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A Christian Response to Modern Extraterrestrialism

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Introduction

Roswell, Area 51, flying saucers, and Unidentified Flying Objects (UFOs) are all words which elicit an image of little green or grey men with big black eyes coming from the far reaches of the universe to visit Earth. While the idea of extraterrestrials (ETs) has roots starting with the ancient Greeks, the idea became viewed as a myth in the modern era. Proponents were also considered “crazy” for believing in such accounts. In fact, due to the sheer number of conspiracy theories and paranormal accounts linked to ETs, ET beliefs gained infamy for being nothing more than a ‘mystical’ trend shrouded in uncertainty.¹ While this reigned true, rendering the idea as no more than science fiction within the modern era, extraterrestrial life has entered the forefront of public imagination, scientific plausibility, and research due to increased interest and media portrayals in the postmodern age. Whether in movies, books, accounts of personal encounters, or even military documents, the extraterrestrial phenomenon is burgeoning and influencing many cultures worldwide.

This paradigm shift seems to have influenced all kinds of people, from the societal elite who settle on a new religion based on ETs,² to the commoner who becomes fascinated from watching “Ancient Aliens” on the History Channel. While this recent cultural phenomenon may not seem worth much consideration, especially in light of many other noteworthy events happening in the world today, this is not the case. On the contrary, this cultural craze impacts nearly every culture today, primarily those in direct contact with contemporary media. It has

¹ Greg Eghigian, "Making UFOs make sense: Ufology, science, and the history of their mutual mistrust," *Public Understanding of Science* 26, no. 5 (2017): 614, <https://journals-sagepub-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/doi/pdf/10.1177/0963662515617706>.

² Ross Douthat, “Flying Saucers and Other Fairy Tales,” in *Extraterrestrials and U. F. O. s*, ed. New York Times Editorial Staff (New York, NY: Rosen Publishing Group, 2020), 31, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/reader.action?docID=5888722&ppg=30>.

seeped into seemingly all forms of modern-day culture. For interest in ETs had situated itself into science and religious, political, philosophical, and entertainment, which all began to culminate in the 20th century when technology caught up to making accurate studies and ideas of ETs possible.³

While all these implications are fascinating, and papers of many sorts can be written on this subject, this thesis will analyze views held by modern Christians. This paper will focus on ET beliefs which this thesis will refer to as “Extraterrestrialism” or “ET-ism.” The purpose of this paper is to show the possible ramifications or benefits ET-ism may have on Christianity and how Christians (both individually and as a congregation) should respond to this enlarging cultural craze. Given the exploding influence of ET-ism, Christians must prepare to address questions regarding this cultural phenomenon with godly wisdom.

Why This Matters for Christians

The first and foremost question that needs addressing before delving into the logistics of this topic is why this issue matters to Christians. It is no secret that many Christians brush this topic off as a quirky idea or something that holds little relevance to their lives. It is also natural to believe that Christians would be less likely to embrace ET-ism than non-believers because there are no direct mentions of ETs as perceived by today’s culture in Scripture. However, the culture of ET belief is rapidly increasing, and if Christians do not address it, it could create a significant division within the church. Moreover, if ETs prove to exist, then the previous Christian rejection of them could discredit Christianity. This idea is a problem for while many Christians hold the

³ Michael Ashkenazi, *What We Know About Extraterrestrial Intelligence: Foundations on Xenology* (Switzerland, Springer International Publishing, 2017), 14, <https://link-springer-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/book/10.1007%2F978-3-319-44456-7#toc>.

consensus that the existence of ET life in any form would not destroy the Christian faith,⁴ others adhere to the idea that much of Christianity would require abandoning.⁵ While the number of people (according to a recent survey) shows that the number of Christians who would face a ‘crisis of faith’ is under eleven percent at the most,⁶ this still leaves room for undesirable consequences. These can include a division occurring in the church causing turmoil, some breaking off to create their religion that incorporates ETs with Christianity (much like with Gnosticism during the early first century A.D.), or many leaving the Christian faith altogether. Simply put, these unfavorable outcomes are possible, and Christians of all nationalities must work together to avoid these results.

While the above covers why this topic is essential for Christians on a largely congregational level, the same importance rings true for Christians on the individual level. In this day and age, one is bombarded with a plethora of different ideas daily. If one’s reasoning for their own beliefs is weak, then the possibility of losing one’s faith becomes a reality. This possibility is especially true for Christians where it seems that secular science, social justice movements, and even entertainment work on chipping away at Christian doctrine by either offering alternative answers or trying to obliterate the notion of God altogether. The ET culture is a phenomenon that tries to do both. Christians must be ready to hear these theories from media while being able to keep a solid foundation in Christ. In addition, they must be able to rationally

⁴ Steven J. Dick, "The Societal Impact of Extraterrestrial Life: The Relevance of History and the Social Sciences," in *Astrobiology, History, and Society*, ed. Douglas A. Vakoch (Springer-Verlag Berlin Heidelberg, 2013), 243, <https://link-springer-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/book/10.1007/978-3-642-35983-5>.

⁵ Thomas F. O'Meara, *Vast Universe: Extraterrestrials and Christian Revelation* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), 83, <https://books.google.co.jp/books?id=kRQjQC2sSfAC&pg=PR3&dq>.

⁶ Ted Peters, "Would the Discovery of ETI Provoke a Religious Crisis?" in *Astrobiology, History, and Society*, ed. Douglas A. Vakoch (Springer-Verlag Berlin Heidelberg, 2013), 344, https://link-springer-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/chapter/10.1007/978-3-642-35983-5_19.

answer adherents to these beliefs pointing out any misconceptions their interlocutors may have and offering them the more logical and hopeful solution which is in Jesus Christ.

Extraterrestrials: The Basics

Defining Extraterrestrials

In layman's terms, extraterrestrials (colloquially known as ETs or aliens) are beings that live outside of Earth and did not biologically originate on Earth. This definition is admittedly broad, so for the sake of argument, this paper will disregard humans living outside Earth as ETs (since they originated from the Earth) or any spiritual beings such as angels or God as ETs (for these beings originated beyond the corporeal realm). The ETs discussed in this paper will be material lifeforms that originated on other planets. While microbial ETs exist,⁷ the main cultural uproar is possible extraterrestrial intelligence (IET) far more developed than humanity. IETs will be the primary focus of this thesis, for they constitute the most popular and considered idea in ET-ism. It is also important to note that mankind almost always views ETs as more technologically advanced and spiritually aware than humans.⁸ Due to this notion, popular culture exhibit most ETs in stories and experiences as such. Though IETs have more or less been the perpetuated idea since the idea of ETs has manifested, their reception has drastically changed from the ancient era to contemporary times.

⁷ "Scientists find living bacteria from outer space on ISS satellite's surface," Russian News Agency, TASS, last modified November 27th, 2017, <https://tass.com/science/977591>.

⁸ Krista Suhr Henriksen, "Alien encounters: A close analysis of personal accounts of extraterrestrial experiences" (MA Thesis, Simon Fraser University, 2002), 75, <https://www-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/docview/305477988?pq-origsite=summon>.

Conception in Antiquity

While this phenomenon seems relatively new, many would be surprised to find that ET interest has existed much longer than many people commonly believed. The initial conception traces back to ancient times. While ETs (in modern thought) was not at first explicitly stated, the idea of life beyond the Earth spans from the ancient belief that the stars (and planets in some cases) themselves were intelligent animated beings.⁹ This idea was widely accepted in ancient societies by both the religious and secular alike, who believed that the planet's movements were guided by a higher intelligence or by angels.¹⁰ Christianity strongly supported this belief with Scripture itself referring to members of God's heavenly host as 'stars.'¹¹ Even influential Christian scholars, such as Origen of Alexandria, pushed forward a prominent idea. Origen speculated that all of the visible planets and stars in the sky were not angels (as popularly believed in Christian circles), but rather other living spiritual beings altogether.¹² Centuries after, Thomas Aquinas proposed that the stars are not animate but controlled by supernatural beings such as angels.¹³ This idea became widespread within ancient Christianity, supported even by ancient books such as *The Book of the Luminaries* in *Enoch*, setting forth to explain that spiritual beings lead all the stars.¹⁴ This idea ran supreme with many until the advent of the telescope, allowing more accurate observation of the celestial bodies considerably. Galileo Galilei was the

⁹ Marie I. George, *Christianity and Extraterrestrials?: A Catholic Perspective* (Lincoln, NE: iUniverse, 2005), 7, <https://books.google.co.jp/books?id=VVh1-UY9oAUC&pg=PR3&dq#v>.

¹⁰ Emily Simpson, "Cosmology, Extraterrestrial Life, and the Development and Character of Western European Thought in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," (MA Thesis, University of North Texas, 2011), 35, <https://www-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/docview/1011468080?pq-origsite=summon>.

¹¹ Michael S. Heiser, *Angels: What the Bible Really Says About God's Heavenly Host* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), n.p.

¹² O'Meara, *Vast Universe*, 66.

¹³ George, *Christianity and Extraterrestrials*, 7

¹⁴ George W. E. Nickelsburg and James C. VanderKam, *1 Enoch 2: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch, Chapters 37-82*, ed. Klaus Baltzer (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), 557, <https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/stable/j.ctvb9363g>.

first to use the telescope to peer into space. He made magnificent discoveries such as four of Jupiter's moons and intensely studying the moon's surface."¹⁵ His discoveries, in essence, were not only a giant milestone for astronomy but put to rest the belief that the stars or planets were living beings. However, this did not eliminate the possibility of intelligent ETs living on said celestial bodies, which was a completely different topic altogether.

Another prevailing idea in antiquity was that IETs inhabited the visible planets. The earliest recorded assumption of intelligent extraterrestrial life comes from the Greek philosopher Democritus (c. 460 -370 B.C.).¹⁶ This assumption is quite surprising given that many cultures at the time viewed the celestial objects as living well before the invention of the first telescope or the proposal of the heliocentric model of the universe. These thoughts persisted with Greek philosophers and advanced into the Middle Ages with medieval Christian schools,¹⁷ thus allowing Christians and old church fathers to tackle this issue well before knowing how space operated. During this age, there were three main thoughts about space that persisted. These were that the universe in scale is massive (or even infinite), other inhabited worlds exist within the universe, and that the beings that live on these inhabited worlds were considered further advanced than humans on earth.¹⁸ These three ideas were birthed from religious and philosophical thought in this era and shaped what medieval people thought of space and ET life.

Then, in the 14th century, a monumental astronomical breakthrough was achieved by Nicolaus Copernicus. Copernicus was an astronomer that revolutionized astronomy so much so

¹⁵ George Basalla, *Civilized Life in the Universe: Scientists on Intelligent Extraterrestrials* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006), 19, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/detail.action?pq-origsite=summon&docID=3052093>.

¹⁶ Ashkenazi, *What We Know*, 14.

¹⁷ O'Meara, *Vast Universe*, 63.

¹⁸ Basalla, *Civilized Life*, 3

that his contributions continue to make an impact today. Between 1508 and 1514, he released a treatise named the *Commentariolus* (translated as the ‘Little Commentary’). This treatise proposed the heliocentric solar system's foundation while correctly ordering the planets known at the time from the sun.¹⁹ During this time, belief in ETs spread rapidly due to Copernicus’s revelation.²⁰ Though the ancient Greek astronomer Aristarchus of Samos speculated heliocentrism generations before,²¹ it was not until Copernicus that this idea started to take hold. While Copernicus indeed laid the foundations for this model, it was not until Galileo, Isaac Newton, and Johannes Kepler (with his discovery of elliptical orbits)²² that the heliocentric model started to gain popularity and finally worldwide recognition by the last 1700s.²³

While Copernicus’s heliocentric model created a solid foundation for further astronomical research, Galileo took the initiative to study space further and lay out his ideas on ET life. Galileo is one of the most renowned scientists in history, commonly known as the father of modern science due to his achievements.²⁴ Galileo’s research extended well into the field of astronomy, while he is considered the first astronomer to utilize a telescope to observe space. As mentioned above, Galileo was the first to observe and even chart the moon using a telescope, yet his discoveries did not dissuade him from the thought of potential ET life, even on the desolate moon itself. Galileo accepted the possibility of life on the moon and even perpetuated the idea

¹⁹ “Nicolaus Copernicus,” History, last modified October 24, 2019, <https://www.history.com/topics/inventions/nicolaus-copernicus>.

²⁰ Michael J. Crowe and Matthew F. Dowd, “The Extraterrestrial Life Debate from Antiquity to 1900,” in *Astrobiology, History, and Society*, ed. Vakoch (Springer-Verlag Berlin Heidelberg, 2013), 5, <https://link-springer-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/book/10.1007/978-3-642-35983-5#toc>.

²¹ William Harris Stahl, “The Greek Heliocentric Theory and Its Abandonment,” *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, 76 (1945): 321, https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/stable/283344?pq-origsite=summon&seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents.

²² Alan Gould and Brian Dunbar, “Johannes Kepler: His Life, His Laws and Times,” Kepler and K2, NASA, August 4, 2017, <https://www.nasa.gov/kepler/education/johannes>.

²³ “Nicolaus Copernicus.”

²⁴ “Galileo Galilei,” History, last modified on October 24, 2019, <https://www.history.com/topics/inventions/galileo-galilei>.

that if intelligent life did live on the moon, they worshiped and praised the Lord.²⁵ Though Galileo was persecuted and eventually sentenced to life imprisonment, his astronomical discoveries and ideas on ET life sparked further researchers by other Christian astronomers. One such individual was Johannes Kepler (1571-1630), who discovered the law of planetary motion. Kepler was a religious man, like Galileo, who found balance in the belief of ET life alongside Christian doctrine. Kepler maintained that while other intelligent beings may live among other planets in the solar system, God placed the Earth in a premier.²⁶ As shown here, Kepler (and other Christian astronomers) believed in possible ET life while giving humans special recognition. This idea also concerned different worlds (both known and unknown) outside of just the moon and resulted in further discussions on how the existence of ET life would impact religions under the idea called the 'plurality of worlds.'²⁷ Influential astronomers from history promoted ET beliefs using an array of many thoughts, discussions, and discoveries. While these researchers made great strides in antiquity, it was not until the beginning of the modern era where the idea of ETs started to truly flourish and saturate culture on a global scale.

Reception in Modernity

While people in antiquity were more spiritual and relied more on religious delineations to understand the world around them, reliance on science and technology takes prominence in the modern era. In today's day and age, it is no secret that one will put science on a pedestal to explain how the universe works, leaving spirituality and religion for 'faith' rather than 'reason.'

²⁵ Basalla, *Civilized Life*, 20.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 23.

²⁷ Constance M. Bertka, "Christianity's Response to the Discovery of Extraterrestrial Intelligent Life: Insights from Science and Religion and the Sociology of Religion," in *Astrobiology, History, and Society*, ed. Douglas A. Vakoch (Springer-Verlag Berlin Heidelberg, 2013), 330, <https://link-springer-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/book/10.1007/978-3-642-35983-5>

As a result, Modern people inundated with technology are more likely to witness the world as being full of corporeal matter rather than filled with spiritual elements.²⁸ This way of thinking has invaded all fields of study, making modern science more based on physical research while only referring to spiritual elements if there seems to be no explanation for a problem.

Historians allocate observational astronomy into three separate periods. These are the naked eye, telescope, and radio telescope periods.²⁹ Out of these three periods, the telescope and radio telescope periods are what modern science has used to advance astronomy. Many after Galileo gazed upon the skies with telescopes, and while scientific knowledge of the universe was growing, acceptance of ET life was declining. This circumstance was due to a myriad of new astronomical discoveries while finding no concrete evidence of ET life within the Sol system. This trend continued well into the early 1900s where numerous astronomers were dubious about extraterrestrial life existing at all in the universe, for they predominantly believed that planetary systems were a rarity within outer space.³⁰ This idea continued to flourish and grow with supporting astronomers such as Sir James Jeans and Arthur S. Eddington, who believed the Earth itself was the only planet that boasted life.³¹ It was not until after the invention of the radio telescope that this rationale began to change. Karl Jansky invented the radio telescope in 1931. The radio telescope was a significant upgrade from its predecessor, picking up radio signals well beyond the Sol system.³² This invention supported the idea that other planetary systems did exist beyond the one Earth resides in and consequently started to shift minds in support of ET life gradually. This postulation substantially blossomed under E. A. Milne, a prominent

²⁸ George, *Christianity and Extraterrestrials*, 7.

²⁹ Basalla, *Civilized Life*, 18.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 127.

³¹ *Ibid*.

³² *Ibid*, 18.

astrophysicist and cosmologist. Milne promoted the idea of ET life and melded Christianity and science back into this idea as it was in antiquity. He did this by giving numerous lectures propagating the idea that galaxies with life-supporting planets filled the universe, explaining that God could not be satisfied "...if a single planet were the sole seat of His activities?"³³ This proposition spread far and wide, culminating in the time frame between 1943 to 1958. Astronomers started believing not only that other planetary systems were standard in space but that ones that supported life existed as well.³⁴

Subsequent Research

The widespread assumption was that ETs existed and solar systems were a commonality in space. This assumption changed how one studied astronomy and opened a door for new research dealing with life beyond the Earth. This research dealt with possible life beyond Earth's solar system and the theory that life on Earth originated outside the planet.

Astrobiology

Wes Huntress developed the term 'astrobiology' in 1995 while attempting to find signs of life and water on Mars while working at NASA.³⁵ Astrobiology deals with the origins of life on earth from outside the earth itself, such as other planets or asteroids.³⁶ This scientific study became popularized in the modern era after Huntress coined the term, especially with projects like SETI (Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence) and centers such as NASA's Astrobiology

³³ Basalla, *Civilized Life*, 128.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 130.

³⁵ Akihiko Yamagishi, "What is Astrobiology?" in *Astrobiology: From the Origins of Life to the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence*, ed. Akihiko Yamagishi, Takeshi Kakegawa, and Tomohiro Usui (Springer Nature Singapore, 2019), 4, <https://link-springer-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/book/10.1007/978-981-13-3639-3#toc>.

³⁶ Edward J. Steele and N. Chandra Wickramasinghe, *Cosmic Genetic Evolution*, Vol. 106 of *Advances in Genetics*, ed. Dhavendra Kumar (San Diego, CA: Elsevier Science & Technology, 2020), xvii, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=6374145#>.

Institute, founded in 1998. Astrobiology is not just focused on astronomy but utilizes multiple different disciplines of science in order to find the answers this study aims to find. Astrobiology aims to answer scientific inquiries of the universe and philosophical questions regarding life itself. Akihiko Yamagishi explains it best when he describes astrobiology as "...a multidisciplinary scientific field encompassing biology, chemistry, physics, geology, planetary science and, astronomy. Scientists participating in this field are interested in trying to answer fundamental questions of life such as 'Where did we come from? Are we alone? Where are we going?'"³⁷

Since Astrobiology's conception, a slew of scientists, organizations, and even governments have begun to participate and meticulously research in this new and exciting scientific study in hopes of becoming the first to discover life beyond earth. It was not long until basic principles for the existence of life arose in this new scientific field, giving more direction and shape to the study. These guidelines include the essential elements of life (carbon, oxygen, nitrogen, and oxygen), polymers, ribozymes, and early life needing to be heterotrophic and thermophilic.³⁸ Following these guidelines, astrobiologists have already made remarkable progress discovering other Earth-like planets that could support life and even radio signals that some believe originate from intelligent species living beyond the solar system. So much so has this new scientific field gained notable recognition that both European countries and the United States have already invested hundreds of millions of dollars into researching astrobiology.³⁹ Naturally, with so much attention and funding, astrobiology evolved further and with new studies branching out and theories emerging from within. One such theory has been gaining

³⁷ Yamagishi, "What is Astrobiology," 3

³⁸ Steele, *Cosmic Genetic Evolution*, xvii.

³⁹ Samuel R. Levin et al., "Darwin's Aliens," *International Journal of Astrobiology* 18, no. 1 (2019): 1, <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1017/S1473550417000362>.

rapid popularity, spawning many new ideas and even scientists solely dedicated to researching this new scientific hypothesis. This idea is the scientific theory of panspermia.

Panspermia

Panspermia initially was an unpopular idea. The idea of panspermia (meaning 'seeds everywhere') was brought into existence in the 19th century by a group of chemists and physicists but then started to decline in popularity in the 20th century when scientific tests showed that living spores were unable to survive the radiation that space contained.⁴⁰ These tests meant that even if (before their discovery) microbial ETs existed with the potential to create life on earth somewhere in the far reaches of space, that panspermia was impossible due to the idea that they would die before having the opportunity to seed life on other planets. This assumption perplexed researchers and made panspermia seem more life science fiction than a fundamental scientific theory. That is until Francis Crick and Leslie Orgel proposed their ideas. Remarkably panspermia was brought back to the fore fray by Crick and Orgel in 1973 when they proposed the 'direct panspermia' idea suggesting that IETs propagated life on Earth, rather than microbial life traveling itself to Earth by sheer chance.⁴¹ This new idea revolutionized panspermia and constructed it into a bonafide scientific theory which many scientists could confidently research without ridicule.

Panspermia quickly became an alternate theory for the idea that life on earth originated from a 'primordial soup' that contained the necessary organic compounds and chemicals, which enabled life to start at a microscopic level and gradually evolve into all the living beings which are now present on earth. Crick and Orgel observed that all living things on the planet contain the

⁴⁰ Basalla, *Civilized Life*, 132.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*.

same genetic code making panspermia a plausible alternate theory for Darwinian Evolution.⁴² Their observation gave two options for a naturalistic explanation for life on Earth. Either life encountered a “bottleneck” resulting in a small interbreeding population, or life originating from another planet was sent to Earth and evolved after.⁴³ Although many scientists viewed the latter as scientifically improbable, Crick and Orgel maintained Panspermia as being scientifically valid.⁴⁴ This way, panspermia became a theory that could hold its weight. While the primordial soup theory advocates that life emerged on earth approximately 3 to 3.5 billion years ago, many adherents of panspermia believe that life was 'seeded' on earth from space around 4.1 billion years ago in a time known as the Hadean epoch.⁴⁵ Though these are very substantial differences in time and the foundations of each theory contrast one another, researchers and scientists alike began to mix and match different ideas of each theory to explain the origin of earthly life and human evolution. For example, while one scientist might believe that ETs seeded life throughout the universe to spread life,⁴⁶ another might believe that ETs discovered humanity evolved from primordial soup, who interfered to help them evolve.⁴⁷ The fact of the matter is that panspermia has become such a fascinating and famous theory that it started to seep into the naturalistic view of life and evolution, trying to answer questions inserting ETs in the equation where orthodox science could not answer. Over the years to the present day, these ideas started to invade culture itself, changing how society thinks and views the world. It would be facetious to say that

⁴² Basalla, *Civilized Life*, 132.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Steele, *Cosmic Genetic Evolution*, 2.

⁴⁶ Basalla, *Civilized Life*, 132.

⁴⁷ Duncan H. Forgan, *Solving Fermi's Paradox*, in *Cambridge Astrobiology*, ed. Bruce Jakosky et al. (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 347, <https://www-cambridge-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/core/books/solving-fermis-paradox/46945FE622E1F62E8DA36832B9F58A8A?>

panspermia and its proposed ideas have only been a passing fancy that has not contributed much to society and today's culture.

Impact on Society

Now it is time to examine how contemporary society has been affected by ET-ism. Christians, like everyone else, are a part of society and must not be blind to how this phenomenon impacts culture. Thus, it is time to examine a relatively new study called ufology (which many still consider a pseudoscience) and how ET ideas have ingrained themselves into the modern-day culture and have affected today's world. Understanding this study will enable Christians to answer any questions they present with more efficiency, understand those who adhere to ET beliefs, and remain steadfast in their faith from the onslaught of new ideas that these beliefs present.

Ufology

One of the most popular and fascinating new studies to come about directly from ET beliefs is ufology. Ufology was coined by the Times Literary Supplement in 1959 when they added the suffix “logy” to the United States Air Force’s Edward J. Ruppelt’s coined term “UFO.”⁴⁸ Ufology studies unidentified flying objects as well as purported human interactions with extraterrestrials.⁴⁹ Although the UFOs and ET-human interaction seem like different disciplines, they are both considered a part of ufology. For a time, many ridiculed this relatively new study as a pseudoscience that only paranoid conspiracy theorists grasp. Recently, however, ufology has gained mainstream attention and rose the ranks from obscurity to worldwide recognition. Though

⁴⁸ “Etymology,” What is Ufology?, MUFON, <https://www.mufon.com/ufology.html>.

⁴⁹ Henriksen, “Alien encounters,” 5.

this study is familiar and has gained massive traction, its inception and fame are clouded in mystery and considered controversial.

The general populace will point towards the infamous Roswell incident on July 8th, 1947, as the originator for the ET craze and ufology. This incident occurred in (as its namesake implies) Roswell, New Mexico, when a rancher named W.W. “Mac” Brazel found some wreckage on his land, which he believed to be from a ‘flying saucer.’⁵⁰ While this spurred the United States Air Force to launch an investigation and recover the debris, they concluded that the wreckage found at the crash site originated from a high altitude weather balloon rather than from an extraterrestrial craft.⁵¹ This, however, did not satisfy many skeptical individuals who believe the government was just covering up the truth due to the government changing the narrative more than once, including one from the Air Force announced that the weather balloon explanation was “bogus” and the true culprit was a spy device.⁵² This incident undoubtedly spurred even more skepticism resulting in the UFO believing community growing further. For they viewed the government’s constant changing of the narrative to be more suspicious than sticking to only one explanation. Not only was the Roswell incident arguably the starting point for how modern views of ETs and UFOs grew and evolved into today’s culture; many regards it as the catalyst which further proliferated this idea into what would become ufology. Seemingly as a direct cause of the Roswell incident, sightings and reports of UFOs exploded so alarmingly that the United States military decided to get involved. According to F.B.I. (the Federal Bureau

⁵⁰ Adam Janos, “What Really Happened at Roswell? Behind the rumors of America’s most infamous UFO incident,” History, January 8th, 2021, <https://www.history.com/news/roswell-ufo-aliens-what-happened>.

⁵¹ “Unexplained Phenomenon,” FBI Records: The Vault, The F.B.I., last modified April 20, 2011, <https://vault.fbi.gov/unexplained-phenomenon>.

⁵² Janos, “What Really Happened.”

of Investigation) records, between 1947 and 1969, over 12,618 UFO sightings were investigated by the United States Air Force, resulting in 701 cases remaining unidentified.⁵³

Grabbing the attention of the United States military and FBI is no small feat and has helped propel the validity people give to UFO sightings and research. The consideration that both the US military and FBI have poured into this matter is nothing to be scorned at, for they have poured countless hours of investigations and research into UFOs after the Roswell incident. In fact, according to the National Archives,

The records include approximately 2 cubic feet of unarranged project or administrative files, 37 cubic feet of case files in which individual sightings are arranged chronologically, and 3 cubic feet of records relating to the Office of Special Investigations (OSI), portions of which are arranged chronologically, by OSI district, and by overseas command. A cubic foot of records comprises about 2,000 pages.⁵⁴

This massive amount of data was collected showing how earnestly the military was looking into the UFO phenomenon. It is also important to note that at this time, people were largely still relying on the government for answers into this new matter that seemed more like science fiction, for no private reputable, established research groups yet existed for UFOs. This means that if the government chose to largely ignore these sightings and pass them all off as misidentifications, then there was a possibility that the attention given to this phenomenon would have stagnated or died out altogether.

Even while the government was conducting this high-level research, ufology was still not an established science. However, this research was pivotal for ufology's creation, for it served as its foundation. Soon after the military got involved in UFO investigations, a slew of many

⁵³ "Project Blue Book (UFO) part 1 of 1," FBI Records: The Vault, [://vault.fbi.gov/Project%20Blue%20Book%20%28UFO%29%20/Project%20Blue%20Book%20%28UFO%29%20part%201%20of%201/view](https://vault.fbi.gov/Project%20Blue%20Book%20%28UFO%29%20/Project%20Blue%20Book%20%28UFO%29%20part%201%20of%201/view).

⁵⁴ "Project BLUE BOOK - Unidentified Flying Objects," Military Records, National Archives, last modified September 29, 2020, <https://www.archives.gov/research/military/air-force/ufos#bluebk>.

private research groups established themselves, such as The National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena (NICAP), established in 1956 in order to investigate reports on UFOs while occasionally communicating with the F.B.I.⁵⁵ While both private and government researchers studied UFOs, the term ‘ufology’ was coined and recognized as a new field of study, as fantastical it did seem. During this time, research was focused mainly on UFOs. That is until the famous alien abduction case of Betty and Barney Hill, which occurred in 1969, giving rise to researching ET encounters alongside UFOs.⁵⁶ During these years, Jacques Vallée created a system to help study ufology called the “Vallée System.” This system uses the four categories of close encounter (CE), maneuver (MA), fly-by (FB), and anomaly (AN), which is then divided up into five subcategories being: sighting, physical effects, life form or living entity, reality transformation, and physiological impact.⁵⁷ With these new research organizations, government involvement, and study system entering the fray, the time was ripe for ufology to gain worldwide notoriety.

After twenty-two long years of arduous investigating, the United States Air Force decided to cease all investigations into UFOs in 1969. Luckily for those still seeking answers, on May 31st of the same year, Allen Utke and Walt Andrus established MUFON (Mutual UFO Network).⁵⁸ Although MUFON started as an unremarkable institution, it has become one of the world's most esteemed UFO and ET research groups. MUFON is currently the longest-running and most prominent UFO organization on Earth, containing over 4,000 members, 100,000 UFO

⁵⁵ “Unexplained Phenomenon,” FBI Records: The Vault, [://vault.fbi.gov/Project%20Blue%20Book%20%28UFO%29%20/Project%20Blue%20Book%20%28UFO%29%20part%201%20of%201/view](https://vault.fbi.gov/Project%20Blue%20Book%20%28UFO%29%20/Project%20Blue%20Book%20%28UFO%29%20part%201%20of%201/view).

⁵⁶ Henriksen, “Alien encounters,” 4.

⁵⁷ “UFO Categorization - Vallee System,” What is Ufology?, MUFON, <https://www.mufon.com/ufology.html>.

⁵⁸ “A Brief History of MUFON,” MUFON, <https://www.mufon.com/history.html>.

cases, a corporate office, 600 field investigators, a ‘History’ network tv show, a rapid response team, as well as a team of trained divers.⁵⁹ With its establishment came many more UFO and ET enthusiasts, advancements in said research, and cemented ufology as a study that considered a ‘fringe’ study rather than a science fiction deserving of ridicule. It goes without saying that MUFON had an extraordinary impact on ufology and has encouraged the world's inhabitants to explore ufology themselves. UFOs, ETs, and ufology have become fascinating new subjects for researchers to study, finding a seat in many facets of culture and the inquisitive minds of humankind.

Popular Cultural Craze

ETs have flooded contemporary culture around the globe. Many would have raised an eyebrow at the very mention of life beyond Earth in the not-so-distant past. However, this idea is now widely scientifically accepted as a possibility by researchers and the general populace alike. The interest in extraterrestrials has not only situated itself into the realm of science; but also in religion, politics, philosophy, and entertainment which all began to culminate in the 20th century when technology caught up to making accurate studies and ideas of ETs possible.⁶⁰ This interest caused a cultural boom so big that this idea spread across the globe and started to be accepted as truth to most people regardless of background or worldview. In fact, according to a study conducted by “Glocalities” on 26,492 individuals spanning 24 countries, a striking 61 percent believe in the existence of ET life.⁶¹ This research concludes that the stigma people hold for those who believe in ET life massively decreased and that the widespread belief in ET life is

⁵⁹ “History,” MUFON.

⁶⁰ Ashkenazi, *What We Know*, 14.

⁶¹ Martin Lampert, “Majority of Humanity Say We Are Not Alone in the Universe,” Glocalities International, <https://glocalities.com/latest/reports/majority-of-humanity-say-we-are-not-alone-in-the-universe>.

rising. This mentality on ETs did not swiftly occur but rather was the product of increased subjugation in contemporary culture.

Interestingly enough, conspiracy steeped itself into the origins of ET culture rather than entertainment. After the Roswell Incident, not only did many more reports of UFOs and ET encounters start flooding in, but also the widespread belief within the ET believing community that there was a widespread government conspiracy. This belief became so prevalent that conspiracies became an almost vital component in extraterrestrial accounts since most of them seem to be deliberately hidden by governments worldwide.⁶² For this reason, many who adhered to the belief of ET existence started to gain animosity from others as paranoid and irrational. Despite the ill repute, more and more started to join the ranks as believers when a multitude of more sightings, encounters, and stories piled up. After a particular point, mainstream society found an opportunity in the rising popularity of this idea and began to incorporate ET ideas in popular culture to profit. This was when the ET phenomena started to evolve into a cultural craze rather than remaining a conspiratorial postulation.

The first portrayal of ETs in mainstream science fiction, which left an enormous impact on society, was “Star Trek,” which debuted on September 8th, 1966. This show was the first of its kind featuring a spaceship crew handling futuristic technology on a mission to explore the universe teeming with droves of alien life consisting of primal animals and highly intelligent races. The crew itself sported non-human races, which worked alongside the human crew members. This show was indeed a marvel of its time, for it uniquely portrayed intelligent alien species and humanized them so the audience could connect with these beings galaxies apart.

⁶² Henriksen, “Alien encounters,” 77.

“Star Trek” even went as far as exploring cultural problems at the time (such as racism which was rampant in the nation) using extraterrestrial races.⁶³ All of this culminated together, prolonging the idea that alien life is a possibility and opened the proverbial gates for television and other media sources to capitalize on this newfound popularity of ETs. In point of fact, due to the raging popularity of Star Trek, cinematography has been responsible for over 300 movies that have depicted ETs, most notably being "The War of the Worlds" and "Star Wars."⁶⁴ Cinematography helped cause its rapid popularization in modern culture. As time progressed, the depiction of ETs spread from cinematography to books, video games, academia, and even religion.

While ideas about ETs gained greater recognition in culture from shows and major motion pictures, they also received such in academia. Many started conducting serious scientific research (as mentioned previously), and these studies also extended to the realm accessible to even amateurs. A great example of this is the collegiate course at Temple University called the 'Unidentified Flying Objects in American Society' taught by Dr. David M. Jacobs. This course not only explored the possibilities of alien life but also dove into the fringe side of the subject with UFO sightings and even alien abduction accounts.⁶⁵ Such courses allowed laypeople to research this subject at an academic level which was previously only available to scientific researchers. The ability for amateur research resulted in many others becoming influenced by the ideas of ET life, which then permeated into people's lives on a foundational level. The beliefs in

⁶³ George, *Christianity and Extraterrestrials*, 198.

⁶⁴ Klara Anna Capova, “The Detection of Extraterrestrial Life: Are We Ready?,” in *Astrobiology, History, and Society: Life Beyond Earth and the Impact of Discovery*, ed. Douglas A. Vakoch (Springer-Verlag Berlin Heidelberg, 2013), 273, <https://link-springer-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/book/10.1007/978-3-642-35983-5?page=1#toc>.

⁶⁵ Michael Decourcy Hinds, “Taking U.F.O.’s for Credit and for Real,” in *Extraterrestrials and U. F. O. s.*, ed. New York Times Editorial Staff (New York, NY: Rosen Publishing Group, 2020), 14, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/reader.action?docID=5888722&ppg=14>.

ETs started becoming less of a curiosity and more a cornerstone in the worldviews of many. New religions formed, established religions integrated ET life into their doctrines, and even science started to find alternative answers in ETs for unanswered theories (such as the origins of life on earth). Some individuals went even as far as to exploit this new fascination for their own gain. The most prominent example is L. Ron Hubbard, a science fiction author with a notoriously controversial past. Hubbard utilized the ancient aliens hypothesis (which this paper will later explore) to create the religion of Scientology in 1953.⁶⁶ This religion is now known as one of the highest-earning and has gained notoriety for its support by famous actors like Tom Cruise and infamy for many scandals, conspiracies, and outspoken abdicators.

As technology kept advancing and the idea of alien life kept spreading, mass media finally took hold of the idea, which fully maximized and accelerated the proliferation of the ideas many hold about ETs today. Even today, mass media in all its forms plays a crucial role in spreading information, scientific findings, and even supernatural stories about ETs to the public, shaping the world's modern culture and influencing global opinion.⁶⁷

Now more than ever before in history, people from across the globe give credence to the idea that ET life could exist somewhere in the universe and are engrossed in the depictions that society places upon them. The popularity of ETs is so pervasive now that one would be hard-pressed to live in modern-day society trying to avoid confrontation with ET portrayals or beliefs in one way or another. Due to the vast increase of available information (and available mediums), a great majority of those who partake in popular culture are knowledgeable of

⁶⁶ Peter S. Williams, "Scientific Rebuttals to 'Ancient Aliens' as Popular Alternatives to Biblical History," *Theofilos* 12, no. 1 (2020): 88, <https://theofilos.no/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Theofilos-vol-12-nr-1-2020-Supplement-academia-6.pdf>.

⁶⁷ Capova, "The Detection," 279.

extraterrestrial encounters and stories.⁶⁸ One of the most prominent mediums that pass said information is people who can pass the information on to reach even those who cannot afford or access physical sources such as television or books. This method allowed this idea to spread throughout all societies and classes from within them, discriminating against none of them.

With numerous polls and studies, it is apparent that while all questioned about ETs have their views on them, the questions caught no one off guard. This poll shows that the ET cultural phenomena conditioned many causing them to also pondered their beliefs. Even more surprising, although all data and evidence collected on ETs are ambiguous, this has not deterred many people from believing in ETs. Recent polls show that sixty percent of Americans believe in ETs (whether simple or intelligent), even though the only evidence and data they have access to are inconclusive.⁶⁹ This poll shows that the willingness for individuals to believe in the idea of ETs is so strong that even guaranteed scientific evidence is not needed for them to believe in ETs. The inclination for people to lay hold of this idea and let it freely manipulate their mindset has not been ignored by researchers so easily. Within the last 20 years, the subject of how ETs could possibly affect culture and society has gained substantial attention. This subject has so much attention that notable groups, such as the NASA Ames Research Center, organized meetings and workshops to discuss this very topic.⁷⁰ Though these meetings may be belated, culture and society have already profoundly changed from these ideas. From those who believe the future of the human race is colonizing space with the hopes of finding intelligent life for help, to the elite

⁶⁸ Henriksen, "Alien encounters," 8.

⁶⁹ Dick, "The Societal Impact," 241.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 227.

in society finding an answer to a new religion in ETs;⁷¹ the majority of people on this planet have their conclusions on ETs affecting their life in some manner.

Three Reigning Paradigms Held by the Modern Populace

Now that it is evident how momentous ET beliefs have been for contemporary culture and society, it is time to add Christianity into the equation along with the main ideas propagated by the ET culture. This method will be the first step in answering how Christians should respond to the ET cultural craze by addressing how they should respond to the main ideas for ETs themselves. Researchers on this subject have ascertained through its growth, spread, and evolution dominating. These are the theories that: ETs do not exist, that ETs exist, or that ETs are misidentified, are masquerading as something else, or both. While there are other more minor speculations out there (such as ETs being humans from the future), these are few and far between, with not much evidence to back these claims other than hearsay. Though the evidence for the top three paradigms is only indefinite, there remains vast amounts of scientific data, research observations, video, and photographic evidence (although commonly challenged), and firsthand accounts to make these hypotheses much more legitimized. This paper will now explain these three paradigms (along with the evidence they carry to bolster their claims), how they affect or challenge the Christian worldview, and how Christians should respond to these claims.

⁷¹ Douthat, "Flying Saucers," 31.

Paradigm 1 – Extraterrestrials are Nonexistent

Propositions

The first paradigm simply exclaims that ETs do not exist (excluding microbial life). This proposition is popular for skeptics and researchers alike who believe that the beliefs in ETs come with too many contradictions, straightforward alternative explanations, or paradoxes to be true.

The first element of the ET phenomena that adherents to paradigm one are quick to dismiss are UFOs. The main reason for their dismissal of this element is that mundane and straightforward explanations can explain numerous UFO reports.⁷² Many reported UFOs are usually the products of misidentified aircraft, stars, to even weather anomalies. Video and photographic evidence do not help much in today's age either with techniques such as photoshop and post-production, which can be efficiently utilized even by an ordinary person with no professional training. Proponents of this paradigm also find it improbable that UFOs are alien in origin if their sightings are abundant, yet ETs remain in hiding. Even the world acclaimed late Stephen Hawking stated, "I discount suggestions that UFOs contain beings from outer space... visits by aliens would be much more obvious"⁷³ This belief makes much more logical sense in light of the fact that there is a staggering number of UFO sightings, while sightings of ETs pale in comparison in both evidence and quantity. Another significant roadblock for skeptics is the reality that there are still a considerable number of conspiracy theories and paranormal elements connected to UFOs. This fact alone renders the theory that UFOs are alien in origin much more improbable to skeptical minds. Following UFOs is the belief that ETs have already come in contact or are currently visiting the Earth. Academic researchers who adhere to paradigm one

⁷² Williams, "Scientific Rebuttals," 94.

⁷³ Stephen Hawking, *Brief Answers to The Big Questions* (London: John Murray, 2018), 83.

scoff at or outright reject this belief since they believe that research into this field is merely a pseudoscience and ultimately a threat to scientific studies.⁷⁴ These are not just empty words to discourage the study of UFOs but are supported by evidence and knowledge which supporters of this paradigm have collected.

The first component that these paradigms supporters are quick to dismantle is the conspiratorial aspect of these beliefs. Though (as previously stated) much of the stigma has been cast off of UFO and ET believers, it has not entirely gone away. Instead, conspiracies linked to these phenomena are often accepted as ‘part of the package’ when dealing with these beliefs. However, those who support this paradigm still scorn these phenomena since some believe that popular culture (namely cinematography) is more responsible for how society views ETs than orthodox scientific research. There is, in fact, scientific evidence that shows that cinematography can alter one’s mind and influence the way one thinks. According to Dr. Diana Walsh Pasulka, movies about the supernatural produce noticeable physiological effects on an individual, for the movie can imitate real memories and becomes a part of the person as it envelopes their mind and body.⁷⁵ This effect alone answers questions about why people tend to believe in and take the supernatural much more seriously after watching a film depicting paranormal phenomena. Neuroscientist Jeffrey Zacks further reinforces this idea explaining that movies centered around assumed actual or historical events create a context in which the viewers can distort fact and fiction, often merging.⁷⁶ In essence, this effect can sometimes cause people to not recall fact or fiction after watching a movie depicting realistic scenarios. This phenomenon rings especially true with movies centered around the UFO and earthly ET visitations, for they generally have a

⁷⁴ Eghigian, "Making UFOs," 622.

⁷⁵ D. W. Pasulka, *American Cosmic: UFOs, Religion, Technology* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019), 121, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=5630944>.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 125.

paranormal ambiance and are based on reportedly actual events. Those who hold to the first paradigms belief use this as evidence on why so many UFO and ET sightings are just cases of misidentification, over-active imaginations, or simply seeing what someone wishes to see.

Moreover, adherents to paradigm one use official documents on the UFO phenomena to strengthen their claims further. Most famously are declassified investigation results which the United States government has previously released concerning their inquiry on reported UFO phenomena. The first and most famous of these investigation results is the “Project Blue Book.” According to the U.S. Air Force,

...the conclusions of Project BLUE BOOK are:(1) no UFO reported, investigated, and evaluated by the Air Force has ever given any indication of threat to our national security;(2) there has been no evidence submitted to or discovered by the Air Force that sightings categorized as "unidentified" represent technological developments or principles beyond the range of present-day scientific knowledge; and(3) there has been no evidence indicating that sightings categorized as "unidentified" are extraterrestrial vehicles.⁷⁷

This report gives much steam for paradigm one supporters since it plainly states “no evidence” that any of the UFO sightings were ET in origin. Although it can be argued that this report focuses much more on national defense rather than ET origin, paradigm one supporters are regardless still eager to use this report as evidence to back their beliefs. This evidence is also from legitimately endorsed investigations headed by the U.S. military, commonly viewed as a much more reputable and capable source than independent research entities. Alongside this stands another report that the U.S. Pentagon released on June 25th, 2021, making this the most recent report released to the public. This report covered 144 reports of Unidentified Aerial Phenomena (referred to as UAPs, an acronym that replaces UFOs) from the period between the

⁷⁷ “Project BLUE BOOK.”

years 2004 to 2021. Remarkably, out of the 144 cases, only one was solved conclusively. While the rest remain a mystery, all the possible explanations the Unidentified Aerial Phenomena Task Force (UAPTF) includes are terrestrial in origin and relatively trite.⁷⁸ It is also worth noting that not once in the report are ETs listed as a possible explanation, nor are ETs mentioned at all. This fact brings one to assume that not only are ETs not pertinent for UFO (UAP) phenomena, but they are so unimportant that they are not even worth mentioning. Those who reject the idea of ETs visiting the earth grasp onto these reports with confidence since these reports support the notion that ET UFOs are nothing but fantastical rumors. With all this considered, it is easy to see how advocates of paradigm one entirely dismiss the UFO phenomena and ET visitation on earth as mere speculations from mostly paranoid and conspiratorial amateur researchers. However, when debunking ETs existing somewhere in the universe, proponents of paradigm one respond with more respect and philosophical methods.

Concerning ETs residing beyond the confines of the Earth, upholders of paradigm one point to the many paradoxes that exist, making it highly improbable for ETs to exist. The individual that pioneered the first of these paradoxes was renowned physicist Enrico Fermi. Fermi mentioned, 'If there are advanced ETI in the universe, where are they?' when he talked about SETI. This question created what is known today as the 'Fermi Paradox' colloquially as 'The Great Silence' in 1950.⁷⁹ Though this is fundamentally an elementary question, it does raise a crucial point many believe in. Many believe that if highly 'evolved' beings are genuinely equipped with superior technology and the capability to travel and colonize space, then there should be some kind of detectable evidence that they do exist. Many that adhere to this idea

⁷⁸ "Preliminary Assessment: Unidentified Aerial Phenomena," Office of the Director of National Intelligence, June 25, 2021, <https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/Preliminary-Assessment-UAP-20210625.pdf>.

⁷⁹ Ashkenazi, *What We Know*, 17.

believe that collecting such evidence should be possible with current technology. Scientifically speaking (using the modern implications that science carries), there is no existing evidence supporting the reality of intelligent ETs despite the numerous past (and present) attempts to prove the contrary.⁸⁰ Building on top of this fact, a whole slew of other paradoxes were consequently born, making convincing arguments that ET intelligence is merely science fiction. These include (but are not limited to): brains, intelligence, and the origin of life are rare; Earth-like planets and characteristics are a rarity, and most stars are too dangerous for surrounding planets to be livable.⁸¹ These paradoxes, among many other explanations, shows just how difficult it would be for life, intelligent or not, to exist in the universe despite the number of planets. There are also beliefs that intelligent ETs did exist in the past but were doomed to extinction. However, this notion still begs the question of why humanity has found no remnant of such a race in an age where technology allows mankind to detect multiple types electromagnetic waves from sources light-years away.

In short, adherents to paradigm one push forward that the number of paradoxes outweighs the probability of intelligent ET life existing, no evidence has been collected those points to any ETs currently existing (excluding microbial life), and natural phenomena or paranoid misidentifications can explain any sightings on the Earth pertaining to UFOs or ETs. Essentially, those who hold to this paradigm reckon that if intelligent ETs existed, humanity would have had some sort of contact with them, especially with the available technology. Those who settle for the first paradigm ultimately believe humans are the only sentient species in the universe and are content with that belief.

⁸⁰ Ashkenazi, *What We Know*, 14.

⁸¹ Forgan, *Solving Fermi's*, 370-371.

Implications for Christianity

Paradigm one primarily supports the concepts of the Christian worldview, so in essence, there is little to no threat this paradigm in itself presents to Christianity. If anything, Christians should breathe a sigh of relief if paradigm one is true, for it would bolster the concepts of Christianity. The first advantage Christians would gain from this paradigm is increasing the prospect (to nonbelievers) that God exists. This belief (if true) would mean that humans being are the only sentient beings in existence in the universe.⁸² This belief would place particular importance on humanity and help others see that it is far more likely that God created life on Earth and designated special importance on humans. This belief makes more logical sense than humankind because of the cosmic chance of time, matter, and time with no comparable examples in the universe. This paradigm would also simultaneously serve to fortify the legitimacy of the Bible. This is because there is a lack of any Scriptural evidence (directly) on the existence of intelligent ETs.⁸³

While this paradigm certainly serves as a buttress for Christianity, it can also be served as a foundation to reinforce the naturalistic framework and negatively portray God as incompetent. While the paradigm in itself does not contradict or challenge the Christian worldview, secular thinkers can use this belief to further their ideologies all the same. One such example is naturalists using this paradigm's beliefs to further the thought that natural selection is the only alternative explanation for specific design in life without a creator.⁸⁴ Naturalists will explain that

⁸² Forgan, *Fermi's Paradox*, 374.

⁸³ George, *Christianity and Extraterrestrials*, 59.

⁸⁴ Samuel "Darwin's Aliens," 2.

if ETs do not exist and panspermia (directed or not) is erroneous, then evolution by natural selection is the only alternative. They will use all the evidence at their disposal to further the claims naturalism has to offer while at the same time trying to undermine the existence of God.

For Christianity, in particular, skeptics try to invalidate God by delineating Him as incompetent. This is mainly done by referring to the Principle of Plenitude. Secular philosophers used this principle by explaining that the universe should naturally be as abundant with life as possible,⁸⁵ but later migrated its way to Christian thought, describing God as a being who treasures the abundance of life. Once integrated into the Christian worldview, the principle argued that God cherishes life so much that He would naturally be inclined to populate the universe as copiously as possible, rather than settling for only making a limited number of species on a singular planet.⁸⁶ This notion thus creates a paradox for nonbelievers where God is supposed to be an omnipotent creator who loves life, yet while He created many spiritual beings and a vast number of species on Earth, He (so far) left the nigh innumerable other planets barren of life. Even if one found conclusive evidence that ETs exist, nonbelievers can still use the same argument, wondering why God still left many other planets lifeless (such as those in our solar system). They could then attribute this to either God being incapable of creating and managing other life-supporting systems (or would be limited in how many He could manage), which accordingly would render Him only a liar that claims to have such immense power. Naturalists and other atheists alike that align with this paradigm use this argument to promote the belief that God is nothing more than a concept humanity made to explain morality, creation, and existence

⁸⁵ Crowe, "Extraterrestrial Life," 7.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

better. They will maintain that this paradigm can create contradictions regarding God's existence and exclaim that the current scientific naturalistic framework is the superior solution for creation.

Should Christians Respond?

Although the beliefs pushed forth by the first paradigm realistically do not challenge the concepts of the Christian worldview, it is wise to respond to the individuals and groups that uphold it. While responding to the paradigm is not warranting the correction of Christians per se, Christians should not ignore the adherents of said paradigm, for they pose valid questions which require equally valid answers.

The first and foremost reason for this is to clear up any misconceptions one may acquire latching on to this paradigm. As mentioned before, a decidedly popular fallacy one can assume is that if ET life does not exist, then God is not as all-powerful as He claims. While this admittedly seems like a trivial misbelief that one can quickly rectify, this claim is becoming more and more favored by skeptics and needs to be corrected. While first relying on the multitude of verses in Scripture such as, "What is impossible with man is possible with God," (Luke 18:27)⁸⁷ and others like it (such as Matt 19:26, Psalm 147:5, and Isa 40:28, to name a few) that reveal His omnipotent nature; this should only be the first step. Many of those that believe God is not almighty are skeptical and naturally do not hold on to Scripture as proper evidence, so Christians should turn to logic and philosophy to strengthen the claims of God's ultimate power.

Christians should appeal to reason first and mention that God not doing something does not mean He cannot do it but instead chooses not to. That God, without a doubt, has the power to create life on every planet if He so wishes, but that (if paradigm one is presumed to be correct).

⁸⁷ Unless otherwise noted, all verses are from the New International Version.

He chose instead to create humans as the only sentient corporeal species, for He made humanity special. Humanity has been created to be His imagers (Gen 1:26) and will even in the future judge the world and the angels themselves (1 Cor 6:2-3). It is imperative for Christians to explain that God is indeed as all-powerful as He claims and just chose humanity to focus on rather than a plethora of other sentient metaphysical lifeforms because that is what He deemed as the most excellent option. Humankind should be honored and humbled rather than disappointed and accusatory towards God if life on Earth is truly the only form of advanced life in the universe. Hence, Christians should not only back God's omnipotence but also incorporate the exceptional importance the Lord has placed on all mankind.

Another reason Christians should respond is to counteract the objections many non-believers will use to promote naturalism and attempt to refute God. The most beneficial way to achieve this would be a two-fold method where first the contradictions and complications of naturalism are presented while offering theism as a more suitable solution. Christians should point out the many questions plaguing the naturalistic framework if ET life does not exist. If there is no designer, then how did matter come into being? Why are humans out of the 8.7 million (and counting) species on earth the only observable species to gain sentience? Why exactly does the universe even exist? These pressing questions are still unanswered and seem to be impossible to deduce with purely scientific methods. If one adds a designer to the equation, all of these questions can quickly be solved. Theism, in short, is more practical, straightforward, and meaningful compared to naturalism. After Christians show how theism is sufficient, the conversation would hopefully lead to why Christ is the key to the question. This, of course, would veer off from the discussion of ETs to Christian apologetics, upholding the Christian faith over the myriad of other beliefs that combat it. Christians should be much more familiar and

comfortable with this field and should be much more prepared after dispelling the common disputes non-believers use that derive from the first paradigm.

When all is said and done, Christians must be ready to face opposition and pressing questions from skeptics who adhere to the first paradigm, even if the paradigm itself carries more positive implications for the Christian faith than negative ones. Christians should be well versed in theology enough to enforce why the Christian worldview is a much more promising aspect than naturalism and that the lack of ET life does nothing to change that fact. While those who uphold paradigm one will continue to question why God did not create intelligent ET life and may use this idea as a way to demerit God's power or care, Christians must not be deterred and reply with confidence rather than shy away and redirect the topic. Finally, even if Christians take all of these steps, but the interlocutors still cannot grasp why God might choose to create a vast universe that contains only one life-bearing planet; it is suitable for Christians to point out how all humans are finite beings and cannot possibly hope to entirely comprehend the ways of an infinite and omnipotent creator (Job11:7).

Paradigm 2 – Extraterrestrials Exist

Common Worldviews

The second paradigm is the polar opposite of the first, believing in ET life in many possible forms. Contemporary culture has been impacted the most by this paradigm, as it seems to stand as the most popular belief held by the majority of the planet's population. While there are many theories this paradigm proposes, the two that currently influence today's culture the most are the ancient alien theory and modern-day ET visitation. However, for the sake of brevity, this paper will focus on intelligent forms of ET life.

The first idea which will be analyzed is the ancient aliens theory. Although Iosif Samuilovich Shklovsky and Carl Sagan first proposed this theory in *Intelligent Life in the Universe*, Erich von Däniken revolutionized this peculiar idea. Däniken achieved this when he wrote his first book, *Chariots of the Gods?* In 1969. This book was the first to be entirely focused on the ancient aliens theory, and as a result of its popularity, it created the ancient aliens belief into a new genre for literature, cinematography, and many other forms of entertainment, which the media utilized. The premise of this book was that intelligent ETs visited Earth in the ancient past to help cultivate humanity by providing them advanced technology and profound knowledge. Däniken believed this was the reason why civilizations in the past were able to accomplish marvelous feats that would prove formidable for even today's technological prominence. This includes the pyramids of Giza, the Nazca Lines, and Stonehenge, to name a few of the most prominent. Due to this, it was Däniken who propagated the belief that the ancient 'gods' mentioned in ancient texts (most notably the Bible) are, in actuality, these intelligent ETs who provided humanity with so much that humanity started to revere them as gods.⁸⁸ Däniken went on to write a multitude of other books, which propelled this theory even further, creating more and more advocates as time progressed. Then Zecharia Sitchin entered the fray, bringing this idea from scientific curiosity to worldwide popularity.

Sitchin was an author who impacted the ancient alien theory so profoundly that even one of his top critics, Michael S. Heiser, credits him as being “arguably the most important proponent of the ancient astronaut hypothesis over the last several decades.” Sitchin initiated this radical growth when he wrote his first book, *The 12th Planet*, in 1976. This book was unique because it

⁸⁸ Ted Peters, *UFOs: God's Chariots?: Spirituality, Ancient Aliens, and Religious Yearnings in the Age of Extraterrestrials* (Pompton Plains, NJ: The Career Press, 2014), 126, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=3134679>.

married the ancient aliens theory and panspermia hypothesis into one seemingly coherent theory. Sitchin supported Däniken's beliefs on ancient aliens, presumed that these ET beings seeded humanity, and forged his ideas sprouting from ancient Sumerian and Akkadian tablets. He promotes in his book that an ET race called the Anunnaki came to Earth from a planet called Nibiru in search of minerals (notably gold). According to his deductions from these tablets and other ancient Sumerian texts, the Anunnaki then created humans as slaves to mine for gold and guided them forward as gods until nuclear war broke out between different sects of ETs, thus ending their reign. These are all exceptionally presumptuous claims demanding equally extraordinary evidence, which Sitchin strives to deliver through his translations and observations. Sitchin and his theories, despite their popularity, have not gone without their scrutiny. He continues to have many critics and skeptics critically analyze his research and ultimately come to acknowledge that while he brings up many interesting ideas, his evidence nonetheless does not come from scientific investigations in a laboratory, but rather from observing the stars (which, of course, is up to his interpretation).⁸⁹ Though most of the critiques his works receive, they have done very little to stifle the admiration received by many and the global proliferation of his postulations. Overall, his works and ideas have profoundly impacted the ancient alien theory and greatly influenced contemporary culture.

While the ancient alien theory started to take off simultaneously, the idea that ETs are now visiting the Earth started to propagate as well. This idea usually uses UFO sightings and close encounters with ETs as proof. This supposed proof is still met with general disdain by many scientists referring to this as a 'pseudoscience' but, regardless, has flourished to the point that today's general public will take this idea with genuine curiosity. Though most of the

⁸⁹ Peters, *UFOs: God's Chariots*, 146.

evidence provided (namely pictures, videos, and firsthand accounts) appears arbitrary, ironically enough, the evidence that carries the most clout for this belief is the same evidence used to disprove it. These are government reports discrediting UFOs. These refer to documents such as the previously mentioned Project Blue Book, Roswell report, Pentagon UAP report. These and other declassified government documents have proved that the United States and the United Kingdom have gathered information on UFO events and suppressed said information from the public.⁹⁰ Though these are only UFO reports, people today usually link them to ETs due to cultural influence, thus making them believe that the government is also suppressing ET information. While paradigm two adherents use this information to affirm that UFOs and modern-day ET visitation on the Earth is nothing more than a myth, those on the opposite side use this information to confirm the contrary.

The standard argument in this paradigm is that there should be nothing for the government to suppress if ETs truly do not exist. While admittedly most of the suppressed information could be related to experimental military aircraft, adherents of this paradigm are quick to dismiss this idea. They are more willing to believe that such classified information deals with ETs. Due to such suppression, many are skeptical about any government reports released to the public about UFOs (or ETs). Adherents to this paradigm are inclined to believe these reports are nothing more than fabrications hiding the truth. Thus, distrust in the government involving these matters has become the norm for this paradigm's adherents. Instead, most of them will turn to private researchers and investigation groups (such as MUFON) for answers. As a result, the consensus for this view is that intelligent ETs are visiting the earth via high-tech aerial craft (UFOs) and interacting with humans from mundane communications, sinister abductions, or

⁹⁰ Pasulka, *American Cosmic*, 128.

even conforming to human society through the use of alien-human hybrids. As this paradigm grew, it naturally began to influence culture tremendously.

While these two ideas sprouted forth and swelled concurrently, they meshed together and are more often than not thought of as conjoining ideas rather than separate theories. As things stand now, modern popular culture has given credence to the belief of ancient aliens (and ETs in general).⁹¹ Owing to this, the paradigm that ETs exist has flooded cultures worldwide in nearly all mediums available to do so. This element, of course, was discussed above, but it cannot be stressed enough just how much this paradigm has affected the world of today. Science regards the mission to find life on Mars as one of the most important in modern astrobiology.⁹² In literature, there are creditable newspapers and magazines sprinkled with UFO reports such as the Roswell crash, Lubbock lights, and pilots from Japan Air Lines;⁹³ and books from Däniken, Sitchin, and a plethora of other authors writing on this subject.

In terms of cinematography, movies such as Star Wars have romanticized the idea of ETs so thoroughly that many hold high hopes that they do exist; while TV shows such as 'Ancient Aliens' have persuaded droves of people that ETs not only exist but have had a tremendous effect on human history. With the advent of the internet, numerous websites came about supporting UFOs and the SETI project, pointing to the fact that many people suspected that we might not be alone in the universe.⁹⁴ This paradigm also went as far as to leak into religions and worldviews, such as Scientology mentioned above, New Age movements, and Mormonism. Those who grasp

⁹¹ Williams, "Scientific Rebuttals," 86.

⁹² Steele, *Cosmic Genetic Evolution*, xvii.

⁹³ David A. Weintraub, *Religions and Extraterrestrial Life: How Will We Deal with It?* (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2014), 4, <https://link-springer-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/book/10.1007%2F978-3-319-05056-0>.

⁹⁴ George, *Christianity and Extraterrestrial*, 2.

this paradigm have even created their own religions to conform to it, such as the Raëlian religion, which believes aliens created humans 25,000 years ago with genetic engineering.⁹⁵ As outlandish as this claim may seem, it is still more likely than life coming from non-life via time and chance. All in all, it is nearly impossible to live in today's world partaking in science, religion, or popular culture without hearing about the belief that ETs exist. In reality, this paradigm has affected culture so much that even if aliens genuinely do not exist, their mere cultural interpretation has impacted the world as if they do.

Common Arguments Contradicting Christian Beliefs

In modernity, Christians must be aware of this paradigm, for it not only has impacted the world the most out of its three reigning counterparts, but its adherents can also carry with them the most contradicting beliefs against Christianity. There are three main arguments this paradigm proposes against Christianity. The first is that in the Bible, spiritual beings are ETs and that ETs caused supernatural events. The second is that Christian doctrine would have to be radically changed if ETs existed. The last main argument is that Christianity would be unable to coexist alongside the reality of ETs.

The first and arguably most prevalent argument this paradigm can pose against Christianity is that the Biblical texts and some other historical documents are, in essence, misinterpreted. Proponents of this belief claim that many mentions of supernatural entities or events refer to ETs rather than the spiritual world. Many secular ancient alien theorists also hold this view because it coincides with their core values. Claims about ancient aliens offer a counter-narrative to the biblical understanding of various historical and prehistorical events and figures.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Williams, "Scientific Rebuttals," 88.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 85..

The first element of this counternarrative is the belief that all mentions of God or other spiritual beings point to ETs. Advocates of this theory support the notion that if one replaces the references to God or 'the gods' in Scripture with extraterrestrials (excluding Gen. 1:1, which they generally leave out), it would all logically fit in.⁹⁷ This outlook initiates many other ideas to reconstruct historical events in Scripture and spiritual happenings that continue today. These include the ideas that spiritual entities could be a logical elucidation for stories of ETs,⁹⁸ all the miracles mentioned in Scripture are not supernatural at all but merely 'super technological' being from highly advanced ETs,⁹⁹ and that ancient sources show that humanity contains extraterrestrial DNA within their genome¹⁰⁰ (such as Gen 6:4). The popularity of these theories is gaining more traction in the scientific community as many believe that there is an abundance of archeological and textual evidence supporting these theories.¹⁰¹ These theories are plentiful and are only continuing to flourish over time. The more they evolve, the more they encroach on the Christian worldview, becoming more and more threatening as time progresses. As it started to be an alternative viewpoint, adherents are now pushing for it to replace Christianity (as well as many other religions) altogether.

The basic principle of this argument is that it would be necessary to abandon much of Christianity, but the moral law could remain intact.¹⁰² Supporters of this argument are not entirely against Christianity, nor are they advocating abolishing it per se; however, they see a need for it to be 'updated' to remain relevant in a universe populated by ETs. These updates include setting aside the centrality of atonement focused on Christ alone (since Christ is human

⁹⁷ Peters, *UFOs: God's Chariots*, 145.

⁹⁸ Henriksen, "Alien encounters," 27.

⁹⁹ Peters, *UFOs: God's Chariots*, 147.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 145.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² O'Meara, *Vast Universe*, 83.

while ETs are not),¹⁰³ removing the notable importance on humanity as the only corporeal creation created as God's imagers, and having Christianity becoming a universal religion encompassing all lifeforms in the universe.¹⁰⁴ With these changes put in place, many who uphold this argument believe Christianity could still survive, albeit having some of its core values stripped away and replaced with those inclusive of ETs. Christians have made endeavors to meet in the middle for many of these proposed changes, such as debating if Christ's crucifixion on earth would provide salvation to beings that lived on other planets (assuming they need salvation).¹⁰⁵ Many of these changes would admittedly change Christianity into another religion altogether. Such suggestions would be vastly unpopular for the Christian community and put many at odds with those who support these notions. Though this argument is not as prevalent as the former, it is still being circulated and needs addressing.

The third argument this paradigm can present is the belief that Christianity and ETs cannot coexist since both systems are too contradictory for each other. This belief is due to both sides noticing contradictions between their core beliefs (such as the origins of humanity).¹⁰⁶ Presumptions that ET's existence would render original sin and the redemption narrative null and void.¹⁰⁷ As well as the belief that ETs proven to exist would make the Bible unreliable since there is an apparent lack of mention of ET intelligence in Scripture.¹⁰⁸ All these culminate to form the thought that there are far too many contradictions for Christianity to remain relevant if

¹⁰³O'Meara, *Vast Universe*, 83.

¹⁰⁴Weintraub, *Religions*, 89.

¹⁰⁵Dick, "The Societal Impact," 242.

¹⁰⁶Williams, "Scientific Rebuttals," 85.

¹⁰⁷O'Meara, *Vast Universe*, 82.

¹⁰⁸George, *Christianity and Extraterrestrials*, 59.

ETs existed. While this viewpoint is in the minority, especially among its counterparts mentioned above, it nonetheless presents itself as one of the biggest threats towards Christians.

How Christians Should Answer

With these arguments established, the next step is to examine how Christians should respond to the arguments presented above. While there are many unmentioned arguments in this paper, the most important ones that need to be addressed by Christians are the three mentioned in the previous section. The arguments described above arguably pose the biggest ultimatum for Christianity, for they mention that the Scriptures are wrong, need to be changed, or require elimination. It is evident that Christians should confront and answer these arguments to clear up any misconceptions, preserve the Christian doctrine, and ultimately show how Christianity can ultimately survive even if ETs are proven unequivocally to exist. With all of this in mind, the first and foremost thing all Christians should remember when encountering all of these arguments is to do so with humility, not to be demeaning or capricious, and to be open-minded to understanding why their interlocutors believe what they do. This will allow for fluid and friendly discussions on this subject matter and build a foundation of respect where the parties involved will be inclined to be more responsive, less hostile, and not militaristic in pushing forward their beliefs.

The first argument to tackle is the belief that the Bible points to ETs when Scripture mentions anything about spiritual beings, miracles, or even God Himself. This is a misinterpretation that crucially needs amending. The first element to remember is that the biggest proponents of this idea are ancient alien theorists. Christians need to set forth that ancient aliens theories behind religious events are convoluted, ad hoc, and disconfirmed by scientific

evidence.¹⁰⁹ Many of the propositions presented by this claim to infer that ETs were responsible for Biblical stories are usually nothing more than conjectures held up only by presumptions made by researchers on their basis rather than science or physical evidence. This is most notable with Sitchin, whose theories fail to carry any objective scientific evidence. Experts such as Heiser (a doctor of Semitic languages) have also accused Sitchin of making many mistranslations and fallacious claims to bolster his theories.

Christians should be quick to point out that Christianity contains much more archeological, scientific, and historical evidence to support it than the ancient aliens theory. In addition to this, the ancient alien beliefs often connect a surface level respect for science while simultaneously ignoring relevant scientific data.¹¹⁰ This revelation makes all of the claims by ancient alien theorists dubious since even the best evidence they provide is usually easily refuted by science. Christians should also be prepared to utilize cosmological arguments as well. One such example is the question, “Who created ETs?” Even if one assumes they created humans, then someone had to have created ETs as well. No matter how intelligent or unreachable they may seem, they are not infinite, for even the universe is not infinite according to the Second Law of Thermodynamics.¹¹¹ Someone had to create ETs and the universe, which science is still unable to answer without explaining how scientific laws could remain unbroken in the process. However, Christianity provides all of these answers with God, who is outside of time and not a part of creation, making Him the most logical reason why everything exists. Christians should also be mindful not to demean those who adhere to these beliefs but rather approach them with

¹⁰⁹ Williams, “Scientific Rebuttals,” 101.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 86.

¹¹¹ Aaron J. Werner, “Does God Exist?: A Cosmological Answer,” in “Good Answers to Great Questions,” (Copyright, 2020), 13-14, <http://www.aaronjwerner.com/does-god-exist>.

understanding and willingness to listen to their inquiries. Once achieved, a foundation of respect will form, giving Christians a better position to provide more logical answers centered on Christ.

Another critical issue is the reason for the production of these theories. While many beliefs have originated due to scientific discovery, human ingenuity, and curiosity, the ancient aliens theory's creation resulted from doubt. As a matter of fact, when asked why he started to research and believe in the ancient alien theory, Däniken quickly answered "religious doubts," dismissing Roman Catholicism after reading works by Friedrich Nietzsche and Arthur Schopenhauer.¹¹² While on a surface level, this does not seem to be a dire reason to disregard the ancient aliens theory, it does raise questions about its validity. Starting a belief to create an alternative worldview on the foundation of doubting another generally does not bode well. Beliefs originating from doubts usually cause those who create them to make it for their benefaction. In other words, individuals often make their own worldviews in order to replace their old ones to fit their desires, not for the whole of humanity. This occurrence is generally how religious cults, distorted factions, and extremist branches of religions start. Keeping this in mind, Christians should explain how the history of Christianity goes back thousands of years, sports a multitude of Scriptural writers, is supported in religious and secular documents, and was built on the foundation for humanity as a whole. From here, Christians should explain that this makes Christianity the sounder choice on the fact that a single man primarily produced the ancient aliens theory, was only recently theorized in the twentieth century and was created due to religious doubt rather than for the benefit of humanity.

¹¹² Peters, *UFOs: God's Chariots*, 143.

Another argument Christians need to respond to is the belief that Christian doctrine would need to be radically changed if ETs prove to exist. The short answer to this argument is that some outlooks might change, the doctrine of Christianity would remain unchanged. Essentially the existence of intelligent ETs would alternate little of the Orthodox Christian beliefs.¹¹³ If ETs were proven to exist, this would do nothing to eliminate the fact of original sin, the incarnation and crucifixion of Christ, God's existence and nature, and ultimately that of redemptive salvation found with Christ. The Scriptures would remain safe and would not need any alterations to them. However, Christians should be ready to accept the reality that ETs could exist and will have to remain steadfast in their faith while confronting ideas that may be new to them. These would be ideas such as the gift of salvation spreading to other intelligent ET races and the idea Milne already proposed that Christ's sacrifice would have traveled swiftly through the universe to other life-supporting planets. Conversely, Christians would need to consider the idea that ETs may not require salvation, or even that salvation is restricted to them. These questions will require examining at greater length if ETs proved a reality that Christians should be aware of when ministering to those who may hold ETs in high regard. Thankfully, Christians themselves would not have to fret much since these would not be anything that would radically change their faith.¹¹⁴

Not only should Christians affirm that no change to their doctrine would be necessary, but also that ET discovery could be a cause of celebration rather than dejection. Even the renowned theologian Richard Bently explained that Christians could use extraterrestrial life to further progress Christianity.¹¹⁵ Such as the existence of ETs bringing opportunities to further the

¹¹³ Weintraub, *Religions*, 116.

¹¹⁴ Basalla, *Civilized Life*, 128.

¹¹⁵ Simpson, "Cosmology," 50.

kingdom of God with other sentient lifeforms. Although some ETs could equally reject Christianity outright, this would not change the purpose God gave to humanity and the love they should share, even to those that are aberrant from Christ.

The last argument from this paradigm that Christians should take special care to address is the belief that ETs and Christianity cannot coexist. While this is not the most prominent argument, it can be the most destructive. Christians should be swift to answer this argument by announcing that (much like the previous argument) ET's existence would do nothing to dismantle Christianity. On the contrary, Christian theologians believe that an influx of new intellectual ideas will flourish if ET existence is proven to be a reality.¹¹⁶ From this aspect, it is plain to see that secularists believe Christianity would falter, not Christians themselves. According to the "Peters ETI Religious Crises Survey," there are a large number of non-religious people who believe that their worldview would remain intact if ETs were proven to exist. They however believe religious worldviews in any shape or form would face a crisis of faith that could threaten the traditions and doctrines of their beliefs.¹¹⁷

Contrasting this outlook is from the same survey (which incorporates over 1,300 people from across the globe), the vast majority of those who consider themselves Christian (above 80 percent) do not view the existence of ETs as something to undermine their faith.¹¹⁸ These results point out that the consensus for Christianity is that ET life in any form would not destroy the Christian faith.¹¹⁹ At the end of the day, it does not matter how much secularists theorize that ETs would spell the downfall of Christianity. Those outside the worldview cannot very well

¹¹⁶ Bertka, "Christianity's Response," 333.

¹¹⁷ Peters, "Discovery of ETI," 348.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 344.

¹¹⁹ Dick, "The Societal Impact," 243.

dictate what happens within it. It is akin to a biologist predicting that medical practitioners would lose faith in their practice if transhumanism came mainstream. It is extraordinarily challenging for one of a different practice to predict what would happen in an area beyond their expertise, and Christians should relay this to those that exclaim ETs equal the death of Christianity. More importantly, Christians should also strive to explain the concepts of Christianity to these non-believers. As long as most Christians are willing to keep the faith regardless of ET's existence, Christianity will not die, plain and simple. In finality, Christians should assert that their beliefs are not so weak to be destroyed by the discovery of ETs. They should also press the idea that it would leave more room for Christianity to grow even further since nothing can ever disrupt God's existence nor the sacrifice of Christ.

Paradigm 3 – Extraterrestrials are Spiritual Beings

Ancient Origins for a Modern Claim

The third and final paradigm this paper will examine is the belief that ETs are misidentified or masquerading spiritual beings. This paradigm is unique, utilizing concepts from both previous paradigms while still rejecting them.

This theory gained prominence within the twenty-first century as many Christians found too many contradictions for depicted ET beliefs such as panspermia and the ancient alien theory. Nevertheless, they could not ignore the innumerable number of sightings, stories, and physical evidence that some beings and aircraft remain mysterious. From this line of thought, Christians naturally looked to the other sentient created beings said to have sentience in Scripture: spiritual beings. Many ethereal spiritual beings share the same universe with us, from angels, demons, seraphim, and fallen angels. However, they tend to appear in a hard to recognize state, such as

disguised as humans (commonly referenced in Scripture) or in a state in which humans cannot perceive using their five senses. The most commonly referred are angels (who serve God) and demons (who help Satan). From this logic, many Christians started to argue that the other intelligent beings and all varieties of reported ET activity are linked.¹²⁰ This idea is due to the belief that said spiritual beings share many commonalities with ET reports. One good example of this are the reports that many of these ETs (and UFOs) can phase in and out of this dimension, while it is common Christian knowledge that angels are generally understood to be able to phase between the physical and spiritual realms.¹²¹ This theory dives much deeper than just this, and its roots have a much deeper, fascinating, and compelling nature.

This paradigm's foundations lie with the early history of humanity recorded in the book of Genesis. After Adam and Eve's exile from the Garden of Eden, their descendants started propagating the earth, the majority of which spreading corruption. Many are aware that the deluge purged the earth, save Noah and his family (approximately 1,656 years after Adam's creation),¹²² wiping out the evil inhabitants. However, there are two verses found before which people commonly overlook. These were Genesis 6:2 stating, "...the sons of God saw that the daughters of humans were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose," and Genesis 6:4 declaring, "The Nephilim were on the earth in those days—and also afterward—when the sons of God went to the daughters of humans and had children by them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown." Starting with the first verse, the keyword to look at are "sons of God" and

¹²⁰ George, *Christianity and Extraterrestrials*, 7.

¹²¹ Weintraub, *Religions*, 71.

¹²² "Bible Timeline," Bible, Art, and History Museums, Houston Baptist University, <https://hbu.edu/museums/dunham-bible-museum/tour-of-the-museum/bible-in-america/bibles-for-a-young-republic/chronological-index-of-the-years-and-times-from-adam-unto-christ/>.

“daughters of men.” While there is little to no debate on what “daughters of men” referred to, being human females, there is some debate on what “sons of God” represent.

While the Sethite theory persists (that the sons of God refer to the sons Seth sired for they were ‘godly’ men), this paper will focus on the theory that the sons of God refer to spiritual beings. The most significant piece of evidence for this lies within the original Hebrew language in which the authors wrote this piece of Scripture. The term “sons of God” is directly translated from the phrase “Bene Elohim.” What is important to note is that the Bible uses the term ‘Elohim’ throughout the Bible, and it always refers to spiritual beings, not humans.¹²³ Even in later Jewish or Christian translations, 'sons of God' referred to heavenly beings.¹²⁴ This points to the belief that some spiritual beings rebelled against God and sired children with human females. These individuals were then collectively referred to as the Nephilim. This idea is rooted in Scripture and in an extrabiblical text called *The Book of Enoch*.

This book is not considered divinely inspired (though some denominations still include it as a canonical text such as Ethiopian Orthodoxy) but is still heavily respected for its historical and cultural context and insights. This book tells the story of the Watchers, who were a part of God’s heavenly host tasked with watching humanity grow after The Fall (hence their name). They however started to desire human women and so made a pact with one another to descend upon the earth to marry and beget children with them.¹²⁵ The children they fathered were no

¹²³ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), 24, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/detail.action?pq-origsite=summon&docID=5153222>.

¹²⁴ George W. E. Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch, Chapters 1-36; 81-108* (Minneapolis, MN: 1517 Media, 2001), 176, <https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/stable/j.ctvb9373x?Search=yes&resultItemClick=true&searchText=1%20Enoch%20A%20Commentary>.

¹²⁵ George W. E. Nickelsburg, and James C. VanderKam. *1 Enoch: The Hermeneia Translation* (Minneapolis, MN: 1517 Media, 2012), 23, <https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/stable/j.ctt22nm5vn>.

ordinary humans but rather what man today would call demi-gods. Specifically, from the union between Watchers and human women came the giants, from the giants came the Nephilim, and from the Nephilim came the Elioud.¹²⁶ In doing so, they fell from God's grace and, in effect, became what many consider to be fallen angels. Their children were then cursed, so once they died, their evil spirits (colloquially as bastard spirits) were confined to the Earth, thus becoming what some consider the first demons. This book explains that God wiped out the world with The Flood due to the machinations of the Watchers and their hybrid offspring corrupting both Earth and humanity. The book explains that Noah and his family were considered uncorrupted from these events, so God spared them. All the events described in this book are said to take place between Genesis 6:2-4. After these events perspired, Scripture then states in Genesis 6:4 that the Nephilim were on the Earth "in those days-and also afterward," pointing to the belief that a remnant of them survived or reemerged after the flood.¹²⁷ Though there is no solid evidence on just how they remained after the flood, Scripture affirms that they did continue to exist in several passages (such as Numbers 13:33). From here is when the connection to ETs begins.

In short, this paradigm connects the spiritual beings from time immemorial to ETs. Adherents of this paradigm believe that people who encounter ETs or experience a UFO misidentify them as being alien rather than spiritual or that these spiritual beings are actively hiding the fact that they are supernatural by maintaining the guise of super-technological ETs instead. These adherents believe that these beings exist and seem to have corporeal forms yet break the laws of nature because they are, in actuality, the same beings mentioned in Scripture as benevolent angels, or more notably as malevolent evil spirits and Nephilim. In this paradigm,

¹²⁶ Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch*, 24.

¹²⁷ Hines, *Gateway*, 65.

these entities continue to interact with humans on a level current science and people can cope with in this scientific age. People rely less on religion to explain seemingly supernatural events in a world now dominated by rationality and science.¹²⁸ As a result, it makes sense why some spiritual beings who happily garnered reverence and even worship would choose an appearance which modern society would more readily accept and respect.

A Christian Response to the Third Paradigm

Since this third paradigm is consistent with a Christian worldview, it brings forth no argumentation against Christianity. Therefore, it is not necessary to explain the impact this paradigm has on Christian beliefs. Rather, it is essential to discuss how Christians should respond to this paradigm's propositions since a potential change in thinking (i.e. being more open-minded to ideas of ETs) might be necessary for such peculiar theories.

Both science and religion are equally crucial in discussing these theories. Christians first need to recognize that while science and religion seemed to conflict at times, the reality is that they are indeed interdependent with one another.¹²⁹ Thus, to try to explain ETs, which show supernatural tendencies (such as using telepathy)¹³⁰, from a purely scientific perspective will prove only to hinder any progress made. Unlike the other two paradigms, which rely heavily on science, this one relies heavily on the supernatural in conjunction with science, making it well suited for the Christian worldview. In essence, for this paradigm to work, both reliance on science and religion is necessary. Assuming this paradigm is correct, science can explain the

¹²⁸ Henriksen, "Alien encounters," 24.

¹²⁹ Simpson, "Cosmology," 59.

¹³⁰ Kathleen Marden, *Extraterrestrial Contact: What to Do When You've Been Abducted* (Newburyport, MA: Red Wheel/Weiser, 2019), 18, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=5780510>.

connection between different ET encounters, how people are physically and psychologically impacted by them, and attempt to parse the technology they seem to use, such as their aerial vehicles.

However, one should not assume that science and religion are stuck on separate paths of thought but instead combined. Once scientific reasoning is applied to a question, religion could then step in, offering its deduction (or vice-versa). After, the two can be combined to gain a firmer grasp of the truth. Such as scientifically analyzing how water works and what force would be needed for Moses to part the Red Sea while viewing it from a religious view and realizing that such force could only be possible with God's supernatural power. In short, Christians must be comfortable with using both science and religion in conjunction with one another in order to make sense of this paradigm that seems to meld both super technological aspects as well as paranormal occurrences.

The second element Christians need to understand is that spiritual beings, whether benevolent or malevolent, have adapted to the current time just as humans have. Aquinas inferred that all angels are their own species, only sharing some generic similarities, and while all of humanity has 'fallen,' some angels have 'fallen' too.¹³¹ Though biological specification could be argued (since spiritual beings do not always tether themselves to a physical body), the fact that they share free will just as humans and share some common similarities points to the notion that they too would adapt as time progresses. As it happens, it seems that these beings have taken the scientific approach and humans, yet in a different manner. As humanity started to advance technologically, their thinking started to veer more towards scientific explanations.

¹³¹ George, *Christianity and Extraterrestrials*, 112.

Even in religious communities, this is apparent where the supernatural aspects are acknowledged, but more or less viewed as happening, much less in today's world wherein such instances (such as miracles) individuals turn towards science first to explain what has transpired. Spiritual beings have taken notice of this and have adapted how they approach humanity keeping this in mind. Accordingly, this paradigm pushes forth some spiritual beings who chose to take the form of ETs as it is a more scientifically logical belief for many in the contemporary world rather than angels and demons.

Evidence for such a shift is in the history of humankind. In the ancient past, individuals accepted spiritual beings as they appeared, as referenced in the Bible, the Apocrypha, and other extra-biblical texts. There was no need for disguises, for they were already accepted and revered as they naturally appeared. Over time, however, as the belief in God waned (especially after the Babel incident in Genesis 11:1-9), these beings were understood to be 'gods' which reigned over different nations, such as Zeus in ancient Greece or Odin in ancient Norway. Many might be surprised that the Bible cites this concept with verses such as Psalms 82:6-7 and Deuteronomy 32: 8-9 (Note that the correct reading is not "sons of Israel" but rather "Sons of God" as discovered in the Dead Sea Scrolls),¹³² which makes direct reference to these "gods" and labels them as members of God's council.

This idea persisted well into the New Testament era when the early Christians understood that the pagan gods worshiped were actually 'demons' as referenced in 1 Corinthians 10:20 by the Apostle Paul. As time progressed, the worship of pagan gods became increasingly less popular, but the interest of spirits and mystical beings started to take over. While many were

¹³² Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 84.

less inclined to believe in pagan gods, they were extremally fascinated by spirits, ghosts, and supernatural beings such as fairies. Such an example is that just as people today obsess over ETs, many educated individuals from Victorian-era England shared the same fascination with spirits and fairies.¹³³ This fascination was, however, not only constrained in England but spread throughout the world. This is evident with the vast number of folktales, mythical creatures, and spirits found throughout every culture worldwide. While this trend, in essence, is still occurring today (albeit on a smaller scale), ETs arriving on the scene in the twentieth century have become the next big cultural boom. With this evidence in mind, it would make logical sense that the same spiritual beings masquerading as gods in the ancient past are now disguising themselves as ETs to make an enormous impact on humanity today.

Another element essential to look over is explaining how these beings propagated and seem interested in humanity. The first element of this is how these spiritual beings could procreate with humans. This argument is essential for the historical base of this paradigm, and how many accounts of ET abductions resulting in human reproductive tests and even hybridization hangs on this idea. Many today still hold to the idea that spiritual beings cannot sexually reproduce, using the verse, "...people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven" (Matt 22:30) as evidence. However, many misinterpret this verse to mean angels cannot fornicate when, in actuality, the verse points only to the fact that angels do not marry (which one could argue they choose not to marry, not that they are forbidden to marry) as humans do.¹³⁴

¹³³ Douthat, "Flying Saucers," 31.

¹³⁴ Hines, *Gateway*, 51.

Until the early church fathers arrived, it was popular to teach the belief that spiritual beings could lay with humans to explain where the Nephilim and other evil spirits originated. This was up until the book of Enoch started to make the early church fathers uncomfortable for its teaching doctrine which said that 'fallen angels' were thrown out of heaven due to their lust for human women or corrupting the human genome, rather than the popularized account of them following Satan in his rebellion due to their pride.¹³⁵ Regardless of the early church fathers' position and the direction Christian teachings on this subject started to go, the popularity of the 'procreating' belief has resurfaced, pointing to the Nephilim, Goliath, and modern-day ETs as the result of these unions. Even if spiritual beings could not naturally procreate with humans, there is still a possibility of them making hybrid "Nephilim" through the process of Parthenogenesis. Parthenogenesis is a form of asexual reproduction and where an embryo forms without sperm, which was replicated in a human egg by Korean scientist Hwang Woo-Suk.¹³⁶ Hwang's replication scientifically proves that parthenogenesis is possible in human eggs that spiritual beings could have taken full advantage of to create all of the Nephilim and cause a resurgence of them after the deluge.

The final facet Christians need to be ready to do is to propose that ETs could be spiritual beings. Christians can do this by first explaining how many ETs could be the result of misidentification. Christians should explain that when humans (who only have a limited grasp of reality) encounter a spiritual being (i.e., angels or demons) and are beyond complete comprehension utilizing human senses, humans cannot understand what they see entirely. Humans can only compare such beings to things they know, anthropomorphizing beings that

¹³⁵ Hines, *Gateway*, 53.

¹³⁶ Christopher Williams, "Stem cell fraudster made 'virgin birth' breakthrough," *Science*, *The Register*, last edited August 3, 2007, https://www.theregister.com/2007/08/03/hwang_parthenogenesis/.

humanity has no physical reference with. This can naturally cause misidentification. Some theories maintain that the UFOs that humanity sees are not hyper-technological aircraft but spiritual manifestations that only resemble the former. Many believe that these beings try to mimic characteristics (i.e., physical or mental) that humans can understand but are not perfect. An excellent example of this is when some perceive angels as ETs during near-death or dire situations offering telepathic encouragement with faces that look only half-human.¹³⁷

Due to the increase in technology and cultural influences which perpetuate the idea of ETs (such as *Star Trek*), it is not surprising to imagine someone mistaking an angelic being for an ET, something they can culturally understand better. Another fact that affirms this theory is how ET encounters share strikingly similar elements with stories of fairy abductions from the ancient past.¹³⁸ Fairies took cultural dominance in the past, so they likened it to a fairy when encountering a spiritual being. In short, when the times change, so do people's perceptions leading them to equate spiritual encounters with that which they know in their culture. While their interpretations may be different, they are still fundamentally the same thing, spiritual beings that have existed for time immemorial being complete human understanding. Yesterday they were fairies; today they are ETs. Only God knows what they will be called in the future as time progresses.

Christians must also be ready to provide evidence that these beings are malicious entities concealing their true nature and tricking humanity that they are ETs from another planet. Though some reported cases provide help and bestow a sense of altruism, these cases are few and far between. Also, the principal argument against any ET encounters being from angelic beings is

¹³⁷ Marden, *Extraterrestrial Contact*, 128.

¹³⁸ Douthat, "Flying Saucers," 30.

that God and His servants enter the world honestly and in a straightforward manner (such as He did when He incarnated as Christ), meaning that U.F.O.'s which visit humanity mysteriously and without explanation mean they should not be worth trusting.¹³⁹ Though it could be argued that some angels in Scripture appear disguised, or that even the Holy Spirit can be mysterious in nature (John 3:8). The difference is that these heavenly beings do not deceive humanity on their intentions, try to convince them that God is fail, or deny serving Christ.

Many individuals who experience ETs develop PTSD and similar afflictions that need psychological treatment, such as psychotherapy. These afflictions result from the disturbing nature of such encounters, including abductions, lost time, forced medical experiments, hypnotic states, and even an overwhelming sense of evil and dread. These cases are littered in every facet of media and literature and have grown to such abundance that doing an online search for ET encounters or abductions will net hundreds of thousands of results. Since most of these experiences are negative, Orthodox Christians naturally believe that ETs are simply demons disguising themselves and doing Satan's work.¹⁴⁰ A belief that reinforces this idea is that ETs are abducting people in order only to inflict terrible pain and conduct malign 'experiments' rather than provide any real noticeable benefit.¹⁴¹

Furthermore, many contradictions seem to come with the belief that ETs visiting Earth are an advanced species from another planet. The Archbishop Chrysostomos of Etna even mentions this when he states, "If these aliens are not demons, how is it that beings so advanced that they can achieve space travel cannot prevent pain and scarring during routine physical

¹³⁹ Douthat, "Flying Saucers," 31.

¹⁴⁰ Weintraub, *Religions*, 111.

¹⁴¹ Marden, *Extraterrestrial Contact*, 166.

examinations?”¹⁴² This valid argument points out a big paradox in believing that ETs are super-intelligent from beyond the solar system theory. To achieve space travel to Earth alone from any planet that could support life would take four light-years at the least (in reference to the closest habitable planet)¹⁴³ and require supplies for the occupants to survive the harsh journey. Also, even with wormhole spacetime compression, the journey would prove to be longer than a direct trip. Harvard physicist Daniel Jafferis mentions, “It takes longer to get through these wormholes than to go directly, so they are not very useful for space travel.”¹⁴⁴

These two factors alone would require technology that far exceeds human capabilities and may even demand traveling faster than light itself, which currently is viewed as an impossibility no matter the technology available. Even if achieved, assuming that they are currently on Earth, three predominant questions arise. First, how can these ETs achieve science-fictionesque travel yet cannot completely erase the memories of their abductees and leave enough evidence for them to notice? These should be elementary problems for such advanced beings to accomplish yet cannot seem to get right even after eighty years on this planet.

Second, what is the ultimate goal for their visitation on Earth? Some theories abound, such as an alien hybridization program, infiltrating the world governments, or simply collecting research data. However, these theories start to lose traction when looking at obvious evidence requiring only simple deduction. With such elaborate technology to achieve light speed travel, why is it taking so long to achieve such menial tasks for a supposedly developed species? There

¹⁴² Weintraub, *Religions*, 117.

¹⁴³ Neel V. Patel, “There’s a tantalizing sign of a habitable-zone planet in Alpha Centauri,” *Technology Review*, February 10, 2021, <https://www.technologyreview.com/2021/02/10/1017908/tantalizing-sign-habitable-zone-planet-alpha-centauri/>.

¹⁴⁴ “Travel Through Wormholes is Possible, But Slow,” *APS Physics, Newswise*, <https://www.newswise.com/articles/travel-through-wormholes-is-possible-but-slow>.

are only scant reports with little evidence of alien-human hybrids making their existence dubious. ETs infiltrating the world's governments should have been an easy task for such an advanced species, yet there is no viable evidence to suggest they succeeded. Also, if they are only here to collect data, why are they conducting the same reported experiments on human subjects over the decades?

Third, it is apparent that they are trying to stay hidden, so why are they so abysmal at it? All UFO and ET reports point to them trying to stay hidden from the public eye by going out of their way to conceal their aircraft, escape when noticed, and even erase the memories of those who encounter them. However, people still observe them, and even if these sightings are only presumable, there is such a massive amount that it would mean hundreds of thousands of people are lying worldwide. Though this is possible, it is highly improbable. If ETs genuinely wanted to stay unseen, why are there thousands upon thousands of reports of them? People they inflict with amnesia seem to remember them quite easily, there are numerous sightings of their aircraft daily across the world, and they are spotted so much that even major news networks have featured them.¹⁴⁵ A species that is supposed to be hyperintelligent should have no problem remaining concealed, yet they fumble at this constantly. This bolsters the fact that they are not ETs, but spiritual beings here to deceive humanity, allowing humanity to glimpse them to perpetuate the idea they are from another planet and stay hidden just enough, so the absolute truth is just out of grasp. In this way, Satan and his cohorts could deceive humanity into a more scientific mindset away from spirituality, believe that the true enemies lie among the stars rather than an invisible spiritual force, and ultimately keep humanity further in the dark.

¹⁴⁵ Robert Gearty, "Fighter pilot says UFO he chased in 2004 committed 'act of war'," Fox News, September 14, <https://www.foxnews.com/science/fighter-pilot-says-ufo-he-chased-in-2004-committed-act-of-war>.

Paradigm Three's Superiority

This paper will now answer why third paradigm is the most reasonable approach. While this is not the main objective of this thesis, the question of which paradigm is the most plausible is sure to come up, making this answer a valuable asset for Christians to carry. While any of the three paradigms could potentially be correct and all provide convincing evidence on why their theories could be correct, the first two contain more contradictions and paradoxes than the third. While this paradigm does assert that spiritual beings exist and points to Christianity as the correct worldview (both highly contested), it nevertheless comes across as the most coherent, logical, and cohesive argument out of its counterparts.

While the first paradigm carries much empirical weight behind it and plenty of mathematical and scientific evidence to back it up, there are still elements that keep it from being foolproof. The biggest of these elements is the sheer number of recorded accounts of ET and UFO encounters. If honestly nothing of note was happening, as many of the world's governments suggest, then it stands to reason that there should be far fewer reports of ETs. With over 100,000 cases recorded by MUFON alone,¹⁴⁶ It would be ludicrous to assume that every report of ETs was a fabrication. Even if none of them were ETs, there is still something out there taking the form as such. From here, another problem arises. Why is there so much backtracking, lying, and secrecy by the government pertaining to ETs? One of the most prevalent examples of this is how the United States government launched official investigations into many reported UFOs and came back with many that remained anomalous yet offered only simple possible explanations for even those that seemed to perform maneuvers far beyond current technology's capabilities.

¹⁴⁶ "UFO Stalker," MUFON, <https://ufostalker.com>.

Governments also seem to keep getting caught in their own lies, such as the former director of the FBI William S. Sessions maintaining that they had no part in helping investigate the UFO phenomena,¹⁴⁷ only to be disclosed in an official report that the FBI did help the Air Force investigate UFO cases from 1947 to 1954 under the former FBI director J Edgar Hoover.¹⁴⁸ Though, this could be due to Sessions simply not being aware of the FBI's past involvements regarding UFOs. However, many can view this as unlikely considering his past position giving him the ability to easily verify such claims. Thus, this puts into question everything the government releases about the ET phenomena, leaving many to speculate that the United State (as well as other governments) have done their best to suppress all information about UFOS or ETs in order to make their citizens believe that alien visitation from space is nothing but science fiction.¹⁴⁹ These contradictions could naturally point to the government finding out that foreign spy devices or classified projects cause these phenomena. However, the reality that many individuals claiming to experience nearly identical ET and UFO encounters goes against this narrative.

While the second paradigm does not share the same amount of empirical documentation, it makes up for it with its considerable amount of witnesses and accounts. There is also physical evidence (albeit disputed) such as photographs, videos, purported pieces of ET craft, and even alien implants surgically removed by doctors such as the late Roger Leir.¹⁵⁰ This paradigm quickly answers the former's incongruities by believing that ETs exist and are currently operating on Earth. Where this paradigm struggles however is when it comes to the supernatural elements

¹⁴⁷ "Project Blue Book," FBI Records: The Vault, 12.

¹⁴⁸ "UFO," FBI Records: The Vault, The FBI, <https://vault.fbi.gov/UFO>.

¹⁴⁹ Douthat, "Flying Saucers," 12.

¹⁵⁰ Julia Strand, "Alien Nanotechnology," *The Psychology of Extraordinary Beliefs: Ordinary students exploring extraordinary beliefs*, The Ohio State University, March 8, 2018, <https://u.osu.edu/vanzandt/2018/03/08/alien-nanotechnology/>.

presented with ET phenomena. UFOs seem to have the ability to go from stationary to supersonic speed within fractions of a second while remaining completely silent. ETs appear corporeal yet exhibit ethereal qualities such as telepathy, hypnosis, and even impressing feelings of extreme malice upon their victims. There are also reports that ETs can bend the very fabric of reality by phasing through objects, levitating people, and seamlessly appearing and disappearing within moments. The paradox that lies with all of these examples is that no physically bound species that exists should be able to break the laws of nature without any outside force. ETs somehow have been reported to break these laws while using no technology or any outside help; they are just able to will it.

These are not standalone accounts, nor is it an exception to the norm. These instances are numerous and easy to find through books, the internet, and media alike. One of the best evidenced accounts today is that of declassified Navy videos showing military pilots capturing UFOs on video. One of the pilots, now retired, Commander David Fravor even came out saying, “I can tell you, I think it was not from this world.”¹⁵¹ With such high level military personnel coming out in the open, this report is burgeoning and convincing more and more that ETs in fact exist.

These accounts seem to point towards a more supernatural nature, not a highly technological one. There is also the inconsistency of the Fermi Paradox and no scientific evidence existing that ETs exist in the universe, yet there are plenty of accounts of them being on earth. These points seem to suggest their origins being earthly rather than extraterrestrial. All in

¹⁵¹ Billy Perrigo, “Navy Pilot Says UFO He Saw Off California Was ‘Not of This World,’” *TIME*, December 19, 2017, <https://time.com/5070962/navy-pilot-ufo-california-not-from-this-world/>.

all, details that point to them being supernatural beings that live alongside humanity outweigh the evidence that ETs exist as the masses currently depict them.

There is substantial proof above on why the third paradigm is plausible, but just why this paradigm trumps the other two is based heavily on two facts. The first is that this paradigm balances empirical thought and supernatural ideas to understand the ET phenomena. If ETs are spiritual beings, this will rest all the paradoxes presented in paradigm two due to people observing them on earth with no evidence of them existing in space. This belief attests that some of these accounts can be explained by science, such as by analyzing how modern ET abduction stories seem to very closely resemble Sabbat abduction stories familiar in 17th-century witchcraft reports.¹⁵² This belief also contains supernatural explanations explaining that ancient spiritual beings masquerading as gods have transformed into modern-day space aliens.¹⁵³

Not only does this paradigm get rid of the contradictions that plague the others, but it fits the best with Christian theology. Origen pressed forth that the spiritual beings imbue the universe having higher intelligence, abilities, and responsibilities than their human counterparts.¹⁵⁴ This idea falls neatly in line with this paradigm's beliefs. It makes logical sense that spiritual beings (who previously tricked humanity into worshipping them in the ancient past) switch their approach accordingly to continue to fascinate, manipulate, and ultimately deceive humanity more effectively in modernity. While many view ETs as potential saviors of the modern world, Christians should see past the deception and view ETs more as a threat due to the mass number

¹⁵² Henriksen, "Alien encounters," 15.

¹⁵³ Ryan Winters, "Ancient Aliens, Modern Cosmologies: Zecharia Sitchin and the Transformation of Mesopotamian Myth," in *Receptions of the Ancient Near East in Popular Culture and Beyond* ed. Agnes Garcia-Ventura and Lorenzo Verderame (Atlanta, GA: Lockwood Press, 2020), 237, https://books.google.co.jp/books?id=E7VDwAAQBAJ&dq=ancient+aliens&lr=&source=gbs_navlinks_s.

¹⁵⁴ O'Meara, *Vast Universe*, 66.

of malicious actions they inflict upon mankind.¹⁵⁵ There is also the possibility they could reveal themselves to the world, claiming to be the ultimate creators of humankind, demanding worship as a result.¹⁵⁶ This possibility is another Christians should be aware of and spread to help others avoid possible deception. Overall, this paradigm is the most likely scenario due to eliminating many contradictions, the careful balance placed on both scientific and spiritual understandings of the phenomena, and this ideal ultimately harmonizes the best with Christianity.

How Christians and Churches Should Respond

The final component this thesis will explore is how Christians should adapt individually and as a congregation. The ET phenomenon currently saturates contemporary culture and raises many questions that Christians need to respond to and confront without wavering. Proper confrontation will ensure that Christians are ready to respond to any question ET-ism may throw at them if done correctly. Responding correctly to these questions will help develop Christians' abilities to face tough questions, defend the Christian faith against any challenges this phenomenon poses, and help spread the love of Christ to those who adhere to ET beliefs.

Christians first must prepare themselves individually. The first, foremost, and most crucial aspect (which cannot be stressed enough) is to have a solid foundation in Christ before tackling any of these questions. These questions challenge many aspects of the Christian faith, and if one is not firmly rooted, then there is a real potential that doubt could seep in, and in dire cases, one could leave the faith entirely. This outcome is, of course, the worst-case scenario, but it exists nonetheless. In order to do this, one must first learn to rely on God's wisdom rather than their own intelligence (Prov 3:5-6). Christians must make Christ the primary scale on which all

¹⁵⁵ Winters, "Ancient Aliens," 244.

¹⁵⁶ Aaron J. Werner, email message to author, August 22, 2021.

their information weighs on. In this way, even if they encounter a question they may not understand, if they weigh it on God's Word, then at the very least, the concept can become more apparent. This method is an excellent way to process if an idea is from God or the enemy meant to lure one away from Christ. Also, if one has a solid foundation in God, no matter what alternative belief they may hear (no matter how enticing it may seem), they shall remain steadfast with their convictions resolute (Rom 4:20). A faithful Christian with an unshakable foundation in Christ is a force to be reckoned with who can imitate the love of Christ in even the most hostile situations. Christians should never forget this fact.

Next, after Christians build a solid foundation in Christ, they must learn about this new cultural phenomenon to convince those who adhere to it that Christ is a more suitable solution. A Christian who does their research will make compelling arguments and answer complex questions related to Christianity and the ET phenomenon. All Christians should have a basic understanding of ET beliefs since they are likely to encounter questions relating to ETs due to their predominance in today's culture. A Christian will not find much success if they try to answer these questions without any reason to fall back on. A Christian that wants to help these people yet shuts out the ET belief as merely a distraction is akin to a Christian that wants to preach to Muslims yet shuts out anything they hear about Islam. Both will find themselves come against questions that they cannot hope to answer well and can come off disrespectful to those who believe in differing worldviews, serving to only push them away further from Christ. In short, Christians need to equip themselves with the proper knowledge before confronting questions this cultural craze presents (Heb 13:11).

Lastly, Christians must be ready to explain why Christianity would not fail regardless of the outcome regarding ETs' existence, why God would remain prevalent, and why Christ offers a

more logical and satisfying worldview against ET beliefs. It is not enough for Christians to be aware of ETs; they must also know about their own religion. Christians must be aware that they now live in a world that ETs are so prevailing in today's culture that many people find a new religion revolving around ETs. ET-ism is not just some passing fad but an obsession. The roots of these beliefs are deeply set and require more than a short discourse to correct. Christians must remain patient, open-hearted, and ready to wield the Word of God to both dismantle the arguments they use to attack Scripture. They also need to convince them in a loving manner that Christ holds all the answers they are seeking in ETs plus a more hopeful future and guaranteed salvation. It should go without saying that all of this must be conducted with kindness and not anger, for if Christians lose their temperament, they risk losing an opportunity to share the love of Christ

Many religions today would like to ignore the subject of ETs. However, with the age of space exploration coming closer to becoming a reality, this subject is now in the open and must be confronted.¹⁵⁷ This situation is a ripe opportunity for Christianity to be at the forefront of this movement, for it is time for churches everywhere not to cower away from these ideas but stand firm and take them head-on. Churches need to step up and learn to adapt congregationally as well. This process undoubtedly requires preparation which this thesis proposes happens on three levels.

The first level is that all denominations of Christianity must join together to teach each possibility rather than churches picking which paradigms to teach while neglecting the others. Due to the large varieties of Christian denominations and beliefs at the individual level,

¹⁵⁷ Dick, "The Societal Impact," 243.

integrating the results that SETI or other astrobiological studies find in the universe (especially regarding the existence of ETs), the process will be a long and arduous one set with many difficulties.¹⁵⁸ Agreeing on how to respond to the ET culture can alleviate this problem. Many roadblocks will fall if all churches stand in singularity with one another on this subject (just as they do with the salvation power of Christ's crucifixion). While differing interpretations of ETs are likely, this should not cause such a negative impact as long as they approach this phenomenon the same way. All denominations should approach ET ideas with an open mind and focus on God, rather than some churches avoiding ET-ism entirely. Uniformity on all churches examining and confronting each paradigm's possibility is vital, for a house divided cannot stand (Mark 3:25).

The second level is for churches to equip their congregation with the necessary wisdom to confront this cultural craze. Churches can accomplish this by offering seminars, lessons, and even sermons on this matter. Teaching lessons directly from the Bible is well and good, but in today's world, the church needs to start preparing their assembly against threats not directly found in the Word. These teachings should naturally include lessons on paranormal phenomena commonly discussed today, such as ETs, for they offer a counternarrative to Christianity which many are beginning to lean towards. If the church prepares their congregation, they will effectively create stronger disciples in Christ who will defend Christianity against questions that usually leave those unprepared with blank stares. With a prepared congregation comes the potential for more individuals looking for the truth to attend church to learn about God's Word, creating a stronger church.

¹⁵⁸ Bertka, "Christianity's Response," 338.

The third level is that churches need to be ready to change their service in order to better help those who hold onto an opposing worldview. This level will not only help those who cling to ET beliefs but everyone who has burning questions and a desire in their heart to seek the truth. Today, many churches follow a similar formula: Musical worship at the beginning, greetings, tithes, a sermon, and farewells. The formula may differ slightly, and things may sometimes switch, but most churches follow this flow. The times are evolving, and the church needs to adapt as well. A great way to do this would be to open up more services churches can provide during the week. These services should include small groups, prayer services, and Q&A sessions where anyone with questions can receive answers. People often visit a church and still leave with many unanswered questions, causing them to look for other avenues. If the church can answer these questions, those who are answered will feel satisfied and more at home in a church willing to cater to everyone's needs. If a church can rearrange its services creatively, everyone will have time to worship, pray, learn, and be better equipped in an ever-evolving world. If churches stay complacent and are too stubborn to adapt, they may find their numbers dwindling where people are starving for answers to new questions today's world presents, such as ETs. The church should not just be a place for Sunday worship, but a place opened throughout the week, providing many services to equip better, teach, and spread the love of Christ.

Conclusion

This thesis assessed the factors contributing to society's growing belief in extraterrestrials and the various metaphysical implications of this belief. Since this thesis offers a Christian respond to this new cultural phenomenon, its benefit to non-Christians is limited. Although ET beliefs may continue to evolve, the contentions of this thesis will should remain valid. Christians must remain vigilant and ready to confront and answer any questions that come their way from

this constantly evolving narrative. It matters not which paradigm ends up being true (or if another altogether is validated); it matters how Christians ultimately respond to each possibility and to the people that hold on to each one as the truth.

This writer's hope is that Christians will become better equipped at confronting the ET cultural craze while remaining steadfast in their faith. His hope is also that anyone who may not be Christian reading this thesis come out more informed on this situation and see how the Christian worldview provides more suitable answers for these beliefs. When one looks to ETs for life's answers, they will receive uncertainty, fleeting hope, and questions that science may never be able to answer. When one looks to Christ, their life will fill with grace, never-ending love, unbreakable hope, and ultimately salvation.

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