



ANCIENT SKIES

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Official Logbook of the Ancient Astronaut Society

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ANCIENT ASTRONAUTS - RELIGION'S THIRD GREAT CHALLENGE

BY REV. JACK A. JENNINGS*

Organized religion with its institutions, Scriptures, traditions, professional clergy and its hordes of believers, I suspect, could be on the verge of a major theological dislocation because of the work of the Ancient Astronaut Society and its scholars. What I intend to do here is outline what the dimensions of that dislocation might be, a bit of history on what has preceded us, and a look to the future to see what a new theological vision might contain.

I will not spend much time on historical background, but I think it might be good in setting the scene if some of the highlights of that fascinating story were reviewed briefly. And I confine myself to the great religions of the West, in their Judeo-Christian manifestations.

If what the Ancient Astronaut scholars have done to pull some of the supports out from under the traditional religion seems shocking to many people, as I am sure it does, it really should not be. Such shocks are hardly new, and western religion, in fact, is still reeling under previous blows. You are merely the latest in a long tradition of other iconoclasts who have continued to plague classic western religious thought with one scientific dilemma after another. I do not know if your specific challenge to religion will be as devastating as the previous ones, but I rather think that it will.

I have no compunctions about calling this a "scientific" question. In my mind I am sure that it is in spite of articles such as the one in the Saturday Review entitled "A Consumer's Guide to Pseudoscience," in which the physicist James Trefil summarily dismisses all Ancient Astronaut theories with the quip: "If the UFOs are here now, they may have been here before, but that doesn't mean one of their crews built the pyramids." That is the kind of closed mentality that I am sure all of us are tired of encountering. This idea may appear to be "pseudoscience" to those who have not given it a fair hearing, but much of its literature is too impressive and well-researched to dismiss so lightly.

I once thought of entitling this paper "Scientific Encounters of the Third Kind," because I indeed look upon the Ancient Astronaut hypothesis as potentially the third major scientific challenge which the church has had to face in its long history. We shall

look briefly at the other two and also at the one I label "two-and-a-half."

The church was to meet its first major challenge in the person of Nikolaus Copernicus, a Polish scientist (and incidentally a churchman - a cathedral canon for a number of years) who built on the ancient wisdom of Aristarchus, who in the third century BC had seemed to possess the knowledge that the earth was not the center of the universe, and in fact rotated on its axis while revolving around the sun. A copy of Copernicus' magnum opus entitled "On the Revolution of the Heavenly Bodies" reached his deathbed in 1543. He had dedicated it to Pope Paul III, ironically enough, but did not live to see it condemned by the Inquisition.

If the old Ptolemaic earth-centered idea of the universe was about to be discarded it was to go out very hard when we see what happened to some of its proponents. The most famous of these was the Italian Galileo Galilei who was to prove the truth of the Copernican theories through the use of what would now be thought of as a very primitive telescope. But even before Galileo there was Giordano Bruno who had worked out elaborate cosmological theories even without benefit of telescope; theories, many of which are still orthodox astronomy today. For Bruno's efforts he was arrested, tried and burned at the stake on February 17, 1608.

Then there was the German scientist Johannes Kepler who had once himself trained for the Christian ministry, a contemporary of Galileo, who, like Galileo was forced to retract his views and actually had his works condemned by the (Protestant) University of Tübingen.

What had these pioneering scientists done to bring down the wrath of the established church? They had dared to suggest that a new cosmology was in order, that the old one was hopelessly outmoded, and that a geocentric view must be overturned in favor of a heliocentric one. Yet, as shabbily as they were treated by ecclesiastical authorities, their early findings gradually became more and more accepted both within and without the church. This was for one very obvious reason: their ideas happened to be true, and like it or not, the church had to retreat.

The next great scientific challenge to traditional theology, of course, would have to be the Darwinian one in the mid-nineteenth century; a battle which is far from over, unlike the Copernican knowledge now generally accepted. Charles Darwin's classic work, "On the Origin of Species," never specifically stated that humankind had descended from lower types, but the implication was strong enough for churchmen and theologians to react in knee-jerk negativity with all kinds of self-righteous ridicule and condemnations. Many churchmen today have actually become quite comfortable with evolutionary thought from a theological standpoint, and see no basic reason why God could not have

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worked through evolution to effect his purposes. But much basic hostility to Darwinism is still quite evident in many conservative churches today, and that battle is still raging hot and heavy in some quarters. Most have long forgotten that Darwin had also originally studied to be a clergyman.

Interesting, of course, is the "monkey wrench" which the Ancient Astronaut hypothesis has thrown into all previous evolutionary thought. This audacious theory has had the temerity to suggest that even Darwinism did not have it right; or at least that the evolution of species is only part of the truth, and can never explain the quantum leap from the higher primates to homo sapiens. While this new theory is not likely to be welcomed with open arms by ardent religious anti-evolutionists as an answer to their objections, it is a very interesting sidelight to the general discussion nonetheless. It has muddied the waters considerably in the classic theological debate on the merits of the evolutionary theory. Just when Darwinism has begun to come under fire even from within the scientific community as being inconsistent, with too many gaps and missing links, along comes the Ancient Astronaut theory which in many ways is just as disconcerting and controversial to both conservative believers and scientists.

The challenge to religion which I call "two-and-a-half" is the Freudian one. The reason why I do not give it a full numerical value is because it never really got out of the academy and into the street. The so-called common man has never even heard of it. It does not have the universal dimensions of the Copernican and Darwinian challenges, even if, in some ways, it is the most menacing to faith ever suggested. Freud, of course, said that "God" is an idea projected out of one's unconscious. A person suffering from hyperdependency and infantilism with the need for security and a benign heavenly being to look over him, projects such a concept as God "out there." But of course when he becomes mature and free of neurotic dependencies he no longer needs such a concept as God. The best cure for theology then is therapy.

But while we were still trying to digest challenges one, two and two-and-a-half, potentially the third great scientific challenge to historic faith: the Ancient Astronaut theory, which, if it gets out of the academy and into the street, could, I believe, precipitate one of the most disruptive and traumatic periods in the history of western religious thought. If it could ever be "proved" and universally accepted at the level, say, of the Copernican knowledge, very little in traditional theology could remain unaffected. I do not think it necessarily means that it would be all over for the church - and later I will attempt to show why - but I would foresee major turmoil as traditional religion tries to salvage something out of the dilemma.

You see, what you are doing in this Society, as many of you well know, is tampering with many cherished, time-worn and uncritically accepted beliefs of at least a billion people! One has to be struck, as he reads one after another of the books by scholars of the Ancient Astronaut theory, as I have done, to note that all kinds of religious, theological and biblical references are made and implications drawn. Naturally the conservative person who uncritically accepts the Bible as divine truth will not take kindly to the idea that the God "Yahweh" was perhaps an astronaut rather than the creator of galaxies. The somewhat defensive posture which many of these books take on this matter assumes, I think, that it is expected that many readers will become agitated by these new, far-out and dangerous ideas. After all, the common man would ask, does this mean that we have been deluded by the ministers and priests all these years? Does this mean that there is no holy God - only astronauts? Does this mean that humanity, instead of being shaped by the great God from the dust of the ground and blown upon with the breath of life, is in reality only the result of a successful experiment in space genetics? Shocking ideas indeed for those who are steeped in conservatism and liter-

alism which the great bulk of believers tend to be.

But this theory also poses problems for those on the more sophisticated, educated, theological "left" so to speak; the rationalists, progressives and liberals - those who, like myself, might be expected to be your potential allies within the church. When I direct such as these to the Sixth chapter of Genesis with the instruction to look to this passage as a justification for the Ancient Astronaut theory of how "the sons of God" refer to astronauts mating with the "daughters of men" these people look at me with a sense of incredulity. They cannot believe that I, as a reasonably intelligent, rational product of the twentieth century, could possibly suggest that they suddenly begin taking the book of Genesis literally. They are not in the practice of taking those old Hebrew folk tales literally. They have not taken them literally since they were children in Sunday School. They have long since demythologized them. They look upon such literature as a collection of folklore, allegory and myth which no reasonable person would take literally.

And yet in so much of the Ancient Astronaut literature which I have read, it is assumed that these ancient texts should be approached with at least a modicum of open-minded (some would say simple-minded) literalism to see if these ancient stories could possibly refer somehow to actual events. But this whole idea is a scandal to the liberal-rational churchmen, and I have encountered much resistance from some of them at this point. So when you speak of the challenge to organized religion of the Ancient Astronaut hypothesis you must remember that that challenge will appear in drastically different ways to different levels of people. But a challenge it will be no doubt, if it can establish primacy, or even respectability.

The Ancient Astronaut theory, if it should prove out, will necessitate a new view of the cosmos which will build on Copernicus and Darwin and move on from there. If Copernicus and Galileo showed conclusively that the cosmos can no longer be viewed geocentrically, now we must take into further consideration the possibility that the cosmos can no longer be viewed homocentrically as well. Although many have long speculated about the possibility of intelligent life on other worlds, the Ancient Astronaut hypothesis elevated from theory to scientific fact would make it most obvious for all but the totally blind and bigoted to see. If our earth is but one insignificant ball in one galaxy, and our so-called "intelligent" inhabitants are but one race out of no telling how many, these ideas must affect one's view of God and traditional religion. Is there still room for God in this scheme of things?

Erich von Daniken in his book "Chariots of the Gods?" stated that when all of this theorizing about man's origins is finally sorted out and presumably settled to most everyone's satisfaction, the ultimate question of God will remain. In other words, this new hypothesis about our beginnings should not of itself necessarily disturb the basic theological quest for the one great universal God who is above all other gods including those astronauts mistaken for God. Personally, at this point in my own thinking, I tend toward that resolution of the problem. The God who is above all gods is worthy of continued veneration. I for one, though I am open to this theory, still expect to remain a religious person who prays to a cosmic deity. Most peoples' "god" is too small and earth-bound anyway. Perhaps this Society inadvertently will lead the church toward a larger concept of God.

Of course, some would consider my resolution of the issue far too tame and traditional. William Hamilton for instance, who came to instant fame in the 1960's as one of the "death-of-God" theologians, has suggested that actually we may have to go beyond the idea of God entirely and give up any traditional ideas of religion; that if one is to
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preserve a religious sense at all it would be in the area of purpose in life, a sense of wonder and of moral values. In answer to him, I strongly suggest that this kind of theological sterility will not appeal to many people who will still attempt to seek out the one holy, universal and transcendent God who is over all things. Religion merely as moral value does not have the sense of transcendent power that most religious people desire. And yet a religion of transcendence which includes a sense of moral power I believe has much to commend it. One need not exclude the other as I hope to show.

Some thinkers, such as the British theologian and science fiction writer C. S. Lewis, have speculated that possibly God has revealed himself all over the universe without our knowing it, and that his revelation in other places has no dependence whatsoever on his revelation on earth. I have no quarrel with that suggestion except to say that I really do not think we have to go that far, making that kind of speculation, to come up with a new and viable theology. I firmly believe that the one consistent note which echoes throughout all high and mature religion is that God is a God of love and mercy who desires that we (intelligent, thinking, acting people) also be loving and merciful. I feel that if somehow we could take a spiritual voyage to the moral core of the universe we would find inscribed somewhere upon some primeval tablet the essence of the moral law: GOD IS LOVE AND MERCY: GO THOU AND DO LIKEWISE. If one considers this to be the heart of truth and morality, and that it is a gift to the created order by a wise and all-loving God, then I think that that would be enough to affirm and to live out in one's life. And if someday we were to make formal contact with other civilizations I strongly suspect that if they were to have any religious consciousness at all, that it might strongly resemble this axiom of love and mercy. If it did not, then we would perhaps have something morally superior which we could then share with them.

What we have here in this interface between traditional religion and a new theory about man's origins is the latest episode in a continuing series of confrontations between science and religion. This just happens to be the most recent. Biological evolution is the more common variety of the older conflict. And I would say to my fellow religionists who see it as an either/or situation, as do so many who view life in sharply defined categories, that they should not make the mistake of assuming that religion has ever provided scientific answers. It does not. Science should be free to be science and it should not be thwarted as if at every bend of the road science were going to drag out some terrible skeleton which religion cannot tolerate. Let science do its "descriptive" thing. Let it find out all it can about the nature of the cosmos from the largest galaxy to the smallest sub-atomic particle and let it tell us what it has found to be true. Then let religion do its own thing in its own realm. Religion should deal with the broad questions of why things exist the way they do and what the meaning of it all is. Religion interprets. Religion uses the language of myth, allegory and parable to describe what is true for the believer. The question of love and mercy, for instance, is in no way dependent on the truth or untruth of Ancient Astronauts. No matter what the origins of man, love and mercy are the important and eternal values. Science can only tell "how" a certain thing happened: religion in its own way tells "why" it happened, how God has dealt with us, why we have sinned and fallen short of His glory, why we need grace and forgiveness, and why we should display the love of God in our sphere of life.

What we are really in search of here is what might be called an "exotheology" - a theology of outer space. We in the church have not really had to do this before in our comfortable homocentric universe. The scholars in the Ancient Astronaut Society may force us to come to terms with their findings and speculations so that organized religion will need to devise a new theological formulation befitting of the new cosmology. This would include not only the idea of extraterrestrial

intelligence, but also the stupendous and mind-blowing possibility of active extraterrestrial intervention on our very own planet; a planet which we had smugly thought all these years to be our exclusive domain. We in the church can remain naive on these matters no longer. We in the church must find the core of true, cosmic religion and hang on to it for dear life while many of the old ideas and structures fall away. I think the church can and must do this. Speaking of the church, Frederic Brussat in his article "The Myth of the Extraterrestrial" says it well: "Christians will never be able to live down the shortsightedness of the medieval churchmen who refused to peer through Galileo's telescope. They were not willing to deal with more than one world. And they were afraid to take seriously the implications of a powerful new way of looking at reality. It would be a grave error and an irresponsible act for religious people in our time to ignore the myth of the extraterrestrial..." (Of course he is using "myth" here not as something which is untrue but in its classic sense of a device for communicating profound truth.)

The Ancient Astronaut formulations will give the church another opportunity to see whether it can open itself up to a new way of viewing reality. I wish I could predict that it will be up to the challenge, but based on my limited experience combined with some knowledge of history, I should say that I am not optimistic that any idea this radical will be well-received. In all likelihood it will not be. I take no pleasure in saying that the church is usually a close-minded institution, but I am afraid that its track record is not good. You should expect resistance from that quarter, and do not be surprised when it comes.

How much better it would be, though, if the church could say something like this: "If the Ancient Astronaut hypothesis is true, then so be it.

It is not the role of the church to say what is or what is not scientifically demonstrable. It is only the job of the church to draw meaning, to make sense of the facts, and to put people in touch with God. Yes, we will have to interpret our Scriptures differently than we have heretofore, but then don't we want to know the truth about our origins? Don't we want to know how we might have been created? What skeletons are there that the Ancient Astronaut researchers can frighten us with? After all, our ultimate faith is in a God who transcends such things as astronauts, space probes and genetics experiments. What do these have to do with the God who is really God, who daily calls us to Christlike obedience, to the practice of love and mercy?" As I say, do not expect the church to take this approach and be this open to new knowledge; I would only wish that it could.

And if and when, in the final analysis, organized religion must face head-on, with no place left to hide, the indisputable findings of the Ancient Astronaut researchers, I predict that it will find a way to adjust to the new reality as reluctantly, slowly and painfully as it has in times past. And I predict that it will survive. You must never underestimate the resilience of the church to survive crises. But it will survive, I think, in a new and different form. In fact, it could come out of this new faith crisis chastised and disciplined with a whole new lease on life: less childish, more mature, more open to truth, more concerned with what is important rather than what is peripheral. It would then have moved beyond the old homocentric theology into a true exotheology. And its doctrine of a truly cosmic God would be immeasurably strengthened.

The foregoing paper was delivered by Rev. Jennings at the Fifth World Conference of the Ancient Astronaut Society in Chicago on July 28, 1978.

CORRECTION: Please note that the correct mailing zip code for the Society's new office is 60035.

Arrangements are complete for the Society's Member expedition to Guatemala and Honduras departing from Chicago on December 27, 1978, returning on January 8, 1979. Mayan sites to be explored include Tikal, Copan, Quirigua, Seibal, Sayaxche, Naranjo, Yaxja, and Uaxactun. Price for the trip is US\$1,093, per person, double occupancy from Chicago, or US\$810, per person from Guatemala City. For a detailed itinerary write to the Society office. Space is limited and the trip is almost sold out. Anyone wishing to take part should send a deposit of US\$150.00 per person to the Society office immediately.

SIXTH WORLD CONFERENCE - MUNICH, GERMANY

A group flight from Chicago is being arranged for the Sixth World Conference of the Ancient Astronaut Society to be held at the Hotel Sheraton, Munich, Germany, June 14, 15, 16, 1979. Members in the United States and Canada who wish to attend should contact the Society office as soon as possible. Members in other parts of the world should make reservations directly with the Society's European office: Ancient Astronaut Society, 4532 Feldbrunnen/50, Baselstr. 10, SWITZERLAND, telephone 065/23 11 13. Speakers for the Conference will include Erich von Daniken, Prof. Dr. Harry O. Ruppe, Prof. Dr. Irene Sanger-Bredt, Prof. Dr. Luis Navia, Josef F. Blumrich, Rodney Dale, George Sassoon, Robert K. G. Temple, Walter Ernsting, Prof. Dr. Vladimir Avinsky, and Gene M. Phillips.

EGYPT-ENGLAND MEMBER EXPEDITION - JUNE-JULY, 1979

Details of the member expedition to Egypt and England for 1979 are still being arranged. However, anyone wishing to participate should make reservations now. Space is limited because of the capacity of the Nile River cruise ship. Several options are available: specifically, one group will depart Chicago on June 12, 1979 to attend the Sixth World Conference in Munich, and then proceed to Cairo. Another group will depart Chicago on June 17, 1979 and meet the first group in Cairo. Also, members from Europe may join the expedition in Cairo on June 18. To reserve a space on this exciting adventure, send a deposit of US\$250.00 to the Society office immediately.

NEW HARDCOVER BOOKS AVAILABLE IN ENGLAND:

THE MANNA MACHINE, George Sassoon and Rodney Dale (Sidgwick & Jackson, London)

ERICH VON DANIKEN: DISCIPLE OF THE GODS, a Biography by Peter Krassa (W. H. Allen, London)

RECOMMENDED READING:

THE SEARCH FOR THE TASSILI FRESCOES, by HENRI LHOPE. The hardcover edition is published by E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., New York. Subtitled "The Rock Paintings of the Sahara", the book contains many photos, some in color.

ROBERT K. G. TEMPLE's book THE SIRIUS MYSTERY is being reissued by St. Martin's Press, New York, in a paperbound edition.

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Erich von Daniken's third attempt to obtain an object of extraterrestrial origin from the upper reaches of the Amazon has resulted in failure.

During the summer of 1977, von Daniken personally travelled to Manaus, the Amazon city in central Brazil, to meet Tatumca Nara, chief of the Mogulala tribe, which, according to Tatumca, carefully guards artifacts and machinery left by their "gods" in an underground repository deep in the Brazilian jungle. The legend tells that when the objects begin to "sing", the gods are returning to earth!

At the Fifth World Conference of the Ancient Astronaut Society in Chicago in July, 1978, von Daniken announced that Tatumca had communicated to him that the objects are beginning to "sing", like the buzzing of bees. Von Daniken made arrangements with his friend, Ferdinand Schmid, who lives in Manaus, to accompany Tatumca to Akahim and bring back an object for von Daniken to examine. On their first attempt to reach Akahim, their boat capsized and Schmid had to return to Manaus empty-handed.

Now, just a few weeks ago, Schmid and Tatumca set out again from Manaus, bound for Akahim. We will let von Daniken take up the story from here:

I have just received terrible news from Ferdinand Schmid in Manaus, who has informed me in a long, handwritten letter that their expedition has been ruined just two days before reaching Akahim. He and Tatumca Nara had to present themselves before the Brazilian Military Police before their departure from Manaus. On this occasion they were told that it would be "desirable" that they take along with them the Brazilian archaeologist, Professor Roldao Tires Brandao. Prof. Brandao claimed to know me, and said that I knew him, although I cannot say whether this is true or not. I met so many people when I was in Brazil; but I cannot remember having met the man. Our friends obviously had no choice but to accept the unwanted passenger; otherwise the expedition would not have taken place.

So they took off. Ferdinand Schmid, Tatumca Nara, and the archaeologist. Everything went fine. They travelled in a flat Alu-boat with an outboard motor, up the Rio Negro, and then into its tributaries. The last part of the journey, through the mountains, could be made only on foot. When unloading the boat at the last camp, the archaeologist must have made a silly move. He accidentally shot himself in the forearm with his very own rifle. Brandao let out a hell of a scream; Ferdinand gave him a Tetanus injection and dressed his wound. He soon developed severe pains, and announced that he could no longer continue on the journey. There was no alternative but to abort the project and take the man back down the river. Although the way back was fast, it still took several days to arrive at a settlement where there was a shortwave radio in a nearby military police station. A seaplane was summoned, which flew in and took Prof. Brandao back to civilization and a hospital. The doctor discovered that the bullet had gone through the lower arm, smashing the elbow.

Ferdinand wrote that the man would undoubtedly have died from fever if they had not got him to a hospital when they did. If that had happened, the authorities could have come to the conclusion that he had been purposely shot to be rid of the unwanted companion.

Preparing for a new expedition will take months. Gasoline and food depots must be organized again. This will take time; then we must wait for the rivers to rise again to accommodate the boat. We are now delayed until April or May, 1979.

It is really a shame! Every time our efforts to reach Akahim have been thwarted by some unfortunate, disgusting circumstance.