

Is There Intelligent Life On Earth?

**Inside the Whacky World of the
Aetherius Society**

by Alexander Baron DTP., WP., PQB45., Metropolitan Exposer
of Terrestrial Wind Ups

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Is There Intelligent Life On Earth?

London Broadcasting Company (LBC) calls itself 'the information station,' and by and large this piece of self-trumpet blowing is well deserved. All the news is up to the minute: London, national, international, financial, sport, weather and much more. It also has some very intelligent discussions and phone-ins with guests, some eminent, some not so eminent, speaking on a wide range of subjects from conservation to current affairs.

LBC has never been afraid to tackle the controversial or the unusual, including on certain programmes, the paranormal. Ufology and associated 'fringe' subjects have been earnestly and intelligently debated. Every so often though, somebody slips through the net who has no business being represented as an authority, expert or even well informed layman. And while the cranks and weirdos are answered politely when they phone in, there is no earthly reason for them to be invited into the studio under false pretences.

I am referring specifically to the *Aetherius Society* here, who have somehow managed to wangle a spokesman onto LBC talk-ins on more than one occasion. Recently, Peter Deeley, who was chairing the *All Things Considered* programme, had three guests who were discussing UFOs. One of these was the highly regarded ufologist and researcher, Jenny Randles, whose credits include the thoroughly researched and thought provoking *Abduction* which catalogues hundreds of cases of alleged alien abductions. The second guest was another lady, also named Jenny. The third was Dr Richard Lawrence, the Secretary of the European headquarters of the Aetherius Society.

Pete Murray, another LBC broadcaster, speaks very highly of the Aetherius Society and once slagged me off over the air for denouncing it; Peter Deeley was more diplomatic. When I phoned LBC and asked them why Dr Lawrence had been invited onto an intelligent programme instead of being relegated to *Beadle's Comedy Hour*, he defended the decision by saying LBC had to allow all groups access to the station. That's what democracy is all about. Now here is what the Aetherius Society is all about.

In March 1954, plain George King was doing the washing up in his Maida Vale bedsit when a voice boomed out from nowhere: "Prepare yourself. You are to become voice of Interplanetary Parliament." Needless to say he dropped his plates. A short while later he received a visit, a materialisation in the form of a well-known Eastern saint, who, it appears, was a messenger from the Cosmic Masters. George had been chosen to save mankind!

Shortly after this, George founded the Aetherius Society, which is named after Master Aetherius, an inhabitant of the planet Venus, who was then a sprightly 3,456 years old. George communicates with him in a trance state.

He also communicates with Jesus, (yes THE Jesus), who also lives on Venus, and with an entity known as Mars Sector Six. Presumably this fellow comes from the planet Mars. Oh yes, all the planets of the Solar System are inhabited, bar Mercury, which is, presumably, too hot even for the great JC.

In case the reader thinks I am winding him up, I can assure him that all this is Aetherean dogma and is accepted without question by the followers of George King. On a visit to the US he became Dr King; today he is Sir George. I telephoned the Aetherius Society's Fulham Road headquarters and spoke to their PR officer, Christine Aubry. I didn't ask if they still stocked tapes of Jesus speaking through their leader. This was very controversial back in the fifties, and led to accusations of blasphemy. However, I did ask about George's qualifications. Miss Aubry was most reluctant to give a direct answer. Yes, George King does have doctorates, (note the plural). Yes, he does have a knighthood. No, not from the Queen; from an unnamed European source. Is that spelt *source* or *sauce*, one wonders?

Dr Sir George King is now 70, and presides over an empire of thousands. Perhaps George really isn't so daft after all. One suspects that he is laughing all the way to the bank, and he has been to America, New Zealand and to the top of Mount Kilimanjaro in his endeavours (successful apparently) to save us unworthy Earthlings from the Fiends of Garouche - wicked fish-like creatures from the other side of the Milky Way - and from the evil scientist Lubek, an employee of none other than Satan! All this kind of makes the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection look quite tame, doesn't it?

No, George isn't daft, neither are the people at LBC. Misinformed, yes, but daft no. So perhaps, after they read this they will not invite the Aethereans back to discuss UFOs. At least, not until April 1st.

To The Reader

The above article was published in the magazine *Briticism*, which is based in New York. 2 This was the fourth, and as it happened, last issue of this magazine to which I contributed. All subsequent attempts to communicate with the editor were ignored; it is my firm belief that the publication of this article was responsible for this, although I have no proof and am not particularly concerned either way.

Before proceeding any further, a few words about the article itself. I have made a few minor alterations to the original, but this amounts to no more than dotting an 'i' and crossing a 't' here and there. Peter Deeley's name has, I think, been spelt correctly; when I phoned LBC and spoke to him, I asked for the correct spelling. My apologies if I have erred on this point. In the article appears the statement "... the cranks and weirdos are answered politely when they phone in..." This is in fact seldom the case. In general, LBC does not suffer fools gladly, although there are undoubted exceptions. The surname of the other Jenny eludes me; I did in one of my calls try to find out, but the secretary who answered the phone was unable to help. The fact is that I tuned into this discussion by accident, and it was only when I recognised the name Jenny Randles that I started to pay attention. I was not a little taken aback that someone like her should even consent to appear on the same programme as a representative from the *Aetherius Society*.

My first encounter with the Aetherius Society was c1981. I'm afraid I cannot remember the exact date, nor even the exact year; at the time I was living in Leeds, and had been a lifelong believer in flying saucers. It is only fairly recently that I have rejected this belief in totality. At the time I also took it for granted that, not only did flying saucers exist, but that they had landed. I believed too that Erich von Däniken was for real, even though I had read at least one book debunking his *theories* 3, and that there was a worldwide cover-up, the UFO conspiracy theory, which extended to all the governments of the world, certainly all the great powers, communist as well as capitalist.

Being a believer, but by no means a fanatic, it was only natural on seeing a poster in a shop window advertising a meeting of, (what I and others took to be a genuine UFO investigation group), that I would attend. Unfortunately, this was a meeting of the Aetherius Society, which is about as far from a genuine UFO investigation group as one can get.

The poster in question read something like this:

"FLYING SAUCERS ARE REAL

FLYING SAUCERS ARE FRIENDLY

YOUR GOVERNMENT KNOWS THIS...why not come along to a meeting of the Aetherius Society which is being held in (some public hall) and see for yourself?"

Just to make the point about flying saucers being friendly, there was a drawing of a very friendly-looking flying saucer on the poster. So, I went along to the meeting, and so did quite a lot of other people. I seem to recall that at the time the media was having one of its periodic saucer flaps, something which was particularly acute in Yorkshire. About this time too, some time afterwards I think, I was privileged myself to see a particularly bright meteor which was mentioned in the local media, and I have no doubt that some of the people who saw this mistook it for some sort of craft.

The meeting was attended mostly by ordinary people, who, when the main speakers had had their say, showed themselves to be surprisingly intelligent and independent-minded, not at all like the sheep some of the news media would have us believe they are. There were, undoubtedly, both weirdos and true believers present, including one, a young man, who claimed to be a 'medium.'

The passage of time does strange things to one's memory, and I had no desire then to particularly remember the content of the meeting. It was something I attended out of curiosity, so the reader must forgive the vagueness of the next few paragraphs.

The meeting was opened by, I think, a youngish man in a grey suit, who started talking about unidentified objects in the sky and ridiculing some of the attempts by the authorities to explain them away. His tone was condescending and mocking, and I for one found myself nodding in agreement when he sneered at a craft of unknown origin being mistaken for a flock of geese. It is possible that this man was Richard Lawrence; I am fairly certain that he or another speaker was introduced as an en-

gineer. Certainly the Aethereans looked the part: they were all smartly dressed and conveyed an air of both respectability and intelligence. But cranks, like con men, are often the most plausible of people, superficially. If nothing else, this should teach the reader never to judge a book by its cover.

Anyway, the meeting, which had started promisingly, deteriorated, or rather it just droned on. I can't remember if they showed any film slides or attempted to put forward any tangible evidence for the existence of alien intelligences communicating with us naïve terrestres, but when the speakers, three or four of them, had finished their talks, they decided they were going to hold a question and answer session. Several members of the audience dissented, and it was agreed instead that there would be a general discussion. The Aethereans did not come out of this very well.

At some point, George King was mentioned, I think it was *Dr* George King then. And the claim was made that he had communicated with extraterrestrial intelligences, though who were the ETIs concerned, was not specified. And how did he communicate with them? The phrase "He meditates..." comes to mind.

And where do the flying saucers come from?

"They come from Mars. And Venus."

Even with my limited knowledge of astronomy, I knew very well that the planet Venus was, according to the current state of knowledge, uninhabitable by higher life forms. And Mars? It was at this point I realised that the meeting I was attending had not been called by a *bona fide* UFO research group, and that the Aethereans had no startling disclosures to make to the public apart from the usual *revealed truths* of other equally cranky religions and pseudo-religions.

A while later I looked up the Aetherius Society in the library; I found a reference to them in John Sladek's *The New Apocrypha*. For the benefit of those who haven't read it, this is a book which debunks psychic phenomena. Unfortunately, like so many skeptical authors, Sladek weakens his case by resorting to ridicule and satire rather than rational argument. True, some subjects are so ridiculous that it is difficult for any intelligent person to debate them seriously, Creationism for example. But one should always try to bear in mind that, however ridiculous these myths may seem to us today, at one time many of them were accepted by the majority of scholars, including men who would, if they were alive today, be hailed as geniuses. The reason we don't is because they didn't have printed books, television, computers...in short, our established body of knowledge and means of communication is vastly superior to theirs. Whatever the faults of Sladek's book, it certainly convinced me that the Aethereans were out of their tree; had I been aware of this prior to the meeting, I would not have gone. And you, dear reader, would not be reading this publication!

Anyway, occupied with other matters, I forgot all about the Aethereans, until one day in 1989 I tuned in to LBC and heard Richard Lawrence of the Aetherius Society saying his piece. The result was the article *Is There Intelligent Life On Earth?* Having placed it with a foreign magazine, I decided to try to sell it to a British magazine as well. I offered it to two, both of which politely declined, then, for some reason, I sent a copy to Richard Lawrence, saying that it was intended as a bit of a laugh, and hoping he liked it. The result of this was a heated correspondence in which Lawrence threatened to sue me for defamation. Unfortunately, at the time I did not own a com-

puter, and did not retain copies of my handwritten replies to his empty threats, but Lawrence's correspondence is reproduced in full on pages 6,7,8 & 9. Let us go through it point by point.

Letter one:

Lawrence claims the article, is libellous of him, Sir George King, or, as the reader can see for himself, His Eminence Sir George King, O.S.P., PhD., ThD., D.D. Metropolitan Archbishop of the Aetherius Churches.

He says it is not "good clean fun"; I leave the reader to decide for himself if this is the case, and he requires my solemn undertaking not to publish the article. It is difficult for any rational person to be solemn about the likes of the Aethereans.

Next, he demands that I reply by return of post giving this undertaking, or he will refer the matter to the Society's solicitors! Shock, horror! I did reply by return of post; it was too late to stop publication in the US, but if he wanted to stop it appearing in Britain, he could buy the UK rights.

Letter two:

His reply reiterates the view that the article is libellous, and the demand that I do not publish it. He also refuses my most generous offer to allow him to purchase the UK rights. No figure was mentioned, but a couple of hundred would have sufficed; as I only got twenty-five quid from *Briticism*, I would have regarded this as very fair. He accuses me of threatening to publish the article. Threatening? This sounds like malice is intended, and as I had already pointed out, it was no more than good clean fun.

The last paragraph states that I alleged that he bought his doctorate; this is not quite true, as I pointed out to him in my further reply. What actually happened was that I attended a small press book fair, (at London's Conway Halls), where I met a UFO group, (probably BUFORA). I mentioned the Aethereans to the gent who was manning their bookstall, and Dr Lawrence, and this person suggested that Lawrence had bought his doctorate, possibly from some obscure American *university*. I made this clear to Lawrence in both my second and third letters, ie that I was merely repeating hearsay. I didn't suggest he inform me exactly where and when he was awarded his degree, nor did he volunteer such information, but as I will be sending him a copy of this publication as soon as it becomes available, he can always substantiate his insinuation, that his doctorate *is* indeed genuine. Should it have been awarded by the Aetherius Society or by Dr Sir George King, then I will certainly regard it as bogus.

Letter three:

After a well-earned Christmas break, he asks me to supply the name and address of the magazine in which the article is to be published. Which I did, but only as soon as I was sure it was in print. I didn't want a nervous editor being frightened off by a solicitor's letter, however facetious.

The reference to a "legally-minded friend" was a little white lie on my part; there was no such friend, but though I don't know that much about the law, and less than I should about the law of libel, I do know that there was nothing libellous in my



The Aetherius Society

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Telegraphic Address:
AETHERIUS LONDON SW6

AN INTERNATIONAL SPIRITUAL BROTHERHOOD

Founded in 1955 - Registered as a Church.

Founder/President:

His Eminence Sir George King, O.S.P., Ph.D., Th.D., D.D.
Metropolitan Archbishop of The Aetherius Churches.

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Telegraphic Address:
AETHERIUS LOS ANGELES

RHL/ph

14th December, 1989.

Mr. Al Baron,
93 Venner Road,
Sydenham,
London SE26.

Dear Mr. Baron,

Your letter of 6th December to my colleague, Christine Aubry, has been passed to me.

I have read the article which you say you intend to send to your editor. It goes beyond the bounds of "good clean fun" and is libellous of Sir George King, The Aetherius Society and myself.

I require your solemn undertaking not to publish the article. Should the article have been published, I require details of whom it has been published by.

Should I have not heard from you by return of post, in writing as required above, I shall have to refer the matter to the Society's solicitors.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Richard Lawrence
International Director



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Telegraphic Address:
AETHERIUS LOS ANGELES

RHL/ph

19th December, 1989.

Mr. Al Baron,
93 Venner Road,
Sydenham,
London SE26 5HU.

Dear Mr. Baron,

Thank you for your letter of 16th December 1989.

I note that you say that the article in question has not yet been published. I remain of the view that it is libellous and reiterate my requirement that you undertake not to publish it. I have no intention of making any offer for UK rights.

In that you continue to threaten to publish the article I must warn that if it is published the persons libelled will hold you and anyone else associated with its publication liable in damages.

Your allegation that I bought my doctorate is untrue and entirely without foundation and I will regard any repetition of this allegation as defamatory.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Richard Lawrence
International Director



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Telegraphic Address:
AETHERIUS LOS ANGELES

RHL/cma

4th January, 1990.

Mr. A. Baron,
93c Venner Road,
Sydenham,
London, SE26.

Dear Mr. Baron,

Further to your letter of 22nd December, I note that you have sold the overseas rights of the article we consider to be libellous, to a mass circulation magazine. Please supply me with the name and address of this magazine forthwith.

Your "legally-minded" friend will know that to repeat erroneous information from a book published some years ago, is no excuse for publishing damaging and defamatory statements. I know the book "Cults of Unreason" very well and received a full apology from Christopher Evans before he died. There are statements in there which are provably inaccurate about The Aetherius Society.

I make dozens of radio and television appearances every year and have done so ever since I have been Secretary, which is over ten years ago now. It is certainly most insulting to me to allege that I was invited into the studio "under false pretences", and to imply that I am not intelligent, an expert or authority on my subject, or even a well-informed layman. As someone who has given many published lectures on these topics, several of which are available for sale on cassette tape, you must see that this has a strong personal bearing on my chosen profession. I would advise you in future to seek proper legal advice, instead of a friend who is "legally-minded".

The statement that The Aetherius Society "somehow managed to wangle a spokesman on to L.B.C. talk-ins" definitely implies deceptive methods used by the Society. It is this we are concerned about: not whether you or other people consider our views to be acceptable. That is a democratic issue. The implication that I and the Society use disreputable methods to appear on the radio and that we are not fit to do so, is however, a damaging allegation, as you must admit. We have never done this and we are duty-bound to defend ourselves against such an unfair and patently incorrect suggestion.

I look forward to receiving details of the magazine in question, so that we can proceed to the next stage with this very unfortunate matter.

Yours sincerely,



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Telegraphic Address:
AETHERIUS LOS ANGELES

10th January 1990

Dear Mr Baron,

I note from your letter of 8th January 1990 that you are not willing to supply us with the name of the publication in the U.S.A. which contains your defamatory article even though you have received a copy. This in itself is significant.

I also note that you regard us as very intelligent, that you doubt whether we would use deceptive methods to get on to L.B.C. and that even if we did attempt to do so we would have been given "short shrift". I also note that you see no reason why The Aetherius Society should not be called a Church and that we have as much right as anyone to be on the radio.

Further to your offer and solemn undertaking not to sue regardless of anything we might print about you, I must inform you that The Aetherius Society has never adopted this approach and never will.

I feel sure that your last letter which included the above points in it, will be most valuable to us should an article come to our attention in published form and should we consider the publication worthy of legal consideration.

Your continued refusal to supply us with a copy of this publication, although you say you have one, will also be seen as an indication that you regard yourself as vulnerable, or, to quote your own words: "If you are going to try to hang a man you can hardly expect him to put his head in the noose".

This case has already received the consideration of our lawyers and I assure you that we will continue to monitor developments most closely.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Richard Lawrence
International Director

"Service is the Jewel in the Rock of Attainment"

article, either about Lawrence, his organisation, or his *Master*. The reference to the book *Cults of Unreason* 4 needs some explaining. *Is There Intelligent Life On Earth?* was researched in the British Library, primarily from the book by Dr Christopher Evans (a real doctor, I hasten to add). 5 In fact, most of the article was lifted straight out of the text, for which I make no apologies, because I referenced both *Cults of Unreason* and Jenny Randles *Abduction* at the end of the article. These footnotes were edited out. Lawrence's reference to "statements...which are provably inaccurate" is, like the rest of his righteous indignation, total bluster. He does not offer even one instance of these supposedly "provably inaccurate statements" made about the Aetherius Society. His claim that he received a full apology from the late Dr Evans does not have the ring of truth. Presumably this apology has long since been "lost", and of course, as Dr Evans died in 1979, there is no way for Lawrence's claim to be corroborated.

Lawrence's next claim, that he makes dozens of radio and television appearances every year and has done since he became Secretary to the Aethereans is not something I would wish to take issue with. But just because someone has appeared on numerous talk shows, radio phone-ins etc., does not make that person an expert any more than an habitual drunkard whose name regularly appears in the local press is an expert on alcoholism. And, as I asked Lawrence in my reply, exactly what is he an expert on...the flora and fauna of the planet Venus?

Undoubtedly, the main reason the Aethereans get any press coverage at all is because of their novelty value. 6 When an editor is feeling depressed at covering wars, murders, riots and the ever-spiralling cost of living, he turns to one of his subs and says:

"Hey Joe, can't we find something less depressing to put on the five o'clock round up than the Canadian plane crash or the Ethiopian famine?" "Sure thing, Ted, how about a bunch of weirdos in Fulham who believe Jesus lives on the planet Venus?" "Excellent idea!" says the editor. Next thing, someone from the *News At Five* is on the blower to Aetherius PR person, Christine Aubry, who, like Richard Lawrence, is too shallow-minded to realise that the people who are chasing her for quotes are simply extracting the urine, to put it politely.

Returning to Lawrence's letter, he now shifts his ground and claims that I have insulted him by claiming that he had been invited into the studio under false pretences. This claim was not intended to disparage Lawrence, ie., I did not intend to give the impression that he is in any measure insincere in his absurd beliefs, nor that he is unintelligent, as I made clear in my next letter. This is the great tragedy: Lawrence, and people like him are not dumbos, they are often highly intelligent, cultured men and women. But he is most definitely *not* an *expert*, either on the planet Venus, extraterrestrials or on any related subject.

He has given many published lectures on the subject: so what? This has a strong bearing on his chosen "profession". It is hard to credit Lawrence as having a profession, except as a more than willing dupe to a nut case who thinks he tunes in to Mars Sector Six and meets Eastern mystics in his kitchen while doing the washing up. He advises me to seek proper legal advice in the future; I must confess that I have not yet done so, nor do I intend to, but I have done some further research on Lawrence and his friends in Fulham, the result of which is the article:

TAKE ME TO YOUR LEADER (Via The Bank)

Now he becomes concerned with "democratic issues"; he doesn't care whether or not people find the Society's views acceptable. I for one don't find them "unacceptable", merely laughable. 7 The word "wangle" means literally to effect by trickery. Perhaps it was a slightly inappropriate term, and no offence was intended. Recently I was commissioned by the editor of *New Computer Express* (sadly, now defunct) to write an article on the PC Independent User Group, I instigated this commission myself by phoning him and asking him, pleading with him to allow me to do it. In due course, the article will be published and a cheque will drop through my door, at which point I will make no objection to anyone who claims that I have just managed to wangle another hundred quid out of Future Publishing. [In fact, this article was unpublished at the time of the magazine's demise, but I was still paid for it. Love on yer, Andy Storer.]

This allegation of "wangling", Lawrence suggests I must admit, is damaging. Damaging to what, his or the Society's credibility? I hardly think so. It is this they are concerned about! Lawrence looks forward to receiving further details "so that we can proceed to the next stage with this very unfortunate matter." What a pompous ass!

In the last letter in what shall we call it, the *Martian Chronicles*? Lawrence claims that it is significant that I refused to supply him with the name of the US publication "which contains your defamatory article" even though I have received a copy.

There is some confusion here; I have already explained the reason I did not supply Lawrence with the article prior to publication (the only reason): I didn't want a nervous editor being frightened off by a solicitor's letter, however facetious. In fact, as soon as I received my complimentary copy of the magazine, I put my money where my mouth is and sent him a photocopy. My fears appear to have been justified because, as I have already pointed out, all further communications to the editor were subsequently ignored. I can only assume, perhaps erroneously, that she was contacted by Lawrence (a near certainty) and threatened with legal action, which, improbable as it sounds, she found intimidating. I bear Lawrence no malice for this, if this is in fact what happened, but whatever happened, her behaviour in severing all connection with me without even bothering to reply to my letters or trans-Atlantic phone call was quite despicable, and even though this happened two years ago, *this* issue is not yet closed. Take note, Miss Howell!

One issue that *is* most certainly closed though is the possibility of legal action against me by either Lawrence, his organisation or his Master.

Lawrence notes that I regard "us", ie him, as very intelligent; as I have already pointed out, this is the great tragedy of the likes of Lawrence, they *are* intelligent, highly intelligent some of them. But so was Ted Bundy! There is a lot more to intelligence than having a high IQ. The inhabitants of our prisons, special hospitals and doss houses contain more than just a sprinkling of highly intelligent people. Likewise, some of our most distinguished citizens, people who have made and continue to make outstanding, positive contributions to society and the well-being of their fellow men, are not overendowed with grey matter. In other words, it's not the fact of having a high IQ, a flair for languages, possessing extraordinary creativity or any of a dozen other God-given talents, it's what you do with what you've got that counts. I

made this clear to Lawrence in my final letter to him. I also made it clear to him that he was most definitely *not* going to sue me, as I had previously made clear in a phone call to Christine Aubry. I even went so far as to point out that if Lawrence were to use his undoubtedly high intelligence to issue a summons against me, that I would have no hesitation in calling him as a witness for the defence! Lawrence has now had the best part of two years to bring a legal action - obviously his lawyers, if he consulted them, must have told him the same thing I did, albeit more diplomatically.

I find it difficult not to feel a certain amount of pity for Lawrence. In my previous letter I made it clear that whatever he or his organisation cared to print about me, I would not feel the least inclined to sue either him or them. To which he replied with words to the effect that the Aetherius Society is an honourable organisation. I would question that, but I would not question the integrity of this highly intelligent but equally gullible true believer. The Aetherius Society calls itself a church; the churches, whatever else made be said of them, are by no means as honourable, pious and upstanding as they would have us believe. Their history, more than any other institutions', is written in blood. One final swipe I could not resist, Lawrence notes that I see no reason the Aetherius Society should not call itself a church; my actual words were something like: I see no reason it shouldn't call itself anything it wants, including a rubber plant!

However, I have since reconsidered this put down. When one compares the dogma of the Aethereans with that of mainstream Christian, or indeed of most other religions, they do not come out too bad. If we laugh at George King for dressing up like a bishop, then surely we should laugh at the Pope as well? If we are skeptical of his talking to Jesus, shouldn't we be equally skeptical about the New Testament? Nuff said!

The Aetherius Society and LBC Radio

Since this correspondence, I have heard Lawrence speaking on LBC again, possibly twice. He was certainly interviewed prior to the *Mind, Body and Spirit Festival* this year. 8 Apart from his novelty value and their quaint sense of humour, there may be another reason he is not dismissed as totally out of his tree by this otherwise informative London radio station. DJ Pete Murray is himself something of a true believer. On one occasion, when I was in Fulham, I passed the Aetherius Society's bookshop and in the window, apparently receiving some sort of "hands on" or blessing from Dr Sir George, was a photograph of Pete Murray. I have also seen a photograph of Mr Murray with *medium* Doris Collins. I must make it clear that I am not accusing either Mr Murray or *Dr* Lawrence of subterfuge, but in view of this obvious connection and his interest in what many people regard as a fascinating field, it would not be surprising if Mr Murray were to have suggested to one of the production team at LBC that they should use Lawrence as a spokesman for the *New Age* movement. It says a lot for the quality of the "New Agers" that in view of the way he conducts himself and the image he projects, Lawrence is probably as good a *New Age* spokesman as LBC could hope to find.

The following article was written specifically for a "skeptics' corner" column. Since its first issue in Autumn 1990 I have been writing reviews for *Topical Books*; the editor, Ian Mitchell, has been very enthusiastic about some of the books which have

been mentioned in my column, two in particular, a scholarly debunking of religion by a university lecturer, 9 generated enormous interest.

It is his opinion, my own, and one shared by many skeptics that there exists among the general public a healthy interest in such scholarly debunking, particularly of such nonsense as *New Age* mysticism, astrology, spirit mediumship and pseudo-science. This was ably demonstrated by the recent Granada TV series, *James Randi: Psychic Investigator*. 10 People are receptive to rational explanations of supposedly psychic and associated phenomena. They *do* want to hear both sides of the argument. They *are* capable of making up their own minds, when they have access to ALL the facts. However, this opinion is not shared by the media, and I was unable to place either this article or the proposed syndicated column with the agency. Therefore, it will be read by a smaller, but, hopefully, receptive audience. 11 And just to make sure that this time, Richard Lawrence doesn't read anything "significant" 12 into my refusing to supply him with the name and address of the publication, I am, as previously stated, sending him a copy.

TAKE ME TO YOUR LEADER (VIA THE BANK)

One of the great unresolved mysteries of the Twentieth Century is the question of extraterrestrial intelligence; does life exist on other planets, and if so, is it sentient? In short, are human beings the pinnacle of creation? A cynic might answer that if we are, then God can't be quite as smart and omnipotent as he is cracked up to be. There may or may not be life in outer space, but there is certainly life in London SW6; though whether or not it is intelligent remains to be seen.

Number 757 Fulham Road is the terrestrial headquarters of the Aetherius Society, which describes itself as an International Spiritual Brotherhood.....founded in 1955 and Registered as a Church. The Society's founder is George King, or, to give him his proper title, His Eminence Sir George King, O.S.P., PhD., ThD., D.D. Metropolitan Archbishop of the Aetherius Churches. Dr Sir George King, who is modestly known to his disciples as Our Master, lives in Santa Barbera on the West coast of the United States, which, presumably, is more salubrious than the Maida Vale bedsit where, at 11 am one Saturday in July 1954, he was commanded by an Intelligence from the planet Venus: "Prepare yourself! You are to become the voice of Interplanetary Parliament. 13

After his unique appointment, George King set about spreading the gospel of Master Aetherius, with whom he still communicates to this day. The Aetherius Society grew out of meetings convened by the good doctor-to-be at London's Caxton Hall. Dr Sir George's other claims to fame, apart from his role as "Primary Terrestrial Mental Channel" include saving the world from the Fiends of Garouche, (wicked fish-like creatures from the other side of the Milky Way) and writing a book about life on the planets. 14

All this would be rather silly if it weren't taken so seriously by the true believers, Richard Lawrence for example, who also uses the title Dr, but is in reality a Rt Reverend. Lawrence staunchly defends his Master and has appeared on radio talk shows on otherwise quite respectable and earnest stations (London's LBC for example), claiming that *Dr King* communicates with the Cosmic Masters by meditation. He claims also to have received a letter of apology from the late Dr Christopher

Evans, who in 1973 published a book *Cults Of Unreason* 15 in which he stripped bare the nonsense of the Aethereans, the Scientologists and other practitioners of Twentieth Century pseudo-religions. Why Dr Evans should have written such a letter must count as another of the great mysteries of the modern era. If he did (and if pigs can fly), it was obviously written in jest.

Richard Lawrence; the Society's publicity officer (Reverend) Christine Aubry, and its other paid lackeys will dismiss this as poppycock, the same way they will undoubtedly dismiss attempts to ridicule their Master's claims to have communicated with Jesus (yes, *the* Jesus) and another lesser known prophet and interplanetary commuter, the appropriately named *Saint Goo-ling*, but even they will find it difficult to refute the charge of their being liberal with the untruth concerning more terrestrial matters.

For example, Dr Sir George King is not listed in any recent edition of *Who's Who*; those curious enough to enquire about the Master's qualifications will be told somewhat reluctantly that, yes, he does have doctorates, and a knighthood, but the latter does not come from the Queen, rather from an unspecified foreign source. As to the former, doctorates can be bought over the counter in the US, as Richard Lawrence surely knows.

Then there is the question of Dr Sir George King's Freedom of the City of London, an award which he received on June 12th, 1986. According to the Society's journal, *Cosmic Voice*, this award was bestowed on *Our Master* in recognition of his "outstanding humanitarian work." 16

A photograph of Dr Sir George with other Society members: Commander Sir Christopher Watkiss, Dame Iris Lawrence et al standing outside the Guildhall bears witness to this. Curiously, like their Master, none of these dignitaries is listed in the current edition of *Who's Who*. And the nature of Dr King's services to humanity is nebulous to say the least. What could he have done to have been made a Freeman of the City of London? A telephone call to a City librarian solved this mystery: not a lot. In fact, the charming young lady behind the information desk in the Guildhall Library informed the author that she too is a Freeman of the City of London, as no doubt is the local barber, the man behind the counter in the sandwich bar and Uncle Tom Cobbley and all.

Still, there can be no questioning the validity of the award presented to Dr Sir George on 23rd January 1989; he received the first Aetherius Society Peace Prize for ".....your outstanding lifelong Contribution to Peace on Earth." 17

At this point most readers will have come to the conclusion that Dr Sir George King is well and truly off his rocker, but while that may be so for the majority of his followers, the true believers, it is most certainly not true of him. The Aetherius Society now has branches in, among other places, Hollywood and Nigeria, and a worldwide membership, and although it must make a certain amount of money from the sales of its *literature* and tapes, most of its funding comes from donations and contributions, as George King himself admits. 18

However skeptical one may be of Dr Sir George, he certainly deserves some reward for keeping up this charade for the past thirty-seven years; a recent issue of *Cosmic Voice* 19 shows him dressed up like a bishop in full regalia, complete with mitre and staff. Although he celebrated his 70th birthday in January 1989, (Earthyear 25.200), Dr Sir George has no intention of retiring; when he does, perhaps he will appoint Richard Lawrence as his successor. Lawrence surely deserves some reward for his un-

stinting devotion and unswerving loyalty to his Master, although even if he too manages to open a channel to Master Aetherius, he will still have a hard act to follow.

Totally Out Of Their Tree

Although I had walked past the Society's terrestrial HQ on a couple of occasions, it wasn't until Monday 22nd April, 1991 that I actually visited it. I was accompanied by a woman who was into astrology and mysticism in a big way, a right *poseuse* to put it bluntly, although she claimed to have once been an atheist. So she was thus anything but a confirmed skeptic. In fact, she had, in the recent past, cast horoscopes and given personality readings, so inasmuch as anyone operating in this field can be said to be knowledgeable, she was. Even so, she came away with much the same impression as me: that the Aethereans are totally out of their tree.

We knocked on the door or rang the bell and entered. We were greeted by a silver-haired old biddy of seventy years plus, one of several who were working there.

Me: "Is this a bookshop?" 20

Old Bidy: Sort of.

(We looked around and made small talk. I said I was from out of town. I asked...Is this about flying saucers? (Pointing to a book).

Old bidy: Do you mean *why* they're here or *are* they here? That's a book about flying saucers. (Pointing to one of George King's books).

I noticed that a new edition of *Life On The Planets* was on sale.

Me: "They're definitely here, are they?"

Old Bidy: Oh yes.

Me: And the government knows?

Old Bidy: Good grief, yes.

She mentioned the government cover-up/UFO conspiracy theory etc.

My companion mentioned Timothy Good.

Old Bidy: "...Americans who work in the Pentagon know about. Then there were all the papers that came out."

(The MJ-12 saucer crash documents, presumably). 21

Me: "Who is George King?"

Old Bidy: "Well, if you've got three months or so I can tell you." "Is he still alive?" asked my companion. "Oh yes..." We made some more small talk about flying saucers, then the old biddy said "I can give you an introduction you can take away if you like."

She also asked me where I lived and when I replied Leeds, she told me the Aetherius Society had a Northern Headquarters near Barnsley and gave us some leaflets. "They're definitely here, the saucers?" I asked. "Oh yes!" she replied, sincere, almost scoffing in fact.

This is the sort of person who is taken in by this "I spoke to Jesus in my living room" guff; my companion and I laughed at her all the way to the Pizza House, but

we shouldn't have. Undoubtedly this poor old thing devotes much of her free time to working in Aetherius HQ, unpaid of course.

As we left, we looked in the window where we saw some sort of spacecraft or module, though presumably it doesn't fly. There were also books by the Master:

Operation Power Source: The Solution To the Spiritual Energy Crisis

Contact With The Lords Of Karma

Visit To The Logos Of Earth: A True Contact With The Lords Of The Flame

Cosmic Masters Speak To Earth

You Too Can Heal

All these titles had appended to them variations of George King's name. And, of course, there was also a photograph of Pete Murray in the window receiving the hands on from the Master himself. Later, when I read the leaflets the old biddy had given us I couldn't help but shake my head in disbelief. The leaflet entitled:

THE AETHERIUS SOCIETY A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

begins with the quote about George being commanded by the voice from the planet Venus. It also points out that he had previously been a student of yoga and "Spiritual philosophy" and that he had devoted all his spare time to metaphysics and healing the sick. (Not the mentally sick, apparently). The bold and obviously spurious claim is made that he performed many outstanding feats of healing, and that some of his patients, whom orthodox medicine had been unable to cure, were cured within a few days of meeting him. Obviously the BMA would take issue with this, if the case histories of these anonymous (and obviously non-existent) latter day Lazaruses were to be presented to them.

The early history of the Society is detailed, also mentioned is Saint Goo-ling, the Great White Brotherhood (not the Ku Klux Klan, apparently), and, of course, Master Aetherius.

"OPERATION STARLIGHT" which was initiated in 1959, is described as the "greatest single Metaphysical event undertaken upon Earth since Her inception as a Planet." So great in fact that the media, the world's governments and contemporary historians have never heard of it.. The Society has now spread throughout the world, we are told, but then so have the brown rat, organised crime and AIDS. But, the most incredible statement of all is that in November 1960, the Aetherius Society was incorporated in the United States as, among other things, a "scientific organization."

The rest of this leaflet rambles on in similar fashion, and so could I, but by now I hope I have made my point. Any reader who thinks this is all some kind of wind-up

is welcome to write to or phone the Society and ask them to send this leaflet and their latest leaflet about "spiritual push dates." I may be kidding, but they are dead-ly serious.

Not Really A Joke

Although it is difficult to take the Aethereans and their ilk seriously, like organised religion, they should not be regarded as a joke. In fact, all these organisations: the Aetherius Society, the Scientologists etc., and all the individual spirit mediums, dow-sers, astrologers who are touting their wares, can and should be classified as reli-gions rather than as "movements" or beliefs, because what they preach is dogma. The difference between science and religion is that science is always prepared to admit that it might be wrong. 22 Throughout history, the vast majority of mankind has held erroneous beliefs about the vast majority of the nature of things. It is only fairly recently (in historical terms) that it has been generally accepted that the Earth is spherical rather than flat. And most people probably still believe that a solid ob-ject, a brick for example, is really that, solid. In reality of course, all solid objects consist primarily of empty space, while at the quantum level there is no such thing as "matter" rather a "tendency to exist".

The fact that our senses can and do deceive us is difficult for most people to come to terms with, and even when it is demonstrated in one field, it is neither readily appar-ent nor accepted in another. Modern science, indeed any science worthy of the name, is based not on dogma, not on unsupported assertions, not on the glib "prophesies" and testimonies of George King and his kind, but on empiricism. Facts are collated, hypotheses formulated, theories tested, and, finally, "laws" are framed. Natural laws are not commands, merely statements that under certain circumstances such a thing always happens. There is no command forbidding water to flow uphill or prohibit-ing energy flowing from hot to cold.

The Aetherius Society and all the world's religions, great and humble, preach a false message, basically it is that we can know the true nature of things only by reve-lation. Acceptance of a "revealed truth" involves the suspension of disbelief. In the article *Is There Intelligent Life On Earth?* I mentioned the fact that LBC DJ Pete Mur-ray had once slagged me off over the air for deprecating the Aetherius Society. This was on a phone-in programme on which the guest, whose name eludes me, was com-ing out with all sorts of absurd speculations to account for inexplicable disappearan-ces in the so-called *Bermuda Triangle*. I phoned and pointed out that the very exist-ence of this triangle was tenuous, to say the least, and that many of the so-called mysterious disappearances were nothing of the sort: they had been explained ration-ally, and that statistically there was nothing unusual about this somewhat nebulous area. That just as many boats went down and planes disappeared "mysteriously" over other, comparable stretches of water. 23

I was then invited by the guest to "suspend my disbelief"; he said something like "Yes, but if you open your mind, you'll see it "could" be a *time warp*, there "could" be a black hole or a gateway to the fifth dimension etc., *ad nauseum* at the centre of the Bermuda Triangle. True, there could be, but where is the evidence? Another down-to-Earth caller suggested that there *could* be fairies at the bottom of his gar-

den, but that until somebody produced concrete evidence in support of their existence, there was no good reason for him to speculate about them.

Neither Pete Murray nor his guest saw the logic of that statement; both they, Richard Lawrence and millions of others throughout the world continue to suspend their disbelief, and many of them insist that we should do the same. But of course, if we do suspend our disbelief, then anything is possible: God, fairies, little green men, and George King, "Primary Terrestrial Mental Channel" and saviour of mankind with a hotline to Master Aetherius on the planet Venus. Which is very nice for George: it flatters his ego and keeps the bucks rolling in. (Isn't that what religion is really all about?), but in reality it is anything but a joke.

The thing which, more than anything, separates us from the animals is our ability to reason. When we suspend our disbelief, we suspend our reason with it, and when we suspend reason as with suspension of disbelief, not only is anything possible, but everything nasty has a habit of happening. It means, for one thing, that we are unable to see the other person's point of view. However reasonable or unreasonable that person's point of view may be, we flatter ourselves if we believe it is worth less to him than is ours to us. And what right have we to suggest, simply because he holds such beliefs that he is in some way inferior to us? It may be that he comes from a background, be it educational, cultural, religious etc., that we regard as inferior. But *if* our beliefs, our reason, our logic or even our way of life are so demonstrably superior to his, then the only way for us to prove this, and to show him the error of his ways is by reason and logical argument.

In this context I cannot help but quote the following poem on page 19 which demonstrates admirably both the presumed superiority and the arrogance of traditional Christianity, a religion that has long regarded all things outside its orbit as *pagan, heathen or even Satanic*. Yet when it comes down to brass tacks, its practitioners are steeped in superstition, ignorance and their own particular brand of *magic*. (They use the word "miracle"). One is forced to ask the question, *if the Christian religion is so superior, why have these highly civilised and cultured people been bombing the hell out of each other for the past twenty-five years (in Northern Ireland) and why have they been constantly at each others' throats the world over for as long as anyone can remember? It is, as Carl Lofmark points out, the rise of secular humanism that has given religion a human face rather than any inherent goodness of religion itself.* 24

Returning to the Aethereans, they, like all religious movements are most definitely not a joke. This does not mean that they should be outlawed; if people are so stupid as to donate money to the church or whatever it calls itself, and to believe whatever dross Dr Sir George King churns out in his trances, that is their prerogative. But likewise, it is the prerogative, nay the duty of those of us who are able to distinguish science from magic to inform and educate the public. As James Randi has admirably demonstrated, when the public have access to *all* the facts and to *all* shades of opinion, the vast majority of them are perfectly capable of making up their own minds, and of distinguishing fact from fiction, sense from nonsense. It is not the public who are stupid, rather it is the media who think they are, and who thus continue to insult their readers', listeners' and viewers' intelligence by feeding them a diet of daily horoscopes, mysticism and promoting the cult of contactees instead of using their enormous power and influence in a responsible manner.

The Missionary

The Missionary is a man
To view with some suspicion;
He spends his life in foreign lands
Denouncing superstition.

He comes, he says, to free the Blacks,
To love and educate them,
But once inside their humble shacks
Does nothing but berate them.

You must not worship deities,
He castigates the chief,
But practice White Man's pieties
For spiritual relief.

Young lambs must not be sacrificed,
Shamans must be despised;
To save you from sin, Jesus Christ
Was scorned and ostracised.

Out go old customs and taboos,
Like juju and rain dances;
The churches fill their empty pews
And lo: the tribe advances.

Repent, repent your wicked ways:
Barrabas, Jezebel!
If you don't, this fanatic says,
You'll surely go to Hell.

Such is the mission man's tirade
Against his hapless brother,
But all he does is trade
One superstition for another. 25

Notes and References

(1) *Abduction: Over 200 Documented UFO Kidnappings Investigated*, by Jenny Randles, Hale (1988); the paperback version is called *Abduction: Scientific exploration of alleged kidnaps by alien beings*, and is published by Headline, (1989).

(2) *Briticism: A British-American Magazine*, Volume 1 Number 4, December 1989/January 1990.

(3) The fact that this book was written by a number of churchmen was hardly an endorsement of skepticism! I have since been unable to identify it, but Von Däniken's theories, ie his speculations, fantasies and fabrications, have long since been thoroughly debunked in a scholarly manner. The reader is referred to

THE SPACE-GODS REVEALED:

A Close Look at the Theories

of Erich von Däniken

by Ronald Story

published by New English Library, (1978).

also of interest is

DISCIPLE OF THE GODS:

A biography of Erich von Däniken

by Peter Krassa

translated by David Koblick

and published by W.H. Allen, (1978).

This biography is unashamedly pro-von Däniken, but both deserve reading.

(4) *Cults of Unreason* by Dr Christopher Evans, published by Harrap, (1973).

(5) Among his other credits, Dr Evans was a psychologist, a world authority on micro-processors and authored three international best sellers!

(6) There is another reason, specifically why the Aethereans get so much coverage on LBC. This will be revealed in due course!

(7) When I phoned Peter Deeley at LBC and asked him what he thought of the Aetherius Society, he replied, "I try not to." !

(8) As a spokesman for the *New Age*, no less! In this interview, Lawrence claimed that the next age will be the *Age of Aquarius*, (which isn't just a musical!). Apparently these messages go in two thousand year cycles. He offered no evidence to support this claim. He claimed also that the Aetherius Society is now the leading organisation in the world preaching the reality of life on other planets, though he failed to mention that two of these other planets are Mars and Venus.

Fortunately, the *New Age* will bring in a more scientific approach, he said - we can but live in hope. But, sadly, he also mentioned the UFO cover up and the "fact" that "The messages that we have, have also been proven over the years. I mean, we have some very detailed factual information that's been given through Sir George King."

(9) *Does God Exist?* and *What is the Bible?* by Carl Lofmark, published in August 1990 by the Rationalist Press Association. For someone who is just about to embark on a scientific, scholarly or skeptical enquiry into the nature of God, of things, of religion in general or Christianity in particular, I cannot recommend these two easy-to-read primers too highly.

(10) Hopefully this series will be repeated, or others of a similar nature will be made. On these six programmes, Randi tested "psychics", dowzers and other such charlatans in front of the cameras. It was only when they failed miserably that one realised just how ludicrous were their claims in the first instance. One man claimed he could see people's auras, even though they were hidden behind a screen. Needless to say, when he was asked to put his money where his mouth is, his "psychic powers" let him down. In spite of his and other "psychics'" failure to do anything except make themselves look foolish, the Richard Lawrences of his world will continue to believe.

(11) I posted this article as a message to all in the Religion "Room" on London's Crystal Tower bulletin board on the evening of Sunday, 15th September, 1991.

(12) Like cowardice or faint-heartedness.

(13) *Life On The Planets* by George King: Aetherius Press, First Impression, (June 1959).

(14) King, (ibid).

(15) *Cults of Unreason* by Dr Christopher Evans, Harrap, (1973).

(16) *Cosmic Voice*, volume 7, issues 12, 13 & 14, October - December 1986. The front cover proclaims "His Eminence Sir George King Receives High Honours From England." *Cosmic Voice* also points out that other recipients of this award include the Duke of Wellington, Lord Nelson, Presidents Eisenhower and Nehru and two former prime ministers.

(17) *Cosmic Voice*, Volume 11, issues 5, 6 & 7, February 1990.

(18) "The work of the Aetherius Society is funded mainly by donations from its worldwide membership which has proven to be extremely devoted to the work and

very generous in supporting it." *The Age of Aetherius* by George King, Phd., D.Litt., D.D and Kevin Quinn Avery, D.M. published by the Aetherius Society. Revised edition September 1982.

(19) *Cosmic Voice*, Volume 11, issue 12, April 1990.

(20) Quotation marks designate actual quotes; I had a micro-cassette in my pocket but the recording was smothered by my jacket.

(21) Proof at last of a government cover-up! For the truth about these proofs of a conspiracy the reader is referred to *The Skeptical Inquirer*, Volume 12, Numbers 2 and 3, Winter 1987-8 and Spring 1988.

(22) This is true of science, but not necessarily of scientists, who can be just as dogmatic as any shaman. Somebody once remarked that new ideas in science come into general acceptance, not because the old ideas lose ground, but because the older generation of scientists dies out.

(23) *The Bermuda Triangle Mystery Solved* by Lawrence David Kusche, published by New English Library.

(24) *What is the Bible*, Lofmark, (op cit).

(25) This poem was originally published anonymously in *The Voice*, (22nd September, 1987).

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To UK Skeptic Lucy Fisher, thanks for the stimulating on-line conversations.

To "Dr" (or is it Reverend) Richard Lawrence, I await your libel writ.

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