocked flat. What about the chariot wheels being clogged? Didn't they cross on dry ground? The Revised Standard Version admits in a footnote that "clogging" is not a proper translation of the Hebrew. The Hebrew says the wheels were "broken" by the power that came from above. And the chariots drove "heavily," the horses were either paralyzed, or knocked flat.

How did this happen? Back to my wishful notion. Remember I said that the energy beam that parted the sea would have to be phased out in the center, or it would knock the Jews flat when they crossed the sea? Well, I think that power beam was turned on full blast when the Egyptians were in the open sea channel. It was an invisible beam. The Jews could only understand that something invisible came from the Exodus UFO, and knocked the Egyptians

flat. They said the Lord “looked down” on the Egyptians. Why would we expect the writers of the Bible to say that the UFO used some kind of power beam to knock the Egyptians flat?

And the text continues, “Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Stretch out your hand over the sea, that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen.’” (Ex. 14:26)

Moses obeyed, the power was turned off, the walls of water collapsed, and the Egyptians and their horses were drowned. The credibility of God, and of Moses, was established, and the Exodus tradition has power in the lives of Jews and Christians to this day.

Here is how science works. We have a mystery, like the parting of the Red Sea. And then we have a theory as I have proposed, an explanation. I have not proved that my theory is correct, but both the details in the biblical text, as well as observations of modern UFO technology, lead to this conclusion: my explanation is plausible, both biblically and scientifically. My impression is that many people in organizations like MUFON believe plausibility is a good thing. Some Christians think plausibility is a good thing too. What is a “wishful notion” to Gary Bates is faithful biblical interpretation, and faithful science, to others.

INTERPRETING THE BIBLE LITERALLY—ALWAYS?

Some may wonder, if Gary Bates and I are both Christians, how did we end up so far apart in the way we interpret UFOs? The key is the way we interpret the Bible. Bates says (following his condemnation of me), “If the Bible is a true, literal, and historical record of the past, then we should be able to trust its record of the future. It says that God will judge the world again and those outside of Christ will be eternally separated from God. A non-literal approach allows one to choose one’s own beliefs about the past and the future.” (p. 329)

What Bates is saying is that the Bible has to be interpreted as literally true, every word, in every book, in every verse. Am I guilty of not interpreting the Bible literally at every point? Absolutely.

I do not treat the Bible as literally true everywhere, because it is impossible, even with a fairly straight forward description of lived events. In my Strong Delusion article, “Dr. Barry Downing’s Response to Gary Bates,” I spent time dealing with the conversion of the Apostle Paul as it is recorded in Acts chapters 9, 22 and 26. I will not repeat all the details here, but my main point was that the texts are not consistent in what they say happened to the men traveling with Paul when the bright light hovered over them on the Damascus Road. Did the men with Paul hear the voice Paul heard? What was the bodily response of the men with Paul?

Acts 9:7 says the men heard the voice; Acts 22:9 says the men did not hear the voice. Acts 9:7 says the men “stood speechless;” Acts 26:14 says everyone fell to the ground. Here is my position: it cannot be literally true that the men heard the voice, and did not hear the voice; it cannot be literally true that the men “stood speechless,” and fell to the ground. (The RSV seems to have translated the Greek correctly in these passages.) To say the Bible is literally true here is absurd, and many people who love Jesus, and love the Bible, know it is absurd to say something is true and not true at the same time. To say Barry Downing is going to spend eternity separated from God with the fallen angels because he does not take every word in the Bible literally is also absurd. I have many sins for which I am accountable to Christ, but I will not give in to the kind of absurdity that Gary Bates holds up as his badge of honor.

Because I do not take the Bible literally at every point, but do at many points (look how literally I take each point of the parting of the Red Sea), I have a freedom to interpret the Bible, looking with the help of the Holy Spirit for new possibilities. Peter’s experience in Acts 10 tells me that people like Gary Bates are so locked in to the Bible as a document of the past, that they would not recognize the pillar of cloud and of fire if it flew in front of their noses. They only know it if they see it in the Bible.

Paul's conversion is of interest to me not only as a Bible student, but as a UFO student. In modern close encounter cases, it sometimes seems that the UFO reality will target a single person for contact, or even abduction. This person we might call the primary target. If other people are with the primary target, these are secondary targets. One of the questions in UFO research is: what is the impact of a UFO close encounter on the secondary targets?

An example of this is the case of Betty Andreasson Luca. (See Raymond Fowler, The Andreasson Affair)

Betty and I were both speakers at a Connecticut UFO conference, I respect her Christian faith. Her story is that one evening a UFO landed in her back yard, Betty and her children were in their house and were aware of the landing. Beings came right through her kitchen door—she thought they were angels. Later her Christian friends told her she was taken by demons. Betty seemed to be taken with the alien beings to a UFO, and went on a long journey and met a Divine Being. Betty confessed her faith in Christ before this Divine Being. In UFO terms, we would say Betty was the "Primary Target" of this close encounter and abduction.

What about Betty's children? What about the "Secondary Targets?" One daughter was allowed to witness the abduction, but the other children were put in some kind of suspended state until Betty came back.

Thus when we come to the UFO close encounter with Christ on the Damascus Road, we see the Apostle Paul as the primary target, and the men traveling with him as secondary targets. What happened to the men? We cannot be sure, because the text is not clear. All three reports say there was some impact of the close encounter on the secondary targets, either seeing the light, or hearing the voice, or in unison falling to the ground.

If the Acts 9:7 passage could be believed, that the secondary targets "stood speechless," this raises the question of parallelism to the Andreasson case, where Betty's children, except for one daughter, were put in some kind of speechless, suspended state. In the resurrection story in Matthew, an angel came and rolled back the stone in front of the tomb. Eventually Mary Magdalene and "the other Mary" came to the tomb. These women were the primary targets, they received the resurrection message from the angel.

But the guards at the tomb were secondary targets. In the presence of the angel the guards "became like dead men." (Mt. 28:4) As in the "stood speechless" image, some kind of paralysis is implied, but not certain of course.

We also wonder about who besides Paul heard the voice. Did only the primary target hear the voice, as in the case of Betty Andreasson, or did the men with Paul also hear the voice? Acts 9:7 says they did hear the voice, Acts 22:9 says the men with Paul saw the light, but did not hear the voice.

Does it matter that in Acts 9, the story is told simply from the point of view of the writer—Luke—whereas in Acts 22:9, Paul himself is being quoted? Is Acts 22:9 therefore more reliable than Acts 9:7?

I do not know. Modern UFO encounters suggest the angel/alien reality is able to project a voice into the minds of its primary targets, and that secondary targets will not hear this voice. Perhaps the Acts 22:9 verse is more accurate, and is an example of voice targeting. We have other examples of voice targeting in the Bible, as in the call of the prophet Samuel. God called Samuel three times during the night, Samuel heard the voice, Eli did not. In this case Samuel was the primary target, and Eli the secondary target. (1 Samuel 3:1-18) On the other hand, in the Transfiguration story, Jesus is clearly the primary target, and Peter, James and John are the secondary target. Yet, they all hear the voice from the bright UFO, "This is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him." (Mt. 17:5)

The task of faithful biblical interpretation is very difficult. One cannot take a one size fits all approach, taking every word literally, as Gary Bates insists. The Bible consists of 66 books, written by many authors over a period of perhaps a thousand years. The Bible was written in a pre-scientific culture. We should not expect the Bible to read like the Handbook of Chemistry

and Physics. Psalms is poetry, poetry is about feelings, love, guilt, hope, despair. What does it mean to take poetry literally? Proverbs are little bits of wisdom.

There are parts of the Bible that are historical, that I read historically, like the parting of the Red Sea, and the Resurrection of Jesus. But these were witnessed historical events, as was the conversion of Paul in Acts. This is different from a spiritual vision, like the book of Revelation. Also historical events are not like the creation stories in Genesis. After all, not even Adam and Eve could have been around to witness the creation of the universe. It is a big mistake, in terms of biblical interpretation, to treat the first chapters of Genesis as if they were events witnessed by humans. That does not mean we cannot say Genesis is inspired by God, but we have to see it as different kind of literature from the parting of the Red Sea story, or the Resurrection, which are historical. Early Genesis is more like the parables of Jesus, especially the creation parable that Jesus told in Matthew 21:33-43. By taking the Bible literally at every point, Gary Bates and his allies are sure the universe is only 6000 years old. (p. 345) For millions of educated Christians, this is an impossible thing to believe. Faith does involve believing in the difficult, believing that with God all things are possible, but faith does not demand that we believe the absurd. And with a hermeneutical approach to the Bible that understands the cultural and literary context in which the Bible was produced, an absurd faith in the Bible is unnecessary. Taking the Bible literally at every point is absurd. But with faith based on greater understanding, it becomes less necessary to proclaim that those who disagree with us are going to spend eternity separated from God with the fallen angels. May Christ have mercy on all of us as we try to interpret the Word of God faithfully.

UFOS: WHAT DOES CHRIST REQUIRE OF US?

The UFO situation has created a world wide challenge. UFOs are seen everywhere. A recent poll indicated that 14 percent of Americans had seen a UFO. In a population of 300 million, that works out to be more than 40 million witnesses. Our government says, "swamp gas, Venus, or maybe a secret new airplane." Many people who see UFOs as real see them as simply a bunch of aliens from outer space, here maybe to watch us, or experiment on us. Gary Bates is right to suppose that our scientific world view keeps us from even wondering if UFOs might be demonic in the biblical sense. From my point of view, this scientific world view keeps us from seeing UFOs as angelic, in the biblical sense. Whether we see them as angelic or demonic, the angelic and demonic often blend together in the Bible, as in killing the first-born in Egypt on Passover night. What kind of witness does Christ require of us in regard to UFOs? Although Conservative Christians, like Gary Bates, have been very critical of me, at least we agree that there is something at stake here for Christ's church, and mostly the church is silent before the UFO reality. All Christians need to start asking: What does Christ require of us in regard to UFOs. Here is my list.

First, all should read some of the books I have mentioned above, by authors such as Timothy Good, Richard Dolan, Lawrence Fawcett and Barry Greenwood, along with Terry Hansen. Our government has lied to us, and has kept the church of Christ from looking up with the hope that our salvation has come near. Even though the entertainment media—movies and TV—have created a cultural mind set that imagines aliens from other planets, the news media have joined the government in ridiculing those who claim to have seen UFOs. UFO witnesses have often been treated by the news media as crazy people who believe in little green men. I do not believe there can be a moral rebirth in America, or the world—and we sure need one—without the rebirth of the center of the biblical faith—Christ crucified, and raised from the dead, and all that means both for how we conduct our lives now, and how we expect to be judged by Christ in the life to come.

Second, we need to talk about the issue of UFOs with courage among Christian people, and not be afraid of the ridicule. We need to listen to those who have stories of UFO encounters to

tell, and not make fun of them. That does not mean we believe every story we hear. There are hoaxers, those with psychological problems, who want attention, or suffer from delusions. As I have said, we have an identity problem here. Are some UFOs from God? Are some not from God? Would God send punishing angels on America, or on the world, as he did on Egypt? These kinds of questions will not be welcomed in most churches that I am familiar with. But I believe the Christian faith needs help from God in our age. We need to wonder: are UFOs some kind of gift from God to his church in our time? I see UFOs as a kind of diamond necklace Christ has given to the church, his bride. Those who see us wearing it will make fun of us, and say the diamonds are fake, just glass. Humans will mock us and revile us and say all manner of evil against us. (Mt. 5:11) But it has always been so for the bride of Christ.

Third, it seems clear that UFOs could indeed provide the heavenly chariots for Christ and his angels to return in glory, and redeem Christ's faithful. (Mt. 24:30) But at the same time, we must be careful not to announce to the world: Christ is coming immediately. He might, or he might not. A well known evangelist spoke to a crowd at our local arena in the early 1970's, and predicted Christ would return on July 4, 1976, for America's 200th birthday. This kind of false prophecy discredits the integrity of the gospel, and is unnecessary. Listen to Scripture. "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only." (Mt. 24:36) Avoid the arrogance of saying we know what not even Christ knows. We live with ambiguity about God's plans for the future. This is what walking in faith means. We also have to live with ambiguity in interpreting scripture. Is my understanding of the parting of the Red Sea correct? I do not know—it is filled with ambiguity. I believe my understanding is possible, and with God all things are possible. In the mean time, we have to wait and see.

Fourth, we face several "Strong Delusions" in the world, some old, some new. Many are under the "Strong Delusion" that if UFOs were really important for Christian faith, the editors of Christianity Today and The Christian Century, and all our seminary professors would step right up and demand our government stop lying about UFOs. Wrong. Christians in high places do not want to be called fools. Many Christians are under the "Strong Delusion" that even if UFOs exist, they are only a scientific problem, not a biblical problem. Wrong. Oh you of little faith, where are your angels? Many Christians are under the "Strong Delusion" that God would never show a sign in modern times, to encourage his church in faith, hope and love. Wrong. Perhaps if the signs shown to our generation had been shown to Sodom, it would have repented. (Mt. 11:23) And in the world now, all the nations love money more than God, which has always been one of Satan's "Strong Delusions." Wrong again. As we now see, that delusion is melting before the eyes of the whole world.

Fifth, pray without ceasing.

Barry H. Downing
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