

# The Earth is a Dangerous Place -- The World View of the Aetherius Society

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## 1) Introduction

Current UFO accounts display many of the themes that have been central in most, if not all, of the world's religions (Saliba 1995). The widespread belief in flying saucers and the religious connotations ascribed to their presence have contributed to the emergence of several religious organizations based on the existence and activities of extraterrestrial intelligences who are believed to communicate with select human beings. Moreover, many UFO experiences have been frightening and foreboding. Reports of abductions (cf. Jacobs 1993; Mack 1994) are noted also for stressing the dangers that aliens present to a scientifically inferior human race and for the imminent apocalyptic scenario they so often graphically depict (Whitmore 1993). The drastic demise of the members of Heaven's Gate has lent support to the popular view that UFO religions are dangerous apocalyptic cults and may lead their members to commit suicide or other forms of violence.

It is doubtful, however, whether the depiction of all UFO religions as dangerous groups can be corroborated by the currently available data. Of the UFO organizations listed by Melton (1996) in his encyclopedia, the majority are quite harmless and not prone to violence. While many look forward to an age when human life will be improved through contact with aliens, only a few maintain that the end of the world is imminent, or that the advent of the flying saucers is about to happen, or that the aliens are nefarious and dangerous entities intent of destroying humankind. This paper<sup>1</sup> examines a contemporary flying saucer religion, namely, the Aetherius Society, and attempts to show, by an examination of its world view, that it does not fit into the foreboding scenario found especially in the popular media.<sup>2</sup> It will concentrate on providing ethnographic materials on an UFO group which, though often referred to, has never been described or studied in any depth in scholarly literature. Bearing in mind the recent debates in anthropological literature (Barnard 1996; Headland, Pike, and Harris 1990), it will take an emic, rather than an etic viewpoint and aim at depicting the Society's world view from the "inside out" rather than from the "outside in." It will reproduce, and reach conclusions from, data provided by the Aetherius Society itself. Such an approach is justified both from practical and theoretical point of views. From a practical viewpoint, there is so little

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1 I am indebted to Mr. David Capraro of the Michigan Branch of the Aetherius Society for his invaluable comments on the first draft of this paper.

2 See, for example Heard and Klebnikov (1998) where 29 groups, including some UFO cults, who believe that the apocalypse will arrive in the year 2000, are mentioned.

scholarly information on the Society that one has no choice but to rely on its publications and on the researcher's interactions with its members. From a theoretical viewpoint, it can be argued that, in order to conclude whether a UFO group proposes an impending apocalyptic doom and can be judged to be dangerous, one has to understand the role UFOs play in the world view of believers themselves.

## 2) The Aetherius Society and its Founder

The Aetherius Society, one of the most well-known flying-saucer religions,<sup>3</sup> was founded in the mid-1950s by the late George King (1919-1997) who claimed to have received continual communications, through physical contact, trance, and telepathy, from various extraterrestrial beings who stem mainly from different planets in our solar system. His eminence Dr. George King, as the members of the Society usually address him, has been lavished with innumerable titles, academic degrees, and honors.<sup>4</sup> He is credited with countless skills, accomplishments, and missions (*Cosmic Voice*, vol. 16, May 1977: 1-8). He is regarded as a charismatic leader by the society's members and is referred to in its literature as an author, inventor, metaphysician, occultist, prophet, psychic, spiritual healer, spiritual leader, teacher, yogi, and Aquarian master. The following dedication in tribute to George King at his death sums up the high esteem in which the Society's members hold him (*Cosmic Voice* 1997):

To his eminence Sir George King, Beloved Master and Cosmic Avatar whose long life of selfless Service and sacrifice is the example to all who would dedicate their lives to God through practical Spiritual Action, and thus bring a New Age of Peace and Enlightenment to the Earth for the benefit of their fellow man [sic].

Roy Wallis (1974) describes King in classical Weberian terms, namely as a mystagogue who "offers a largely magical means of salvation." The reason for this is probably because King created and directed a number of spiritual and occult techniques and invented artifacts which seem to have magical power. An example of this is a "radionic pendulum," designed by King and intended to tap the forces of human intuition and to be used for character analysis and psychic experimentation. Moreover, the word "magic" is sometimes used by the Society to refer to a supernatural, mystical, or extraterrestrial activity (King 1979; 1982).

Members of the society, however, tend to see King's inventions as scientific, and not just magical. Further, they describe salvation in terms of the laws of karma and understand and stress King's role also as that of a teacher who conveys messages and instructions from extraterrestrial beings with

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3 Members of the Aetherius Society prefer the designation "flying saucers," rather than "UFOs" (Unidentified Flying Objects). For them, these extraterrestrial objects have been clearly identified and their occupants have been in contact with the human race through George King for several decades. One should note, however, that in a recent publication (King 1996), references to "UFOs" occur freely.

4 Aetherius Society literature divides these into (1) titles and honors awarded by cosmic sources; (2) positions held in cosmic mission; (3) hereditary titles and nobility; (4) ambassadorial titles and honors; (5) doctorates; (6) awards; and (7) certificates of merit awarded by the Aetherius Society. Cf. *Aetherius Society Newsletter*, vol. 18 (January/February 1989): 4-6; and *Cosmic Voice*, vol. 1 (December 1980): 9-10. For more recent "terrestrial" and "cosmic" awards given to King see *Cosmic Voice*, vol. 17 (January/ February 1996). Many of the certificates of these awards are displayed in the Society's temple in Los Angeles.

whom he collaborates in various projects. He is not only a miracle worker or a dispenser of magical rites. In some ways he can be seen as a prophetic figure in the original meaning of the term, namely, a person who conveys messages and instructions from supernatural or supranormal beings. His meetings with extraterrestrials have been described as "divine" encounters (King 1996: 31).

The Society's literature contains a dramatic description of how King received his commission and his initial reaction to it; a description which tends to support the view that his leadership is also prophetic. The meetings between King and extraterrestrials began in May 1954 when, one day, he heard a voice tell him: "Prepare yourself. You are to become the voice of Interplanetary Parliament." King, who had not previously read any book on flying saucers, experienced both loneliness and frustration. He retreated in meditation and contemplation. Eight days later he was visited by a man dressed in white robes whom he recognized as "a modern leader of spiritual thought in India." Apparently aware that King was having doubts about his ability to carry out the mission assigned to him, the visitor told him: "It is not for you to judge whether you are worthy to be chosen, my son." The visitor then gave King instructions regarding certain yogic practices and departed through the closed doors.<sup>5</sup>

The mission entrusted to King has not been without its dangers. It brought him hardships and suffering. When he began publicizing the transmissions from extraterrestrials he faced prejudice, opposition, and sometimes ridicule from all sides. Even his friends drew his attention to the dangers of going into trance before a general audience (Aetherius Society n.d., 3). It is not surprising that one finds that King's accomplishments and dedication have been approved of and complemented by those extraterrestrial whose messages he channels (*Cosmic Voice*, issue 20, June/July 1959: 21; and issue 21, December/January 1959-60: 5-6).

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5 For a full account of how King received his mission see Aetherius Society n.d.: 1-3; Abrahamson, 1961; and *Cosmic Voice*, vol. 1 (1956): 47-50.

### 3) Organization

The Aetherius Society, which gets its name from the pseudonym of a being from Planet Venus who first contacted George King, is probably the most well-organized Flying-saucer religion. In the words of Ellwood and Parker (1988:126), "it has by far the tightest organization, and the most explicitly religious structure." It has been officially incorporated in several countries as a charitable, educational, and/or religious organization.<sup>6</sup> It is run by a board of international directors<sup>7</sup> who have handled the daily affairs of the Society for some time. Its work is closely linked to the directives of the Cosmic Masters who are believed to use the Society as an essential tool for the purpose of achieving universal peace and world enlightenment (*Aetherius Society Newsletter*, vol. 3, February 1964: 2). Its members participate in this noble task and become "builders of the New Age" (*Aetherius Society Newsletter*, vol. 3, March 1964: 2). The aims of the Aetherius Society are outlined in detail as follows:<sup>8</sup>

- (1) to spread the teachings of the Master Aetherius, Jesus, and other Cosmic Masters;
- (2) to administer spiritual healing;
- (3) to prepare the way for the coming of the next Master;
- (4) to organize the Society so as to create favorable conditions for closer contact and ultimately meetings with people from other planets;
- (5) to tune in and irradiate the Power transmitted during a Holy Time or Spiritual Push, in order to balance all spiritual practices, irrespective of one's beliefs;
- (6) to form a brotherhood based on the teachings and knowledge of the Cosmic Masters;
- (7) to spread the spiritual operation known as Operation Starlight throughout the world, as directed by the Space People.

There are two headquarters, one for North America, located in Los Angeles, and one for Europe, located in London. Branches, groups, and representatives can be found on several continents, including North America (U.S.A. and Canada), Europe (England), Africa (Nigeria and Ghana), and Australia.<sup>9</sup> Its membership, though not very large, is thus varied.<sup>10</sup> In it, however, is the United

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6 In the United States, for instance, the Aetherius Society received its exemption from federal taxes on October 30, 1963; cf. the *Aetherius Society Newsletter* 2 (November 20 and December 21, 1963): 4. In the United Kingdom the Society is not registered as a charity, though it has two churches recognized as such.

7 For the Constitutions of the Society see, for example, *Cosmic Voice*, issue 23 (1960): 27-29. For an update in the bylaws, cf. *Cosmic Voice*, vol. 12 (December 1973): 3-6. There is also a team of so-called "engineers" who oversee the Society's missions and a Synod which regulates its religious practices and devotions (*Aetherius Society Newsletter*, vol. 5 (September 1996): 2).

8 See *Cosmic Voice*, issue 16 (June/July 1958): 31. The *Temple Degrees Study Courses* (Aetherius Society 1992: 7) adds five more aims, three of which deal with the Missions of the Society, one with the observance of special holidays, and one with the construction of Power Temples with equipment to manipulate spiritual energies.

9 The distinction between branches, groups, and representatives is largely a matter of size. In the most recent listing provided by the Society, there are seven branches, twenty-eight groups, and twelve local representatives. Cf. the Society's Web page at <http://www.aetherius.org/centers.htm>; [date modified: 12/30/98; date downloaded: 1/8/99].

10 There are no accurate statistics of the size of its membership. J. Gordon Melton (1996: 676) writes that its membership is not reported, "but, in 1987, the *Cosmic Voice* newsletter reported a circulation of 650 copies." Barrett (1996: 203) estimates that there are several thousand members worldwide.

States, members are more likely to be adult, middle-class, and white. Its overall membership multi-racial and multicultural. Men and women share leadership roles in the Society both in its administrative and ritual functions. There is, unfortunately, little sociological data on the Society's members. The main reason for this is that the Society does not release membership statistics and is not amenable to scholarly efforts to conduct surveys and reviews.<sup>11</sup> Some internal hierarchy exists. There are bishops and directors of local branches. Members can progress through four degrees of initiation<sup>12</sup> and obtain Merit awards.<sup>13</sup> The Society does not accept members under 18 years old, unless they have their parents' permission

The Society publishes King's books and taped lectures, a journal, *The Cosmic Voice*, which has been in print since 1956, and *The Aetherius Society Newsletter*. These publications cover many topics, including transmissions from cosmic masters, items of information and news from the Society's headquarters and various branches, reports on the activities of members, and columns on the Cosmic Teachings.

The Aetherius Society harbors and encourages good relationships with other religions from which it incorporates several religious themes and spiritual goals. Unlike some of the new religious organizations, the Society does not proselytize. It is not a "converting' organization" (King 1996: 53). Its members have never embarked on an evangelization campaign and, consequently, the Society does not fit into the popular image of a new religion that indulges in heavy-handed recruiting tactics. It rarely criticizes other belief systems. Nor does it hold itself to be the only organization doing good for the human race.

Its members, however, believe that the Society has a function that is not being fulfilled by the other faiths. In one transmission from one extraterrestrial named Mars Sector 6, King maintains that it was revealed that "the orthodox religions have been given every opportunity to make known the great Truths. They have failed because they have chosen to exercise petty free will. Now the great Truths are being released to Terra through metaphysical means..." (*Cosmic Voice*, issue 24, April/May 1961: 23; cf. King 1975: 49-50). Similarly, King is not the only possible channel for extraterrestrials. Yet, at the present time, extraterrestrial beings, particularly Mars Sector 6 and Master Aetherius, are communicating their messages only through King.<sup>14</sup> More recently, Richard Lawrence (1997), reflecting on the future of the Society after King's death, writes: "Over and over again, the plans and teachings of great Avatars have not gone ahead correctly after their lifetime. Ours is greater than any previous spiritual legacy, but it will work only if we make it work."

Sometimes, the traditional faiths are criticized. Thus, for example, in a transmission from the Master Aetherius, it is said that the teachings of Jesus were "cut to ribbons" by the Elders of

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11 Several years ago the author of this paper had planned to carry out such a survey of the Detroit branch, but his request was turned down by the Board of Directors in Los Angeles because it was judged to be too personal.

12 These degrees are reflected in the color of the robes worn during the services. See, for instance, *Aetherius Society Newsletter*, vol. 5 (August/September 1966): 1-2; and vol. 7 (August 1968): 3-5.

13 For descriptions of these merits and awards cf. *Aetherius Society Newsletter* 9 (April/May 1970): 7-11, and *Cosmic Voice*, vol. 19 (December 1980): 9-11.

14 See, for example, *Aetherius Society Newsletter*, vol. 3 (January 1964): 2; and vol. 3 (April 1964): 7-8, where it is made clear that these extraterrestrial beings are using only George King as a channel for their messages; cf. also Abrahamson 1961. For other channelers who claim they are presently receiving messages from extraterrestrials, see Kinney 1996.

Constantinople in 550 A.D., though they have survived and become widespread throughout the world (*Cosmic Voice*, vol. 1:15). Moreover, the work of the Society is given a preeminent role in comparison to that of other religions. It is believed, for instance, that the results of the performance of two of the Aetherius Society's major missions was 945 times more valuable than the combined activities of Buddhism and Christianity (*Aetherius Society Newsletter*, vol. 19, March 1980: 3; Aetherius Society 1992: 14).

#### 4) Major Beliefs<sup>15</sup>

The beliefs of the Aetherius Society are rather complex. As an organization that promotes occult wisdom, it incorporates ideas from various religious traditions. Reference to God is common in its prayers (King 1966), though the planetary beings appear to occupy the central stage in the members' spiritual lives. Its main beliefs are listed as follows:<sup>16</sup>

- Service to mankind is the most essential yoga or religion in these days.
- Jesus, Buddha, Krishna and other religious leaders were of extraterrestrial origin and came to Earth to help mankind.
- The essential teachings of all major religions are similar in nature and that all religious people should cooperate with each other.
- Karma and reincarnation are two natural, all pervasive laws of God. There is advanced, intelligent life on other planets.
- Some UFOs are intelligently controlled extraterrestrial spacecraft visiting this Earth. Unlike many UFO groups we believe that extraterrestrials are friendly and are here to help mankind in our development.
- Man, as with all life, is a divine spark of the Creator, our God, and that Earth is a classroom on the evolutionary ladder of life back to the source from which we all came.
- *The Mother Earth* is a living breathing entity which is thousands of lives more evolved than we are.
- Yoga and meditation are considered to be very important (cf. King 1955). George King is also said to be a Master of Yoga, a well-advanced stage that he achieved at an early age and later enhanced by practices given by a Master who resides on Earth. Meditation or Samadhi is, according to the Society, the experiential state of Adeptship "when the soul is bathed in the Light of pure Spirit and one becomes a knower of truth." Mantras are also frequently repeated during services.

Some of the major beliefs and goals of the Society are summarized in "nine freedoms," which express its goals as well as the stages of spiritual development open to all human beings (King 1963). These freedoms consist of (1) bravery; (2) love; (3) service; (4) enlightenment; (5) cosmic consciousness; (6) ascension (i.e., freedom from rebirth); (7) inter-planetary existence; (8) Saturnian

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15 For an extensive Web site which outlines the major beliefs and practices of the Aetherius Society, see <http://www.aetherius.org/>.

16 See the Aetherius Society Web Page <http://www.aetherius.org/faq.htm> p.3; [date modified: 10/24/97; date downloaded: 07/27/98.]

existence; and (9) solar existence.

One of these freedoms, namely, spiritual service, is a recurrent theme that runs through all the teachings of the Aetherius Society (cf. Lawrence n.d.: 5-7). The greatest Yoga and the greatest religion is service to humankind. It will lead to enlightenment and raise the power of kundalini within the individual (King 1963: 50-51). Many of the operations and missions upon which the Society has embarked should be understood primarily as intended acts of service to the human race which has at times placed itself on the edge of destruction.

## 5) Interplanetary Beings

One of the Aetherius Society's main beliefs is the existence of a kind of pantheon of beings, referred to as Interplanetary Intelligences, who form a spiritual hierarchy concerned with the welfare of planet Earth. These beings, unlike the aliens of abduction accounts,<sup>17</sup> are for the most part benign, compassionate, peace-loving, and dedicated to the service of others and, scientifically and spiritually, millions of years ahead of the human race here on Earth. They live in a paradisaical state and place, where old age, disease, natural disasters, and wars do not exist. In the Society's literature there is mention of four Interplanetary Beings (Shri Krishna, the Lord Buddha, the Master Jesus, and Lao Tsu) who descended to Earth as teachers. The Great White Brotherhood, made up of Masters from all races, is, according to the Society, the spiritual hierarchy on Earth and is made up of Adepts, Masters, and Ascended Masters whose chief function is to preserve and develop spirituality upon Earth.

Among those from whom George King allegedly receives messages are Master Aetherius, Master Jesus, and Mars Sectors 6 and 8. These messages contain detailed descriptions of several "Cosmic Intelligences," of their planetary habitats, and of the major types of space craft they use. Master Aetherius, for example, was, like Jesus, born on Venus and has a physical body which is not only adapted to the conditions of the planet but can also adapt to those on Saturn. As a representative of the Interplanetary Governmental System he is commissioned to help human beings realize that they are drifting away from ancient Wisdom (*Cosmic Voice*, issue 14, February/May, 1958: 18).

Martians are described as having brown skin without any blemish or wrinkle. They are of moderate height with wide shoulders and long dark hair. Their faces are hairless and they look younger than they really are. They move with controlled grace and have great physical strength and mental alertness (King 1961: 44ff.; 1963: 120ff.; cf., *Cosmic Voice*, issue 19, March/April, 1959: 4ff.). Beings from the various planets wear seamless one-piece garments to protect themselves from bacteria. On their planets they have neither a monetary system nor a political organization (King 1964a: 9-12). Large "Mother ships," "Scout Patrol Vessels," and "Special-purpose Vessels" are among those accounted for in the Aetherius Society's literature (King 1964a: 4-8). The reason why these beings cannot land openly is because of the negative karmic effects caused by human beings through their neglect of both God's laws and the Teachings of the Masters.

Many details about life on the various planets can be found in the transcribed communications to

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17 For an interpretation of alien abductions by a member of the Aetherius Society, see Keneipp 1996.

King. The canals of Mars are said to be strips of vegetation. Its inhabitants have erected their buildings both on and under the surface of the planet; while most of those who live on Jupiter, Venus, and Saturn reside in cities and communities beneath the surface (King 1958: 5-6, 11, 18, & 22).

## 6) Apocalyptic Concerns

Some of the teachings of the Aetherius Society have led one scholar, Robert Ellwood, to place the Society within the Theosophical tradition. The literature of the Aetherius Society in the late 1950s and early 1960s exhibits both great concern for the dangers of atomic warfare and fallout as well as excitement about UFO sightings. Accounts that the planet Earth is under attack by evil cosmic forces and references to the coming of the next cosmic Master,<sup>18</sup> may have led Ellwood to interpret the struggles with evil forces as apocalyptic in nature and to conclude that "like the Adamski teachings, Aetherius can be thought of as apocalyptic theosophy" (Ellwood 1993: 93; cf. Ellwood 1995: 396).

While one must admit that the Aetherius Society has been influenced by theosophical thought, it is doubtful whether it can be called apocalyptic if this includes an eschatological scenario that foretells the imminent end of the world (Cf. Collins 1987: 334-36; Bull 1995). Nor can it be called apocalyptic if this implies that a specific time for the landing of the aliens has been foretold. Unlike leaders of some UFO religions, such as Ernest and Ruth Norman of Unarius, Science of Life and Rael of the Raelian Movement, George King has never announced a particular date for the arrival on earth of alien beings in flying saucers. Much less has he attempted to prophesy the precise time for the advent of a millennium or for the end of the world. Reacting to the news that the members of Heaven's Gate had committed suicide, the Aetherius Society immediately warns the readers of its Web Page: "Don't look for a space craft following Hale-Bopp and don't expect the second coming or the end of the world to follow either." It further explained such strange theories as those propounded by Heaven's Gate as follows: "In these days of rapid technological growth, especially in the West, we see technology advancing faster than spiritual growth. This is creating a very dangerous imbalance. This has of course been noticed and written about by many. The mass suicide in San Diego is just another example of this trend."<sup>19</sup>

In fact, some of the transmissions from the Masters suggest that the end is far from near. Master Aetherius, for example, is recorded to have said that the "Third satellite will continue to come into Orbit of your Earth for many centuries to come" (King c1975: 6, 30). He has also given to King the dates for the next 1,000 years during which Satellite No. 3 will be operating round the Earth (King, c1975: 34ff.). The society believes that we are on the verge of a great millennium, the Age of Aquarius, which is described as follows (King 1996: 85):

In the Age of Aquarius we will see a merging of science and religion; a breaking down of the barriers between different religions and cultural and racial groups; the introduction of mysticism into orthodox thinking to bring a deeper realization about the meaning of life in

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18 This Master is referred to as a great adept. See *Cosmic Voice*, issue 13 (December/January 1957-58): 10.

19 <http://www.aetherius.org/hale.htm>, p, 2; [date modified: 09/05/94; date downloaded: 10/24/97.]

all aspects; and, above all, a much clearer realization and recognition of the importance of Service to humanity.

Even though one of the goals of the Society is to prepare for the eventual coming of the next Master, there has never been any attempt to specify the time of his arrival. King has stated that when the next Master will arrive, he will come as an adult in a spacecraft and present irrefutable credentials to the Earth's leaders. Though it is said that he will come "shortly," his arrival will depend on whether there are enough people prepared to receive him (King 1978; 1996: 141-44). Hence, the time of his appearance is somewhat of a mystery. Judging from their literature, the Society's members believe that they are doing their best to prepare for his advent, but appear unconcerned with the exact time of his arrival or of the end of human history. Moreover, in their regular prayer services, apocalyptic concerns are not present. In some respects the attitude of the members of the Aetherius Society to the coming of the next Master and the New Age is not unlike the mainline Christian belief in the Second Coming of Christ or the Parousia. King (1996: 145) writes:

The work of the Aetherius Society is to bring as much positive change to our world as possible before the coming of the Next Master, so when it does take place, as many people as possible are prepared to respond to it. It may happen tomorrow, it may happen in a hundred years, or it may happen after that.

Reflecting on the same issue, Richard Lawrence (1997) remarks:

You and I personally, I am sure, would like the next Master to land tomorrow. But from the point of view of mankind as a whole it would not be so good. When the next Master comes it is the end of the life-it is the time of decision. What the missions have done, and will continue to do, is to alleviate earthquakes, flood, and other catastrophes...So, ironically, what we are doing may be putting back the date of the coming of the next Master to give mankind a chance to change before He comes. It cannot be put back indefinitely but it does show that the Plan is changing.

This is certainly not the apocalyptic frenzy of some Christian evangelists who are preparing for the impending disasters prior to the reappearance of Christ, or of UFO groups like Heaven's Gate who have taken steps to meet the flying saucers. Recent short descriptions (Barrett 1996: 202-205; Perdue 1998) of the Aetherius Society omit any reference to any impending apocalyptic predictions. Even one anticult organization, while ridiculing the Aetherius Society's beliefs, has admitted that there is "a benign anti-apocalyptic humanity behind the Society's aims."<sup>20</sup>

Members of the Aetherius Society are not preoccupied with an imminent catastrophe that will mark the end of the world. Rather they believe that the Earth faces periodic disasters of vast proportions. These calamities, which may stem from both internal and external sources, can, and have been on

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<sup>20</sup> See, for example, "The Observer Life Magazine Cult Internet Site," [http://www.guardian.co.uk/observer/cults/a-z-cults/k\\_cults.html](http://www.guardian.co.uk/observer/cults/a-z-cults/k_cults.html); [date modified: 09/12/96; date downloaded: 11/21/97.]

several occasions, averted. They are not inevitable or fatalistic. Thus, for example, there was an urgency to the early messages King received from the Space Intelligences. Some of these beings, referred to as the "Lords of the Ineffable Flame of the Logos of the Earth," are endowed with unlimited power and could, if necessary, prevent human beings from destroying the planet through atomic warfare (*Cosmic Voice*, vol. 11, July 1972: 1-2.). Others visit the Earth regularly to protect it from the wrong thoughts and actions of humankind and to help humans to live according to God's laws so that dangerous situations may be interrupted and prevented from harming the human race (Aetherius Society 1992: 10, 12.)

Much of the work of the Society is dedicated to counter various forces of destruction. The attitudes of the Society's members are rather similar to those Christians who, while making a pessimistic analysis of the present situation, which is judged to be heading towards the establishment of Satan's kingdom on Earth, still see a ray of hope because human beings can save civilization by returning to God's plan through repentance and/or ritual acts.<sup>21</sup> Members of the Aetherius Society believe that, in spite of the dangers that human beings encounter on Earth, there is always help from higher intelligences who are willing to intervene on behalf of the human race. A good instance of this is the work of the Three Adepts who "are highly trained Individuals from another Planetary culture, much more advanced than that of Earth, who have taken residence in Earth physical bodies in order to help terrestrial man in times of dire need" (King c1975: 13). These Adepts go periodically to the lower astral regions of the Earth to counteract and transform the evil brought about by human intelligences whose deeds had led them to the lower astral planes.<sup>22</sup> The cosmic battles with evil forces or intelligences also bear some resemblance to the fundamentalist Christian concept of "spiritual warfare," shorn of its imminent apocalyptic content (cf. Murphy 1992; Passantino and Passantino 1991).

The Society's literature contains several records which corroborate their belief that the Earth had been on the brink of annihilation.<sup>23</sup> Two serious incidents, namely the Alien Mission and Operation Karmalight, occurred after the Primary Initiation of Earth.<sup>24</sup> The Alien Mission began in May, 1965. Intelligences outside our galaxy had fabricated a non-human android and placed it in the lower astral regions of the Earth. Shaken by the effects of the Primary Initiation of Earth, the android began its programmed activities designed to take control over all life on Earth with the intention of using this planet as a base to strike at other parts of the solar system. The alien android was almost indestructible and, because of the deadly thought-forms it could create, placed the Earth and its inhabitants in a precarious situation. For eight months George King and the Three Adepts, aided by other agencies including members of the Great White Brotherhood, engaged in combat with the android and succeeded in extracting it from its location and sending it out of the solar system.

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21 Cornelia R. Ferreira (1991: 18), for instance, sees the rise and success of the New Age Movement as an omen of impending doom, but states that disaster can be avoided if Christians follow God's plans as set out by Our Lady of Fatima, plans which also require "the Rosary and the scapular, the First Saturday devotion, and sacrifice--especially that of one's daily duty."

22 See King c1975: 14ff., where various "sorties" by these Adepts into these lower planes are described.

23 See Aetherius Society 1992: 45ff., where short descriptions of the missions are included in the materials aspirants to the Society are expected to know.

24 This event refers to the day, July 8, 1964, when the Earth was given a great amount of spiritual energy that was conveyed in space vehicles piloted by Interplanetary Intelligences (King c1975: 26-27). It is commemorated yearly by the Aetherius Society.

Operation Karmalight, which began in October 1967 and lasted 16 months, was directed against Satan who made an attempt to bring under his control the lower astral realms as well as all other life forms on Earth. The Adepts, whose task was to "transmute" the evil entity (Satan), encountered several difficulties but successfully completed their mission in 24 phases. The success of this operation, however, upset the balance of power in the lower astral realms. This was also remedied by the Adepts in a number of phases which lasted until 1982.<sup>25</sup>

Another danger from outside the solar system threatened the Earth in 1972. Described as a "World Emergency," this threat came from an alien race which attempted to draw off the Earth's spiritual energy it needed for survival. These invaders are described as small beings (four to five inches long), with ant-like features, and with the ability to move at great speed. Their actions would have led to the eradication of all life on Earth. The Adepts once again came to the rescue of the human race which wasn't even aware of the impending disaster. By a show of force without exercising any violence, they convinced the aliens to stop their activities and escorted them away from the planet. Other intelligences then led them out of the solar system.

The Garouche incident is yet another instance of the dangers that the Earth faces from outside evil forces. King relates how once he was called upon to help the Intelligences of Mars fight off an evil planetoid that was bent on destroying them. Scientists from Mars had landed on this meteorite to mine its minerals by robots. The destruction of several Martian craft and their crew, however, indicated that an evil intelligence inhabited the planetoid, had taken control of the robots, and was manufacturing atomic weapons which, if used, would damage Mars. After an intense struggle, with the help of intelligences from Venus and Saturn, the evil entity split the planetoid in two and was defeated.<sup>26</sup>

King explains how later on he learned that the planetoid was launched by four evil beings who lived on a world known by the pseudonym "Garouche," which is located at the end of the galaxy from our solar system. He was allowed to intervene, not physically but in a super-conscious projected state, in the counterattack because he lived on Earth himself. He writes (King 1961: 66):

The evil entities who had made this weapon wanted to conquer Earth because, as they were water dwellers themselves, the conditions here could be easily adapted for their use. The idea of these monsters was to kill all humanoid life on Earth and then inhabit the seas which cover a greater part of the surface.

The Martians, knowing of this evil intention, actually intervened to save the Earth which could not have defended itself against such overwhelming forces.

To the outsider, such accounts are comparable to the intergalactic wars of science fiction. To the members of the Aetherius Society, however, they are real events which denote the human struggle both on a physical and spiritual level. While these incidents forebode danger to life on Earth, none of them was the harbinger of the imminent end of human history or of the world nor were they the

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25 Operation Karmalight was reported extensively in *Aetherius Society Newsletter*, vol. 7 (1968) and vol. 8 (1969).

26 In one of his books King (1961: 42-67) dedicates a whole chapter to describe "The Mars Story." See also *Cosmic Voice*, issue 14 (February/March 1958): 9ff., where the event is described in some detail, and issue 25 (November/December 1961): 22.

precursors of the advent of aliens in their flying saucers.

## 7) Main Operations and Missions

In practice, much of the work of members of the Society is dedicated to conducting and/or maintaining several major operations and/or missions, some of which confirm the members' preoccupation with the perils to which the Earth is exposed. Among these missions are (cf. Aetherius Society 1992: 20ff.):

(1) Operation Starlight, a Mission which began in Holdstone Down in Devon, England, in July 1958, and continued till August 1961. During this period 19 select mountains were charged with spiritual energy that can be radiated to uplift our world by anyone who prays unselfishly on them. Located in different parts of the world (9 in England, 4 in the USA, 2 in Australia, and one in each of the following countries, Tanganyika, New Zealand, Switzerland, and France), they can be used to send out spiritual energies to the world by anyone who, with pure and selfless motives, climbs them and prays for peace and enlightenment (King c1975: 55-56). These mountains are at times used in Operation Power Light, a mission whose purpose "is to manipulate and radiate powerful, highly beneficial Spiritual Energies for World Healing and Uplifting."<sup>27</sup>

(2) Operation Space Power, a Mission which began in 1959 and continues till the present time. The Mission involves the cooperation of the Aetherius Society with Interplanetary Beings to radiate spiritual power to Earth during "Spiritual Pushes." At certain times of the year, Satellite No. 3, which is invisible to the naked eye and undetectable by radar, gathers spiritual energies from the Sun and transmits them to specially-designed radiators invented by King and housed in the Society's American and European headquarters (King 1987).

(3) Operation Bluewater, which alleviated the effects of a warp in the earth's magnetic field, a warp produced by atomic experiments and the negative thoughts and actions of human beings that interfere with the natural flow of spiritual energies to Earth. It was "specially designed by the Cosmic masters and executed by people on Earth to give back directly to the Earth some the energy which had been taken unfeelingly from it." (King c1975: 66). The mission had four phases, from July 1963 to November 1964, and took place over one of the Earth's psychic centers in the Pacific Ocean off Newport Beach, Southern California. A crew was trained to carry out the mission under the direction of King who remained mentally in touch with the space intelligences during the intricate boat maneuvers. Energy was gathered and intensified through specially constructed equipment and transferred to the psychic center.

(4) Operation Sunbeam (King 1979), through which spiritual energy is restored to the Earth as a token repayment for all the energy humanity has taken from it. Credit to this Mission goes to King, who is its inventor, organizer, and coordinator and who has received for his work several awards from The Academy of Space Sciences. This mission, which was started in September 1966 and which has gone through several hundred phases, continues periodically. Batteries were carried up to Mount Baldy, charged with spiritual energy, and later discharged into the psychic center off the

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<sup>27</sup> *Cosmic Voice*, vol. 17 (June/July 1996): 3. A brief introduction to the mission and a description of its recent phases, numbers 41-44, are also provided.

California coast. Operation Sunbeam has been extended over several phases to different psychic centers. The importance of this mission was confirmed by the space intelligences who revealed to King that it was the "greatest metaphysical Mission being performed on Earth today by any organization or even country!" (Aetherius Society 1992: 39).

(5) Operation Prayer Power is a mission that involves the storing of spiritual energy through the prayers and mantras of members, an energy that can be released to relieve suffering anywhere on Earth. Devised by King himself, this Operation was accepted, in 1975, in the cosmic plan for the earth's salvation and enlightenment. Prayer sessions are held once a week to generate spiritual energy which is then transmitted and stored in power batteries (Aetherius Society 1992: 60-64). In times of specific crises, prayers have been released to avert conflicts and wars and to mitigate the dire effects of natural disasters, such as earthquakes, tornadoes, and hurricanes, and of human actions, such as wars and atomic fallout (King 1996: 106-11).

## **8) Ritual Practices**

The rituals of the Aetherius Society, which can be rather elaborate, are carried out on a weekly basis and on special commemorative occasions. The temple (often a small room) where the services are held is usually decorated with religious symbols that include a photograph of George King and a portrait of the Master Jesus. Members sit either in a circle or in rows facing a sanctuary area where religious objects are displayed and from where the officiating ministers lead the congregation.

Every week the following services are held: (1) a prayer meeting that includes a short meditation period, the recitation of some segments of the Twelve Blessings of Jesus, and petitions for the healing at a distance for anyone who has requested to be placed on the healing list; (2) a service dedicated to Operation Prayer Power; (3) a private healing service; and (4) a regular Sunday service, during which taped instructions or lectures of King and messages from various planetary beings might be played.

On a yearly basis the start and/or completion of several of the Missions and Operations are commemorated. Pilgrimages to the Holy Mountains, charged with spiritual power during Operation Starlight, are periodically made by devoted members of the Society (cf., Aetherius Society 1996).

Various other spiritual practices are also encouraged. Instructions for spiritual healing, correct breathing exercises for promoting mental balance and spiritual well-being, healthy drinking and eating habits, and aura cleansing exercises can be found in the Society's literature (King n.d.). Yoga plays an important part in the lives of the Society's members since it is the means by which an individual comes into contact with his or her Higher Self and thus acquires the knowledge and understanding of truth (King 1964b).

## 9) Future of the Society

The future of new religious movements has been one of the concerns of scholars studying them (Bromley and Hammond 1987). Sociologists tend to look on new religious groups as dynamic organizations subject to change. New movements can remain marginal in the society in which they sprung; or they could simply die out because of internal conflicts and/or outwards pressures. They could alternatively grow into larger bodies and become established religious groups. This, in the opinion of Stark and Bainbridge, is not very plausible. They think that "all contemporary cult movements contain too much magic to become really successful mass movements" (Stark and Bainbridge 1985: 456) and they expect no single new religious movement to become a dominant force in Western culture.

The future of the Aetherius Society depends very much on what happens in the aftermath of the demise of its leader. Even during the last few years prior to King's death, there seems to have been very little speculation among members of the Society on this issue. Some believe that George King will not be succeeded by another Master as the Primary Mental Channel. One transmission from the Master Aetherius states explicitly: "When George King--as you call him--has to vacate the terrestrial body he now inhabits, he will not be replaced" (King c1975: 7). Others maintain that in the unspecified future a Cosmic Intelligence could come to Earth and be the next Master with a mandate to act as the spokesman for the Interplanetary Intelligences.

What will happen to the Aetherius Society is open to several speculative possibilities:

- (1) After the death of its founder, the members will disband and the Society will cease to exist. This is unlikely to happen since, as Gordon Melton has remarked, "the death of the founder rarely proves fatal or leads to drastic alteration in the group's life" (Melton 1991: 7). It has, in fact, not happened. Rather the Society, a year and half after King's death, is continuing to operate with no visible changes in the religious lives of its members.
- (2) The Society will split into several branches as happened to other religious movements. There is no indication, however, that any rifts between members have occurred and there are no signs of factions within the Society. The Board of Directors is carrying on business as usual and there is no evidence of internal conflicts between individuals vying for control. The relatively small size of its membership is likely to militate against divisions (cf. Melton 1991: 7).
- (3) The Society will become an institutionalized religious organization with authority and charisma vested in itself. The succession of authority, necessary if the organization is to survive, will pass from George King to the membership or board of directors. This is what is apparently taking place. The fact that the Society has been a well-structured organization with a well-defined religious agenda favors such institutionalization. As Gordon Melton (1991: 8) has pointed out "once the founder articulates the group's teachings and practices, they exist independently of him/her and can and do develop a life of their own."

To some extent the Aetherius Society had already begun the process of institutionalization before King's death. Its leader made provision for the continuation of the society's missions. He not only established the Board of Directors which would provide a mechanism for governance, but also

stated explicitly (King 1989) that after he is gone, the members of the Society will still be able to cooperate with the uplifting, healing, and inspiring spiritual energies sent from Satellite 3.

Less than two years after King's death, the Aetherius Society has already assumed the task of continuing King's work. Thus, for example one of the missions of the Society, known as the Saturn Mission, was initiated by George King in 1981 with the primary function of contributing to "World Peace and Devic Stabilization." During its operation, special energies are discharged over one of the Earth's psychic centers. George King had always taken the lead in the many phases of this mission since its inception. But in 1994 the Saturn Mission was offered to the Aetherius Society for the future. The first phase after King's death took place in November, 1988 and was conducted by specially trained members of the Society over Lake Powell, in Utah.<sup>28</sup> Other Missions can continue without the presence and direction of George King.

Another example of the move towards institutionalization is the exercise known as a "Spiritual Push." Since the 1950s the Society's members have believed that a massive spacecraft, known as Satellite No. 3 and manned by the Cosmic Masters, came into the Earth's orbit to beam the correct energy to those people, irrespective of their belief or nationality, involved in helping humankind. The result has been that many human disasters, such as nuclear war, have been averted and the spiritual evolution of the human race has been enhanced. There are set times, four every year, when this satellite is believed to come into orbit and radiate its energies. Consequently, the members of the Aetherius Society can respond to the presence of and activity of the Cosmic Masters without the aid and direction of George King. However, this Satellite "often comes into Earth orbit for what are called Emergence Periods, which change from year to year. The Aetherius Society is informed through Sir George of these Emergency Periods just before they start."<sup>29</sup> With the departure of King, the members of the Society can follow the procedures during the set times, but they do not have a way of being informed of emergence situations - unless they develop a mechanism for divining when these periods occur.

It is, therefore, likely that the Aetherius Society will continue to function as a small religious movement or organization where belief in flying saucers is central and whose main mission is to protect the Earth from evil forces and prepare it for the millennium.

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28 See *Cosmic Voice*, vol. 19, Summer Issue, 1998, part of which is dedicated to the resumption of the Saturn Mission.

29 <http://www.aewtherius.org/sp.htm> p. 3; [date modified: 09/04/97; date downloaded: 1/10/99.]

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