



International Raëlian Movement

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Introduction

The International Raëlian Movement (IRM), founded in 1975 by Claude Vorilhon (b. 1946), aka Raël ('Light of the Elohim'), is perhaps the world's most successful extraterrestrial (ET) religion (here used to refer to New Age religions in which ETs figure as the agents of salvation). On 13 December 1973, Claude Vorilhon (Raël) reportedly saw an unidentified flying object—'a flying saucer,' according to Raël (2005, 3)—land in the caldera of Puy de Lassolas, a volcano near Clermont-Ferrand, France. There he met an 'Eloha', a diminutive humanoid ET who was one of the 'Elohim'; according to Raël these are the ET scientists who created humanity and all life on Earth. The theologian and sociologist of religions George Chryssides has discussed this as Raëlianism's 'scientific creationism' (Chryssides 2003). Raël reported that 'the figure was only about 4 feet (1.2 meters) tall. His eyes were slightly almond-shaped, his hair was black and long, and he had a small black beard. ... His skin was white with a slightly greenish tinge' (Raël 2005, 5). Raël was told by the Eloha to return to the crater the following day, which he did for six consecutive days, and he was instructed to tell no one of the meeting (or he would never meet the Eloha again), to wear no metal, and to bring a Bible and notebook (Raël 2005, 9). As historians of religion Eugene Gallagher and Paul Brian Thomas have noted, Raëlianism is fundamentally a biblical religion (Gallagher 2010; Thomas 2010). Sociologist of religion Susan Palmer (1995a, 1995b, 1998, 2000, 2004, 2014; Palmer and Sentes 2012) has written extensively about the IRM.

The Elohim

The Elohim, according to Raël, are human beings, albeit of an elder race—so they are not gods, the Eloha told Raël, although they *are* our creators. Evolution, Raël writes, is 'a myth ... this did not happen by chance' (Raël 2005, 92–93). Evolutionists are 'false prophets' (Raël 2005, 273). The Eloha told Raël that the Elohim genetically engineered all life on Earth from the simplest unicellular creatures to humanity's hominid ancestor, to whom the Elohim creators added 'what makes us essentially human. In this way, we made human beings in our image' (Raël 2005, 92). According to Raël, the Elohim have created life on two other planets besides Earth (Raël 2005, 278). The Elohim themselves, according to Raël,

were created by other people coming from another planet, who had been created by other people coming from another planet, and so on to Infinity. It is as foolish to search for the beginning of the Universe in time as it is to search for its beginning in space. (Raël 2005, 253)

In biblical Hebrew, *elohim* is the plural of *eloha*. While the God of Genesis 1 speaks in the first person plural ('Let us make mankind in our image and likeness'), biblical scholars generally see this not as a reference to an actual plurality of gods but as a plural of majesty: 'The most common of the originally appellative names of God is Elohim, plural in form though commonly construed with a singular verb or adjective. This is, most probably, to be explained as the plural of majesty or excellence' ('God', 1906). Jewish interpreters commonly argue that the Tanach (the Hebrew Bible) 'believes in the total Unity of E-lohim with such monotheistic clarity, that it usually uses E-lohim more than E-loha ... without suspecting any kind of confusion or plurality' (Shvat 2015). To Raël, though, the Elohim are an ET race of space-faring bioengineers dedicated to creating life throughout the universe.

Raël, Prophet of the Apocalypse

Raël, it is claimed, has been chosen by the Elohim as the Prophet of the Age of Apocalypse. The Elohim chose a Frenchman as their spokesperson, Raël was told, because France was the birthplace of democracy, and Raël in particular because his father was Jewish and his mother Catholic, and he could thus mediate between the Jews and the Catholics (Raël 2005, 8). In fact, though, Raël claims to have been told by Yahweh and Jesus, whom he later met on the Planet of the Eternals, that Yahweh, ruler of the Elohim home planet, was Raël's *actual* father, and that Raël—like Jesus before him—was conceived aboard an Elohim spaceship:

After the explosion at Hiroshima, we decided that the time had come for us to send a new messenger on Earth. He would be the last prophet, but the first one to address mankind asking them to understand and not to believe. We then selected a woman, as we had done in the time of Jesus. This woman was taken aboard one of our ships and inseminated as we had done with the mother of Jesus. Then she was freed after we had totally erased from her memory all traces of what had happened. Your real father is also the father of Jesus, and that makes you brothers. (Raël 2005, 290)

According to Raël, the serpent of Genesis 3:1-5 represents the Elohim scientists who revealed to the human beings whom they had created that they—the Elohim—are not gods, but human beings (Raël 2005, 17). To punish humanity's Elohim creators, Yahweh, ruler of the Elohim home planet, confined them to Earth, where they took human wives who bore hybrid offspring, the Nephilim: 'The creators living in exile took the most beautiful daughters of humanity and made them their wives' (Raël 2005, 19). Here, Raëlianism's Elohim are the *Bene ha'Elohim*, the Sons of God of Genesis 6:4 (Flaherty 2010). It was then that Yahweh decided from the Elohim home planet to destroy all life on Earth (Raël's reading of Genesis 6:5): 'They then decided from their distant planet, to destroy all life on earth by sending nuclear missiles. However, our exiled creators, informed of the project, instructed Noah to build a spaceship which would

orbit the earth during the cataclysm' (Raël 2005, 206). A single cell from the male and female of each species was preserved. The explosion of the missiles caused a tidal wave that submerged the continent (originally there was only one continent; Raël 2005, 13). Subsequently, the animal species were re-created from the cells that had been preserved on the spaceship, and Earth was restored (Raël 2005, 22).

The International Raëlian Movement

According to the IRM, there are an estimated sixty thousand members worldwide (Raël 2005, xvi). The movement is strongest in France, Canada, South Korea, Japan, and Africa (Raël 2005, 365). Originally Raël called his movement MADECH (Mouvement pour l'Accueil des Elohim Createurs de l'Humanité, Movement for Welcoming of the Elohim Creators of Humanity; or Moïse a Dèrance Elie et le Christ, Moses Preceded Elijah and Christ) but in 1975 the group's name was changed, with the Elohim's authorization, according to Raël, to the International Raëlian Movement (IRM).

The original emblem of the IRM was a Star of David (a hexagram)—also called the Shield of David or Māḡēn Dāwīd—with a swastika in its centre. Raël claims to have seen this symbol on the Elohim spaceship that he observed in 1973 (Raël 2005, 62). The swastika, according to Raël, is an ancient symbol of infinity with a long history as one of humanity's most sacred symbols before it was appropriated by the Nazis in the twentieth century. In 1992, though, the swastika in the IRM emblem was replaced for North America and Europe with a six-armed galactic-shaped swirl within the hexagram because of the swastika's association in the West with Germany's Nazi past and the Holocaust (Raël 2005, 369): 'In Asia, where the swastika can be found in most Buddhist temples and where it represents infinity in time, the original symbol is not a problem' (Raël 2005, 368). In 2007, though, Raël decided to restore the swastika in the hexagram as the official IRM symbol ('The Official Raëlian Symbol Gets its Swastika Back', 2007). The swastika, according to Upendra Singh, National Raëlian Guide for Nepal and leader of the Worldwide Pro-Swastika Alliance, 'is a symbol cherished not only by Raëlians, for whom it represents infinity in time, but by Hindus, Buddhists, and Jains' (quoted in Simon 2016).

Until the 1980s, Raëlianism diffused primarily through the international French community, but in the 1980s Japanese Raëlians translated Raël's books into English: *Le Livre qui dit la Vérité* (*The Book that Tells the Truth*)

(L'Édition du Message, 1974) and *Les Extra-terrestres M'ont Emmené sur leur Planète* (*Extraterrestrials Took Me to Their Planet*) (Édition du Message, 1975) were published as a single volume: *The Message Given to Me by Extraterrestrials: They Took Me to Their Planet* (1986). Raël's third book, *Accueillir les Extra-Terrestres* (*Let's Welcome the Extraterrestrials*) (L'Édition du Message, 1975) was published as *Let's Welcome Our Fathers from Space: They Created Humanity in Their Laboratories* (1989). In 2005, new English translations of *The Message Given to Me by Extraterrestrials* and *Let's Welcome the Extraterrestrials* were completed and published as one book, *Intelligent Design: Message from the Designers* (2005), which the IRM has made available on its homepage as a free download (<https://www.rael.org>).

The Embassy Project

The beginning of the Aquarian Age (the Age of Apocalypse), according to Raël, coincided with Raël's birth and the return of the Jews to Israel in 1946, which Raëlians count as the Year One (Raël 2005, 206):

The Age of Pisces was the age of Christ and his fishermen, and the Age of Aquarius, which follows, began in 1946. This is the era in which the people of Israel found their country again. ... It is not by chance that you [i.e. Raël] were born in 1946. (Raël 2005, 81)

Raël says that the Elohim instructed him to create a movement to spread the messages of the Elohim creators worldwide, and to build an 'embassy' near Jerusalem where the Elohim spaceships will land (Raël 2005, 176). Raëlianism's embassy will be, according to Raël, the rebuilt third temple of biblical [prophecy](#) (Raël 2005, 368), which to many Zionists and Christians is a necessary prerequisite of the advent of the messianic age (the first temple in Jerusalem, the Temple of Solomon, was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 bce; the accession of Cyrus the Great of Persia in 559 bce made possible the construction of the second temple, which was destroyed by the Romans in 70 ce). Raël has warned that if Israel does not permit the embassy's construction, the embassy will be built elsewhere and the people of Israel will once again be dispersed (Raël 2005, 177). According to Raël's 1997 Message of the Elohim:

Jerusalem is everywhere where human beings love us, respect us and wish to welcome us with due respect, and the chosen people are those who, knowing what we are, want to welcome us, meaning the Raëlians. The real Jews on Earth are no longer the people of Israel, but those who recognize us as their creators and wish to see us return. The link we have with the people of Israel is about to be severed. ... They have very little time to understand their mistake before being dispersed once again. (Raël 2005, 359)

In 1991 the IRM submitted an official request to the Chief Rabbi in Israel regarding the construction of the Elohim embassy in Jerusalem. The swastika had been removed from the IRM symbol in 1992 not only 'out of respect for the sensitivities of the victims who had suffered and died under the Nazi swastika during the Second World War' (Raël 2005, 368) but also to facilitate embassy negotiations with Israel. An Israeli government commission concluded that the IRM was peaceful and not a threat to Israel's national security; nonetheless, in 1993 Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin rejected the IRM's request that the embassy be constructed in Israel (Raël 2005, 368). The IRM then began negotiations with other nations, including Canada and Russia, but it has not yet succeeded in securing the agreement of a nation-state in which it can establish the embassy. Once a country authorizes the embassy's construction, Israel will, according to Raël, have one last opportunity to reconsider, but if in the end Israel rejects the embassy project, according to Raël, Israel will be dispersed (Raël 2005, 360).

According to Raël, 'our greatest task is to build the embassy for the Elohim so that at long last they can come here and land officially and live among us' (Raël 2005, 71). In 2015 the IRM submitted a request to the United Nations—'Optional Protocol Concerning Embassies for Extraterrestrials'—asking that the Elohim be granted special diplomatic status (International Raëlian Foundation, 2015). Daniel Turcotte, Raëlian

Guide and leader of the IRM in Canada, is Raël's assistant responsible for the IRM's Embassy for Extraterrestrials Project.

Cloning

Raël claims that in 1975 he encountered the Elohim a second time, and they took him to the Elohim home planet and to a second, smaller planet—the Planet of the Eternals—where he met Moses, Jesus, Buddha, Mohammed, and Yahweh. On the Planet of the Eternals, people live seven hundred years. Upon their death, eternalists are cloned from a cell taken from their old bodies. There are nine thousand eternalists—Elohim and people from Earth—and ninety thousand biological robots who serve them. Eight thousand Earth humans have already been re-created on the Planet of the Eternals (Raël 2005, xix). The biological robots are incapable of suffering or feeling and cannot reproduce (Raël 2005, 162). Raël teaches that we must show the Elohim that we are proud of having been created in their image by one day being able to ourselves create human beings in our image: biological robots who will free us, their creators, entirely from work:

Work should not be considered as something sacred. Everyone has the right to be comfortably off even if he does not work. Everyone should try to fulfill himself and blossom in the field which attracts him. If men organize themselves, it will not take them long to mechanize and automate entirely all indispensable work. ... Do everything to create the biological robot which will relieve you from menial labor and enable you to blossom and fulfill yourselves. (Raël 2005, 196-97)

In 1997 the IRM established Clonaid, the world's first human cloning project. In 2000 Raël severed all formal involvement in Clonaid (Raël 2005, 365), placing it under the direction of Brigitte Boisselier (b. 1956), a PhD-level biomolecular chemist and Raëlian bishop. According to Boisselier:

In a not too distant future, advanced cloning technologies will allow us to even re-create a deceased person in an adult body, with all his past experiences and memories, allowing mankind to enter the age of immortality as it has been announced by His Holiness Raël, founder of Clonaid, in 1973 already after his contact with the Elohim, mankind's extraterrestrial creators. (Boisselier 2004)

There is no 'God', Raël teaches. Nor is there a soul that survives the body's death. There are our ET Elohim creators, though, and the genetic code, the 'cellular plan', which allows the Elohim to re-create the individual, to whom is granted eternal life (Raël 2005, 247). As feminist theorist Gena Corea wrote: 'The promise of immortality is apparently one of the most attractive features of cloning' (Corea 1985, 262).

On 28 March 2001, Raël appeared before the US Congress during hearings on human cloning. He testified that 'human cloning will make it possible for us to reach eternal life' and dedicated his testimony to Giordano Bruno (1548-1600), the Italian Dominican monk, philosopher, and scientist who was, Raël said, 'sentenced to death by the Catholic Church for saying there was life on other planets' ('User Clip', 2001) (in his 1584 treatise *De l'Infinito, Universo e Mondi—On the Infinite, Universe and Worlds*—Bruno

postulated an infinite universe and multiplicity of inhabited worlds; he was tried for heresy by the Church of Rome and executed). While there have been a number of legislative attempts to institute a federal ban on human cloning in the United States since Raël testified before the US Congress, there is currently no federal law in the United States that completely prohibits human cloning, although cloning is banned in a number of individual states.

In July 2002, Clonaid's South Korean affiliate, Biofusion Tech Inc., announced that a woman had been impregnated with a cloned human embryo (Park 2003). In response, in September 2002, South Korea's Ministry of Health and Welfare announced a ban on human cloning: 'Whether the claim is true or not, it has become more imperative that we enact such a law at the earliest possible date' (Shin 2002). In December 2002, Clonaid announced that a cloned baby girl, whom they named Eve, had been born by caesarean section in the US state of Florida. In January 2003, Clonaid reported that a second cloned baby girl had been born in the Netherlands, and that a cloned baby boy had been born in Japan ('Clonaid Says It's Cloned First Boy', 2003). Clonaid's claims were met with scepticism from scientists ('Clonaid's Claims Were a Hoax', 2003) and condemned by mainstream religious and political leaders worldwide (Associated Press 2002).

Nuclear Holocaust and the Apocalypse

According to Raël, the development of nuclear weapons was a sign to the Elohim that human beings were ready for reestablished contact with their ET creators. Whereas to Raël the sixth seal of the Apocalypse (Revelation 6:12-17) represents the development of nuclear weapons, the seventh seal (Revelation 8:1-6) represents actual nuclear war (Raël 2005, 299). Raël's Elohim will not intervene to prevent nuclear war: 'Either Humanity will develop an interplanetary consciousness and the whole of Mankind will enter the Golden Age, or everything will explode, and you will be those who we will saved to rebuild everything' (Raël 2005, 306).

While there is a 1 percent chance of averting nuclear holocaust, according to Raël, there is a 99 percent probability that there will be a cataclysmic nuclear war (Raël 2005, 306). In the event of such, those who have had their 'cellular plan' transmitted to Raël or to a Raëlian Guide designated by Raël will be re-created on the Planet of the Eternals. Additionally, upon death a one-square-centimetre bone sample is to be taken from the forehead of the deceased and sent to the Guide of Guides (Raël) to be kept in the Raëlian embassy (Raël 2005, 192). Individuals will be re-created on the Planet of the Eternals only if the required bone sample is sent to the Guide of Guides (Raël):

The total of those who will be 'sealed in the forehead' will be around 144,000. For as long as the total of these human beings does not reach 144,000, we will help delay the final cataclysm, so as to have a sufficient number to start a new generation on Earth when it has become a suitable place again for humans to live. (Raël 2005, 298-99)

Here, Raël's teaching is a reading of Revelation 7:1-8 and 14:1,3-5, in which it is [prophesied](#) that 144,000 servants of God bearing the seal of the Living God on their foreheads will reign with him on the heavenly Mount Zion.

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