

# Exotheology

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*Not to be confused are UFO religions or ancient astronaut theories that posit that historical religious scripture or mythology was inspired by visits from extraterrestrials. "Exotheism" is a fictional denomination in the Vampire: The Requiem role-playing game.*

The term "**exotheology**" was coined in the 1960s or early 1970s<sup>[1]</sup> for the examination of theological issues as they pertain to extraterrestrial intelligence. It is primarily concerned with either conjecture about possible theological beliefs that extraterrestrials might have, or how our own theologies have been or will be influenced by evidence of and/or interaction with extraterrestrials.

One of the main themes of exotheology is applying the concept of extraterrestrials who are sentient, and more to the point, endowed with a soul, as a thought experiment to the examination of a given theology, mostly Christian theology, occasionally also Jewish theology.

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## Christianity

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A Christian writer early to address the question was C. S. Lewis (1898–1963) who in a 1950s article in the *Christian Herald* contemplated the possibility of the Son of God incarnating in other, extraterrestrial, worlds, or else that God could devise an entirely distinct plan of salvation for extraterrestrial communities from the one applicable to humans.<sup>[2]</sup>

Lutheran theologian Ted Peters (2003) asserts that the questions raised by the possibility of extraterrestrial life are by no means new to Christian theology and by no means pose, as asserted by other authors, a threat for Christian dogma. Peters points out that medieval theology had frequently considered the question of "what if God had created many worlds?", as early as the discussion of the Antipodes by the Church Fathers.<sup>[3]</sup>

The Catholic Vatican theologian Corrado Balducci often discussed the question in Italian popular media, and in 2001 published a statement *UFOs and Extraterrestrials - A Problem for the Church?*. In a 2008 statement, José Gabriel Funes, head of the Vatican Observatory, said "Just as there is a multiplicity of creatures on earth, there can be other beings, even intelligent, created by God. This is not in contrast with our faith because we can't put limits on God's creative freedom".<sup>[4]</sup>

Smaller denominations also have similar treatments in passing in their key writings: Christian Science and the Course in Miracles treat extraterrestrials as effectively brother spiritual beings in a non-absolute physical experience, the founder of the former writing, "The universe of Spirit is peopled with spiritual beings,..."<sup>[5]</sup> and Emanuel Swedenborg wrote, "Anyone with a sound intellect can know from many considerations that there are numerous worlds with people on them. Rational thought leads to the conclusion that massive bodies such as the planets, some of which are larger than our own earth, are not empty masses created

merely to wander aimlessly around the sun, and shine with their feeble light on one planet. No, they must have a much greater purpose than that. ... What would one planet be to God, who is infinite, and for whom thousands, or even tens of thousands of planets, all full of inhabitants, would be such a trifling matter as to be almost nothing?"<sup>[6]</sup>

While other Protestant denominations have tended to be somewhat terracentric, much as Roman Catholicism was until more recent times, receptivity to the idea of extraterrestrial civilizations likely depends on the degree of associated biblical literalism. Those of more fundamentalist leanings as interviewed occasionally on UFO- and paranormal-themed radio shows like Coast to Coast AM often try to fit extraterrestrial beings into the mold of demons or Nephilim, lacking much better category in which to place them, whereas schools of less literal persuasion would be more open to alternative perspectives. These would include either fundamental reexamination of traditional assumptions, some reconsideration of extraterrestrials as in some sense angels, or at least wider interpretations possible in the saying ascribed to Jesus of Nazareth, "And other sheep I have which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd."<sup>[7]</sup> which while probably quite presumptuous-sounding in the very large cosmic perspective could potentially lend itself to a reading in some more impersonal sense as well better befitting the larger magnitude of exotheology.

## Judaism

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Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, who was also a physicist, was inclined toward the belief in extraterrestrial life, citing various classic Jewish authorities. Among them are the medieval philosopher Rabbi Chasdai Crescas (Ohr Hashem 4:2) and 18th century kabbalist Rabbi Pinchas Eliyahu Horowitz (Sefer HaBris). After presenting his sources, Rabbi Kaplan remarks, "We therefore find the basic thesis of the Sefer HaBris supported by a number of clear-cut statements by our Sages. There may even be other forms of intelligent life in the universe, but such life forms do not have free will, and therefore do not have moral responsibility"—at least in the same sense as human beings.<sup>[8]</sup> Rabbi Kaplan also cites Judges 5:23 ("Cursed is Meroz..."), about which Rashi, the foremost medieval commentator remarks, "Some say [Meroz] was a planet, and some say [Meroz] was a prominent person who was near the battle area and yet did not come [to intervene]."

Rabbi Norman Lamm, former chancellor of Yeshiva University, has also written on this subject, asserting that if the existence of extraterrestrial life should be confirmed, religious scholars must revise previous assumptions to the contrary. He, too, does not rule out this possibility from an Orthodox Jewish point of view.<sup>[9]</sup>

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, an eminent 20th century Talmudic authority and rabbinical leader, is cited as having been open-minded about extraterrestrial life. He is said to have remarked that life on other planets would only reflect God's greatness, which exceeds mortal understanding, while not contradicting the role of the Jewish people to heed the Torah and in so doing to perform God's will here on earth.<sup>[10]</sup>

## Islam

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Depending on the suras cited, the Quran of Islam appears to leave open the door to the idea of extraterrestrials, as in 27:65, situated similarly on a par with humans subject to a divine judgment leading toward a heaven or hell as reward or punishment for the deeds of one's life.<sup>[11][12]</sup>

## See also

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- Cosmic pluralism
- Exopolitics
- Potential cultural impact of extraterrestrial contact
- Ufology

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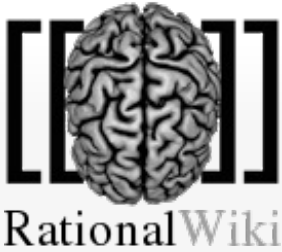
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# Exotheology

“ Just as there is a **multiplicity of creatures on Earth**, so there could be other beings created by **God** [beyond it]. ”

—José Gabriel Funes, [Vatican astronomer](#)<sup>[1]</sup>

**Exotheology** is a branch of religious study that concerns itself with the potential impact on earthly [religions](#) and theologies of the discovery of [life](#) or [intelligence](#) elsewhere in the universe.

As with the development of most [science](#), such discoveries would in all likelihood overturn at least some notions or [dogmas](#) held by religions, especially [fundamentalist](#) ones. This in turn would lead to fierce opposition to the evidence of such life, and political battles over funding of research and the nature of how we would teach about our discoveries.

There are also bound to be religious orders that have no problem encompassing any such scientific breakthroughs, just as we have seen with other advances and their acceptance by some churches or religious people. An example is the [Roman Catholic Church](#), which announced in May 2008 that "Aliens are My Brother". True. The Vatican also speculated that some [aliens](#) may have avoided [original sin](#).<sup>[2][3]</sup>

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## Speculation [edit]

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Speculative fiction (a [euphemism](#) for [science fiction](#), of course) often plays about with the concept of exotheology. [Carl Sagan's](#) *Contact* (both the novel and film) question what effect alien contact would have on the human population. Particularly the selection process of who should make first contact with an alien species becomes a conflict between science and religion and which view should be primarily put forward. In a more negative sense, it also depicts religious [fundamentalists](#) destroying the multi-billion dollar "machine" that the aliens had the human race build in order to make contact — sadly a quite probable scenario.

Another example of science fiction to touch on exotheology are [Orson Scott Card's](#) *Ender* series, specifically in *Speaker for the Dead*, *Xenocide* and *Children of the Mind*. In these books, a race of sapient aliens, having initially rejected the gift of a copy of the [Bible](#), is exposed to [Catholic missionaries](#) after partially integrating into human civilization, with mixed results. Parts of the plot explore the implications of human- and Christian-specific concepts like [human exceptionalism](#) and [original sin](#) as applied to species for which they are clearly unsuited, as well as the short history *The Star* by [Arthur C. Clarke](#), in which a Catholic priest who forms part of a space mission suffers a strong hit to his faith.

## See also [edit]

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- [Exopolitics](#)

## External links [edit]

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- [Dabbling in Exotheology](#)<sup>[a]</sup>, TIME Magazine, 24 April 1978
- [Catholic Exotheology, post on Web of Contradictions](#)<sup>[a]</sup> at the [Wayback Machine](#) (archived October 14, 2007), 13 October 2005

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- ↑  Vatican says aliens could exist<sup>[a]</sup>, *BBC*

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