

# UFOs and the Bible: 7 Theories by Dr Barry Downing

Contributed by Administrator  
Monday, 17 June 2013  
Last Updated Monday, 17 June 2013

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"I went to the Wikipedia site and found there was no reference for "UFOs and the Bible," so I accepted their invitation to write one. It was submitted in February of 2010. Almost immediately it was nominated in the "everyone can be an editor" process for deletion as "fringe" material. The original material was shrunk to a few paragraphs, which were then merged into an already existing 'Ancient Astronaut' article. Then Wikibin published only the text of the original article, without footnotes. (As is their policy, no author is listed.) Strong Delusion, in the interests of clarity and intellectual integrity, has agreed to publish the document as originally submitted to Wikipedia."

Barry H.  
Downing

## UFOS AND THE BIBLE

Barry H. Downing

February 2010

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Dr. Barry H. Downing

The  
advent of the phenomenon of Unidentified Flying Objects (UFOs) in the

middle of the 20th

Century has led to a wide range of religious speculation, especially in regard to the Bible, in western culture. There have been four major theories put forward to connect UFOs and the Bible: the ancient astronaut, the angelic, the demonic, and the fallen angel theory. These theories all seek to reconcile the concept of extraterrestrial visitation with the biblical material.

There

is also a wider sense in which UFOs have influenced religious imagination, and in this regard the Bible is seen as a resource but not as an authority to be interpreted. There are three other major ways in which the issue of religious imagination has related to the UFO experience: UFOs as a modern religious mythology, UFOs as hope for a New Age spirituality, and the emergence of religious cults rooted in UFO mythology.

All

of this discussion has taken place against a back drop in which the governments of the world deny that we are being visited by an extraterrestrial reality, while UFO researchers claim that the evidence of a cover-up is overwhelming. The United States Air Force study of UFOs stated there was "no factual basis whatever" of a government UFO cover-up. (1) But authors such as Donald Keyhoe, Timothy Good, Richard M. Dolan, Terry Hansen, Lawrence Fawcett and Barry J. Greenwood believe there is a cover-up. (2) Because of the lack of clarity about UFO truth, a truly scientific and academic appraisal of the religious implications of UFOs can only be tentative at this time.

## FOUR THEORIES LINKING UFOS AND THE BIBLE

### THE ANCIENT ASTRONAUT THEORY

The

"Ancient Astronaut" theory is most closely associated with Eric von Daniken, and his multi-million best selling book, *Chariots of the Gods?* But authors such as Brinsley Le Poer Trench, and Morris Jessup had begun to explore the issue of extraterrestrial visitation and our religious past before von Daniken. (3)

Von

Daniken asked questions about our archaeological past, wondering about Egyptian pyramids, and ancient temples, suggesting that their design and construction were inspired by extraterrestrial contact. Television programs, especially on the History Channel, showed photos of strange lines on the plains of Nazca, which are best visible from the air. Von Daniken published books with photos of archaeological

sites that added plausibility to his ancient astronaut thesis. (4)

#### Chapter

4 of von Daniken's book is entitled, "Was God an Astronaut?" He refers to the vision of Ezekiel, who saw a strange flying object that looked like a "wheel within a wheel," suggesting Ezekiel had seen a spaceship, a comparison Morris Jessup had made in 1956.

(5) But von Daniken makes his basic epistemology clear in a discussion of Genesis 19, the story of the visitation of Lot by two angels, and the destruction of the city of Sodom. He suggests that these were not angels, but ancient astronauts. They may have used atomic weapons to destroy the city. In any case, the other worldly beings acted as if there was a time set for Sodom's destruction—why would God work on a time table? "It is also difficult for enlightened children of this age to think of an infinitely good Father who gives preference to 'favorite children,' such as Lot's family, over countless others." (6)

#### Von

Daniken makes several assumptions with religious implications. He assumes that in our scientific age, it makes sense to substitute the idea of space aliens for angels. If we were to land on another planet, where the people were very primitive, our astronauts would be worshiped as "sons of heaven" or as "gods." (7) Thus one key to von Daniken's theory is the issue of mistaken identity. Our primitive ancestors might have thought they were seeing angels, but we in our scientific age have grown beyond that understanding. We now know better.

#### He

also assumes that the story of the destruction of Sodom can be taken literally, which is contrary to the thinking of many religious liberals, who would see this story as biblical mythology, not as real history. Religious conservatives, however, would read this story literally, but would object that von Daniken has turned angels into space aliens, and has turned what may have been the supernatural destruction of Sodom into destruction by means of advanced technology. Religious liberals would agree that a "truly fair God" would not have "favorite children," but conservatives would object that calling the Jews God's chosen people is a central biblical concept. (8)

#### Once

the concept of space aliens is imagined in relation to the Bible, then those like R.L. Dione have argued that God is a space alien, literally, as in his book *God Drives a Flying Saucer*. Some even suggest that Jesus was an extraterrestrial, and his miracles were due to his extraterrestrial powers. After his crucifixion and resurrection, he returns to his extraterrestrial existence, having told his disciples, "you are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world." (9)

## THE ANGELIC THEORY

The angelic theory of UFOs has been put forward by Barry H. Downing in his book, *The Bible and Flying Saucers*, first published, like *Chariots of the Gods?*, in 1968. Downing's thesis is that UFOs carry the angels of God. He does not secularize them, like von Daniken, into space aliens with no special religious mission. (10)

Downing makes an ontological distinction between God and God's angels. God in his essence is invisible. "No one has ever seen God." (11) But his angels can be seen, and take physical form. Jesus is the visible "image of the invisible God." (12) In the Old Testament, angels were sometimes given God-like status, as when at Mt. Sinai the book of Exodus says "And Moses went up to God, and the Lord called him out of the mountain." (13) But in the New Testament, the distinction between God and God's angels is more firm. It is understood that the Jews "received the law as delivered by angels." (14)

Angels are so physical, and so human, that we may not identify them properly. "Do not hesitate to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." (15) While Downing would not say "God drives a flying saucer," he suspects the angels might, since they can be physical. If Jesus could ride a donkey, angels should be allowed to fly in spaceships. (16)

Downing devoted a major section of his book to the Exodus, claiming that the "pillar of cloud and fire" of the Exodus was a space vehicle for the angels, and the angels use technology. The "pillar" shape suggests a cylinder which is similar to modern "cloud cigars" that are frequently reported. (17) He takes the position that we cannot be sure that ancient people, or we ourselves, can tell the difference between the supernatural and the super technological. He argues it is premature to make the separation that Roman Catholic theologian Msgr. Corrado Balducci makes saying that miracles, angels and demons come from the supernatural world, whereas UFOs come from the natural world. (18)

Downing and UFO researcher Joe Lewels, have put forward "The God Hypothesis," which argues that UFO beings are not here on earth only as observers, but rather that they are directing and controlling human destiny. (19) Scientific researchers such as Jacques Vallee seem to support this hypothesis in works such as *Dimensions*, where Vallee argues that UFOs are a god-like force, a "Control System." (20)

How can UFOs be in control, and not land and make open contact? As Vallee says, "Direct contact would preclude genuine learning." (21) Downing argues that if, as the Bible says, we are being made in the image of God, then we have to be free from God, for God has no God. The parable of Jesus concerning the householder who plants a vineyard, lets it out to tenants, and leaves town, illustrates this principle. God creates the earth, then goes away, to see if humans will care for the vineyard, or the planet, responsibly. (22)

But

it is not true to say that UFOs, or the angels, do not interact at all with life on earth. Rather, Downing argues that "targeted intervention" is used to establish the biblical religion. (23)

For

Downing, the Exodus story is an example of targeted intervention. Moses is targeted as a chosen person to speak for God, and to lead the Exodus. Killing of the first-born in Egypt, leading to Jewish Passover, is targeted intervention. The timing is targeted—midnight; sexually targeted, males; birth order targeted, first-born only; ethnically targeted, Egyptian only; Jewish first-born are "passed over." (24)

The

Jews are led up to the Red Sea by the Exodus UFO, the "pillar of cloud and fire," which hovers over the sea, using its propulsion system (some type of beam technology) to split the water, and later to either break off, or lock up, the Egyptian chariot wheels as the army of Egypt tried to follow the Jews. ( 25)

The

Exodus UFO drops the "manna" for the Jews to eat during their Exodus journey, at Sinai the commandments of the Jewish religion are given, and then the Jews are led on to the "Promised Land," where their law, their priesthood, their "revealed" religion, becomes self-directed. Once the Jewish faith becomes self-directed, in theory it no longer requires angelic intervention. Nevertheless, through the Exodus story the Jewish faith becomes, and still is, a model to the world of divine intervention. (26)

In

the New Testament, Jesus becomes the ultimate form of targeted intervention, he becomes God in human form, born the king of the angels. UFO related New Testament events include the star of Bethlehem, the angelic appearance to the shepherds at the birth of Jesus, the Spirit of God that "descends like a dove" at the baptism of Jesus, the "bright cloud" at his transfiguration, an angel rolling back the stone at his tomb, and the "cloud" that takes Jesus to heaven at his ascension. The ascension story of Jesus has its parallel in the story of the "chariot of fire" that took Elijah to heaven. (27) The conversion of the Apostle Paul becomes one of the most important acts of targeted intervention in the formation of the early church. On the road to Damascus, Saul/Paul has a UFO close encounter which includes hearing the voice of Jesus. (28)

Are

UFOs carrying out some kind of "targeted intervention" in our time? Downing argues there is compelling evidence that UFOs have interacted with our nuclear weapons facilities, disabling some weapons, while perhaps preventing some disasters at nuclear power facilities. The purpose of UFO abductions is not clear, but they meet the definition of targeted intervention. Some abduction cases such as that of Betty Andreasson Luca report a meeting with God through her experience, presenting the possibility that some larger spiritual purpose is involved in modern abductions. Perhaps the main abduction message is: we are dealing with a power greater than any human power. (29)

It

is thus the conclusion of those who hold "The God Hypothesis" that UFOs are not just space aliens, but rather they are a divine, or angelic power, guiding the development of life on earth. The Exodus story in the Old Testament, and the Jesus story in the New Testament,

are examples of religious targeted intervention that have shaped human development, although as Vallee would argue, in a very subtle and indirect way.

## THE DEMONIC THEORY

The two remaining theories in regard to UFOs and the Bible are both developed by conservative Protestant Christians. They are the "Demonic Theory" and the "Fallen Angel Theory." Both theories agree in rejecting the "Ancient Astronaut" and "Angelic" theories discussed above, but they do not agree on how to connect modern UFO evidence in light of the Bible. These two theories share not only a common opposition to von Daniken and Downing, but they also agree that whatever UFOs are, they are evil. They are evil either because they are trying to deceive us into rejecting Jesus as the Christ, or perhaps trivializing Jesus by making him into a space alien. It is also possible they are working in a way that is destructive of human genetics, especially in the area of human sexuality.

Both the demonic theory and the fallen angel theory are rooted in an attempt to explain the abduction phenomenon in connection with UFOs. This is no small issue. If UFOs simply challenged our jet fighters, or interacted with our nuclear sites, we might understand UFOs to be extraterrestrial observers who are largely willing to leave us alone. But with hundreds of reports of alien abductions of humans, researcher Thomas E. Bullard comments, "Respected investigators like John Keel and Jacques Vallee declared the phenomenon elusive by nature and pronounced that UFOs are not just stranger than anyone imagined, but stranger than anyone could imagine." (30)

Researcher Budd Hopkins has suggested aliens need our DNA, while Jacobs has wondered if aliens are using our genetics to develop a hybrid race. The late Harvard psychiatrist John Mack has argued that abductions lead to a spiritual transformation, toward a more eastern type of thinking (Buddhism in particular), while Whitley Strieber wrote extensively of the spiritual dimension of his abduction experience in his best selling book *Communion*. The strange combination of the physical, genetic, psychological and spiritual has been a challenge to secular UFO research organizations such as MUFON. (31)

Christian conservatives have approached the issue of abductions with a sense that evil was at work here, a power working deceptively. The writings of Keel, Vallee, Jacobs, Mack and Strieber have all provided material on which either the demonic theory, or the fallen angel theory, was built. (32)

One of the early books promoting the demonic theory was by John Weldon,



## UFOs: What On Earth Is Happening?

Published in 1976, the argument was that UFOs were demons let loose on earth in anticipation of the Second Coming of Christ. A similar point of view is in Timothy J. Dailey's book, *The Millennial Deception: Angels, Aliens & the Antichrist*. Published in 1995, in addition to drawing on the writings of Keel, Vallee, Jacobs and Strieber to make his demonic argument that the anti-Christ has been let loose, he also lists the near death experience of those like Betty Eadie as examples of the "masters of deception." (33) The central New Testament concept is that in the end times there will be a "coming of the lawless one by the activity of Satan" with all "wicked deception," bringing on a "strong delusion" concerning what is false. (34) Our scientific age has been deceived into believing UFOs are space aliens, when in fact they are demons whose presence will separate true believers in Christ from those who can be tempted to believe in false signs.

## A

more recent book making the demonic argument is by Gary Bates, *Alien Intrusion: UFOs and the Evolution Connection*.

Bates draws on the works of Keel, Vallee, Jacobs, and Mack among others to make his argument that UFOs are demonic. Concerning whether the aliens are physical or spiritual, Bates concludes that the aliens are spiritual beings "sometimes manifesting as physical." (35)

## One

key element in conservative thinking is that true Christian believers, if they call on the name of Jesus as they are about to be abducted by an alien, the abduction attempt will stop. This belief has been supported by MUFON CE-4 researcher Joe Jordan, among others, who has discovered this pattern in his abduction studies. (36)

## Bates

writes from the point of view of a "Young Earth" Christian, who believes the earth is only about 6000 years old, and holds to a literal Genesis, anti-evolutionary point of view. (37) Thus any suggestion that space aliens are visiting earth opens the possibility we live in an evolutionary universe, contrary to the Bates understanding of creation. Thus he condemns von Daniken on the basis of "dubious research," (38) but his condemnation of Downing is more theological.

## Bates

places Downing with the fallen angels because Downing, though a pastor, presents a deceptive doctrine of "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)." (39) Although Bates does not refute Downing's argument that a UFO parted the Red Sea, he senses that a technological explanation for any divine or angelic intervention destroys its value. Thus the faith of Bates depends on a concept of the supernatural, in spite of the fact that "supernatural" is not a biblical word.

The fallen angel theory has its roots in a brief passage in early Genesis. "When men began to multiply on the face of the ground, and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were fair; and they took to wife such of them as they chose. "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." (40)

The Nephilim are perhaps children of the fallen angels, although scholars are not sure. (41) Eric von Daniken sees an extraterrestrial connection in this passage, "we have the sons of God, who interbreed with human beings." (42)

Chuck Missler and Mark Eastman in their book, *Alien Encounters: The Secret Behind the UFO Phenomenon*, make the argument that UFOs carry the fallen angels, or offspring of fallen angels, the Nephilim of Genesis, who have now returned.

They believe it was this interbreeding between the angels and humans that led to what they call "the gene pool problem." Noah was perfect in his "generations," that is "Noah's" genealogy was not tarnished by the intrusion of fallen angels. It seems that this adulteration of the human gene pool was a major problem on the planet earth." (43) Modern UFO abductions have a reproductive purpose. Missler and Eastman quote David Jacobs who says the purpose of alien abductions is "to help the aliens produce other beings." (44) Budd Hopkins says the aliens are "here to carry out a complex breeding experiment in which they seem to be working to create a hybrid species, a mix of human and alien characteristics." (45) Missler and Eastman see this as evidence that connects modern aliens with the Nephilim.

Missler and Eastman see modern UFO abductions as the work of fallen angels, rather than demons, because of the physical nature of the UFO reality, as well as the sexual dimension of abduction reports.

"Most students of the Bible tend to assume that the demons of the New Testament are equivalent to the fallen angels. Angels, however, seem to have the ability to materialize, etc. (that is, except those which are presently bound in Tartarus.) In contrast, the demons seem desperate to seek embodiment. Angels and demons seem to be quite different creatures." (46) In the New Testament we find the story of Jesus driving out demons or evil spirits from a man. The demons talk to Jesus, and ask permission to be driven into a herd of pigs. After the demons entered the herd of pigs, the pigs rushed down a steep bank and drowned in the sea. (47) This New Testament story seems to support the Missler and Eastman argument that since UFO aliens seem to have their own bodies, they cannot be demons.

The

authors turn to the apocryphal Book of Enoch which reports that "watchers" are a group of angels whose task is to watch over the earth, and "200 of these Watchers lusted and fell into sin when they married the 'daughters of men.'" (48) Because Enoch is mentioned in Hebrews 11:5, and Jude 1:14, the authors believe this is sufficient authority to trust the reliability of this non-canonical book. But it is the reproductive dimension of modern abduction reports that leads Missler and Eastman to prefer the fallen angel over the demonic interpretation of UFO encounters.

Gary

Bates considered the fallen angel or Nephilim argument at the end of his book. He is aware of the work of Missler and Eastman, and cites them occasionally in his own book. They agree on the basic concept that UFOs are some kind of evil force seeking to deceive us into rejecting Jesus as the Christ.

But

Bates neither rejects, nor endorses the Nephilim argument. Since much of the fallen angel theory depends on the Book of Enoch, which is not part of the Protestant canon, he is skeptical of the authority Christians should give to the "Return of the Nephilim" theory. Bates says the Book of Enoch is one of those books "that no council of the entire early church favored." (49) It might also occur to Bates that the more physical the fallen angels seem, the more likely they may be the kind of extraterrestrials that Erich von Daniken believes in. This is a position Bates seeks to avoid.

## UFOS AND RELIGIOUS IMAGINATION

Each

of the above theories is based on the assumption that UFOs are real, and whatever this reality is, it was around during biblical times, and can be interpreted in light of the Christian religion, although a scientific approach to the issues may alter our understanding of our religious traditions.

But

there are other religious dimensions to the UFO phenomenon, some of which impact the biblical world view, but which are mainly a product of our human imagination. The question has to be raised: what is the role of human psychology in modern UFO reports, and how does human ability to create mythologies impact the religious dimension of the UFO experience?

UFOS

can be seen as religious mythology in which our space age mind set is used to turn angels into space aliens. Or we can suppose that UFOs represent a significant change in human mentality, perhaps at the level of the collective unconscious, and so all of humanity is in a sense growing into a "New Age Form of Religion."

Once

the traditional understanding of religion is questioned by UFOs and space age thinking, the field is open for humans to explore "New Revelations," and we find that several religious cults have been born out of the UFO womb.

## UFOS AS RELIGIOUS MYTHOLOGY

The ancient astronaut, angelic, demonic, and fallen angel theories of UFOs all depend on a belief in the literal reality of UFOs, as well as the literal reality of angels and demons reported in the Bible. Von Daniken turns angels into ancient astronauts, but they are assumed to be as real as humanity itself.

But a wide range of liberal Christian scholarship is skeptical of the existence of angels and demons, they are seen as pre-scientific mythology. Thus Cuthbert A. Simpson says of the Genesis 6 passage, "The nucleus of this tale is a brief notice of the origin of the Nephilim, a mythical race of giants referred to again in Num. 13.33." "Nephilim were thus represented as semidivine, the offspring of the sons of God, and the daughters of men." (50) Some liberal Christians extend a mythological understanding of the angelic to the New Testament. Thus John Hick would see the story of the Virgin Birth of Jesus as a similar myth, a union between God and a female human. (51) Those like Bishop John Shelby Spong call on the church to give up the myth of Christ as risen savior. (52) This point of view is heretical to conservative Christians, but represents the thinking of modern secular scholarship, as well as some liberal Christian scholarship.

For Christian liberals, the attempt to interpret the Bible in light of the space age is simply reforming an old myth in technological terms. Swiss psychologist C.G. Jung set the academic foundation for this point of view in his book, *Flying Saucers: A Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Skies*. He argues that the round shape of UFOs represents the human soul, although "they do not represent our modern conception of the psyche, but give an involuntary archetypal or mythological picture of an unconscious content, a rotundum, as the alchemists call it, that expresses the totality of the individual." (53)

As signs in the sky, UFOs then become gods, and when one sees a UFO, it becomes an experience of the divine in which a religious experience gives "the personality the greatest possible unity and wholeness. It creates the image of the divine-human personality...an Elijah who calls down fire from heaven, rises up to heaven in a fiery chariot, and is a forerunner of the Messiah, the dogmatized figure of Christ." (54)

Jacques Vallee added academic justification for the mythological view of UFOs

and religion in his book *Passport to Magonia: From Folklore to Flying Saucers*. Vallee demonstrated parallels between modern UFO reports and stories of fairies and "little people" from the past. (55) Interestingly, Vallee's book *Dimensions* lends support to the angelic theory of UFOs, while his book *Revelations: Alien Contact and Human Deception*, is a source of support for the demonic point of view. (56)

Since UFOs do not land and make open contact, and since the governments of the world take the position that UFOs are only unidentified natural phenomena, much is left to the human imagination, creating the modern UFO myth. Those like Keith Thompson explore these issues in his book *Angels and Aliens: UFOs and the Mythic Imagination*. Thompson devotes some of his book to the question of how modern films and TV programs about space aliens have created the modern UFO myth. (57)

Thompson points out that two of the most qualified scientific researchers in regard to UFOs, J. Allen Hynek, and Jacques Vallee, noticed "there appeared remarkable parallels among UFO phenomena and descriptions of human encounters with spiritual entities throughout history." (58) Whereas von Daniken projected space aliens into the Bible, seeing them as perhaps a little more technologically advanced, but otherwise human-like, current UFO research includes what Hynek came to call a "strangeness rating." (59) Sometimes the data from UFO reports falls outside what human logic predicts, including a spiritual dimension. Does the "high strangeness" of UFO reports indicate they are mainly of a psychological or mythical nature, or is high strangeness evidence of an extremely advanced life form?

Liberal Christianity has mainly ignored the religious dimensions of the modern UFO story. One exception is Lutheran professor of theology Ted Peters. In his book, *UFOs--God's Chariots?*, Peters explores the issue of "flying saucers in politics, science and religion." He is skeptical that UFOs are real physical objects, saying the question of UFO reality "is a long way from being resolved." (60) Peters is comfortable with a psychological and mythological interpretation of UFOs. He says, "even though we in our modern era have been enlightened by the discoveries of science to the extent that we feel we have outgrown the mythological world view of the ancient religions," (61) modern attempts to link the Bible and UFOs, angels and aliens, illustrates how our need to connect to a higher reality is still in us.

Peters devotes considerable space in his book to von Daniken, and Downing, as well as R.L. Dione, in the way they give a space-age interpretation to both the Old and New Testament. Peters says, "What is startling about the claims of von Daniken and other would-be UFO theologians is that they actually humanize and trivialize God. They make natural what we believe to be supernatural." (62) Thus Peters agrees with Bates that to explain the miracles in the Bible technologically rather than supernaturally destroys their value. This book by Peters was published in 1977, well before those like Bates, Missler and Eastman were making their demonic or fallen angel arguments in regard to UFOs. Consequently Peters has no section in

his book devoted to the demonic interpretation of UFOs.

#### Theological

liberals like Peters are willing to offer their interpretation of the UFO phenomenon without serious concern whether UFOs are "real," and whether there is a world wide cover-up on the part of the governments of the earth. If governments were to release evidence that UFOs are real, however, the types of issues that religious liberals avoid would have to be faced. For instance, one of the most famous miracles in Roman Catholic history involves a sighting related to the Virgin Mary in Fatima, Portugal, on October 13, 1917. Many researchers connect this miracle to UFOs, since what was seen by thousands was "a huge silver disk, the apparent size of the sun." (63) Release of classified UFO information could force religious leaders to face the question: how do we tell the difference between the supernatural, and the super technological? That would lead to the further theological question: In what way does the difference matter?

#### UFOS AND NEW AGE SPIRITUALITY

A good introduction to New Age Spirituality is Shirley MacLaine's book *Out on a Limb*.

The book takes a conversational approach to issues such as reincarnation, past lives, contact with spirits from other worlds, channeling, the meaning of UFOs and even the biblical implications of extraterrestrial contact. She connects UFOs and the biblical Exodus, Jesus, and the Plains of Nazca in Peru all in the space of only two pages. (64)

But

the most basic truth for MacLaine is the concept of reincarnation, because on this basis each soul is responsible for its own progression, for its own salvation. Thus there is a strong Hindu and Buddhist direction at the core of MacLaine's faith. Why would the Christian church deny the truth of reincarnation? Because "such a truth would make the power and the authority of the Church unnecessary. Each person, that is, each entity, becomes responsible to itself for its conduct. It does not need a church." (65) This is one dimension of New Age thinking that Christian conservatives find most objectionable; if we can save ourselves, we do not need Jesus as a savior. Connecting UFOs and New Age spirituality in this way is exactly the kind of "deception" that those like Bates, Dailey, Missler and Eastman are against.

Jacques

Vallee, one of the most insightful of modern UFO researchers, has concluded, "We are not dealing with successive waves of visitations from space. We are dealing with a control system," (66) a system that theologians usually have called God. Vallee wonders about "the next form of religion," wonders "what will happen to our civilization if the next step in the development of the phenomenon is a massive change of human attitudes toward paranormal abilities and

extraterrestrial life.” (67) Part of the issue here is separating cause and effect. Do UFOs represent a change in human psychology, or are UFOs causing a change in human psychology?

Perhaps

the best known psychiatrist dealing with UFOs has been the late Dr. John Mack, formerly of Harvard Medical School. In 1977 he published the Pulitzer Prize-winning book *A Prince of Our Disorder*, a biography of T.E. Lawrence. Through Budd Hopkins Mack became interested in UFO abductions, publishing *Abduction: Human Encounters with Aliens* in 1994, and then *Passport to the Cosmos: Human Transformation and Alien Encounters*. On the basis of interviews with abductees from many parts of the world, Mack gained the impression that UFOs are some kind of spiritual reality, trying to wean us away from the hard science rationalism of the West, and move us in the direction of Eastern spirituality, a view typical of New Age religious movements.

Mack

devotes a chapter to “Bernardo Peixoto, a shaman and anthropologist of native Brazilian and Portuguese parents.” (68) Bernardo tells Mack that his native people have legends of contact with strange entities who come from the stars, and are “spirits who take human form in order to be seen.” (69) Some of these spirit beings are good, some are evil; pictures of these beings were drawn on the walls of caves. The star beings went away, and “Bernardo’s people, rather like Christians expecting the Second Coming of Christ, are waiting for the star people to return.” (70) Bernardo tells of his own contact with these beings; when asked where they came from, the aliens answered “We come from nowhere.” (71) This kind of anti-logical answer meets Allen Hynek’s standard of a high degree of “strangeness,” but it does have echoes in the biblical tradition. When Moses meets a divine being at the burning bush, Moses asks for the name of the being, and the answer was given: “I am who I am.” (72) There is a sense of timelessness, and perhaps spacelessness, about this answer, which corresponds to the commandment given later against making graven images. (73) The spirit beings that Bernardo meets in some sense are like the biblical angels, they briefly open a material window into a non-material world.

How

do Bernardo’s alien contacts impact his life? He feels called to protect his people, his land, his earth. As “a result of industrialization, cattle farming, and ecotourism,” fires are clearing land to graze cattle. The forests are being destroyed. His goal is to “increase awareness on the part of both Indians and whites of the ecological peril the region faces.” (74) What we find is that the message from the aliens, and their impact on Bernardo, has led him to live out what has come to be called New Age spirituality. Mack might not reject the four theories relating UFOs and the Bible entirely, but he would say each is far too simplistic. Whatever aliens are, they are not simply scientists from outer space.

In

regard to UFO aliens being either angels, or demons, or a combination of both, Mack’s research indicates that native tribes from around the world hold to similar beliefs, although their names for this extraterrestrial reality may vary. What Mack would say is that UFOs are a world wide phenomena, they are not something to be interpreted exclusively in light of the biblical tradition. UFOs need to be

studied for their spiritual purpose, but in light of spiritual truth all of humanity can embrace. Mack says, "In the end, the abduction phenomenon seems to me to be a part of the shift in consciousness that is collapsing duality and enabling us to see that we are connected beyond the Earth at a cosmic level. No common enemy will unite us, but the realization of a common Source might." (75)

At the same time, he believes we no longer expect "an Old Testament God/bully that will part the seas" as we go, nor will we find a divine savior coming from above. Rather UFO contacts, and "near-death and other out-of-body experiences" point us toward "the essence of all creation." (76)

Although there has been no clear connection between UFOs and near death experiences (NDEs), books like Raymond Moody's *Life After Life*, Betty Eadie's *Embraced by the Light*, Kenneth Ring's *Heading Toward Omega: In Search of the Meaning of the Near-Death Experience*, as well as Howard Storm's *My Descent Into Death*, are examples of books that have impacted modern consciousness about the reality that may lie beyond death. (77)

NDEs have a widely disputed history of interpretation, some seeing them as genuine experiences beyond death, others suppose the "light at the end of the tunnel" is only a birth memory. The reports of NDEs have contributed to a widening sense of the spiritual that goes beyond what has been considered biblical orthodoxy. Thus conservative writers like Timothy Dailey see NDEs, UFOs, channeling, and belief in reincarnation all as forms of spiritual deception in our time. (78)

Howard Storm was an agnostic art professor before his NDE. During his NDE, when he was on "the other side" Storm reports meeting Jesus, and several angels, and he asked a series of questions about the meaning of life, and the nature of the universe. After his experience, Storm became a Christian, went to seminary, and is now an ordained pastor. (79)

The problem New Age spirituality represents for traditional Christianity is this: are we going through a "falling away" from true Christianity, or are we going through another "Reformation," in which things like UFOs and NDEs are some modern form of revelation which will bring us to a truer and more universal understanding of the biblical faith?

## UFOS, CONTACTEES AND RELIGIOUS CULTS

The issues of psychology, religion, UFO contactees, and religious cults are closely connected. In the early years of the UFO mystery, there



were many stories of persons having contact with our "space brothers," and perhaps being given a ride in a flying saucer to a far planet. Later, abduction stories tended to move in a more complex religious and extraterrestrial, or extradimensional direction.

John

Mack's study of Bernardo Peixoto represents one kind of contactee experience. All contactee reports have a religious dimension, some contactees, or those who claim to be contactees, go on to form a religious cult. The problem of separating genuine contact reports from fraudulent ones challenges the resources of those trying to study UFOs scientifically. (80) Although those studying UFOs scientifically look skeptically at contactee stories, the problem for those who connect UFOs and the Bible is this: might Moses, Elijah and Jesus be examples of early contactees?

One

mid-20th century

contactee was Orfeo Angelucci, who reported that he was on his way home from work one evening in Burbank, California, when he noticed a glowing disk following him. He stopped his car, and met a beautiful man and woman from another planet, who gave him a ride in their saucer, and who gave him spiritual wisdom. "He tells us that we are continually under observation by the Spirit of God, by a hierarchy of angels and heavenly hosts, and by the very highly evolved beings he encountered, beings of other planets who are so perfected as to be 'almost angels, on the threshold.'" (81) Using Angelucci's book, *The Secret of the Saucers* (1955), C.G. Jung devoted attention to Angelucci's story, illustrating how the human unconscious can transform the old biblical mythology into a space age mythology. (82)

Religious

cults can emerge from those who claim to have had extensive, or perhaps even on going, contact with aliens. One such is the Raelian Movement, started by former French race car driver, Claude Vorilhon. He reported a UFO encounter in which the Elohim named him as a prophet. He now has a fairly strong following, and his new name, "Rael," is a name that implies a total reconsideration at all levels, individual, social, political, scientific philosophical and religious. This allows Universal involvement in building of tomorrow's society. (83) Rael is still receiving messages telepathically from the aliens, with information such as: "I, Yahweh, through the words of my messenger Rael, address to the people of the Earth the following message. 'Beware! It is not impossible that other Aliens will make contact very soon with the people of the earth.'" (84)

Heaven's

Gate was the name of a well known UFO religious cult that ended with the suicide of 39 of its members, including its leader Marshall Applewhite. The suicides occurred during Holy Week of 1997, in Rancho Santa Fe, California. This was actually Applewhite's second UFO cult. He was first linked with Bonnie Lu Trusdale Nettles, who had died in 1985. They had been leaders of the cult of "The Two," based on Revelation 11:3, "And I will grant my two witnesses power to prophesy for one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth." When Nettles died and Applewhite lived on, he formed a new cult, waiting to be rescued by a UFO that would follow the Hale-Bopp comet. Suicide was the means by which cult members could leave their earthly bodies and join that UFO salvation in the sky.

(85)

The religious, psychological, social and political issues that relate UFOs to the Bible are complex. If the governments of the world are hesitant to be open about UFO information, this reluctance is to some extent understandable. If there is secret UFO information to be released, it is difficult to judge what the social and religious implications would be for those who trust the Bible as their source of spiritual inspiration.

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