

## Book Reviews

**Ted Peters** *UFOs: God's Chariots? Spirituality, Ancient Aliens and Religious Yearnings in the Age of Extraterrestrials*

Pompton Plains, NJ: New Page Books, 2014. \$16.99 ISBN 978-1-60163-318-7

In this substantially revised and updated edition of *UFOs: God's Chariots* (originally published in 1977), Ted Peters presents a compelling overview of UFOlogy including its scientific and theological foundations and implications. Polls conducted over many years show that appreciable numbers of people believe that advanced spacecraft are visiting Earth; that humans have seen and interacted with these alien astronauts; and that governments are withholding the truth from the people. Whether or not UFOs are real in a physical and tangible sense, beliefs about UFOs are real and have real consequences. These include disenchantment with “mainstream” science, rejection of traditional religious views, and declining trust in government. For almost seventy years, interest in UFOs has persisted despite loud and repetitive claims that UFOlogy is scientifically worthless, spiritually bankrupt, and unpatriotic.

The UFO story ranges from lights in the skies through long-term involvement with aliens and massive cover-up plots invoking the military–intelligence–industrial complex; secret societies, such as the Knights Templar and the Ark of the Covenant; Rosicrucians and Freemasons; and Nazi technology and occult practices. It continues to grow in complexity. Ted Peters has prepared himself for *UFOs: God's Chariots?* by surveying the academic literature, getting immersed in UFO books, interviewing people with vastly different perspectives, and participating actively in UFO conventions and conferences.

In this book, Peters explores the roles of science and religion in UFOlogy, as seen from afar by elite academics and by workers within the field. His focus is on the largely overlooked theological and spiritual dimensions, but he also takes a hard look at efforts to distinguish between science and pseudoscience. (Will the real scientists please stand up?) He explains why it is no longer sufficient to distinguish between “believers” and “skeptics,” and addresses moral issues such as the use of smear tactics to impugn honest witnesses.

Authoritative, well written, and liberally salted with engaging case reports, Peters’ book is organized in part by a clever typology of aliens. These are Interstellar Diplomats, sent to establish relations with the peoples of Earth; Research Scientists, that come to explore, take geological and biological specimens, and learn about human peoples and cultures; Celestial Saviors, purporting to offer hope and salvation; and Hybridizers, that study and sometimes impregnate abducted women.

Peters' central thesis is that atavistic religious needs—to grasp all that is and orient ourselves within it, to find moral guidance, to maintain hope, and to receive forgiveness—remain in full force today. However, in our increasingly materialistic world so heavily dominated by science, satisfying these needs with traditional religious values has become difficult. Enconced in a culture that discourages them from pinning their hopes on God, many people turn to science and technology for comfort. Fascination with the prospects of interstellar spacecraft piloted by visitors from benevolent and wise extraterrestrial civilizations is one manifestation of this. Religious themes appear openly (as in the case of UFO religions) or implicitly (when people turn to advanced spacemen for answers to great existential questions, for succor and support, and for a brighter future).

In the 1950s, a number of mostly American prophets or “contactees” claimed that they had been visited by superior humanoids from Mars, Venus, or a more distant world bringing glad tidings and warning Earthlings about the dangers of nuclear warfare, and urging everyone to cooperate and live in harmony. Soon there emerged a succession of UFO religions (described variously as cults and new religious movements) which predict that UFOs will save those who believe. This is not recommended theology because an infinite, omniscient, eternal, transcendent, and forgiving supernatural God is abandoned for purely finite natural beings that by virtue of our admiration for advanced technology project god-like qualities. Unwavering faith in science and technology also provide a framework for claims that “ancient aliens” kick-started life on Earth and intervened over the years to better human evolution and culture. Ancient alien theorists believe that they are scientific and do not consider that they are promoting false idols. Peters' analysis of ancient alien claims is insightful and devastating. Even researchers who study abductees' claims such as “I talked to Jesus” or “I saw God” are so focused on finding scientific explanations that they are blind to theology.

In the early days, both demons and angels flew flying saucers; but over time, it was the angels who gained the upper hand. Peters argues that despite its deficiencies, UFO theology is consistent with the Ten Commandments and is a theology of hope. Peters acknowledges the trauma and stress in reported alien abduction experiences, but points out that under the guidance of caring and talented psychotherapists the ordeal can eventuate in a positive transformation. Still, some experienced UFOlogists see something sinister, treacherous and evil about certain types of alien—sometimes referred to as extraterrestrial biological entities (EBEs). Crude, powerful, self-serving and duplicitous, these devilish entities are more reminiscent of Jung's archetypes, the shadow and the trickster, than of Freud's ego ideal.

Welcome additions to this new edition include detailed analyses of reported abduction experiences; expanding his new field of astrotheology; an explanation of the ETI myth; and the results of the author's Religious Crisis Survey, which strongly supports other evidence that contrary to scientists' dire expectations people do not believe that the discovery of extraterrestrial life will shatter their faith. All things considered, the newly revised *UFOs: Gods Chariots?* is a worthy

successor to the first edition, offering a fresh opportunity for a new generation of readers and a thoroughly updated and expanded work for readers who remember the 1977 edition.

ALBERT A. HARRISON

University of California, Davis, USA

© 2014, Albert A. Harrison

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14746700.2014.927257>

**Amos Yong** *The Spirit of Creation: Modern Science and Divine Action in the Pentecostal-Charismatic Imagination*

Grand Rapids, MI: WB Eerdmans, 2011. 256 pp. \$32.00 ISBN 978-0802866127

Pentecostal theology is a field of increasing academic interest. One of the main contributors to the academic development of Pentecostal theology is professor Amos Yong, with his characteristic interdisciplinary perspective. His new book *The Spirit of Creation* addresses the relationship between Pentecostal theology and science.

*The Spirit of Creation*, mainly a collection of published material from various periodicals, consists of six chapters. In the first chapter, Yong paints a picture of the history of Pentecostalism and modern science, addressing his purpose for publishing this book. Then he examines the science of Pentecostalism, and sets out to “display the illuminative power of science regarding Pentecostalism while yet also securing a noneliminative or nonreductionistic interpretation of the latter” (p. 34). In chapters 3, 4 and 5, he explores science–theology in more depth and relates them to his pneumatology and the understanding of God’s action. Chapter 3 analyzes the “divine action project”; chapter 4, teleology, eschatology, and the activity of the Spirit; chapter 5, a pneumatological theology of emergence; and chapter 6, a pneumatological cosmology.

Pentecostal theology does not have a long history of involvement with the sciences, and Yong observes a gap between science and Pentecostal theology. Yong tries to bridge this gap in *The Spirit of Creation*, and describes the gap as a span between “supernaturalistic religion like Pentecostalism” and “the naturalistic and rationalistic world of modern science” (p. 1).

Why should Pentecostals deal with science? Yong identifies three reasons. First of all, Pentecostals are themselves children of the modern world. Secondly, failure to engage with modern science could undermine the vitality and future of Pentecostalism. Thirdly, Pentecostalism in a way represents an alternative to modernity, though born in the midst of modernity. Yong characterizes Pentecostal spirituality as a countermodernist discourse: “As such, Pentecostal spirituality signifies an eruption in the modern world of the nonrational (not irrational) elements of human feeling, expression, and experience that oppose not the methodologies of science and engineering disciplines but the overextended claims of science” (p. 11). According to Yong, Pentecostalism contributes with an experiential, empirical and pragmatic orientation that can enrich science–theology discourse.