

# CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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**Series:** Exposition of Romans

**Number:** 170

**Johnson**

**Text:** Rom. 12:1-2; II Peter 3:15-18

**Date:** Nov. 25, 2012 (am)

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## PETER ON PAUL: HITTING THE SAME NOTE

Aliens are everywhere! Our culture's fascination with aliens is clearly seen in our current obsession with movies about aliens. (At last count, five of top ten money-making movies of all time involved aliens). Some aliens are totally benevolent (E.T., CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND, CONTACT, COCOON), while others are downright hostile (ALIENS, PREDATOR, WAR OF THE WORLDS, INDEPENDENCE DAY, STARSHIP TROOPERS). In some movies, aliens are portrayed as good and bad (STAR WARS, STAR TREK, MEN IN BLACK, THE LAST STARFIGHTER).<sup>1</sup> A recent national poll revealed that the vast majority of people believe that we are not the only inhabited planet in the universe. Why are we so fascinated with this subject? Is it possible that this fascination tells us more about ourselves than it does about the possibility of extra-terrestrials? Even Christians can find themselves getting caught up in this frenzy without realizing the implications of such beliefs.<sup>2</sup> What presuppositions are at work here?

### I. NATURE OF THE UNIVERSE

In the movie CONTACT, Jodie Foster looks up into the heavens and exclaims, "If there is no life on other planets, it would be an awful waste of space." This decidedly unbiblical attitude regarding the purpose of God's special creation is often held by unthinking Christians. We forget that the expanse of the heavens is not wasted. All creation displays the glory of God. His glory is evident, compelling, awe-inspiring, and fear-provoking (Ps. 19:1; Rom. 1:20). If the universe exists for no other reason than to display His infinite glory, then that is reason enough! Space is only wasted on those who refuse to see.<sup>3</sup>

### II. THE EVOLUTION FACTOR

One of the major premises for belief in alien life is the doctrine of evolution. How so? The argument runs along the following lines. Since there are approx. 100 billion stars in over a million galaxies, the odds are very good that another planetary system underwent the same evolutionary development—and if this process began prior to ours, then these beings would be more technologically advanced. The well-known astronomer Carl Sagan (who wrote the script for the movie CONTACT) helped promote this hypothesis and it has gained wide acceptance. Christians need to ponder the implications of such thinking. Years ago the Darwinian enthusiast Julian Huxley declared, "Evolution, if consistently accepted, makes it impossible to believe in the Bible."<sup>4</sup> Recently, noted Christian philosopher Alvin Plantinga observed, "According to a semi-established consensus among the intellectual elite in the West, there is no such person as God or any other supernatural being. Life on our planet arose by way of ill-understood but completely naturalistic processes involving only the working of natural law. Given life, natural selection has taken over, and produced all the enormous variety that we find in the living world. Human beings, like the rest of the world, are material objects through and through; they have no soul or ego or self of any immaterial sort. At bottom, what there is in our world are the elementary particles described in physics, together with things composed of these particles. I say that this is a semi-established consensus, but of course there are some people, scientists and others, who disagree. There are also agnostics, who hold no opinion one way or the other on one or any other of the above theses. And there are variations on the above themes, and also halfway houses of one sort or another."<sup>5</sup> One of these halfway houses that attempts to harmonize the Bible with Darwinian evolution is a group of self-professing Evangelicals who are identified by the name BIOLOGOS. Among their members is Peter Enns, former O.T. professor at Westminster Theological Seminary in Phila. He was dismissed from the seminary for his aberrant views and has now become even more outspoken. He declares, among other things, that the Genesis account of creation is myth – there was

no historical Adam and Eve. The Apostle Paul and even Jesus are said to have been captive to the time in which they lived and therefore were *wrong* about many things, i.e. Moses' authorship of Genesis, Adam and The Fall.

### III. WHY THE FASCINATION?

Our culture's preoccupation with extra-terrestrials goes hand in hand with our never-ending quests for new experiences.<sup>6</sup> There is a renewed interest in the miraculous and the mysterious. The so-called New Age movement is a very large part of this hunger for experiences that puts the individual in direct contact with something that cannot be understood within normal everyday affairs, (the modern day Charismatic movement plays a part in this as well).<sup>7</sup> Why the deep interest in aliens? Consider these four factors:

1. We all feel puny before the seemingly infinite expanse of space above us. Such a magnificent and mysterious display of power provokes fear in the hearts of mere humans. Oftentimes our stories of hostile aliens from outer space are a reflection of our overwhelming feeling of insignificance before such a cryptic and enigmatic expanse. It follows that the foreboding space above would serve as a natural setting for alien encounters that often take on religious proportions.<sup>8</sup>
2. We all long to believe that life has value and meaning. We don't want to ultimately discover that we are a cosmic mistake. The stark cold silence of a purposeless and lifeless universe leads to feelings of loneliness, alienation, and desperation. Is the expanse of space before us empty? Does life have any value, meaning, and purpose, or is it merely the chaotic and impersonal result of random forces with no intended end? If life has no value, the surrounding universe takes on a haunting ambiance. The desire for aliens can be interpreted as the desire to have existence and life vindicated and validated. Aliens from another planet would prove that human life is not ultimately a mistake.
3. We all hunger for answers from an outside, objective source. We haven't found the answers to all of life's mysteries, including the answer to the ultimate mystery—life itself—but we hope that answers will be found somewhere. Any objective observer can see that our limited human answers have been tried and found wanting time and time again. An understanding, benevolent alien would be the perfect source of objective information.<sup>9</sup>
4. We all hope to make contact with a benevolent power or being significantly greater than ourselves. We long for a transcendent encounter that will permanently change our lives for the better. In order for this to occur, the being we meet with must be greater than us, but at the same time, similar enough to communicate and share with us. Repeatedly in alien encounters, the experience takes on religious dimensions.

### IV. LOOKING FOR TRUTH IN ALL THE WRONG PLACES

The human quest for meaning and significance is legitimate and noble. This yearning, however, can only be satisfied by the Creator.

1. The heavens are a cosmic backdrop, revealing the grandeur and glory of the Creator of the universe. It is not surprising that we tremble before such power.
2. He is the Author and Sustainer of life. He gives meaning to life by revealing that life is not a cosmic mistake but a purposeful gift.
3. God's self-revelation in Christ Jesus is the grand unifying truth we long for. He is the central reality of the cosmos—its source, purpose, and end.
4. Finally, He is truly the one alien encounter that changes lives. He is similar enough to share with us, represent us, and even become our substitute, yet different enough to powerfully deliver us!

### V. PETER'S WARNING

John Piper wrote that "the misinterpretation of Scripture can lead to destruction. Verse 16: "The ignorant and unstable twist them to their own destruction." Another way to put this is that the interpretation of Scripture is a matter of life and death. James said (in 3:1): "Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, for you know that we who teach shall be judged with greater strictness." Why? Because the eternal destiny of the people hangs on how they interpret the Scripture. It is the "untaught" and the "unstable" who are prone to twist Scripture and be destroyed. These are the ones in 2:14 whom the false teachers were able to sweep off their feet. And 2 Peter is written to help us not be like that. Furthermore, the Apostle tells us (in verses 17 and 18) how to avoid being swept away into error and destruction: "Therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand (that you can be destroyed by misusing Scripture), beware lest you be carried away with the error of lawless men and lose your own stability. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." The antidote to deception and destruction is growth in the grace and knowledge of Christ. The contrast between verses 17 and 18 is between, on the one hand, a

tree which does not grow and so loses its stability in the earth and is blown over by a wind of false teaching and dies, and, on the other hand (v. 18), a tree which keeps its roots planted in God's grace and so grows and stays healthy and stable and does not get blown over by false teaching.<sup>10</sup>

**CONCLUSION:** A great number of people eagerly await the first contact by extra-terrestrials. We need to recognize that what we have here is an excellent opportunity for communicating the truth of the Gospel of Christ. But we cannot do this if we glibly serve up some typical evangelistic platitudes—"God loves you and wants you to have the abundant life—will you accept Jesus into your heart?" That is a truncated gospel that fails to confront people with the grandeur and majesty of God. It fails to emphasize the sinfulness of sin and the need for genuine repentance.<sup>11</sup> Instead of starting with a man-centered gospel, we need to begin with the Person of Christ. "In the beginning was the word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:1, 14). Jesus is the One who has "come down from heaven" (John 6:38). The apostle John wrote, "He who comes from above is above all, he who is of the earth is from the earth and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all" (John 3:31). Jesus is the One with whom we must have a close encounter. He came for just this purpose. He has taken the initiative and made first contact. Sadly, He is rejected by the majority of those who long for what He offers. Indeed, He is quickly cast aside without a second thought. And yet, when it comes to the search for alien life, even the smallest amount of evidence causes people to quickly jump to the conclusion that we are not alone. For instance, in *Contact*, all that was needed was a pattern of sounds coming from outer space in order to conclude that the source of the sounds must be an intelligent being of some sort. The fact that the sound came in patterns seemed to be the clinching evidence. And yet, when these same people see an abundance of pattern, order and unity in the world around them, they refuse to conclude that an intelligent being was its creator. Darkened in their understanding, a wispy strand of evidence intoxicates them while the clear revelation of God's truth is suppressed. It is our task to reveal to them their folly. In a way, Christians await the ultimate contact, a close encounter of the infinite kind. However, as the angels stated, we do not wait for Him by "looking into the sky" but by actively testifying of His first and second comings. In the words of the angels, "This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup>Do not underestimate the power of films to influence people's minds. Richard Rorty, one of the most influential literary critics writing today thinks that literary critics and storytellers will increasingly take over what had been the work of philosophers, as part of a general turn against theory and toward narrative: "that is why the novel, the movie, and the TV program have, gradually but steadily, replaced the sermon and the treatise as the principal vehicles of moral change and progress." This prompted Philip Johnson to quip, "When I think of what this means in practice—the music videos of MTV come to mind—I want to ask, 'Progress toward what?'" *Reason In the Balance* (IVP, 1995), p. 119.

<sup>2</sup>Billy Graham and Tony Campolo, for instance, have gone on record allowing for the existence of extra-terrestrials, saying that visits from beings from another planet would be simply opportunities for evangelism!

<sup>3</sup>Richard Vincent's thought provoking article "A Window on Our Culture" *Viewpoint* (Vol. 3, No. 2. April-June, 1999), pp. 23-25 has provided the basis of my critique.

<sup>4</sup>J. Huxley, "Evolution and Genetics," cited in *What is Science?* Ed. J.R. Newman (Simon & Schuster, 1955), p. 272.

<sup>5</sup><http://www.tnr.com/print/article/books-and-arts/magazine/110189/why-darwinist/materia...>

<sup>6</sup>In order to properly understand how this mentality impacts the church consider this—"the mainstream American cultural tradition is strongly pragmatic and activist—rather than doctrinal and contemplative—first-hand spiritual experiences that "work" for people can provide for them stronger epistemological foundations for personal religious faith than can the narrative elegance or intellectually defensibility of the theological systems. As the adage says, "You can't argue with experience." C. Smith, *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving* (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 177. I would add that Christians who hold to their belief in the same way are always in danger of having some new or different experience that will prove fatal to their Christianity.

<sup>7</sup>Wade Clark Roof in his *A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation* (Harper Collins, 1993) writes, "Interest in the paranormal and psychic experiences is widespread and appears to have increased during the 1980s: Clairvoyance, ESP, precognition, déjà vu, and related experiences of the "supernatural" are more commonly reported now than a decade or two ago, and more so among the college educated than among those with less education. Mythical and psychical themes find popular

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expression on the screen in such films as *Star Wars*, *E.T.*, *Close Encounter of the Third Kind*, and more recently, *Ghost*. P.71.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Wuthnow has noted, "Uncertainty is generally understood as a psychological state that can cause people to seize hold of some encounter with the supernatural as a way of gaining assurance that life has meaning or that divine help is available. There is some truth in this understanding, but it needs to be amplified in order to see clearly how social conditions have contributed to the interest in miracles and mystery. Uncertainty can lead people to find comfort in many other ways—for example, by working harder, overeating, or joining a support group. *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950's* (Univ. of Calif., 1998), p. 124.

<sup>9</sup> I am strongly inclined to agree with Alan Morrison, who writes, "The increasing number of UFO sightings, however, has nothing to do with genuine extra-terrestrial civilizations, but is part of an ongoing strategy of the 'powers of darkness' (Eph. 6:12), under the direction of their 'price of the power of the air' (Eph. 2:2), who are engaged in convincing the minds of the gullible that 'something out there is trying to contact us'. To those whose minds are attuned to such contact, demonic beings will actually manifest themselves as benign 'extra-terrestrials' (ET's) who wish to offer help to humanity—an offer that will, if it presents itself more openly, be avidly received as the influence of the New Gnosticism develops in world culture. If it can be 'proven' that ET's do exist, and that they are on a 'high plane' than the inhabitants of planet Earth, this will go a long way towards vindicating the claims of the Neo Gnostics, as well as establishing the suppositions of the New Physics and the evolutionary theories of secular humanism. If this was to be supplemented by an alleged scientific 'discovery' of the secret of the 'life-force', the way would be paved for some truly cataclysmic changes on this planet. We should not be at all surprised if these developments occur in the near future as part of the advancing strategy of the powers of darkness to discredit the Gospel, debunk the Bible, and eradicate the concept of a transcendent Creator God. The world will then be ready to believe the Lie which Satan has always sought to perpetuate, and the global conditions will be in place for the revealing of the ultimate Man of Sin (2 Th. 2:3-12). *The Serpent and the Cross: Religious Corruption in an Evil Age* (K & M Books, 1994), p. 257.

<sup>10</sup> Piper's notes on 2 Peter available at [DesiringGod.org](http://DesiringGod.org).

<sup>11</sup> "Belief in the idea of sin, as taught in the Bible, is deeply implausible today," observes Dick Keyes, "If no transcendent God as Judge exists who had revealed good and evil to us, then who can say what sin is or who it is against? If our ideas about God and ultimate moral truth are merely human constructions, then why should they have any authority over us? In this setting, the idea of sin is seen to encourage joylessness, uptightness, inhibition, manipulation, self-righteousness, cruelty, disdain for culture, and lack of self-esteem. Who wants all that? The implausibility of sin is also strengthened by modern views of human nature. Strong voices from within the human sciences claim that sin is an archaic notion. The reality of human choice itself is under heavy fire from psychology, sociology, neuroscience, evolutionary psychology, and computer science. And claims from within these fields hold that human attitudes and actions are at least potentially explainable by biological factors that we are not aware of, let alone able to control. The idea of being held morally accountable to God is therefore seen as barbaric and dependent on obsolete and negative moral categories. But sin is not a peripheral Christian teaching. It is the biblical diagnosis of the most basic human problem, to which Jesus is the solution in his atoning death on the cross—and the only reason why he had to go to the cross at all." *Chameleon Christianity: Moving Beyond Safety and Conformity* (Baker, 1999), p. 63.