

OCT

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29
178

Churches meet the UFO challenge

From page 67

They succeed, but man becomes lazy as the creative drive is snuffed out, hence the mission ultimately fails.

A fascinating sub-plot reveals how the Overlords have the figure and form of the traditional devil. The devil of Christian tradition turns out to have been not a fallen angel but a space traveller, whose advent and appearance were misunderstood by the ancients.

The film, *Close Encounters of a Third Kind*, has a distinct missionary emphasis during the final reel in which an encounter takes place between the (primitive) earthlings and (advanced) aliens.

This film and its rival, *Star Wars*, have prompted theological articles in the American magazine, *Christianity Today*; the Australian newspaper, *Catholic Leader*; and the (normally staid) English journal, *Church Times*.

The *Church Times* writer said *Star Wars* evoked Alice Meynell's poem, *Christ in the Universe*, with its picture of Jesus walking the stars:

"Nor in our day may His devices with the heavens be guessed,

His pilgrimage to thread the Milky Way, or His bestowals there to manifest . . ."

The article in the *Catholic Leader* is by Father Ted Peters, Asso-

ciate Professor of Religious Studies, Loyola University, New Orleans; author of *Futures, Human and Divine*; *UFOs, God's Chariots?*; and *Flying Saucers in Politics, Science and Religion*.

It starts by examining the views of Father Andrew Greeley, an American sociologist, that "science fiction puts back something that modern religion has lost, namely, a sense of 'wonder'."

According to Father Peters: "The UFO is mysterious yet majestic. It humbles us by reminding us of our finitude. We are next to nothing in the face of the intergalactic infinities at the command of the UFO."

He expresses a note of caution. "UFOs may represent an unconscious hope that technology will save us from all our ills.

"But such a hope fails to recognise that some of our ills are due to problems with the human heart. From these, God and God alone is able to deliver us."

The article in *Christian Century*—the most comprehensive religious treatise of the subject to appear in print—is called "UFOs—The Next Theological Challenge."

The article starts by exploring various facets of UFOlogy including the oft-expressed theme of extra-terrestrial intervention in the evolution of

man and higher animals.

In religious circles this idea has been strongly promoted by an American rabbi, Yonah ibn Aharon, whose scholarly interests have brought him six doctorates, in the fields of rabbinics and South Semitic and Middle Eastern languages, among others.

The article, by the Rev. Jack Jennings, an American Presbyterian minister, rejects the "God as astronaut" approach of von Daniken and others.

He states: "The UFOs present us with profound implications for theology. We may have to face some hard questions, and perhaps even change some of our ideas. Our predecessors eventually adjusted to Copernicus and Galileo . . ."

The writer quotes a treatise by Professor Frederic A. Brussat, which included the following:

"Christians will never be able to live down the shortsightedness of the medieval churchmen who refused to peer through Galileo's telescope. They were not willing to deal with more than one world. And they were afraid to take seriously the implications of a powerful new way of looking at reality.

"It would be a grave act and an irresponsible act for religious people in our time to ignore the myth of the extra-terrestrial or to try to reason the UFOs out of existence."

#2
2