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Claire S. Gould

Connecticut College, cgould@conncoll.edu

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SCIENCE REPLACING SUPERNATURAL

The Raëlian Movement and their
Reinterpretation of the Judeo-Christian Bible

By Claire S. Gould

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Religion is one way that humans construct their worlds.ⁱ World construction is accomplished through the processes of externalization, objectivation, and internalization in order to create and perpetuate a society that provides its members with a sense of meaning and stability. According to Peter Berger, externalization is the continuous “physical and mental activity of men”; objectivation is the product of this activity in the physical or mental world; and internalization is the action of transforming those products back into human subconsciousness (Berger, 4). By nature, these created worlds are “inherently precarious” (Berger, 29), because of human’s “self-interest and stupidity” (Berger, 29) and are created largely to oppose the forces of chaos, a “terror of anomy” (Berger, 26) or “abyss of meaninglessness” (Berger, 27). Religion is part of this process of world construction because the nomos, or ordering of a world, is a mirror image of the greater cosmos, or ordering of the universe against the threat of disorder and chaos, and also directly corresponds to what religions strive to accomplish through their sacred narratives and actions. A key concept in world construction and maintenance is sacred knowledge, a form of understanding and legitimation that provides humans with a direct relationship with the “sacredness”ⁱⁱ of a religion’s higher power, or god. This serves as a way to maintain the distinction between the human and divine realms and the higher power’s authority. A higher power is assumed to possess special knowledge and may choose to bestow a limited amount of this knowledge on certain humans, generally prophets in religious traditions.

Religious prophets, primarily in Near Eastern religions such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, are “instruments for the proclamation of a god and his will”ⁱⁱⁱ

who attain and maintain their authority as leaders in a religious movement by their claim to “divine revelation,” or sacred knowledge directly revealed to them by the movement’s higher power. Prophets share this acquired knowledge with others through oral traditions and/or within a religious movement’s central text such as the Qur’an or the Judeo-Christian Bible. These texts are considered sacred because they contain special knowledge generally recorded by prophets who claim to have communicated directly with God, or have had God “speak” through their writing. Their claim to possess or reveal sacred knowledge plays a central role in the organization of a nomos and cosmos because it acts as a method of distinguishing the sacred and profane realms and differentiating specific texts and humans from others. Humans orient themselves to the world by seeking practical and theoretical knowledge, “a common order of interpretation upon experience...[that] consists of interpretative schemas, moral maxims and collections of traditional wisdom” (Berger, 20-21), and similarly construct and maintain a sacred or religious nomos through knowledge of a higher power and sacred realm. This last form of knowledge is the most powerful orientating knowledge of all because it orders everyday life and answers – or begins to answer – cosmic questions humans ask, like what happens after death, why are we here, and if there anything greater than us.

In addition to working to maintain the distinction between the human and divine realms and providing a prophet with special authority as a religious leader, sacred knowledge recorded in central religious texts can act as a form of initiation for the reader.

Mircea Eliade argues in *The Sacred and the Profane*, that

Initiation usually comprises ...revelation of the sacred, of death, and of sexuality...We must add that, if the novice dies to his infantile, profane, nonregenerate life to be reborn to a new, sanctified existence, he is also reborn to a mode of being that makes learning *knowledge*

possible. The initiate is not only one new born or resuscitated; he is a man who *knows*, who has learned the mysteries...he learns the sacred secrets: the myths that tell of the gods and origins of the world, the true names of the gods...in the religious history of humanity, we constantly find this theme: the initiate, he who has experienced the mysteries, is he who knows. (Eliade, 188-189)

As Eliade writes, once a human is initiated into a religious movement, he or she learns about a higher power and becomes privy to a number of sacred secrets that consequently alter his or her worldview and further work to construct a religious nomos. This includes everything from history to language, all of which is related to collective knowledge obtained when one is initiated into a religious movement. An initiate gains knowledge of the religion's history and its myths, such as narratives about the origin of the earth and humankind, which are generally recorded by a movement's prophets (or their followers) in a text. He or she then internalizes these narratives, which makes them fundamental to world perception.

The Judeo-Christian Bible is one such example of a recorded history and mythology, with certain narratives like Adam and Eve eating of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and Moses' interactions with God and receiving the Ten Commandments provoking questions about what sacred knowledge actually is, how sacred knowledge is revealed to humans, and why the God in Judaism and Christianity is purported to be so determined to limit man's knowledge. The stories also may serve as a first step of initiation for their readers into the Judeo-Christian religious tradition by constructing a foundational and collective history, group of established leaders, and set of rules. This, in turn, works to structure a religious nomos and orient humans.

The struggle to establish and maintain a nomos through sacred knowledge is revealed at a basic level in the narrative of Adam and Eve. After being specifically

instructed by God not to eat of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, a serpent tempts the two and they disobey God's only rule and eat the Tree's fruit. This disturbs the critical distinction between the divine and human realms by equating Adam and Eve's knowledge with God's knowledge, but does not affect God's special immortal status, which continues to maintain the distinction:

the Lord God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever." So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden...After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life. (Genesis 3:22-24)

Here sacred knowledge is characterized by the symbol of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil of which Adam and Eve both ate. Their "eating" of the Tree may be considered a form of initiation as they internalized the "fruit" of Knowledge of Good and Evil:

Adam and Eve's eyes were opened to sacred knowledge. God feared they would then eat of the Tree of Life, which grants immortality – the only characteristic now separating humans from God – so they were thus banished from the Garden of Eden and punished. This maintained the distinction between man and God after Adam and Eve threatened the division between the realms and constructed cosmos, or divine order against chaos (Berger, 26). By internalizing a certain amount of sacred knowledge, however, their eyes were opened to the power of God. Readers of this text, like Adam and Eve, become privy to knowledge merely by reading about the origins of the world as recorded by prophets and may, in turn, internalize the narratives as a world-view, and become a part of the religious schema which places a barrier between humans and God by placing God in a role set apart from and above humans.

Another example of mythology used to establish a cosmos occurs in the Judeo-Christian Bible's Book of Exodus, where the prophet Moses encounters God, obtains knowledge of God's strength and power, and is called to carry out an important mission:

And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet with Elohim; and they stood at the nether part of the mount. And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because **יהוה** descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly. And when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spake, and Elohim answered him by a voice. And **יהוה** came down upon mount Sinai, on the top of the mount: and **יהוה** called Moses up to the top of the mount; and Moses went up... And Moses said unto **יהוה**, The people cannot come up to mount Sinai: for thou chargedst us, saying, Set bounds about the mount, and sanctify it...So Moses went down unto the people, and spake unto them. (Exodus 19:17-20, 23-24)

The type of knowledge Moses receives and the mode in which he received it is strikingly different from the narrative of Adam and Eve. Here Moses is specifically approached by God and asked to carry out a specific mission of earthly leadership. He alone is called upon to climb Mount Sinai and receive a message directly from God, and others from the camp are described as merely waiting at the base of the mountain while observing the interaction between the sacred and divine realms atop the mountain. Exodus 19 precedes the moment when Moses receives sacred knowledge from God in the form of the Ten Commandments. In addition to reaffirming the distinction between the divine and profane realms in the way that they are supernaturally received, these laws and the rest of the laws that follow them create order. By internalizing the Ten Commandments as a form of structure or law to follow during everyday life, a cosmos is constructed.

These examples from the Judeo-Christian Bible are forms of establishing a cosmos that is now widely accepted and perpetuated in cultures throughout the world.

For new religious movements (NRMs) that seek to establish a cosmos, many build on these traditional sacred narratives while explicitly and implicitly challenging established religions and their orthodoxies. Their need for legitimation is greater than that of other socially constructed worlds or religious movements. By making claims that build upon or directly oppose established traditions and assert to reveal new and unprecedented sacred knowledge, NRMs must first prove to have legitimate claims to authority through a relationship with a higher power. This allows them to obtain and sustain members. Therefore, NRMs specifically have to stake a claim in their prophet's authority, since he or she is the liaison between the two realms, and often base their movements to some extent on traditional texts regarding humans obtaining sacred knowledge from the divine, but feature a new spin to the story. In order for a NRM to succeed, it must maintain the right amount of tension with the outside world: it must be similar enough to local established traditions to establish "cultural continuity," while simultaneously differing enough from those traditions to attract those dissatisfied with existing institutions.^{iv} However, to achieve any sort of long-term stability, a NRM cannot allow tension with their outside societies to become too great (Wessinger, 1).

Like other NRMs, the Raëlian Movement particularly focuses on traditional Judeo-Christian narratives of sacred knowledge in order to provide the Movement's prophets and subsequent sacred texts with authority. Claude Vorilhon (now called Raël, which means "messenger"^v) founded the Movement in France in 1974 after he allegedly met an alien (called an Eloha) and was imparted with the mission of obtaining and sharing the truth about the creation of the world and the earth's true "gods." The Eloha spent several days with Raël, going chapter by chapter through the Judeo-Christian Bible,

reinterpreting the text and teaching Raël “the truth,” which Raël recorded and later published. The Eloha describes the Judeo-Christian Bible as the religious text purported by the Elohim to be most accurate in terms of their relationship with humans and the earth, so the Judeo-Christian Bible is reinterpreted and translated almost line by line in the Movement’s central text *Intelligent Design* to reveal the “truth” to readers. In fact, the title of the first publication the Elohim dictated to Raël is entitled, in translation from the French, *The Book Which Tells the Truth*.^{vi} This reinterpretation claims to present a corrected rendering of the events as they occurred and is a compilation of Raël’s encounters with the Eloha.^{vii}

By focusing on these traditional Judeo-Christian texts, the Raëlian Movement strives to maintain a balance between both continuity with traditions and a certain amount of tension with society. Their emphasis on traditional, well-known narratives from the Judeo-Christian Bible such as Adam and Eve, the burning bush, and the receiving of the Ten Commandments, draws readers in with their familiarity, while their innovative translation and reinterpretation attracts those dissatisfied with their own religious affiliation, or with the conventional spiritual and religious institutions available for them to otherwise choose. This focus also serves as a way to recruit those dissatisfied with the lack of emphasis on scientific facts in traditional texts. In Palmer’s interviews and survey of Raëlians, she concluded that the Raëlian population observed in Quebec is composed primarily of former members of the Catholic Church who “reject conventional middle-class and Christian family values...tend to revere science and despise religious institutions, particularly the Catholic Church.”^{viii} The Movement caters to this demographic in particular in its writings on the “end of the world.” Unlike many other

traditions, their focus on the end of the world is not the end of the earth's life through return of a higher power or a catastrophe, but instead of the death of the Church:

As you have noticed, the Christian church is dying. It is the end of this world because its mission has been fulfilled, albeit with quite a few mistakes because it tried for so long to deify the creators. (Raël, 80)

In predominantly Christian and Jewish societies, the Movement assumes the populace has a working knowledge of the Judeo-Christian Bible, but may question it based on modern scientific progress and rationale of its contents. Rather than devise an entirely new creation story, the movement utilizes the narratives of Adam and Eve and Moses while reinterpreting them to suit the Movement and a modern society least apt to believe in supernatural occurrences not supported by quantifiable facts. This shift in the definition of knowledge shown in these narratives reflects the larger shift of the Raëlian Movement from more abstract and mystical to concrete and quantifiable.

Through the attainment of sacred knowledge, or the act of seeking or receiving sacred knowledge, humans both bridge and perpetuate the gap between the human and divine realms, create a religious nomos, and work to initiate readers into a religious tradition. Although this is not unique to the Judeo-Christian Bible and its narratives on sacred knowledge, the narratives of Adam and Eve's experience with the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and Moses' interactions with God and the Ten Commandments are two examples of religious narratives that successfully employ the concept of sacred knowledge to achieve these effects. In their attempt to attain legitimatization and establish and maintain themselves as religious traditions some NRMs like the Raëlian Movement, use these Judeo-Christian narratives as a starting point to construct their own foundational religious narratives on sacred knowledge. By closely

examining their construction of religious prophets and how they obtain sacred knowledge as well as their reinterpretation of narratives like Adam and Eve and Moses, we can garner great insight of how the Raélians construct and maintain a religious nomos, and how they strike a balance between both perpetuating traditions and a certain amount of tension with society.

ENDNOTES

ⁱ See Peter L. Berger, The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion. (New York: Anchor, 1990.) Quotations from The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion will be referenced in the body of the text with Berger's name and the page number(s).

ⁱⁱ For the purpose of this thesis, "sacred" is defined as that "set apart" from ordinary, every day things, often associated with a higher power or god-like being. See Mircea Eliade, The Sacred and Profane: The Nature of Religion. (Orlando: Harcourt, 1987), p. 11. Quotations from The Sacred and Profane: The Nature of Religion will be referenced in the body of the text with Eliade's name and the page number(s).

ⁱⁱⁱ A description of an "ethical prophet" or one who preaches "as one who has received a commission from god...[and] demands obedience as an ethical duty." See Max Weber, "The Prophet." The Sociology of Religion. (Boston: Beacon Press), 1993. p. 55. Quotations from The Sociology of Religion will be referenced in the body of the text with Weber's name and the page number(s).

^{iv} Catherine Wessinger, "New Religious Movements: Overview." Encyclopedia of Religion. (2nd ed. 2005.) pp. 1-2. Quotations from Encyclopedia of Religion will be referenced in the body of the text with Wessinger's name and the page number (s).

^v Raël is translated as "light of God," "light of the Elohim," "Ambassador of the Elohim" or merely "messenger." See Raël (Claude Vorilhon), Intelligent Design: Message from the Designers (np: Nova Distribution, 2005), p. 94. Quotations from Intelligent Design will be referenced in the body of the text with Raël's name and the page number(s).

^{vi} Book One in Intelligent Design: Message from the Designers.

^{vii} Raël was born of a Christian mother and Jewish father. See Raël, p. 8.

^{viii} Susan J. Palmer, Aliens Adored: Raël's UFO Religion. (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2004.) p. 120. Quotations from Aliens Adored: Raël's UFO Religion will be referenced in the body of the text with Palmer's name and the page number (s).

CHAPTER 2: REINTERPRETATION PROCESS

With its reinterpretation of the Judeo-Christian Bible, the Raëlian Movement maintains a balance of tension in the societies in which it was founded and to which it has spread. Although centering upon a text familiar to many members of its surrounding society,¹ the Movement's fundamental process of reinterpretation allows the group to emphasize where it differs with traditional interpretations: mainly in the perception of supernatural and scientific elements. This chapter will discuss differences between the traditional reading of the Judeo-Christian Bible and the Raëlian's reinterpretation of it, specifically regarding the text's literal truth, its proper translation, and the roles science and technology play.

The Raëlian Movement recognizes the Bible as a foundational text that records the Elohim's interactions with the earth, but also demonstrates how the traditional "supernatural" narratives have been "distorted" (Raël, 11). The Eloha who speaks with Raël said:

I would like you to refer to the Bible where you will find traces of the truth about your past. These traces, of course, have been somewhat distorted by successive transcribers who could not conceive of such high technology and could therefore only explain what was described as being a mystical and supernatural force. (Raël, 11)

The Eloha acknowledges the Judeo-Christian Bible as a primary, foundational source to discover the "truth" about the creation of the earth by the Elohim, while simultaneously setting the stage for a reinterpretation which places the Elohim's "high technologies" and science in place of Bible's "mystical" forces (Raël, 11). Rather than placing the literal Biblical text as an absolute truth, the Raëlian Movement emphasizes the need to interpret the Bible to resolve any "distortions" to the truth that have occurred over time.

However, the Movement acknowledges that although the text is not inerrant, it is the most accurate recording of the Elohim's interactions with humans and the earth:

I am sure you can appreciate that, thanks to the law, which said that the Bible had always to be re-copied without changing even the smallest detail, the deepest meaning has remained intact throughout the ages, even if the text has been larded with mystical and futile sentences. (Raël, 11)

Many conservative Jews and Christians believe the Bible is a perfect text which has not been altered a "jot or tittle"ⁱⁱ since it was originally written. While the Raélians too believe that the Judeo-Christian Bible has not been modified since it was first recorded and compiled, they claim that its authors did not fully understand the Elohim's scientific innovations and therefore misinterpreted rockets, spaceships, and other advanced technologies as miracles.ⁱⁱⁱ For example, the Eloha compares Moses' perception of the burning bush in Exodus 3 to that of a primitive:

A rocket landed in front of him, and his description corresponds to what a Brazilian tribesman might say today if we were to land before him in a flying vessel illuminating the trees without burning them. (Raël, 27)

The Movement's reinterpretation thus preserves a reading of the text in terms of overarching narratives and broad themes, while furthering their own schema of shifting the reading of the texts from supernatural to scientific.

Part of the Raélians effort to re-present the original meaning of the Bible is their effort to restore the original word for God – Elohim – in its translation of the Judeo-Christian Bible (Raël, 378). The Movement therefore does not use a mainstream translation of the Bible such as King James or New International Version. Rather, they utilize the Restored Name King James Bible (RNKJV), which claims to restore the traditional Hebrew names of God back to the original forms of Elohim and YHWH, for

the majority of their interpretive work. The Scripture Research Association that translated the RNKJV edition, claims there are four reasons why the existing translations of the Judeo-Christian Bible are not completely accurate and have in some ways been beset with pagan elements: 1) The Masorites, in their attempt to guard the four letter holy name of the Most High, substituted the name of the Cannanite deity Adonay in over 130 places wherever the most holy name was implied; 2) Christian theologians translated the Scriptures from a non-Israelite approach which lost sight of their original central focus on Israel; 3) Others conducted a literal translation of the Bible from Hebrew to classical languages of Latin and Greek, but the Hebrew language cannot be literally translated because one Hebrew word may have from three to ten different meanings depending on the context; and 4) Some translators substituting the names of the local deities of the nations surrounding ancient Israel whenever the Most High's holy name appeared.^{iv} Thus the Movement's choice to use this translation is a traditional restoration of the text, and in some ways may appear conservative despite their more radical scientific reinterpretations of the text, such as placing an alien race in the place of an omnipresent god.

The reversion to the original name of the plural Elohim also solidifies the Movement's emphasis on the Elohim alien race as the true god of the Judeo-Christian Bible. As they seek to remove distortions that have been made to the Bible over time, a restoration of the original names may also be considered a tactic to prove a case for the Elohim and Yahweh, the alien race and central leader of the Elohim. Replacing the concept of God (Judeo-Christian concept of a omnipresent, supernatural being) in the rereading with the names Elohim (plural form of the alien race described by Raël) and

Yahweh (the leader of the Raëlian alien race) the Movement demonstrates that the Elohim's role in creating the earth, among other things, is not an entirely new concept unique to the Raëlian's reinterpretation. Rather, it was edited out of traditional Judeo-Christian texts, or rendered more "supernatural" (Raël, 11). In a religious group that places the Elohim alien race and their science as the higher power, rather than the traditionally conceived Judeo-Christian God, this particular reinterpretation featuring the Elohim and Yahweh is fundamental to the Raëlian Movement and supports the vast majority of their Biblical reinterpretation.

By using the RNKJV translation of the Judeo-Christian Bible, the Raëlian Movement's central text, *Intelligent Design*, selectively analyzes and reinterprets the Bible's Book of Genesis in regards to what the Raëlians perceive to be scientific realities by paying close attention to the stories of Creation, Adam and Eve, and the Flood, while omitting parts deemed to be unnecessary (Raël, 11). This reading solves a good number of seeming contradictions in the Judeo-Christian Bible. By replacing supernatural forces with scientific and technological realities, the conflict between the Bible and science in narratives such as the day-by-day narrative of creation may be resolved. The length of time allotted for creation of the world and individual plants, animals, and man in the Judeo-Christian Bible is a mere "day" (Scripture, Genesis 1:3-31 and 2:1-2), Humans typically regard a "day" as approximately or twenty-four hours in length, or the time necessary for the earth to spin once. Because of scientific advances such as carbon dating, the age of the earth, and thus the length of time necessary to form and develop forms of life, is at odds with the Judeo-Christian text which claims the earth is merely a few thousand years old. However, a "day" is explained in *Intelligent Design* to be a

period in which the sun “rises under the same sign on the day of the vernal equinox,” or approximately 2,000 years (Raël, 12). This would help to resolve, almost to the date, this problem. The vast variety found across the earth in vegetation, animals, and humans is explained by the Eloha: different teams of Elohim scientists and artists worked on different parts of the world. The variety found in life around the world corresponds to different teams of creators:

...It is easy to see how many teams of creators did this [create artificial human beings] – each race on Earth corresponds to a team of creators. (Raël, 15)

This also explains the Judeo-Christian Bible’s emphasis on the area now known as Israel it was the place where the most talented Elohim artists and scientists created life and therefore marks the place where the most “intelligent” humans reside, as well as the ones who are most likely to attain the intellectual status of the Elohim:

Their animals were perhaps the most beautiful and their plants had the sweetest perfumes. This is what you call “paradise on Earth.” The human beings they created there were the most intelligent. So steps had to be taken to ensure that they did not surpass their creators. The created, therefore, had to be kept in ignorance of the great scientific secrets while being educated for the purpose of measuring their intelligence. (Raël, 15)

Other descriptions of Israel and Jews highlight their “intellect and genius”^v and emphasize the Elohim’s return to Israel. In Raël’s second encounter with the Elohim, he is given “new commandments,” one of which is directed at the people of Israel (Raël, 176) who are requested to renounce some land near Jerusalem for the embassy of the Elohim to be constructed (Raël, 176-77). This embassy would be for the “second coming” of the Elohim to the earth, an end result which is part of Raël’s main mission from the Elohim. Aside from spreading the word about the Elohim to people on earth,

Raël is to build an embassy for the Elohim where they will show themselves openly on earth once enough followers have been obtained and desire to meet the Elohim: “when there are enough people, and when they wish intensely enough for us to come without any religious mysticism, but as responsible people respecting their creators, then we will land openly...” (Raël, 102). The concept of embassy building, which the Eloha refers to as the “New Jerusalem” (Raël, 176) described in the Judeo-Christian Bible (Revelation 3:12), uses texts from the Judeo-Christian Bible’s Books of Exodus, Isaiah, and Revelation^{vi} for justification, and informs the Jews that this message from Raël is their “last chance” to make amends to the Elohim for not recognizing Jesus as a messenger and keeping the message of the Elohim buried (Raël, 177). This looks to the past history of the Judeo-Christian Bible on the history of the Jews and uses traditional texts in an attempt to substantiate the Raelians’ reasoning behind building an embassy in Israel, the origin of the Judeo-Christian tradition. This again uses the Judaism and Christianity as a building block and legitimizing factor for new interpretations.

The Raëlian Movement’s scientific representation of apparent contradictions or problems found in Genesis both resolves these contradictions and emphasizes science’s elevated position as the true sacred knowledge of the higher power. Furthering this idea, the Raëlian Movement’s website advertises the Movement as “intelligent design for atheists.”^{vii} Here the term “intelligent design,” which is typically employed by those who make a case for a literal reading of the Judeo-Christian Bible, has been utilized for a seemingly opposing purpose. The general Judeo-Christian concept of intelligent design “holds that certain features of the universe and of living things are best explained by an intelligent cause [God], not an undirected process such as natural selection”^{viii} and call for

a literal reading of the supernatural narratives described in the Bible. Both literal Bible readers and Raélians agree that the earth was not formed in the ways described by Darwin's theory of evolution, but by an intelligent higher power who constructed the earth, plants, animals, and humans. This might prove attractive those following the Christian or Jewish faiths who had been raised with narratives from the Judeo-Christian Bible, but had trouble reconciling fantastical stories, such as the story of creation, with modern scientific findings. One Raëlian bishop, "Colette," who converted to Raëlianism from Catholicism said in an interview:

I had a good feeling when I was in church, but I was always frustrated with the teachings. I would ask questions but there were no answers. I was told to believe, and that wasn't good enough. I still wondered. I couldn't just settle for just believing...I started reading it [*The Book that Tells the Truth*] and couldn't stop...I found that evolution was not a solid theory; there are a lot of "missing links" in the theory itself, and the other theory that God created man, well that's a different explanation or enigma as well. Then I found out why the two look so apart, and I said finally, "Well someone did it, a lot of them did it, but to human beings to examine the various possibilities. For evolutionists who deny God, it looks like it happened by itself." So, now I could reconcile the two theories about the origin of life with the logical theory about the Elohim. (Palmer, 125)

"Colette," who taught mathematics and reported the studies being "rational" (Palmer, 125) and "logical" is just one convert from Catholicism who found the concept of evolution as presented in Raël's book to successfully and logically merge the two theories of creation together. This appears to hold true for the larger community of converts from Catholicism judging from a survey of Raélians residing in Quebec, Canada, a major center for the Movement:

Most members (72 percent) were baptized in the Catholic Church...When respondents were asked how often they attended church during their childhood, 52 percent said they attended regularly, and 34 percent attended only a few times a year (Christmas, Easter,

funerals, weddings, and the like). This finding is consistent with a question that asked, “Are your parents religious?” to which 62 percent answered yes, 30 percent no, and 8 percent “no response.” Only 10 percent never attended church...To give a simple answer to the question “What kind of people join the Raélians?” I would say that, in Quebec at least, the movement attracts young, attractive adults from a Catholic background that they have already rejected...They tend to revere science and despise religious institutions, particularly the Catholic Church. (Palmer, 119-20)

Here Palmer’s study demonstrates that followers of the Raëlian Movement tend to be converts from Christianity, specifically the Catholic Church, who reject mainstream religion in light of science. Converting from Catholicism to Raëlianism seems initially to be a large shift, but in actuality, the two groups have similar organizational structure^{ix} and are based in Judeo-Christian Bible’s text. The shift from an omniscient God with supernatural abilities to a race of mindreading aliens with advanced science and technology is merely based in a difference of perspective from the supernatural to the scientific, or to an “atheistic religion,” as the Elohim describes it.^x Despite sounding like an oxymoron, the official Raëlian website describes their reasoning for the use of such terminology:

Many people have the wrong idea of what ‘religion’ really means and view it as a belief in a deity of some kind. The word ‘religion’ comes from the Latin word ‘religare’ which means ‘to create a link,’ whether it be a link between people, or between the Creators of humanity and their creation, or between humans and the stars, or between the Earth and the Sky, etc... it really does not matter because the most important is to ‘create this link.’ Moreover, like Buddhism, Raëlianism is an atheist religion which is to say Raélians' do not believe in a 'god' because gods do not exist. (www.rael.org)

Here the Movement makes it clear what their definition of a religion is and why they consider themselves to be an atheist religion. Rather than forming a “link” between the

humans and God, they seek to forge a connection between humans and their Elohim creators.

Raël's first book that tells of his initial encounters, *The Book that Tells the Truth*, is written for a modern audience that views the cosmos in terms of scientific truths that can be calculated. "Belief" in the Judeo-Christian God and prophets with supernatural abilities is pushed aside to be replaced by "understanding" of the Elohim and science according to the Raël (www.rael.org). Although proof of the Elohim's existence cannot be fully substantiated, Raël's acquired information about their creation of the world, and reconstruction of Biblical narratives based on their interactions with the world offer an alternative reading of traditional texts based on science and technology. The Movement's reading is both a restoration of traditional texts and a look forward to advanced technologies. Using the Judeo-Christian Bible as the Movement's main textual source, while offering several significant clarifications, is an attempt to increase the legitimacy of the Raëlian Movement by securely anchoring them in previously established traditions, while simultaneously challenging the literal reading of the text, definition of sacred knowledge, and image of the higher power.

ENDNOTES

ⁱ The Movement originated in France, a predominantly Catholic country.

ⁱⁱ “For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.” See Mathew 5:18 Restored Name King James Bible. <<http://yahushua.net/scriptures>>.

ⁱⁱⁱ “...successive transcribers...could not conceive of such high technology and could therefore only explain what was described as being a mystical and supernatural force.” See Raël, p. 11.

^{iv} Scripture Research Association (<http://yahushua.net/scriptures/preface.htm>).

^v The Eloha describes Jews as “chosen people” because they were chosen by the teams of Elohim creators as the best. He adds that there are a number of “geniuses born out of that race.” See Raël, p. 18.

^{vi} The Eloha describes the Israelites exodus from Egypt and the gathering of Jews “from the ends of the Earth” in Isaiah, among others. See Raël, p. 176-79.

^{vii} International Raëlian Movement, 2005. <http://rael.org/rael_content/index.php>. Quotations from the International Raëlian Movement website will be referenced in the body of the text by its URL.

^{viii} "Intelligent Design." Discovery Institute – Center for Science and Culture. 1 April 2010. <<http://www.intelligentdesign.org>>.

^{ix} Both structures have hierarchal orders with positions of power such as priests and bishops.

^x “...the movement you have created, the Raëlian Movement, must be the religion of religions. I insist that it is indeed a religion, although an atheistic religion...” See Raël, p. 173.

CHAPTER 3: ESTABLISHING A PROPHET

Prophets articulate a message that is attributed to a higher power, for which they serve as intermediaries because they are bestowed with the power and authority to reveal new religious messages, including new readings of familiar texts. A movement's followers typically accept these new teachings as legitimate because they believe the prophet maintains a direct connection with a higher power. Raël, the author of *Intelligent Design* and founder of the Raëlian Movement, acts as the Movement's charismatic prophet.¹ In the beginning of the *Intelligent Design* narrative, he places himself as the mediator between the higher power and humans by claiming to have received a special message from an Eloha, or member of the Elohim alien race who contacted Raël. Like Moses, his encounter with a higher power establishes his charismatic authority by stressing that he alone spoke with the Movement's higher power, obtained sacred knowledge, and was specifically selected to act as a messenger. In order to attract followers who buy into his charismatic authority and message, Raël emphasizes that prior to his initial encounter with the higher power, he was an ordinary man:

I have to admit I have only recently begun to look back on my life to figure out exactly how it had been guided for me to be available and ready to go into action on the spiritual, psychic and emotional levels...Certain events in my childhood had never seemed to me to have the least meaning when taken separately – but they did when taken together. Far be it from me to tell my life story in any way that suggests that each event in it was exceptional. (Raël, 123)

Here he describes his life prior to the encounter in such a way that show he is not predisposed to experiencing religious visions or seeking extraterrestrial life forms. It is only after the encounter that he can begin to recognize a pattern that would suggest an

extraordinary ability or condition. This provides Raël with a kind of “Everyman” charismatic authority (Palmer, 113).

Raël’s ordinariness and humility are precisely his charm. He represents their ideals exactly by not being particularly attractive, not very rich, not a superb speaker...He is an average man who has been chosen by above-average beings. His only power was that the message had been revealed to him, not to someone else. This tension was...accentuated in this meeting during Learⁱⁱ’s speech about demystifying Raël and focusing on the message, but not the messenger, and at the same time calling him “the most enlightened man presently on Earth.” (Palmer, 113-14)

The setting of the encounters with the higher power underlines the notion that Vorilhon was having a sacred experience, or one out of the ordinary. Raël, like Moses, receives a message from a superior being – in this case from an Eloha – while on a “peak,” or volcano overlooking Clermont-Ferrand in central southern France: a secluded space not unlike Mount Sinai where Moses spoke with God. The similarities between the two settings are striking:

... Mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because YHWH descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly...And YHWH came down upon mount Sinai, on the top of the mount: and YHWH called Moses up to the top of the mount; and Moses went up. (Exodus 19:18, 20)

The air was cool at the time, and the sky rather gray with a background mist...suddenly in the fog, I saw a red light flashing...the object continued to descend. (Raël, 3-5)

In both settings, the men who are later to be vessels of sacred knowledge and authors of accounts of their interactions with the sacred are drawn towards these secluded, elevated spaces that are separated from the rest of humanity. The geographical setting confirms their claims to extraordinary authority and emphasizes that they are literally and figuratively set apart from their fellow humans. The higher powers emphasize their

elevated status by an act of descent onto a mountain peak to converse with a lowly human who made a great trek upwards. This accentuates the distinct boundaries between the two realms. While on the mountain peaks, Moses and Raël encounter a higher power, which is cloaked in secrecy and obscured from direct view by smoke and fog. This adds an air of mystery to the being and its message. Both Moses and Raël are bestowed with sacred knowledge while on this peak, and are asked to share this knowledge with the world. God informs Moses about his plans for the Israelites and instructs him to act as his messenger to the Pharaoh and Israelites. Likewise, the Eloha asks Raël to be a messenger: “tell human beings about this meeting...the truth about what they are, and about what we are” (Raël, 7). The men are thus both vessels specifically chosen by a higher power to receive knowledge that is privy only to them, and to communicate those messages to the profane realms. The similarities between the two prophets here are striking and may be either be directly related to a universal pattern of how prophets receive a message from a higher being, or an unconscious or conscious effort on the part of Raël to orient his narrative with that of Moses. The latter seems most likely given how Intelligent Design itself as a narrative seeks to orient itself in the Judeo-Christian Bible’s text through the process of reinterpretation. Here the reinterpretation process is taken one step further and is applied to the larger narrative surrounding the Biblical reinterpretation presented to Raël by the Eloha.

In the recorded narrative of their encounters, God and the Eloha claim to be able to speak through Moses and Raël, providing them with the words and knowledge to be a suitable mouthpiece of the higher power’s message with the rest of humanity:

And he said, Certainly I will be with thee; and this shall be a token unto thee, that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the

people out of Egypt, ye shall serve Elohim upon this mountain.
(Exodus 3:12)

Here the Judeo-Christian God assures Moses that he will help him carry out the sacred mission. This demonstrates that Moses is not himself a higher power, but merely a human liaison who has been bestowed with sacred knowledge by a greater being. For those reading the recorded text of the encounter, this focuses their attention more on God, his power, and message, rather than on the human Moses. He is not meant to be worshiped, but is merely meant to act as a liaison between the true higher being and the world. This still endows him with great power as an “ethical prophet,” or one who acts as “an instrument for the proclamation of god and his will” (Weber, 55).

Raël, too, is an ethical prophet. In his encounter with the Eloha, he is asked to:

...make it known throughout the world that you have met me, and repeat what I have said to you...You know the truth, and we will stay in contact with you by telepathy to give you confidence and additional information if we think it is necessary...If a sufficiently large number of people follow you, then we will come openly. (Raël, 101)

The Eloha reminds Raël that he is the liaison between the Elohim and humans because he knows “the truth” about humanity, and if the Elohim decide to grant additional knowledge to humans, he alone will receive this knowledge. Raël is also considered the Elohim’s last prophet. He differs from prophets like Moses, however, because instead of merely directing humans to focus on the Elohim, their science, and relationship with humanity, Raël later claims that he is greater than a mere human relaying a message. In *Let’s Welcome the Extraterrestrials*, he reveals that he is Jesus’ brother and the son of extraterrestrial Yahweh, president of the Council of the Eternals – whose members include 700 Elohim and over 8,400 humans who “enabled humanity on Earth to progress from its primitive level through their discoveries, their writings, and their exemplary acts

of fraternity, love or selflessness” (Raël, 161). Raël’s mother, like the New Testament’s Mary, is described as being specifically chosen to carry the child of a higher power. However, in Raël’s mother’s case, she was taken aboard one of the Elohim spaceships, inseminated, and subjected to an erasure of her memories aboard the ship. His human “father,” a Jewish refugee, was chosen by the Elohim. This elevates his status from an ordinary man with a special mission to the level of Jesus. Raël thus blends two of the most prominent examples of prophets in the Judeo-Christian tradition to construct his identity over time as part of a progressive process of legitimation, as well as connects the two religious traditions of Judaism and Christianity by blending key prophets from both the Jewish Bible (Old Testament) and New Testament.

In recordings of their initial encounters, Moses and Raël are not portrayed as especially extraordinary or god-like: rather, they emphasize the distinction between the higher power and themselves. Both men initially question why they were selected for such a mission, as they claim to consider themselves ordinary men. During his encounter with God at the “burning bush” in Exodus, Moses asked: “...Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?”ⁱⁱⁱ Likewise, Raël asks the Eloha, “Why did you choose me?” (Raël, 8). By diminishing their own role, the two men emphasize the higher power as the impetus for their role as messenger – the higher power initiated the encounter, proposed the mission, and ultimately is central for the success of the mission. Raël reminds readers, “It is not the messenger who is important, but the message itself...Do not look at my finger, but rather at the direction in which it’s pointed” (Raël, 291). He starts the narrative of *Intelligent Design* by emphasizing the ordinariness of his day before the encounter:

Since my early childhood I had dreamed of one day being a racing-car driver, following in the footsteps of someone as famous as Fangio. Thanks to contacts made in the magazine I founded, I was given the opportunity to race and about ten trophies now adorn my apartment as a result of those races. On the 13th of December 1973, however, I went to a volcano overlooking Clermont-Ferrand in central southern France. (Raël, 3)

With the shift brought on by “however,” Raël implies that his encounter with the Elohim came as a surprise and in fact interrupted his life that had been set on following his childhood dream of racing. Here he claims that becoming the messenger of the Elohim was not a position or role he actively sought, but one that was thrust upon him. As Weber writes, “prophets do not receive their mission from any human agency, . . . the assumption of power by the prophets came about as a consequence of divine revelation (Weber, 51). Thus, as the Elohim’s chosen prophet, Raël did not have the ability to choose whether or not he wanted to be a leader: the sacred knowledge bestowed upon him by nature bestowed him with power and authority as their human leader and messenger, transforming him and charge him the mission of transforming others.

However, Moses and Raël’s emphasis on their average lives and sub-par abilities before their sacred encounters may be considered a form of rhetorical play using the rhetorical pose of the self-effacing narrator to ultimately reinforce their own authority (Weber, 51). Particularly in Raël’s case, this emphasizes he is mentally sound by the world’s standards, with no history of supernatural encounters or experiences prior to his initial contact with the higher power, or any previous claims to religious authority. This helps to reinforce Raël’s authority as prophet in both his leadership and his knowledge of the higher power. Weber writes it is rare that a prophet can establish authority without

some sort of validation and/or claim, mostly based on their personal revelation with a higher power and personal charisma (Weber, 47):

Bearers of new doctrine practically always needed such validation... There was always required of such prophets a proof of their possession of particular gifts of the spirit, of special magical or ecstatic abilities. (Weber, 47)

Raël does not demonstrate supernatural abilities, for that would in essence conflict with the Movement's demystification of established religions and Elohim's interest in assessing humans' ability to receive their scientific knowledge. Rather, the knowledge obtained from the Eloha acts as a kind of validation of his claims. A man with a background in car racing and poetry writing, he becomes able to speak intelligently about a myriad of things from advanced scientific knowledge to deep philosophies. He claims he is able to do because of the superior knowledge he gained from the Elohim, and their telepathic connection that gives Raël confidence and allows the superior beings to provide him with additional knowledge as necessary (Weber, 101):

Even though I had a dreadful case of stage fright... everything went very well, the answers to the most difficult questions seemed to come by themselves to my lips. I felt some help coming from above, just as they had promised me. I had the impression of listening to myself answering things I could not know myself." (Raël, 139)

The Eloha himself even reinforces the veracity of Raël's claims by explaining why the Elohim believed he would be the best prophet for the Movement:

We needed someone who is intelligent and quite open to everything. Besides, your activities do not in any way predispose you to making incredible revelations, and this will make your words all the more credible. (Raël, 8)

Moses too is not described as having a history of supernatural encounters or experiences or any previous claims to religious authority, but instead merely relies on

sacred knowledge from God in order to attract followers and legitimation. God also provided him with a special staff and the ability to perform miracles:

And Moses answered and said, But, behold, they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice: for they will say, YHWH hath not appeared unto thee. And YHWH said unto him, What is that in thine hand? And he said, A rod. And he said, Cast it on the ground. And he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from before it. And YHWH said unto Moses, Put forth thine hand, and take it by the tail. And he put forth his hand, and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand: That they may believe that YHWH Elohim of their fathers, the Elohim of Abraham, the Elohim of Isaac, and the Elohim of Jacob, hath appeared unto thee. (Exodus 4:1-5)

In addition to proving him with magical abilities, God provides Moses with a direct connection to sacred knowledge. Once Moses meets with the Israelites and Egyptians, God will provide him with the knowledge and words to carry out his role as intermediary. But despite this, Moses still expressed concern about his physical ability as messenger:

And Moses said unto YHWH, O YHWH, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue. And YHWH said unto him, Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I YHWH Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say. (Exodus 4:10-12)

While Moses admits he has a lisp, or is “slow of speech and tongue,” this still does not diminish his charisma as a prophet and in some ways increases his charisma and focus on God’s message. Surrounding his interactions with Israelites and Egyptians alike, the Book of Exodus writes that Moses performed physical miracles that attracted attention and awe. His claim to be “slow of speech and tongue” physically limited his ability to speak however, and his brother Aaron took over this role while Moses carried out

miracles in dramatic, sacred spaces like Mount Sinai. God provided Moses with sacred knowledge, and Moses used Aaron as his mouthpiece to speak effectively to the masses.

It is one thing for a prophet to attract followers with charismatic authority, and another for him to perpetuate that authority over the long-term, since it is precarious by nature. Weber emphasizes the need for the maintenance of charismatic authority by continuous legitimization, with consistent “charismatic displays” as one way to maintain this authority.^{iv} Susan J. Palmer, who closely observed and studied the Raélians over a long period of time, writes that Raël’s progressive revelations from the Elohim appear as patterns that “invite a deeper level of commitment from his followers... or escalate his charismatic identity (from prophet to messiah)” (Palmer, 50). It might be said that Raël’s charismatic authority is primarily derived from his possession of knowledge from the Elohim. As he furthers his relationship with the Eloha, Yahweh, and others of the Elohim alien race, Raël becomes privy to greater knowledge – both in amount and significance – and records this knowledge in his “prophetic” writings. His continuous, developing relationship with the Elohim both reinforces and enhances his authority as prophet of the Elohim, and later, his claim to be himself of a sacred status. Palmer’s interviews with Raélians reflected the complicated relationship members have with Raël’s evolving identity between god and man. Both followers describe him as both familiar and unfamiliar; accessible and inaccessible; simultaneously an ordinary man and a god:

“Raël is like a brother, a friend. But in another way. He is the light that is radiating. I feel like he is a luminous being. He says things that were true without negative emotions or positive. I see Raël as a prophet, sent by the Helloim [Elohim]. I see him as truly like a direct line between the Helloims [Elohims] and me.” (Palmer, 133)

“He’s very down to earth and full of love and harmony. He touches you very easily... He can only give us a little bit at a time, because the advanced technology the ETs showed him is too hard for us to understand. They made him understand by chemical education, and he was given all their knowledge in minutes. The knowledge of our highest genius is like the level of a simple child up there.” (Palmer, 133)

Here two of Raël’s followers describe his presence in a way that is both ordinary and divine, corresponding to his claims to be nothing more than an ordinary man who was randomly approached by an alien who decided to bestow him with sacred knowledge while simultaneously claiming to be an elite member of the Elohim alien race. He seeks to reconcile these two seemingly contradictory personas through the concept of sacred knowledge and the idea that as one’s knowledge within a religion deepens, so can one’s understanding their own status within the cosmos in relation with a higher power.

ENDNOTES

ⁱ Charismatic authority shall be defined per Max Weber's definition in his work *Economy and Society* which compares traditional, rational-legal, and charismatic modes of authority. Charismatic authority, a non-institutionalized leadership, is based on the perception that an individual possess extraordinary qualities or knowledge. See Max Weber, "Charisma and its Transformations." *Economy and Society an outline of interpretive sociology*. Ed. Guenther Roth. Vol. 1. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978.) pp. 1111-1157.

ⁱⁱ Lear (Raël spelt backwards) is a bishop in the Raëlian Movement. Palmer, 104.

ⁱⁱⁱ From the Restored Name King James Bible. (<http://yahushua.net/scriptures>). Exodus 3:11. Quotations from Restored Name King James Bible will be referenced in the body of the text with Book, chapter, and line number(s).

^{iv} Max Weber. *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1947. p. 362.

CHAPTER 4: BOOK OF GENESIS

As the intermediary between humans and the Elohim, Raël writes in *Intelligent Design* about how during his initial encounter with the Eloha, his extra-terrestrial visitor relates the Judeo-Christian Bible to his alien race. In the process, Raël is established as the official intermediary through a charismatic authority derived partly from his knowledge from the Elohim, which works reciprocally to legitimate his reinterpretation of Genesis in *Intelligent Design*. The rereading of the Judeo-Christian Bible, specifically in the Creation and Garden of Eden narratives, centers upon the use of additions to and omissions from the established text in order to replace traditional sacred knowledge with knowledge and understanding of the Elohim. In doing so, it helps to reconcile some perceived contradictions between science and the Judeo-Christian Bible with regard to the creation of the world and the Garden of Eden. This in turn helps to legitimize the Raëlian Movement and their interpretation of the traditional text of the Bible. The following section discusses the reinterpretation of the Creation and Adam and Eve narratives and how the Eloha's omitting its "poetic babble" and aspects unclear to transcribers "who could not conceive of such high technology" helps to resolve some contradictions between the Judeo-Christian Bible's "supernatural" forces and the Raëlian Movement's scientific account (Raël, 15).

Commencing with the story of creation, the Raëlian Movement's translation places the plural Elohim in place of God as creators of the "heaven and the earth," "grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree," "living creatures...and birds," "cattle and creeping thing and beast of the earth," and "man" (Genesis 1). Most particularly striking of these is man because the Judeo-Christian Bible says, "Let us make man in our image,

according to our likeness” (Genesis 1:26). The plural forms of “us” and “our” in the original text correspond with the many Elohim creators and teams the Eloha claims were involved with the creation of the earth, plants, creatures, and humans:

The most skillful among us wanted to create an artificial human being like ourselves. It is easy to work out how many teams of creators did this – each race on Earth corresponds to a team of creators... “In our image!” You can see that the resemblance is striking. (Raël, 15)

The Movement’s narrative explains that some Elohim back on their home planet were concerned about the creation of humans in their own image because they feared humans would surpass them in intelligence:

On our home planet, people were outraged when they heard we were making “test tube children” who might come to threaten their world. They feared that these new human beings could become a danger if their mental capacities or powers turned out to be superior to those of their creators. So we had to agree to leave the new humans to live in a very primitive way without letting them know anything scientific. (Raël, 15)

Thus in the Garden of Eden, the Elohim needed to protect the ultimate knowledge, that of science, by preventing human study:

Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die. (Genesis 2:16-17)

This means that humans can study anything they like, aside from science, the most important knowledge to the higher powers, and which knowledge distinguishes the creators from created.

According to the Eloha, the “serpent” in the Adam and Eve story was actually a group of Elohim scientists who “felt a deep love for their little human beings” (Raël, 16) and wanted to teach them about science so that humans could become “as knowledgeable as their creators” (Raël, 16). Thus, when reinterpreting Genesis in *Intelligent Design*, the

Eloha leaves out passages of the Bible that describe the Elohim scientists as having serpent-like qualities: such as being created by God, and being categorized with other creatures of the earth like cattle. Assuming the “serpent” was actually a group of Elohim scientists, they themselves are part of the race that created the world, and could not have been “created” by others from the Elohim. Thus the phrase “...now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made” (Genesis, 3:1) is omitted from the Eloha’s conversation with Raël since this reduces the advanced Elohim scientists to mere “beast-like” creatures, rather than beings that resemble humans (Raël, 15). Likewise, they would not be cursed “above all cattle, and above every beast of the field” (Genesis 3:14), nor were their punishment be to suffer a doom of slither on “thy belly” (Genesis 3:14). These phrases and punishments mark the designers as beast-like, rather than as intelligent creators, and therefore these lines from Genesis are not addressed or reinterpreted in the Eloha’s reinterpretation of the story. Instead, these phrases, by merely being omitted, represent the mystical elements that were added to the Judeo-Christian Bible over time (Raël, 11). The only parts of their punishment that remain intact are the ones that show a punishment that the Elohim might inflict on their own kind: residing on earth and enduring its climate and limited technological advances. The phrase “because thou has done this, thou art cursed...dust shall thou eat all the days of thy life” (Genesis 3:14) shows the Elohim’s punishment of this group of designers. In this sense, the phrase “cursed above all cattle...” (Genesis 3:14) might be considered true for the Raëlian designers since being banished to the earth, they may be thought to experience the most terrible of punishments.

Another central aspect of the Fall of Adam and Eve that is significantly altered by the Eloha's reinterpretation of the text are the general ideas of good and evil. In *Intelligent Design*, the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil is reinterpreted as the Tree of Knowledge of Science. According to a footnote by the editor, "in many French bibles, and in the original French equivalent of this book, the word *science* is used instead of good and evil" (Raël, 378). This reading dramatically changes the meaning of sacred knowledge as defined in Genesis. In Genesis 3, sacred knowledge may be defined as a true understanding of good and evil, which is outwardly represented by the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and forbidden to mankind. Only God is meant to be privy to this knowledge, as anyone who eats of the Tree shall become "as gods" (Genesis 3:5). By changing moral knowledge to scientific knowledge, the concept of sacred knowledge becomes something more tangible and attainable for humans. This also emphasizes the great scientific knowledge and understanding of the Elohim. The Eloha emphasizes that the Bible "preserved a sentence which is close to the original document" (Raël, 17):

Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever. (Genesis 3:22)

By replacing "good and evil" with "science," this passage suggests that with a prolonged life, humans would become equal with their creators, having full scientific knowledge, and enough time to act upon that knowledge. As the Eloha acknowledged:

If when they were first created these new beings could have lived much longer, they would have rapidly become our equals because their mental faculties are slightly superior to our own...soldiers with atomic disintegration weapons were placed at the entrance of the creators' residence to prevent human beings from stealing more scientific knowledge." (Raël, 18)

A knowledge of “good and evil” is much more philosophical and intangible while scientific knowledge is quantifiable and demonstrable. This shift in the definition of knowledge reflects the larger shift of the Movement itself from what it sees as the more abstract and mystical focus of the Judeo-Christian tradition to a more concrete and quantifiable understanding of the text. Here a human with scientific knowledge equivalent to his creator possesses the ability to physically perform acts of his creator: like forming life. To the Elohim, man’s “evil was their wish to progress, perhaps enabling them one day to catch up with their creators” (Raël, 20) and according to the Eloha, they also had the ability to surpass their creators:

...their [humans] mental capacities are slightly superior to our own. They are unaware of their full potential. This applies especially to the people of Israel who, as I mentioned earlier, had been selected in a contest as the most successful type of humanoid on Earth due to their intelligence and genius. (Raël, 18)

It is especially interesting to note here that the Elohim creators acknowledge that their creations are their intellectual superiors. This contrasts sharply with the Judeo-Christian Bible that fears humans might catch up or seek to strive towards attaining an intellect equivalent with God (Genesis 3:22). As noted from the quotation above, by becoming the intellectual equivalent, or even superior, to their creators, particularly in the field of science, humans would significantly lessen, or completely remove the only real distinction between the creators and created. Sacred knowledge, which according to the Raëlian Movement primarily concerns science, would cease to act as a distinguishing factor, and the Elohim and humans would be equals. This consequence of humans having too much knowledge mirrors the probable effect sacred knowledge would have on the relationship between humans and God in the Judeo-Christian Bible which writes that

humans would “become as one of us” (Genesis 3:22). This would seriously affect the established religious nomos which requires a fixed relationship between a higher power with superior knowledge and an inferior human who seeks, but cannot attain all of the higher power’s knowledge. It relies on a construct of superior and inferior beings based largely upon knowledge.

It may be noted that the Biblical story emphasizes that the snake tempts and tricks Eve to eat fruit from the tree, possibly for its own benefit,¹ but it is still her choice to disobey God’s command in an attempt to gain knowledge. This idea of choice is a key distinction between the Biblical story and the Raëlian’s reinterpretation of it. Adam too had a choice of whether or not he would eat the fruit Eve offered him. The Eloha says that certain Elohim creators felt pity for their human creations and taught them how to become as knowledgeable as their creators. It may be understood that humans had knowledge thrust upon them; in this reading, it does not appear to have been a choice to obey or disobey, to gain knowledge or remain in ignorance, or to disturb the balance between the sacred and profane realms. This lack of choice, however, also suggests that the Elohim maintain an even greater control over knowledge than the Judeo-Christian God, since they can choose what knowledge to reveal or not reveal to humans. This further distinguishes the Elohim and their knowledge from their creations. In the Judeo-Christian text, God set knowledge apart by requesting they not eat of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, but the human discovery of knowledge still appears to be an accident that he could not control. Therefore from the very beginning, the Elohim are predetermined to share their knowledge with their intellectually superior creations, which will result in an unavoidable power conflict between the creators and created. This is not

the case with the Judeo-Christian Bible's God since there are numerous steps for humans to match God's knowledge, including breaking a rule that might result in their own death, disobeying God, and trusting a snake.

Despite the numerous omissions and translations necessary for the Raélians to properly reinterpret Genesis to feature the Elohim and their science, they still find a degree of truth in the Judeo-Christian stories of Creation and Adam and Eve. Aside from a "mystification" of the original stories, they believe the underlying narratives of the two stories are accurate, which is in line with the Eloha's description of the Judeo-Christian Bible as a document that has retained its "deepest meaning" (Raël, 11) over time. One of the key differences between the texts is the idea of sacred knowledge, the knowledge that distinguishes humans from the sacred, which is shifted from knowledge of morals and philosophies to that of science and technology, a theme that is repeated throughout the Raëlian's reinterpretation of the Judeo-Christian Bible and central to the Movement. This reflects the demographic of the Movement itself – individuals who have been raised with traditional narratives from the Judeo-Christian Bible, but who, upon becoming more educated about the world and science, begin to doubt the plausibility of supernatural miracles the Bible describes and begin to scrutinize the story of Creation and other foundational Biblical narratives through a scientific lens. In its original construction, the stories are all but impossible to reconcile between the supernatural creation method and almost impossibly short timeline, among numerous others. The Raélians' reinterpretation of the texts begins to reconcile the two opposing views of the text into a cohesive narrative that satisfies both its followers' desires for a mystical, religious cosmos and one rooted in tangible, scientific realities.

ENDNOTES

ⁱ According to one interpretation by Eliade of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, the snake attempts to use the knowledge of Adam and Eve to attain his own immortality. See Mircea Eliade. "Vegetation: Rites and Symbols of Regeneration." *Patterns in Comparative Religion*. New York: Meridian, 1972. 265-330.

CHAPTER 5: MOSES IN EXODUS

The Raëlian's reinterpretation of Moses' encounters with God in Exodus and his reception of the Ten Commandments focuses less on adding to and omitting from the traditional text to replace traditional sacred knowledge with knowledge and understanding of the Elohim, and more on reinterpreting the prophet Moses himself and his encounters with a higher power. This reading shifts the depiction of Moses as one who brings higher knowledge and order to the people of Israel, to merely one who restores the status quo of a time before the destruction of centers of progress such as Sodom and Gomorrah eliminated some of the world's most intelligent people and started the world on a track of regression back towards a primitive state (Raël, 26). The following section discusses the reinterpretation of Moses' encounters with the sacred and how, according to the Raëlians, his perception of the sacred and knowledge presented to him did not actually further humankind, but merely was an effort to restore a previous state of intelligence and progress. From the burning bush to the Ten Commandments, his encounters are reinterpreted by the Raëlians as not-so-supernatural encounters with the Elohim and their scientific advances. These depictions of Moses also shed light on Raël's role as a messenger and prophet of the Elohim, since many of the scenes described in Exodus are mirrored in his encounters with the Eloha and ways he receives important knowledge.

Moses' initial encounter with God at the burning bush in Exodus 3 is described as a supernatural encounter that reveals God's power and authority and bestows Moses with a mission to free the Israelites from the oppression of the Egyptians. God appears to Moses in a burning bush that could not be consumed by fire and tells Moses to

acknowledge the space as “holy ground” (Exodus 3:9). This reveals God’s status as a supernatural being who can defy and overcome laws of nature in order to create a sacred space. In the Raëlian’s reinterpretation of the event, it is explained instead in scientific, tangible terms:

A rocket landed in front of him, and his description corresponds to what a Brazilian tribesman might say today if we were to land before him in a flying vessel illuminating the trees without burning them. (Raël, 27)

This passage significantly lowers the estimation of Moses’ knowledge, specifically scientific knowledge, and reduces the awe he feels for God during this initial encounter to merely a typical reaction any primitive would feel towards unfamiliar, advanced technology. In a sense, Moses is portrayed as no more special or intelligent than his fellow Israelites, though the Elohim placed him as their messenger to restore order and knowledge to Israel. This in some ways reflects the position of Raël, who is the latest prophet and messenger of the Elohim. He, at least at first, is not depicted as a particularly intellectually advanced individual, but merely as an ordinary man called upon by a sacred power to receive sacred knowledge and reveal it to the rest of the world.

Sacred knowledge is primarily received through a specific law and structure Moses receives from God within the Ten Commandments. The ten rules are meant to govern the lives of the people of Israel and provide set regulations for their relationship with God. The Raëlians too describe Moses as a figure who restores order to the people of Israel. They contend, however, that these laws were not meant to construct any kind of cosmos, but instead to merely teach the “primitive” Israelites morals and proper hygiene to help restore them to their rightful home and state of mind in Israel (Raël, 28). This, in essence, disregards the Ten Commandments for current-day use because they are

not laws set in stone by a higher power – Elohim or God – but are instead guidelines for a primitive people:

Do not have any other gods before me...You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments. You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name. Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy...Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor. (Exodus 20:1-17)

A list, altered or unaltered, of the Ten Commandments is not cited within *Intelligent Design* as a text that the Raëlians reinterpret, but rather it is completely omitted which calls into question whether any of the laws are relevant for the Raëlian Movement. As the Eloha explains to Raël at the beginning of *Intelligent Design*, “only the parts of the Bible that I translate are important. Other parts are merely poetic babblings of which I will say nothing” (Raël, 11). However, although the Movement does not reinterpret the Ten Commandments, it also does not suggest that they are completely ignored. Aside from the law “you shall not commit adultery,” which appears to contradict a way of life encouraged by the Raëlians – sexual freedom and experimentationⁱ – the Ten Commandments seem to hold true to the values of the Elohim. Some of these laws, like “thou shalt not kill” are ones that the Elohim clearly believe strongly in following. The Eloha stresses to Raël the importance of encouraging greater “love and fraternity” into

the world and discouraging violence of any kind (Raël, 203). The Raëlians have their own set of “New Commandments,” which were presented by Yahweh to Raël:

You will appear at least once in your lifetime before the Guide of Guides so that he may transmit your cellular plan through manual contact, or have it transmitted by an initiated Guide, to the computer that will take this into account at your life’s assessment hour of judgment.

You will think at least once a day of the Elohim, your Creators.

You will try to radiate the message of the Elohim around you by every possible means.

You will, at least once a year, give a donation to the Guide of Guides that is equal to at least one percent of your annual income, in order to help him devote himself full time to his mission and travel around the world to spread this message

You will, at least once a year, invite the Guide of your region into your home, and you will gather at your place people who are interested in hearing him explain the message in all its dimensions. (Raël, 175)

These Commandments, unlike the Judeo-Christian Bible’s Ten Commandments, focus internally within the Movement and how a follower should work to become an integral part of the Raëlian community, compared with a more general community. Compared with the more global Ten Commandments with a focus on heath and societal structure for a more “primitive” people, these new commandments focus on rules for modern followers of the new movement.

Moses’ interaction with God is described in a complicated combination of physical and spiritual interactions, as best noted in his encounter with God at the Tabernacle in Exodus 33. Although it seems that at first Moses and others may come into the presence of God, verbally interact with him, and speak “face to face,” a mere nine lines down, this notion is reversed:

And it came to pass, as Moses entered into the tabernacle, the cloudy pillar descended, and stood at the door of the tabernacle, and **יהוה** talked with Moses. And all the people saw the cloudy pillar stand at

the tabernacle door: and all the people rose up and worshipped, every man in his tent door. And יהוה spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend. (Exodus 33:9-11)

And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live. And יהוה said, Behold, there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock: And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a clift of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by: And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen. (Exodus 33:20-23)

These sections, which appear to be direct contradiction with each other, offer examples of the barrier between humans and the divine in both a physical and spiritual sense. In order to preserve the sacredness of God, some boundaries must be established between the prophet Moses, the human who is in closest contact with God, and God Himself. In *Intelligent Design*, the Elohim describe these two encounters as moments not utilized to preserve the distinction between the sacred and the profane realms, but rather an example of the more physical divide between humans and the Elohim. As members of a different species who life in a different planet with an environment and atmosphere that differs from Earth, the Elohim cannot physically stand face to face with a human:

There you have reference to the difference in atmosphere between our planets. Humans cannot see their creators unless the latter are protected by a pressurized suit, because the terrestrial atmosphere is not suitable for them. If a man came to our planet he would see the creators without a space suit, but he would die because the atmosphere is not suited for him. (Raël, 30-31)

This, like other Raëlian reinterpretations of the Judeo-Christian Bible, presents a physical, scientific reasoning to replace the Bible's mystical or supernatural depiction of interactions between the sacred and profane realms. In the rereading, Moses is not

approaching a being that is sacred or anyway distinct or holy, but merely the physicality of the different beings is the underlying distinguisher that separates the two.

As a prophet, Moses is described as having received special “God-given” abilities to perform seemingly magical tricks that provide him with authority as a messenger and leader, and set apart from others. From a staff that can transform itself into a serpent and back again (Exodus 4:2-4), to being able to feed multitudes for years with a small amount of bread (Exodus 16), to extracting a water supply from a rock (Exodus 17), Moses is depicted as an individual bestowed with supernatural abilities and powers, or at least one in close contact with a higher power maintaining these abilities. In the Raëlian’s reinterpretation of the Book of Exodus, however, these powers are attributed to simple scientific realities and Elohim technology, which resemble tools we have today:

The manna was nothing more than pulverized synthetic chemical food, which when spread on the ground, swelled with the early morning dew. As for the staff which allowed Moses to draw water from the rock, as it says in Exodus 17:6 – it was nothing but a detector of underground water pools similar to those which you use at present to find oil, for example. Once water is located, one has only to dig. (Raël, 28)

Attributing these seemingly supernatural occurrences to scientific and technological solutions greatly diminishes Moses’ authority and power, as well as God’s, the being from whom he obtains these abilities. If all of God’s “miracles” could be explained scientifically, then what makes him any more special than a human? What then distinguishes God from humans if both realms’ abilities are equal and derive from merely a close study of science? To the Raëlians, the only thing that distinguishes the Elohim creators from the created is their advanced science. Humans have more potential than the Elohim in terms of their memory capacity, which is why some Elohim fear humans will someday surpass them in intelligence because they are theoretically able to accumulate

more knowledge (Raël, 113). However, one of the Elohim's main messages to Raël is their desire to someday return to earth to share their scientific knowledge with their created humans (Raël, 101-102). Some of the innovations that the Movement discusses within *Intelligent Design* have already developed and emerged on earth as well, because those are the easiest ones for the Elohim to explain to Raël and for him to describe to readers of his works. For example, modern readers of this Raëlian reinterpretation of Exodus likely will also recognize the scientific and technological tools described as freeze-dried food and water detectors.ⁱⁱ

In their reinterpretation of Exodus, the Raëlians focus largely on the relationship between Moses and God in regards to knowledge, physical interaction, and the establishment of laws. By devaluing Moses as a supernatural authority with the abilities to perform mystical and magical performances to reveal his connection with a higher power and to establish and perpetuate his charisma, the Raëlians continue to demonstrate that science and the Elohim alien race are the real root of the Judeo-Christian Bible, its prophets, histories, and narratives.

ENDNOTES

ⁱ Raël describes sexual encounters with robotic women during his visit to the Elohim spacecraft. Other parts of the message encourage sexual exploration. See Raël, 168-174, 270-271.

ⁱⁱ Likely referring to something like ground penetrating radar, which uses radar to determine water presence and depth. See Ground Penetrating Radar. 28 April 2010. <<http://www.geo.mtu.edu/~jdiehl/GPR.html>>.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS

Through narratives such as Adam and Eve and eating of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and Moses' interactions with God, questions are provoked about what sacred knowledge is, how it is revealed, and how it initiates readers by constructing a foundational history, group of established leaders, and set of rules. New Religious Movements like the Raëlian Movement, which construct its primary sacred text in relation to these narratives and other central stories from the Judeo-Christian Bible, place themselves in a unique position of drawing upon the shared cultural and religious history of Christian and Jewish traditions while also orienting themselves in a distinct religious nomos. As previously noted, the Raëlian Movement in particular mainly attracts converts from Catholicism who “tend to revere science and despise religious institutions” (Palmer, 120) because the Movement structures itself primarily on demystifying the Judeo-Christian Bible and constructing its narratives in light of scientific and technological discoveries.

As over 70 percent of the Movement's converts reported being raised in a Christian or Jewish tradition (Palmer, 119), the Movement's look back on these original texts provides the convert with narratives that are familiar, and likely have left the modern, scientifically-minded reader unsure of how much of the Biblical stories they should believe. Riddled with nearly-impossible Creation time frames, miraculous feats, and seeming contradictions in light of scientific discoveries, the stories may seem outdated to modern readers. At the same time, a brand new text that seeks to establish a new religious movement may appear suspect and not garner much interest or attention. By orienting themselves with a familiar text with an interpretation that satisfies many

modern, scientifically-minded readers, the Raëlian Movement maintains the right amount of tension with the outside society. Its reinterpretation of traditional texts within the framework of science attracts those dissatisfied with the mystical aspects of religion, while those same traditional texts are not too much of a jump from mainstream religious writings. Once a convert buys into the main foundational difference between the two religious movements – one believes an omniscient higher power or God created and maintains the world while the other argues that aliens created and maintain earth – the other key differences between the movements more easily transfer.

Many other new religious movements follow a similar strategy of maintaining a level of tension with the surrounding society without allowing that tension to become too great. This allows them to gain enough stability to carry on the tradition over a long period of time, rather than slowly being mitigated as years pass (Wessinger, 1-2). Berger's conception of religion as socially created and "inherently precarious" world (Berger, 29) aptly describes the state of socially constructed worlds in general, but particularly well depicts the predicament of a new religious movement as it secures its grounding and begins to develop. As religious movements that is by nature are based upon religions that have come before (Wessinger, 2) – either combined in new ways, or with a new twist – their newly established group at first has low membership, is entrenched in skepticism from the outside world, and is prone to poor, or limited established leadership structures in the beginning as it gains momentum. Many of these newly constructed religious nomos do not survive the first few years because of these factors, while others successfully secure a group of followers, win over the surrounding society with a perfect balance of tension with existing religious traditions, and establish a

leadership hierarchy that allows for the movement to survive even if the founder or prophet dies or leaves the group.

Just one example of a successful new religious movement based upon these factors, the Raëlian Movement struck a successful balance between all of these necessary aspects, and even succeeded in beginning to bridge the gap between supernatural and science in religious movements which is a main concerning factor in the modern world. The movement has a diverse range of followers and may now be found in over 170 countries (www.rael.org), though it is largely concentrated in places such as France or Montreal where the predominant established tradition is Christianity and *Intelligent Design* may be read in the original French translation. Using the Movement as an example of a new religious movement that succeeds at creating a new religion that is both traditional and modern – based in traditional Biblical stories and scientific truths – over time religious scholars should study patterns in movements such as these in order to discover where the future of religious movements is headed and in what form. Will science take on a more central role? Will successful new religious movements eventually all replace the traditional idea of sacred entirely with scientific theories about evolution, and replace scientific knowledge as the key distinguishing factor between the higher power and humans? While this is yet to be determined, the Raëlian Movement demonstrates a distinct shift in the concept of sacred and sacred knowledge worthy of note and further investigation.

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