

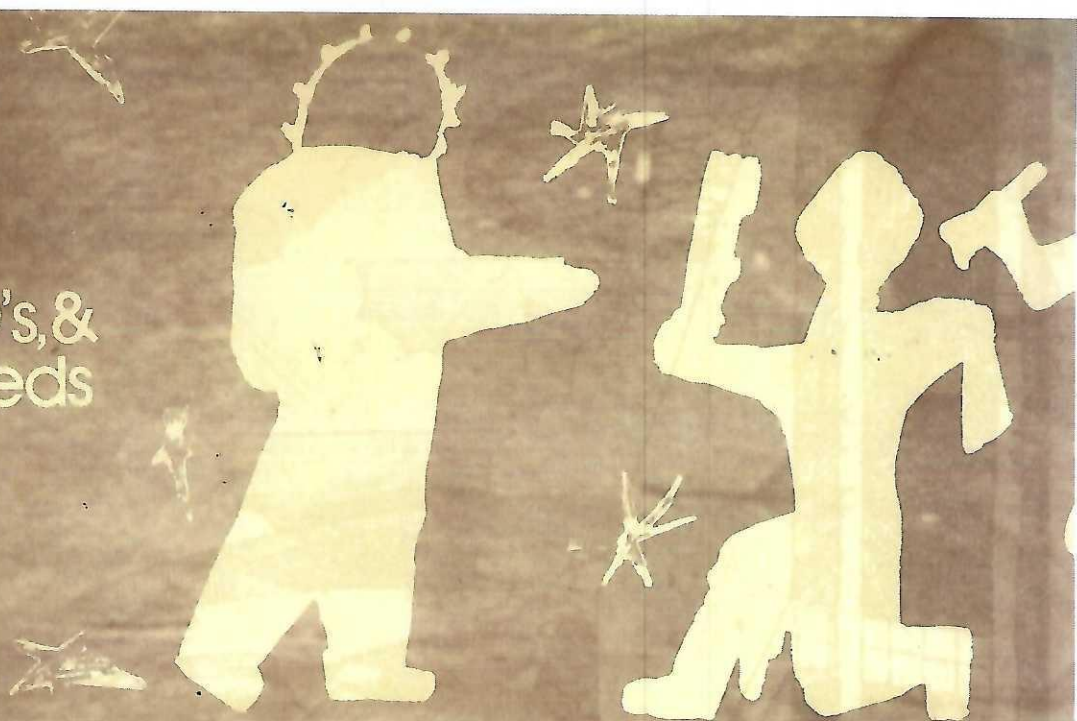
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Chariots, UFO's, & Religious Needs

Chariots, UFO's, & Religious Needs

by Ted Peters



Is the Bible a garbled interpretation of events long ago that really records visits to earth by spacemen from another world? Is the God of the Christian religion the supernatural *creator* of all things, or is he really a super-technological humanoid *creature* living on another planet who is trying to influence affairs here on earth? These are the kinds of questions being raised by readers of Erich von Däniken's *Chariots of the Gods?* and by a developing UFO theology.

The "Chariots of the Gods" Theology

Erich von Däniken, the Swiss author whose worldwide book sales now top 25 million, believes that the pyramids of Egypt and the giant statues on Easter Island were built by intelligent beings from outer space. He goes on to say that, when the Old Testament prophet Ezekiel describes his vision of a great cloud with fire flashing forth and a "wheel within a wheel," Ezekiel is really witnessing the landing of a spaceship. (Ezekiel 1:4-28) Not being a product of our modern space age, Ezekiel could describe what he saw only in primitive religious terms. Von Däniken says also that the Genesis account of God's use of fire and brimstone to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah is really a description of a nuclear explosion set off by the ancient astronauts.

Moses was not in prayerful communication with God, says von Däniken, or, at least God as we ordinarily think of him. He writes, "*without actually consulting Exodus*, I seem to remember that the Ark was often surrounded by flashing sparks. . . . Undoubtedly the Ark was electrically charged."¹ [writer's italics] With this as his scientific proof, von Däniken goes on

to conclude that what Moses thought was God was really a spaceman with whom he communicated via an electrical transmitter whenever he needed help or advice. (In contrast to von Däniken, I *have* consulted Exodus and could not locate any such sparks.)

Von Däniken also has a theory about the origin of man. He believes that we did not develop our capacity for intelligence through the long slow march of evolution. Rather, according to von Däniken, we are the descendent offspring of an ancient marriage between super-human spacemen and sub-human apes less than 40,000 years ago. The book of Genesis is half correct when it says we were created in God's image; it is really the image of our astronaut ancestors. From these ancestors, he says in his second book, *Gods From Outer Space*, we have inherited our search for immortality, our hankering for the stars.²

Although evidently working independently of von Däniken, a school teacher from Old Saybrook, Connecticut, R. L. Dione, has published a book, *God Drives a Flying Saucer*, which might serve as a theological extension of von Däniken's theory. Dione believes that flying saucers or UFO's are in fact manned by humanoid creatures from outer space and that today, as in biblical times, earth's history is being influenced at the command of one such creature on another planet. Dione calls this creature "God." He argues that this God is not supernatural but rather super-technological, that he is capable of producing by technical and mechanical means all the events which we have hitherto called miracles. God is really not an eternal spirit but rather a humanoid who has made himself immortal through medical technology. After he and his immortal civilization had lived for aeons with their successes, boredom set in. So God created the human race on earth in order to watch our struggling evolution as a form of entertainment.

Dione seems compelled to translate everything in

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our religious tradition which hints of the supernatural into naturalistic terms. He has a strong faith in natural science, and he maintains that miracles—Christian or otherwise—break no laws of nature. Right now science is incomplete. We will, however, realize that miracles can never occur as soon as science has understood all the laws of nature. God is a technician, not a magician. Although it appears that Jesus healed the crippled and the blind, what really happened was that spacemen had previously hypnotized certain people so that their infirmities were psychosomatic, present through suggestion. They further programmed them to respond to Jesus as a post-hypnotic suggestion. The healings of Jesus, then, were a complicated hoax designed to amaze superstitious people. The Bible also records visits of supernatural beings known as angels, but Dione claims that they were messengers from outer space trying to influence human affairs according to God's interplanetary directives. With regard to the Virgin Mary—who was undoubtedly a virgin at Jesus' birth—the angel Gabriel was a biological specialist who artificially inseminated the mother of Jesus with a hypodermic needle. The semen, of course, came from that super-technological deity in outer space, which makes legitimate the concept of incarnation.³

A distinctive UFO theology seems to be developing among some people. Why are some people expressing such an interest in the association of religious doctrines to UFO's? I suggest that the study of UFO's has the appearance of being scientific, hence, it gives some people the opportunity to discuss their religious feelings in scientific terms. Whether we say it in public or not, many of us believe science is good and religion is bad; science is for modern educated people and religion is for superstitious people. We feel a little embarrassed when we have a religious feeling, as if we were being subverted from within by a pre-civilized emotion. If only we could feel that our religious be-

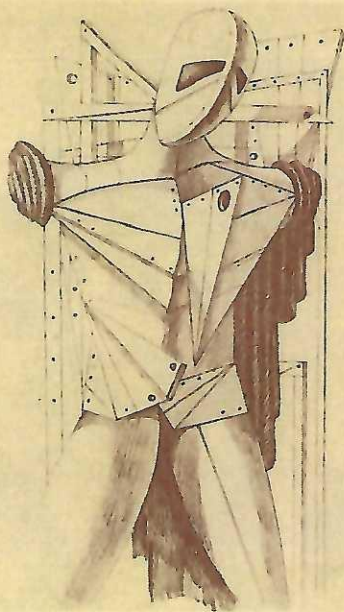
liefs had the respectability and credibility of science! Then we could have confidence in what we believe. I suggest that von Däniken's chariots and other UFO theologies offer us a respectable way of talking about our deeper religious needs. Our religious feelings urge us to ponder the ultimate heights and depths of our spiritual reality. If we have to translate our spiritual concerns into naturalistic or scientific terms, then we need nothing short of the infinity of the stars to capture our speculations. A UFO theology can do this for us.

Does Religion Become Science?

What is startling about von Däniken's claims is that he actually humanizes God. He makes natural what we believe is supernatural; he makes physical what we accept as spiritual. This is not obvious at first because of his flamboyant writing style and grandiose claims that he is upsetting everyone's beliefs. Underneath all that, he simply says that what we once thought to be extraordinary is really ordinary. The Ark of the Covenant was awesome—not because of its spiritual power but because of its electrical power. Moses did not pray to a God who had created the entire universe and whose infinite and omnipresent being was present everywhere in it—von Däniken says Moses prayed instead to a single individual spaceman in a high altitude flying saucer by means of a walkie-talkie radio. Electricity and radios we understand; spiritual power and prayer we do not. How great it is to have a Bible that is now believable because we have found the key for translating its mysteries into concepts we can understand!

Science and religion can now become friends, according to UFO theology. In the past scientists had accused religious people of simply making up the idea of a god in order to provide an emotionally soothing explanation for things we could not otherwise explain.

Giorgio de Chirico
The Condottiere, 1917
 Pencil, 13 x 9 3/4 inches
 Courtesy M. Knoedler & Co., Inc.



The idea of a god who created our world and the belief that angels are watching and caring for us was said to be the fabrication of an insecure unconscious. We were told that mystery leads people to superstition and religion, but now that science is explaining away many mysteries, we no longer have any need for superstition and religion. Science looked down on religion as primitive and out of date.

Now, however, followers of von Däniken can triumphantly claim that the idea of our God is not a product of our unconscious wishes and imaginations; our idea of God was revealed to us by spacemen. In fact, it was through a marriage of these super-scientific visitors with pre-human beasts on earth that produced the intelligence common to our species today. And it is recorded in the Bible itself, in Genesis 6, albeit in a form difficult to interpret correctly. We are children, not of a supernatural "God," but of spacemen who continue to watch over us, with electronic surveillance from their flying saucers—something like the F.B.I. Religion was given to us; we did not make it up. And, further, religion has found a way to explain itself without resorting to miracles or anything else supernatural.

But if we adopt such a UFO theology, will all the distinctively religious questions be resolved? I suggest that UFO theology has kicked up a lot of dust, but when that dust settles we will see that it has simply pushed some religious questions back another step.

Paul Tillich, the famous Protestant theologian, said that when the five-year-old child asks, "Where did the sky come from?" he is asking a religious question. It is religious because it questions the source of all reality, the ground of all being. This basic question about the ultimate ground of all things is finally—whether the asker knows it or not—the question of God. In the past more sophisticated people than our five-year-old child have asked about the first cause or source of all things. They asked, for example, if things in our world today are in motion, and things

that move must be caused to move by other moving things, then somewhere some time ago there must have been an unmoved mover. Someone or something originally set things in motion. Aristotle and St. Thomas—and all religious people—said it was God.

If Tillich is correct—that the questions about the ultimate ground of all reality are religious questions—then many such questions remain after the UFO theologians are done. For example, if the ancient astronauts created human intelligence on earth, who originally gave intelligence to them? If these ancient extra-terrestrial visitors gave us our religion, where did they get it? Where did the sky with all its stars and planets come from in the first place? The question of the first cause or source of all things may have been extended in time and space, but it still remains. □

¹ From *Chariots of the Gods?* (Bantam Books, 1968), p. 40.

² From *God's From Outer Space* (Bantam Books, 1968), p. ix.

³ All of these ideas are found in *God Drives a Flying Saucer*, by R. L. Dione (Bantam Books, 1969).



If some members of the group are familiar with von Däniken's work, let them share any ideas or questions they have as a result of their reading. If they have questions that need answering, write them on newsprint or chalkboard and refer to them during this discussion.

After reading the article, what answers to those questions can the group arrive at?

If anyone supports von Däniken's viewpoint, allow time for these persons to evaluate the article in terms of its being a fair presentation of his views.

Do you agree with the writer that the religious question is still "the question of God"?

Does von Däniken's writing answer "the question of God"? Can that question ever be settled?

Giorgio de Chirico
Hector and Andromache, 1917
 Pencil, 12 3/4 x 9 3/4 inches
 Courtesy M. Knoedler & Co., Inc.

