

POLITICS, RELIGION, AND HUMAN NATURE: Practical Problems and Roadblocks on the Path toward Official UFO Acknowledgment

By Peter Robbins, August 2009

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Introduction

"We seek a free flow of information... we are not afraid to entrust the American people with unpleasant facts, foreign ideas, alien philosophies, and competitive values. For a nation that is afraid to let its people judge the truth and falsehood in an open market is a nation that is afraid of its people."

—President John F. Kennedy

"I have discussed this matter with the affected agencies of the government, and they are of the opinion that it is unwise to publicize the matter at this time."

—Senator Richard B. Russell, former Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee. (Russell personally sighted a UFO over Russia in 1955, an event which was classified SECRET by our government)

Curiosity seems to be an integral component of human nature, for most of us in any case. Anyone who has ever gazed up and observed something unusual traversing the sky overhead has likely wondered what it is and what its origins were, especially if its flight characteristics and appearance suggested it might be under intelligent control. This longing to understand has not been confined to modern times. Generals and foot soldiers serving under Alexander the Great almost certainly wondered the same thing as “flying shields” hung over their field of battle the night before an engagement, as did the residents of sixteenth century Nuremberg, Germany, as cylinder-shaped UFOs released innumerable spherical and disc-shaped objects into the morning sky. Uncounted people from every era and corner of the Earth have shared a similar sense of wonder, awe, fear, and curiosity, but it was not until history ushered in the modern era of UFO sightings that some began to assume – correctly as it turned out – that our governments might actually have known more about this illusive phenomenon than they chose to let on.

The passage of years has brought with it a growing number of voices both here and abroad who are calling on the American Government to declassify and disseminate classified files relating to UFOs, and that this process be undertaken in a timely manner. France, Denmark, Belgium, Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, Sweden, and Uruguay have done so with the United Kingdom currently in the process of making thousands of pages formerly classified UFO documents and information available to the public on official web sites. Even so, its fair to assume that the most highly classified information in possession of least some of these countries remains well secured. Since its inception under the Carter Administration, our

Freedom of Information Act has been an effective instrument of release for thousands of pages of official UFO documentation, but no British-style declassification initiative has ever been enacted here.

There is good cause for the frustration driving this movement. For the past sixty-two years, requests that the subject be taken seriously and accorded some measure of official, public respect have fallen on deaf ears and repeatedly been met with evasion, confabulation, silence or outright lies. Decades of dedicated study and evaluation have made many of us confident we can face this truth, whatever implications are suggested by the other-worldly presence lurking behind it. As for the readiness of our fellow citizens and the eight-plus billion others who populate this planet and may *not* be of similar mind, well, they'll just have to get used to living in a world transformed.

But what really are the implications of stepping through such a cosmic doorway, and what, if any responsibility do we owe the people and institutions who remain woefully unprepared for such an Earth-shaking transition? It's imperative that we come to appreciate the reasons for proceeding with caution and respect for the unconsidered possibilities which the wholesale release of compelling UFO information may unleash upon us, and upon those who are generally oblivious to the weighty issues involved.

I for one would like to know what our government knows about UFOs, but am deeply concerned about the impact which public airing of such data may have on 'the uninitiated,' for it will be their dreams, beliefs and hopes that stand to be most effected.

UFOs and the Politics of Politics

"I think it's time to open the books on questions that have remained in the dark; on the question of government investigations of UFOs. It's time to find out what the truth really is that's out there. We ought to do it because it's right; we ought to do it because the American people quite frankly can handle the truth; and we ought to do it because it's the law."

—John Podesta, now Presidential Advisor Podesta

"I've never met Dennis Kucinich and I don't know Governor Richardson. No, I don't think there are UFOs. No, I don't think the government... What the hell are we talking about? This has gone downhill real quick.."

—Joseph Biden, now Vice President Biden

"You know, I don't know, and I don't presume to know. What I do know is that there is life here on Earth, and that we're not attending to life here on Earth."

—Barack Obama, now President Obama

It's something of a given in American politics: being perceived as someone who takes the subject of UFOs seriously is tantamount to political suicide, doubly so if you've been reckless enough to go on record as maintaining that some UFOs may represent advanced technology under the control of other intelligences from parts unknown. An initiative aimed at making such information public would spin this given around on its head, but when it comes to this particular issue, winning the hearts and minds of the powerful, influential, and significant public figures, remains extremely challenging.

Of course there have been exceptions to this rule and they should be acknowledged as such. A small but courageous contingent of astronauts have put their careers and reputations at considerable risk by saying they are now convinced – through either informed opinion or experience – that UFOs are real. The late Steven Schiff, a progressive Democrat and Congressional Representative from New Mexico, and the late Barry Goldwater, a conservative Republican and senior Senator from Arizona, were shining examples of this contrarian position and neither ever backed down from his outspoken beliefs. President Reagan, who had a stunner of a UFO sighting when he was Governor of California, also took the subject seriously and referred to matters extraterrestrial on a number of occasions during his time as President. In 1987 he made this statement during a speech before the 42nd General Assembly of the United Nations: “In our obsession with antagonisms of the moment, we often forget how much unites all members of humanity. Perhaps we need some outside, universal threat to make us recognize this common bond. I occasionally think how quickly our differences worldwide would vanish if we were facing an alien threat from outside this world. And yet, I ask, is not an alien force already among us? What could be more alien to the universal aspirations of our peoples than war and the threat of war?”

Even with such an allegorical tagline, General Colin Powell, then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, did not find such statements uplifting or entertaining, and on such occasions was known to make less than pleased remarks about the President's “LGMs,” as in little green men. The anti-UFO secrecy position held by Presidential Adviser John Podesta is another exception to the rule, but then he is an appointed rather than an elected official and most Americans remain oblivious to his outsider opinions on the issue.

Despite similar convictions which may be held by government officials, few have had the courage to follow in Goldwater's or Schiff's steps, or even Reagan's, and with good cause. Since the summer of 1947, our media, our military and numerous other branches and offices of

our government have done a superb job of embracing – at least in public – the false notion that a serious belief in the reality of UFOs is functionally identical to delusional thinking, mental illness, or something very much akin to it. Some past Presidents and Presidential candidates have had an obvious sympathy for UFO openness, only to recant later, then retreat into silence or into the mob of naysayers. Whatever the motivating factors behind their actions or reactions, understanding the dynamics that create such back-peddling may ultimately help us to change the climate that fostered it.

Michigan Republican Gerald Ford took a courageous stand for UFO openness during his days in the House of Representatives. A spate of unexplained sightings inundated his district during the mid-sixties and a number of the witnesses were people Ford had known for years. He took their accounts seriously and acted decisively in recommending that a committee be created to investigate the phenomena: "I think we owe it to the people to establish credibility regarding UFOs and to produce the greatest possible enlightenment on this subject." Such a committee was established in 1968 only to wither and die because of a lack of any serious implementation. Ford's UFO activism vaporized once he assumed the Presidency, as did any public comments on the matter.

Jimmy Carter's UFO sighting occurred in January 1969 during his run for the Georgia governorship. He remembered it as "the darndest thing I've ever seen. It was big, it was very bright, it changed colors and it was about the size of the moon. We watched it for ten minutes, but none of us could figure out what it was. One thing's for sure, I'll never make fun of people who say they've seen unidentified flying objects in the sky." His completed MUFON sighting report is one of Ufology's most interesting artifacts. Now convinced that UFOs, whatever they might be, were real, Carter went on record during his 1976 Presidential campaign that if elected he would release then-classified UFO information – with one possible factor acting as a deterrent: "I don't see any reason to keep information like that secret, but there may be some aspects of the UFO information which I am not familiar with that might be related to some secret experiments that we were doing that involve national security or new weapons systems. I certainly wouldn't release that." "Defense implications" were indeed cited as the reason he did not make good on his pledge.

We now know that Carter wanted to transfer responsibility for UFO affairs to NASA, only to have its highly respected director threaten to resign if he did so. The Director's stated reason was that saddling the already financially overburdened space agency with responsibility for this routinely mocked subject would only result in popular as well as official ridicule that would

jeopardize much needed funding. The President considered his options – then backed down, never to raise the issue again during his time in office. In later years Mr. Carter kept his distance from the subject, possibly because he'd grown tired of being asked about his sighting and earlier outspoken views. In 2007 he was quoted as saying, "I think it is impossible in my opinion – some people disagree – to have space people from other planets or other stars to come here. I do not believe that is possible." Then again, that same year he allegedly confided to Shirley Maclane, "that basically the President or the Executive Branch is not on a 'need to know basis.'" Whatever opinions you may hold on Ms. Maclane or her views, the statement she relates is an extremely important one.

I am far from alone in having come to the conclusion that the President is not in fact on a need to know basis, and that occupants of the office from Eisenhower on have been briefed in accordance with their loyalty, pre-existing knowledge of the situation, and level of popularity among those who actually hold power over this information. And who are the individuals charged with control over such secrets? We're not actually sure anymore. In 1947 it was certainly a highly cleared core of military and intelligence personnel, aided by key scientists and a small cadre of distinguished insiders who had the trust and confidence of President Truman. But the balance of true power has shifted markedly since then, leaving us to ponder the degree of influence which leading defense contractors, multinationals and financiers exert over our government's secret keeping apparatus - another dark dividend of this country's not having heeded President Eisenhower's parting warning on the dangers posed by a military industrial complex allowed to proliferate veritably unchecked.

Governor Bill Richardson of New Mexico would like to know some of these secrets; in particular, those pertaining to what actually happened in his state in early July of 1947. In 2004 he went on record as such, but don't expect him to publicly acknowledge it now. It was that year he wrote, "It would help everyone if the U.S. government disclosed everything it knows. With full disclosure and our best scientific investigation, we should be able to find out what happened on that fateful day in July of 1947. The American people can handle the truth no matter how bizarre or mundane, and contrary to what you see in the movies."

The reason for the Governor's seeming change of heart was simple. The autumn of 2007 saw Richardson's contender for the Democratic Presidential nomination, Dennis Kucinich, outed by the late television commentator Tim Russert as having actually observed a UFO of some sort – this in the company of his wife and their friend Shirley MacLaine. For weeks to follow, Kucinich was unable to make an appearance without being questioned about the

sighting. He soon tired of defending his perceptions and began responding to such questions with some humor, as in this interview with a Michigan radio station: "I later learned after this story surfaced that 40 million Americans have seen things in the sky that they thought they couldn't identify. I also learned that President Reagan and President Carter at one time or another saw UFOs. So it may just be that seeing a UFO is a prerequisite to becoming President."

But once the pundits and talking heads grew tired of working over Kucinich, they turned on Bill Richardson. Their reason being that he was Governor of New Mexico, and attacking the credibility of the Roswell incident has remained fair game for the uninformed. Richardson is a political realist, and as a viable contender for the Democratic Presidential nomination, acted quickly to control political fallout, within days disavowing any public pretense of taking the subject seriously, but not in a mean-spirited or undiplomatic manner: "...I promote Roswell as a tourism issue, but there is no credible evidence... I've never seen one. I doubt their existence, but I admit, I'm the governor of the state and I push the tourism promotion side..." Put yourself in the Governor's place for a moment and you'll begin to appreciate why such a response was, regrettably, both rational and appropriate.

A few examples of professional politicians whose careers intersected with a subject encumbered by such a virulent ridicule factor that even a passing association with it can mark or damage a career, or leave the individual fighting for their political life. It is not out of the question we may someday find ourselves with a President who, through one channel or another, learns enough, and becomes passionate enough about the subject in the process of learning about it, that they decide to put themselves squarely on the line, then cross it, 'need to know' be damned. This is of course dependent on the possibility that such an independent, executive undertaking has ever even has the possibility of succeeding. Short of mass UFO landings, such a Presidential directive would seem to have a significant potential to help shine a light on all of those long buried telex's, cablegrams, reports, orders, memoranda and technical analyses. Anyone waiting for assistance from that small army of unnamed, appointed bureaucrats whose security clearances and positions allow them to hold sway over the temporary occupants of the highest offices in the land, may be waiting for a very long time. Had Governor Richardson been nominated and elected in 2008, then given a chance to learn the answers to some of the questions he'd asked in 2004, it might have been President Richardson who finally bucked the system.

But we live in a democracy and the ideal would be for the House and/or Senate to spearhead such an initiative. The key to this possibility is education, but that necessitates a willingness to be educated. My guess is that taking time from their busy schedules to study the evidence supporting UFO reality holds a low priority for the overwhelming majority of current office holders. Short of allowing them to view a recovered extraterrestrial craft and its cryogenically suspended crew, my vote would be to lock them all into Roswell's International UFO Museum and Research Center for a month and have them begin to work their ways through its world-class library. Regrettably the logistical and legal problems involved preclude this possibility.

Attending UFO conferences is a practical way to gain information on the subject. Again, enticing our dignitaries to register is something else. I remember the surprise I felt when I learned that Claiborne Pell, then the Senior Senator from Rhode Island, was sitting just a few aisles from me during a lecture at MUFON's 1987 Symposium. This was at American University in Washington, D.C. At the break, some of us approached him and asked why he was there. Pell responded with a smile that he was also interested in the subject – in his capacity as a private citizen, of course. Finding a ranking American senator at a UFO conference is, well, extremely rare. There was, however, a privately funded effort to place quality UFO evidence in the hands of the executive and legislative branches, and the driving force behind it was one of the wealthiest men in America.

Laurance Rockefeller's* name was first publicly linked with the subject in 1995 with the publication of a series of newspaper articles. His interest quickly accelerated into activism, the end result of which was the *Unidentified Flying Objects Briefing Document: the Best Available Evidence*. This was accomplished with the aid of two old friends who shared his passionate interest; Sandra Wright and Marie Galbraith – wife of our then-Ambassador to France and daughter-in-law of the economist John Kenneth Galbraith. They were assisted in their efforts by members of The Fund For UFO Research. The document's actual writers were the Fund's Don Berliner, Galbraith, and veteran ufologist Antonio Huneus.

In December 1995, copies of the handsomely bound 170 page report were delivered to every congressman and house member, and as I understood it, the President, Vice President, cabinet level officials and other Washington movers and shakers. But its impact was considerably less than Laurence and his colleagues had hoped for. Whatever disappointment they may have felt was compounded by the outing which he and Galbraith received on the front

page of *The New York Observer*. On April 8, 1996, the weekly published an extremely mocking article entitled "Rockefeller Greets Aliens! A Rich Guy's UFO Dream." It was accompanied by a huge cartoon of Laurence and Marie running through Washington shielding themselves from a sky filled with flying saucers and aliens. Even billionaires are subject to embarrassment and Mr. Rockefeller was no exception. Both he and Galbraith withdrew from any publicly expressed interest in the subject and returned to their private lives. *The Best Available Evidence* was later published as a mass market paperback, but in the end the results of the efforts expended by this dedicated group were next to nil. The ridicule factor has spared few who sought the public airing of UFO related information. Rich men, presidential candidates, presidents, it doesn't matter.

The declassification of compelling UFO documents would go a long way in allowing elected officials to once and for all break through the ridicule barrier and take the subject seriously in public discourse. Yet the chances for declassification and dissemination are limited at best if politicians and influential public figures remain fearful of taking an open and courageous stand. The essence of this problem was summed up by the late Dr. James E. McDonald, University of Arizona atmospheric physicist and pioneering ufologist: "The scientific community as a whole does not take the UFO problem seriously because it lacks experimental data, but it lacks experimental data because it does not take the problem seriously. It is like the youth of 20 who cannot find a job because he lacks experience and lacks experience because he cannot find a job."

But an even greater obstacle to resolving this conundrum is the often invoked term, 'National Security,' or perhaps more accurate to this discussion, national insecurity. As such, it's imperative we take this phrase and its interpretations to task.

The Question of National Security

"It is my view that this situation has possible implications for our national security which transcend the interests of a single service."

—General William Bedell Smith, Director of the CIA from 1950-53

"It is time for the truth to be brought out in open Congressional hearings. Behind the scenes high ranking Air Force officers are soberly concerned about the UFOs. But through official secrecy and ridicule, many citizens are led to believe the unknown flying objects are nonsense."

—Admiral Roscoe Hillenkotter, Director of the CIA from 1947-50

Like beauty, national security seems to exist in the eye of the beholder. What currently classified UFO related information constitutes a threat to legitimate and rational national security

concerns? The dictionary defines the word "security" in part as, "The state of being secure; freedom from danger." Will widespread knowledge of the truth about UFOs, the intelligences behind them, and the implications of both tend to increase or decrease the potential for danger to our citizenry? Opinions on this vary.

One faction maintains the status quo should be upheld and the secret keeping continue until such a time when the government decides on its own to reverse their standing policy. Another supports full and complete declassification and dissemination and nothing less. A third advocates release and publication with some specific reservations. The rest of us remain conflicted and likely a little overwhelmed by the ramifications of any of these decisions. Which national security concerns should help guide our thinking here? It appears that striking a balance between society's and the individual's right to know while simultaneously protecting the legitimate concerns of National Security is a problem of the first order.

Nuclear physicist Stanton T. Friedman remains one of the UFO field's ranking figures and is one of only a small handful of Ufologists to have actually held security clearances. In Friedman's case, during his fourteen years of work on the development of a wide variety of advanced classified nuclear and space systems for such companies as GE, GM, Westinghouse, McDonnell Douglas and Aerojet General Nucleonics. Though an advocate of releasing UFO related information, he remains opposed to doing so without reservation and maintains: "There is a real need for recognition of the security aspects and that one can't tell one's friends without telling one's enemies... Instead I believe that any such announcement should be on an international basis along with an announcement that international conferences will be held to deal with the religious, economic and political aspects of the new world situation that would occur once disclosure has been made. Planning will be required."

Friedman's co-author of *Captured: The Betty and Barney Hill UFO Experience*, Kathleen Marden, is also a proponent of limited declassification and release, and has had decades to consider the question from a particularly unique point of view. She is the niece of Betty Hill, one of the world's best-known UFO abductees, has served on the MUFON Board of Directors as their Director of Field Investigator Training, and has a background in both social work and education. Marden's training and education has left her concerned about "social unrest, depending on what's released." Her main concern is "the uncertainty regarding the sociological, religious and economic impact of full disclosure," and she does not mince her words in articulating them:

“We currently have a situation where an alien civilization can visit us at will, abduct and experiment upon us and harvest our natural resources. We are completely helpless to protect ourselves politically and militarily. My primary questions are as follows: How would we proceed after disclosure? Would we normalize relations with them, or do they feel so technologically, intellectually and emotionally superior to us that they think of us as primitives, unworthy of standing on equal ground? Would they then land at will in full public view? Would they openly abduct us? Would full disclosure lead to a chaotic society and the degradation of cultural values? Would it lead to a rise in alcoholism and drug abuse? Full disclosure does not necessarily imply the sharing of technology and it could have a disastrous impact upon our civilization.”

Ms. Marden’s concerns fall squarely within the realm of national security and the questions she poses are not new ones. Early support for caution is reflected in the conclusions of the Brookings Institution’s 1960 report, “Proposed Study on the Implications for Peaceful Space Activities for Human Affairs.” This paper, prepared at the request of NASA, supported the idea of an extraterrestrial presence and warned that actual contact might result in a certain amount of social chaos, a shaken faith in our scientific establishment, and a crisis of faith for religious fundamentalists.

The state of being secure. Freedom from danger. Is it possible for the truth about UFOs and their implications to coexist with a true state of national security? Our system of government grants us the option to set limits on openness, just as long as the public has the final say in determining whether ‘the truth shall set them free’ or ‘ignorance is bliss.’ It’s difficult to know how to resolve this contradiction.

Organized Religion and the Impact of Declassification

"We are not authorized to exclude that on another star beings do exist, even if they are completely different from us".

–*Cardinal Nicolò Cusano, philosopher and scientist, 1401-1464*

"It is absurd to claim that the worlds surrounding us are large, uninhabited deserts and that the meaning of the universe lies just in our small, inhabited planet."

–*The Jesuit Father and astronomer Fr. Angelo Secchi, 1818-1876*

"It seems to be in accordance with the aim of the world that inhabitable celestial bodies are settled by creatures that recognize the glory of God in the physical beauties of their worlds, in the same way man does with his smaller world."

–*Joseph Pohle, German theologian, 1904*

Some months back my friend Bridget and I were discussing the potential impact which official confirmation of UFO reality might have on the country's religious communities. Her take on the subject was of particular interest to me as she is an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ. Bridget followed up with an email, part of which underscored a particularly serious thought, but had me laughing just the same: "The other day Jonathan and I were watching that funny and annoyingly disturbing cartoon, "Family Guy" and Peter Griffin (do you ever watch this program?) is afraid to go to the store Bed, Bath and Beyond because even though he's okay with going into the Bed and Bath part of the store, he's afraid of going into the Beyond section! They show him entering through a door where he is immediately sucked into the world of weird equations and other oddities floating all around him. ... I wanted to use it as part of a sermon illustration but didn't want to admit that I watch "Family Guy"!"

Bridget's observation is at once wise, funny and poignant. Most people seem far more comfortable in Bed and Bath than they do in Beyond. Religion offers us the potential for protection of a higher power as well as a set of beliefs that we can hold fast to and draw comfort from when the 'Beyond,' or unknown comes calling. The dictionary defines "faith" as "unflinching trust; belief without firm proof; belief in a supreme being; a religion." None of us can say with any certainty how followers of the world's religions will take to the idea that they share the universe with other intelligent beings, or with an assortment of them for that matter, something which, in the interpretations of many, is not referred to or discussed in their holy texts. Surmounting the problems associated with this perceived lapse will be easier for people of faith to overcome if their traditions allow for some latitude in the interpretation of their religious teachings, less so for those who hold that their beliefs and holy texts are sacrosanct and not open to interpretation.

We can assume that the relevant surveys and polls taken over the past few decades which indicate a majority of Americans feel there is intelligent life in space include a good percentage of individuals who, if asked, would identify themselves as people of faith. I've taken my own informal poll of Christian and Jewish friends, and listened to the views of Muslim and Hindu ones on the subject. To a person, all were in agreement that if our government ever confirmed the reality of UFOs, and stated that some were likely extraterrestrial in origin, their faith God and in their religions would remain unshaken. While entirely unscientific in its approach, the results of my inquiry tend to refute those of the Brookings Institution's study, in relation to all but the beliefs of religious fundamentalists. Thankfully there is no need to lean on my data.

The September, 2008, issue of the MUFON UFO Journal featured the results of a survey conducted by Rev. Ted Peters and his associate Julie Froehlig. It was published under the title, "Is Extraterrestrial Intelligent Life a Threat to Religion?," and is very much worth reading. The goal of "The Peters ETI Religious Crisis Survey" was to test whether or not contact between Earth and an extraterrestrial civilization would result in a crisis (or even collapse) of belief among the religious traditions of Catholics, Protestants, Orthodox Christians, Mormons, Jews, and Buddhists. The survey found that for the most part religious persons do not fear contact." Somewhat surprisingly, a secondary finding was that a majority of non-religious respondents were the ones most concerned about such a crisis occurring.

How should theologians react to the religious implications of the 'official' discovery or acknowledgment of extraterrestrial (or other unearthly) life? What models should be considered in counseling their flocks, especially the more skittish among them?

In 1937 the Jesuit theologian Herbert Thurston wrote, "From a logical point of view, Christians that accept miracles and other episodes related on the Gospel "... cannot reject in a obstinate way the reiterated testimonies of modern and reliable witnesses that relate what their eyes have seen." There are a number of other religious arguments that can be made in favor of the extraterrestrial hypothesis, some of which are reflected in the quotations preceding this section.

The late Monsignor Corrado Balducci was a Vatican theologian and insider best known for his public pronouncements on the UFO phenomenon. He maintained that extraterrestrial contact is a real phenomenon and "not due to psychological impairment," nor did he see this belief "in conflict with the Christian religion." On October 8, 1995, he caused a major stir among ufologists, and I daresay a good number of Roman Catholics, when he appeared on Italian National Television and stated, that "Extraterrestrials do exist," and "... if 99 out of 100 {UFO reports} were false and that one was true, it's that one that says some phenomenon exist." It's worth noting that some years earlier, Stanton Friedman said, "The question is not whether all UFOs are of extraterrestrial origin, but are any? The evidence indicates some are."

It was the Monsignor's contention that after excluding such conventional anomalies as "light effects," atmospheric phenomena, clouds, ball lightning, etc., and factoring in some common sense, human rationalism and the testimony of hundreds of thousands of reliable eyewitness accounts worldwide, "it seems impossible to deny at a rational level that something real does exist!" It was also his belief there may be other inhabited planets, and noted that "In

the Bible there are not specific allusions to other living beings, but neither is it excluded {in} this hypothesis." A review of the Monsignor's arguments can be found in his paper, "Ufology and Theological Clarifications."

There is no way that a Prelate of Balducci's stature would have been allowed to express the public views he did without the expressed permission of the Vatican. Whatever the Church's innermost reasons for embarking on such a program, it represents a truly revolutionary approach to an extraordinarily complex problem: how to make the faithful aware of this presence in an officially sanctioned manner, and in the process, prepare them for at least some of the information which declassification and release would reveal. Other religious leaders who appreciate the seriousness of this situation might do well to consider applying a similar strategy tailored to the needs of their followers. I would recommend they begin by reading any of the following books: *UFO and the Bible* by M.K. Jessup, *The Bible and Flying Saucers* by Rev. Barry Downing, *The Spaceships of Ezekel* by Joseph F. Blumrich, and *The 12th Planet* by Zecharia Sitchin.

Fundamentalism and UFOs

"...no reasonable mind can assume that heavenly bodies which may be far more magnificent than ours would not bear upon them creatures similar or even superior to those upon our human Earth."

—*Giordano Bruno, Italian scientist-philosopher, arrested in 1592 and burned to death as a heretic in 1600.*

"I believe in G-O-D, not U-F-O."

—*Mike Huckabee, evangelical Christian minister, former Governor of Arkansas, and former candidate for President*

The results of The Peters ETI Religious Crisis Survey do not take into account the UFO related beliefs of religious fundamentalists, Christian or otherwise, and we should strive to understand what they are. If we fail to do so our ignorance may result in some very rough going. Reverend Bridget offered me a good starting point, "... the interesting part about the religious beliefs and the skepticism about UFO reality, is that religious fundamentalists are willing to literally believe in angels and miracles as recorded in the Bible because the Bible is their authority, but dismiss other concepts that could explain the same sort of phenomena. I also think the fascination and fear of the unknown is in many ways why religion, especially the fundamentalist, black and white brand, thrives and mainline gray area faiths are struggling."

I first became interested in the UFO-related beliefs of fundamentalists a dozen years ago, and not for the best of reasons. It followed my learning of a broadcast of the popular evangelical television show, "The 700 Club." The program aired on July 8, 1997 and featured an exchange about the then current Mars Pathfinder Mission. The discussion soon shifted to the possibility of aliens from space and UFOs. It was then that host Pat Robertson stated it was his firm belief that, even if they were real, such 'aliens' were really demons whose intention was to lead people away from Christ. His opinion allowed for no possibility that an actual space alien had ever made its way to Earth, even for a brief visit. In fact the situation was so grave, maintained Robertson, that those who actually believe that space aliens were real should be put to death by stoning.

I had never heard of anyone holding such a draconian view in all the years I'd been involved in UFO studies. Was this an isolated position or one shared by others who adhered to Mr. Robertson's religious beliefs? My UFO-related views and opinions are not faith-based and it was difficult for me to take in how someone could claim to know what I considered the unknowable. In this case, the absence of any possibility the Earth has ever been visited by intelligent beings from another planet, solar system, galaxy, dimension or time. Intolerance should always be taken seriously, and soon afterwards the journal *Freedom Writer* included a commentary about the show, saying, in part: "As the founder and chairman of the Christian Coalition – a group dedicated to becoming the most powerful political force in America – Mr. Robertson's extreme ideas need to be taken seriously, for they not only negate pluralism, but condemn to death those who dare to believe differently."

We Americans have the right to hold whatever religious beliefs we wish, including the right not to believe, just so long as our beliefs do not impinge on the rights of others. My readings on the broadcast included a pair of books on Christian fundamentalist beliefs as they pertained to the UFO phenomenon, *UFOs and Their Mission Impossible*, and the more luridly titled *UFOs: Satanic Terror*. Both underscored Mr. Robertson's basic belief – not that you should stone to death those whose UFO conclusions differed from yours, but that we were misguided souls whose secular, scientific and historic views were only leading us further from Christ's teachings and any understanding of the revealed word. In the opinion of the authors it came down to this: that as no direct references to extraterrestrials or their applied technology appear in the Old or New Testament, all anomalous UFOs are demonic in origin and among the signs and portents predicted in the Book of Revelations.

In an effort to better understand fundamentalist UFO beliefs, I put a series of questions to three people I know who were qualified to answer them. My good friend Kim, a Christian fundamentalist, and Joseph Jordan and Guy Malone, Christian fundamentalists with an established involvement in UFO studies. All were gracious and forthcoming in responding to my questions, even the most difficult of them.

Malone observed that, "Like most secular people, most Christians have not made this an independent topic of research, and therefore their opinions are largely shaped (like all) through what they see on television and movies, and their own ponderings. Adding any form of religious belief in God to the question of life on other planets, and you typically get the same response from religious adults as you do from a religious 12-year old : "Well I suppose God could have created life on other planets if he wanted to..." (add disclosure event here, and it becomes) ".. and now the government says it's true so I guess it is."

All three adhere to a literal interpretation of The New and The Old Testament, and were in agreement that, as neither holy book contained any literal, direct reference to aliens from space, the notion was excluded from their beliefs, an argument, regrettably, which the Roman Catholic Church used in the 1500s to destroy the native populations of the Americas. The "antipods," as they were called, could be nothing but Satanic because nothing in Scripture even alluded to their presence.

Kim, Joe and Guy share the view that the intelligences behind the UFO phenomenon are not from another star system or planet, but interdimensional entities, demonic in nature, pretending to be aliens. A fallen angel is able to manifest itself in physical form. Satanic craft are able to make it appear they originate from somewhere out it space. Jordan added that the demon hypothesis was rooted in the belief that 'they' were preaching a new, and by extension, blasphemous gospel which included a message given to some abductees and contactees that 'they' were the true creators of our religions. This is seen as a key deception that can only be attributed to Satan.

As to how Christian fundamentalists as a whole may respond to any official pronouncement that UFOs and aliens were real - and that at least some of are extraterrestrial in nature, Malone felt, "...they would react to a government disclosure announcement with disbelief, and possibly conclude that said government is either in collusion with the fallen angels, or deceived by them.."

Strong words. The possibility of citizens convinced the government is in collusion with or deceived by fallen angels. What if the government does implement a declassification process which supports an extraterrestrial explanation? Might not some of the more extremist fundamentalists conclude that elements within the government were now, bluntly put, in league with Satan? And if so, might not acts of domestic terrorism be an appropriate response? I respectfully noted that the self-professed Christian Timothy McVeigh's justification for bombing the federal offices housed in the Murrah Building in Oklahoma City was to strike back at the government for its botched mishandling of the Branch Davidian standoff in Waco, Texas, a year to the day prior. McVeigh's unconscionable act resulted in the deaths of 168 men, women and children and the complete destruction of the building and remained the greatest single act of domestic terrorism until September 11, 2001. All of my respondents sadly agreed such a possibility would not be out of the question, but that such an action would only be undertaken by a true extremist, an acknowledged reality in all religions. They also agreed that no true believer – meaning someone who has established a personal relationship with Jesus and maintained a 'heart belief' as opposed to a 'mind belief' in his or her Christianity – would ever take part in such a heinous act, but instead would do everything within their power to preclude it.

Jordan summed up, that as an Evangelical Christian who at one time had been an agnostic, and been involved in metaphysical studies, he supports the release of *all* pertinent, classified UFO information. He feels this would result in an honest discussion between the citizenry and the government, cause Christians to finally wake up, and act as a call for everyone to make a choice: between an extraterrestrial or other hypothesis, and the UFO beliefs held by Christian fundamentalists.

The UFO beliefs of other faiths religious extremists vary, but I do have a particular concern about the rise to power of the reactionary Taliban, as intolerant and vindictive a fundamentalist religious sect as the world has seen. We do not know what their reaction to an official endorsement of an extraterrestrial reality might be, but I'm convinced it will be seen as a heresy and in some manner interpreted as in direct violation of their interpretation of The Koran. Such a threat to the fundamentalist Muslim way of life will only be compounded if it originates with 'The Great Satan,' that is, America. Lets remember that other perceived insults to the faith ranging from infidel troops on the ground in Saudi Arabia to disrespectful political cartoons published in a Danish newspaper, have resulted in the destruction of property, the deaths of many people, and out-and-out Jihad.

Thinking Out Loud

“In the very middle of the Near East crisis, UN Secretary General Thant took time to do a very significant thing. He arranged to have one of the top advocates of the theory that flying saucers – UFOs – are from another planet, speak before the Outer Space Affairs Committee of the UN. Interesting fact is that U Thant has confided to friends that he considers UFOs the most important problem facing the UN.”

–Nationally syndicated newspaper columnists Drew Pearson & Jack Anderson, 1967

“... those in government who have knowledge showing UFOs are identifiable feel the subject cannot be discussed by those in the know without serious repercussions. Others are afraid their friends and co-workers will think they are crazy if they even so much as insinuate that UFOs are identifiable as manned craft from outside the Earth. This particularly applies to newspaper editors and publishers, reporters and analysts.”

–Sarah McClendon, career journalist and former White House correspondent

“I sincerely hope you are successful in preventing a reopening of UFO investigations.”

–USAF Colonel Charles H. Senn, Chief Community Relations Division Office of Information, from a September 1, 1977 letter to NASA

Just how should our government go about initiating the process we contemplate here? I share the conviction that any such announcement and initiative be made on an international basis supported by careful and thoughtful planning. In no way, however, does this preclude initiating the process of declassifying thousands of lower and mid level UFO-related documents and posting them to a Department of Defense website as they become available, much in the manner currently being undertaken by Her Majesty’s Department of Defence. Time and attention should be spent studying the impact which online posting has on the public consciousness and taken into consideration as planning continues.

Should our government choose to proceed beyond such a basic plan, what follow are a series of steps they might wish to consider. This of course precluding the possibilities that: such an undertaking is even possible, that such actions are not already under consideration, or that they, or ones similar have already been implemented. The reasons I feel we should *not* expect to see any such initiatives undertaken at present are purely political in nature.

If you are old enough to have been involved in UFO studies during the Watergate era, you may recall a brief but pervasive rumor that swept through ufology at the time. It came and went as the revelations of Republican Party corruption mounted and consensus within the then-ongoing Senate hearings was tipping more and more toward the possibility of Presidential impeachment. The repeated buzz was that Nixon was seriously considering declassifying and

releasing UFO related files in a last ditch effort to redirect public attention from his own spiraling journey down the political drain. Of course this never happened, but it actually would not have been a bad strategy for the increasingly desperate president to take in turning our collective focus toward a far greater issue, and one that just might have resulted in a temporary standing down from Watergate for the sake of stability during a national, and by extension, international crisis.

Support him or revile him, our current president is now responsible for a national economy in full scale crisis, a hot war and a very warm war, an aging infrastructure in grave need of attention, and a nation overdue for revised energy and environmental policies, these for starters. How would news that the president has become interested in UFOs and aliens be greeted? Even in the best of times, its difficult to say, but my personal thoughts are that any interest he might publically exhibit – no matter how seemingly inconsequential – will inevitably be seen by many as a desperate attempt to turn the nation’s eyes from the all-too-Earthy problems and challenges he faces. This could result in an all-out assault and absolute field day for his opponents – and many of his supporters – uniting as nothing else could under a banner of every single flying saucer and little green men insult, slur, aside and putdown. Even so, none of these considerations needs stand in the way of Mr. Obama’s discretely learning more about the subject now. It also seems to me that a web-based airing of at least some currently classified UFO documents could be undertaken and accomplished without directly involving the President, an important plus in helping to deflect or bypass the ridicule, at least initially, which would likely result.

Qualified members of the President’s staff might then begin to quietly select, vet and assemble trusted personnel to form the core of a highly classified working group charged with beginning to draft a workable plan with any eye on implementation when the political and financial climates stabilize to some degree. Through secured channels, representatives of the working group could then begin to make contact with some of the officials who were involved in declassifying and posting UFO information in their own countries in order to take advantage of their experience and lessons they may have learned in the process of doing so. A liaison between the working group and appropriate personnel within Her Majesty’s Ministry of Defence would be of particular value, given the long and close relationship existing between our governments. Subject to the approval of the president, our ambassador to the United Nations should also receive a limited briefing on this undertaking in preparation for a time when he or she may be called upon to network with their colleagues in the international community. And if

they have not already begun to do so, the United States should encourage other world leaders to initiate the establishment of similar working groups within their own governments. An individual of the president's choosing should then be appointed chairperson. They in turn should begin to seek out those best qualified to become members of a larger international committee, one charged with creating a workable worldwide strategy appropriate to such a far-reaching undertaking.

One of the working group's first jobs should be to vet, or to re-vet, the relatively small group of bureaucrats cleared to review and declassify the veritable warehouse of waiting documents. I say 're-vet' in that there may be personnel among those charged with this exclusive responsibility who might base their decisions to declassify or not on reasons of conscience or religious opposition, much as a pharmacist might refuse to sell birth control to someone they deemed inappropriate on moral or religious grounds. But *all* candidates under consideration for the national working group and committee into which it will evolve will need to be screened and cleared to ensure they have both the emotional stability and intellectual capacity to deal with the increasingly stressful realizations they will face during the course of their work. To reiterate: whether religious or agnostic, technically-minded or artistic in background, all possible should be done to ensure that the men and women involved are open-minded, well-rounded and be able to 'take it' when it comes to educating themselves to some of the more disturbing aspects of 'other intelligences studies,' and the possibilities which their presences imply. In the words of Karl Abraham, former science writer for The Philadelphia Enquirer, "If the enquiring scientist can't stand the heat, he should get out of the kitchen."

Who should be considered for membership in such a committee? Without question, leading members of our scientific community and qualified individuals in such diverse fields the military, intelligence, economics, physics, anthropology, law, communications, crisis intervention, medicine, mental health, defense industry, journalism, publishing, print and broadcast media, education, diplomacy, political science, theology, philosophy, sociology, social work and the film industry, along with representative members of the House and Senate. For good measure I would include balanced representation from the president's board of religious advisors, a political scientist, cultural, folk, and military historians, a child behaviorist, several respected writers and artists, an astronaut or two, and, yes, a select number of ufologists. Frankly, I would rather be subjected to enhanced interrogation techniques than cite my preferred choices here, but they should certainly include experienced, leading figures in their specialty areas of study. It would be their job initially to help establish a 'curriculum' that the others could follow in

commencing their ufological education. Once this was established and underway, these ufologists would remain available to advise and consent with the diverse mix of committee members.

Needless to say, committee members would have to be sworn to the strictest confidence, at least during the initial phases of their work, both to allow for the freest flow of information between them, and to better assure that participants were confident that their involvement would not become the subject of irresponsible media leaks. I cannot prove this, but I strongly suspect that back in the forties, key members of the Truman Administration were called upon to brief a select number of America's most powerful publishers and broadcast magnates on the seriousness of the UFO problem and, citing national security concerns with an additional appeal to their patriotism, were able to enroll such business leaders in helping to keep the secret through a program of stilted reportage. Likely professional peer pressure played more of a part in this than direct orders from any editor, publisher or reporter, but however this pattern was set in motion, it was extremely effective and thrives to this day. It's worth noting, however, that the great majority of local newspapers around the nation remained – and continue to remain – immune to this trend, but then their honest and sometimes laudatory coverage has rarely been featured in the nationals. At some point in the committee's work, this process should be repeated, but in reverse, allowing for an appropriate shift in UFO news coverage and reporting that encourages editors, publishers and network executives to give their reporters and producers the consent and encouragement they will need to retool their historic treatment of this subject. It would be ideal for this to coincide with limited, online declassification of UFO documents on a dedicated DoD website.

By this stage, governments are hopefully falling into line behind each other and progressing along the same general course. Meetings and conferences would now be regularly scheduled in more and more countries, each attended by representatives of their and other country's committees, all doing their best to share new developments on their growing findings and learning all they are able from their growing pool of knowledge. Some of the actions contemplated or generated at such gatherings may lean toward the incalculable. A subject that is sure to arise is, should governments begin to institute guidelines for the training of a new breed of diplomat? Should the members of such a new diplomatic corps lean toward representing their own governments or only work in concert?

Many will disagree, but I question the potential effectiveness of such a diplomatic undertaking. The documented behavior of many of these intelligences indicates, to some of us at least, that not only can they read our minds, but that they have the power to cloud them, creating scenarios in which we perceive something to be other than what it actually is. Certainly history may prove me wrong, but I think such an effort will turn out to be more symbolic than practical. On a decidedly human note, would such go-betweens—especially those representing the more powerful and influential governments—attempt to cut separate deals calculated to (hopefully) secure better terms or treatment for their citizenry? Then again, perhaps just for their elite, say anyone with the right connections or earning in excess of, oh, twenty million dollars a year? The possibilities spiral beyond imagination.

Shared knowledge and careful study may result in our confirming that some of the ‘thems’ are generally passive and more intent on observing our species than interacting with it. There may be others who seem benevolent and demonstrate the potential of becoming allies against more predatory species. Then again, deception seems to underscore so much of the behavior I’ve learned to attribute to these other intelligences, why should we take even our own best conclusions at face value? It may also emerge that others are more aggressive in nature and that we would be wise to consider new means of defense and defense strategies – if this is even a possibility. At some point, even if just for some fictional perspective, representatives may want to call for a screening of the classic *Twilight Zone* episode, “To Serve Man,” with its wonderful ‘cookbook’ ending. And so these international dialogues will continue to develop and refine themselves.

Overall, the public airing of some of the information culled from such ongoing activities may prove to yield a social and political climate increasingly free of the ridicule factor, one that would allow for a heretofore unknown exchange of honest and genuine UFO related concerns and considerations at every level of society. A secondary, but crucially important result would be that for the first time, elected officials, scientists and other public figures would finally feel safe enough to openly go on record with their opinions, beliefs, suggestions and even fears on the matter. As each new finding, fact and opinion are assimilated by an increasingly aware public, the next wave of releases may be a bit easier to grasp, accept and incorporate into our newly evolving understanding of ourselves, and of our place in the greater scheme of things. I’d like to think an additional byproduct of this process will be a kind of de-facto reconciliation with our government over their historic compulsion to coverup and hoard the unnerving information they’ve been collecting and classifying for decades.

A final benefit, or danger, depending on your point of view, is that many of us may actually begin to think of ourselves as human beings first, and as Americans, Christians, Jews, Hindus, black, white or brown second. While warm and New-Agey in concept, such a reapportionment of humanity's priorities may bring with it a very real potential for conflict between those who grow to embrace this view, and those who do not. Member of the 'humans first' contingent will be more difficult for government and organized religion to control or manipulate, and drive many who already fear government intervention, the evils of FEMA, creeping socialism and the eroding of what they consider their God-given rights to begin to behave in increasingly reactionary ways. The knowledge we acquire may bring with it a whole new set of fears of the unknown to replace our preexisting ones, no matter how farsighted and thoughtful the planning we institute proves to be.

With so much uncertainty playing across the horizon, my thoughts return to President Reagan's carefully crafted statement, "In our obsession with antagonisms of the moment, we often forget how much unites all members of humanity. Perhaps we need some outside, universal threat to make us recognize this common bond. I occasionally think how quickly our differences worldwide would vanish if we were facing an alien threat from outside this world." Will the 'threat' he referred to turn out to be another fear of the unknown, or a viable, definable, real world *threat*, like getting hit in the head by some cosmic baseball bat? Will declassification and the revelations it is sure to bring with it assist us in addressing the threat he refers to, or will it make us more vulnerable to it? Some believe they have the answer to this question but I am not one of them. The only thing I know for sure is that if the government of the United States and that of its sister governments, acting on behalf of a representative number of "we the people," resolve to open this Pandora's box, we had better be prepared to take full responsibility for whatever follows in its wake. For once opened, the concept of 'limited' declassification and publication may prove as difficult to control as spilled mercury.

I have a quotation posted over my desk that's been with me for years. It's from Mark Twain, one of my favorite writers, and it says: "The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning." Let us hope that if and when it comes to reaching a final decision about this, our president—or whoever proves to be responsible for such a decision—will weigh all of the options fully and thoughtfully, surround him or herself with the very best people possible, and implement the right plan, and not the almost right plan. It may prove to be the most far-reaching decision any president, or anyone else for that matter, will ever make.

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ENDNOTES

♦ *Personal Note:* Laurance (correct spelling, he was named after his mother, Laura) Rockefeller spent much of his adult life as a philanthropist, donating hundreds of millions of dollars to the establishment and upkeep of wildlife sanctuaries, national parks, wetlands and other environmental causes. In the early nineteen eighties, he became interested in the work of a small but dedicated non-profit repertory theater company, which I house managed. For the next five or six years Rockefeller quietly underwrote the production of about a dozen of the Off Broadway plays we produced, and in the process helped to keep dozens of our actors, technical and support personnel employed, something for which I will always be grateful to him. During that period, I saw him several times a season during which we'd usually find a few minutes to chat, mostly about the current production.

Some years later, in late 1994 or early 1995 as best I remember, I received a call from someone particularly close to Rockefeller who also happened to be a good friend of mine. After securing my absolute discretion in the matter, they told me that over the preceding months Laurance had quite simply become obsessed with the subject of UFOs and the government's seeming cover-up of information relating to them. This was informing more and more of their conversations and the friend had grown concerned that if this preoccupation continued to grow, Laurance might begin to seek information or advice from people who would either take advantage of his position and standing, or supply him with specious data. Could I put together a reading list of what I felt were the best UFO books available and assemble a collection of declassified documents and reports which would serve as a proper introduction to the subject? The friend would be glad to pay my copying costs. I agreed of course and set to work.

A week or so later I informed them that the material was ready, along with a cover letter noting my willingness to meet or speak with the recipient and do my best to answer any questions the papers might generate. The friend asked me to deliver the material at a specified date and time. True to form Mr. Rockefeller maintained an office on the top floor of 30 Rockefeller Plaza and a security officer at the information desk directed me to a special elevator. Once it reached the top floor, the door opened directly into an exterior office where another security officer stood waiting for me. "Mr. Robbins?" he asked, eyeing the parcel I held. "Yes," I answered. "I'll take that," he responded. I handed it to him, he thanked me, and that was that.

I received a final call from the friend soon after, thanking me on behalf of Laurance and saying he appreciated the material and the time I'd taken to organize and copy it. Not long after this Rockefeller began to establish his own contacts within the UFO research community, becoming friends with Budd Hopkins and John Mack, among others, and going on to spearhead the funding, publication and distribution of *The Unidentified Flying Objects Briefing Document*.