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## Aliens: Risky or Ridiculous?

by John M. DeMassa

*Is it “too risky” to communicate with aliens or just too ridiculous to believe they are there?*

**Stephan Hawking** thinks it might be “too risky” to communicate with space aliens. But his fears have had little influence on NASA and other researchers who met in Houston during the last week of April.

**Seth Shostak**, a senior astronomer at the Seti Institute in California, the world’s leading organization searching for telltale alien signals, is

not so sure if concern is warranted. “This is an unwarranted fear,” Shostak says. “If (alien) their interest in our planet is for something valuable that our planet has to offer, there’s no particular reason to worry about them now. If they’re interested in resources, they have ways of finding rocky planets that don’t depend on whether we broadcast or not. They could have found us a billion years ago.”

With the discovery of over 300 **exo-planets** some scientists have moved from the camp of doubters. In one **survey** of over 900 scientists, 46% believe intelligent life will be found on other planets. Somewhere in the universe in the “Goldilocks zone”

(where conditions on the planet are not too hot and not too cold but “just right,” so that liquid water is present and life could evolve) life is thought to be present.

The long debate regarding “phoning ET (extra-terrestrials)” was reignited with Hawking’s remarks among conference goers.

The aliens according to Hawking, almost certainly exist and reflect human attributes including intelligence.

“We only have to look at ourselves to see how intelligent life might develop into something we wouldn’t want to meet,” Hawking said. “I imagine they

might exist in massive ships ... having used up all the resources from their home planet. Such advanced aliens would perhaps become nomads, looking to conquer and colonize whatever planets they can reach.”

Hawking further illustrates that the intelligent visitors might be a bit like Christopher Columbus bringing peril to the Native Americans. The majority of extraterrestrial life, he guesses is more akin with microbes living in subsurface habitats shielded from inhospitable environments. Europa, a moon of Jupiter, is thought to host such organisms where, it is believed vast oceans of liquid water exist a mile or so beneath the surface. Though such microbes are fascinating to scientists, intelligent beings like us far removed from squiggly mud dwellers capture the public imagination. Hawking wonders what these aliens might be like. He pictures a bellicose civilization, among the possibilities, that might attack earth. Alternatively, he sees a technologically advanced civilization blowing itself up. Hawking is a widely respected and published cosmological theoretician despite a severe neural disorder leaving him wheel chair bound for most of his life.

The basis of Hawking’s belief that life could be found extra-terrestrially arises from his acceptance of the **theory of evolution**. “We are just an advanced breed of monkeys on a minor planet of a very average star. But we can understand the Universe. That makes us something very special.” According to Hawking, many other life forms populate the unexplored universe.

**ET researchers** generally point toward pieces of evidence that might support the hypothesis.

1. 1976, The Viking Mars landers detect chemical signatures indicative of life
2. 1977, The unexplained extraterrestrial "Wow!" signal is detected by an Ohio State University radio telescope
3. 1996, Martian "fossils" are discovered in meteorite ALH80041 from Antarctica
4. 2001, A more rigorous estimate of the "Drake equation" suggests

that our galaxy may contain hundreds of thousands of life-bearing planets

5. 2001, The red tinge of Jupiter's moon Europa proposed to be due to frozen bits of bacteria, which also helps explain the mysterious infrared signal it gives off
6. 2002, Russian scientists argue that a mysterious radiation-proof microbe may have evolved on Mars
7. 2002, Chemical hints of life are found in old data from Venus probes and landers. Could microbes exist in Venusian clouds?
8. 2003, Sulfur traces on Jupiter's moon Europa may be the waste products of underground bacterial colonies
9. 2004, Methane in the Martian atmosphere hints at microbial metabolism
10. 2004, A mysterious radio signal is received by the SETI project on three occasions - from the same region of space

Though each piece of evidence is potentially supportive, the scientific community remains skeptical. For example, the 1996 wildly celebrated discovery of a rock allegedly blasted off of the face of Mars and landing in **Antarctica**, has met a cooler reception in recent years. What appeared to be chemical signals created by life, specked on the rock’s interior, are now thought to be signatures of chemical activity. In a more recent report, **methane**, an indirect sign of life, discovered in the Martian atmosphere, convinces some the possibility of biological origin. Yet others hold to methane origin from volcanic or rock sources.

Some **scientists** commenting from a Christian position have presented their own position on the Martian evidence. Frank Sherwin with the Institute for Creation Research writes, “Christians should keep three things in mind regarding this whole issue:

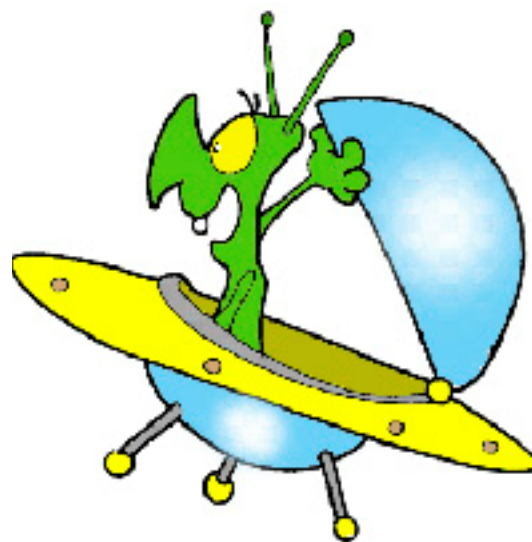
1. Life has *never* been found on the planet Mars. Doubts continue to grow regarding fossilized bacteria in

the meteorite from Mars.

2. If some day life were to be found on Mars, there would be good reason to believe it may have come from Earth, possibly having been blasted there by asteroid impact during the Flood of Noah’s day.
3. Given the amazing complexity of life, wherever life is found, it had to have been created by an intelligent Designer.

Dr. **Danny Faulkner**, a professor of Astronomy/Physics at the University of South Carolina in Lancaster writes, “While we cannot prove biblically that God did not create life elsewhere, the strong implication of Scripture is that He did not. These very different predictions of the special creation and evolution models mean that the search for life elsewhere amounts to a powerful test between the two theories of origin.”

Is it “too risky” to communicate with aliens or just too ridiculous to believe they are there? Judging by the diversity of opinions in addition to the absence of agreeable data, it would appear that the question of extra-terrestrial life remains open.



## Day of Prayer Draws Godless and Godly to Arms

by John M. DeMassa



### *The National Day of Prayer (NDP) on Thursday (May 6<sup>th</sup>) drew annual criticism from groups opposed to the statute.*

But this year a federal judge's ruling, on April 15, brought ire to the faithful as NDP was ruled unconstitutional for the first time since its inception in 1952 by an act of congress.

U.S. District Judge Barbara Crabb (nominated by Jimmy Carter, 1979) who made the ruling stated it is "an inherently religious exercise that serves no secular function."

The NDP designation (36 U.S.C. § 119) calls for the nation "to turn to God in prayer and meditation," in keeping with a tradition stretching back to the **founding fathers**.

- The First Continental Congress called for "a day of publick humiliation, fasting, and prayer" in 1775, on the eve of Revolution.
- Regarding Thanksgiving, George Washington wrote in 1777, "Being the day set apart by the Honorable Congress for public Thanksgiving and Praise; and duty calling us devoutly to express our grateful acknowledgements to God for the manifold blessings he has granted us, the General ... earnestly exhorts, all officers and soldiers, whose absence is not indispensably necessary, to attend with reverence the solemnities of the day."
- John Adams declared May 9, 1798, as "a day of solemn humiliation, fasting, and prayer ... that our country may be protected from all the dangers which threaten it."
- James Madison followed this tradition, but wrote, "I was always careful to make the Proclamations absolutely indiscriminate, and merely recommendatory; or rather mere designations of a day, on which all who thought proper might unite in consecrating it to religious purposes, according to their own faith & forms. In this sense, I presume you reserve to the Govt. a right to appoint particular days for religious worship throughout the State, without any penal sanction enforcing the worship."

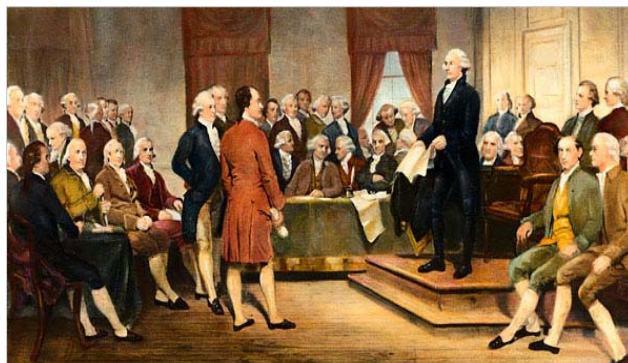
- In 1952, Congress established the National Day of Prayer as an annual event by a joint resolution, signed into law by President Harry Truman. In 1988, Congress set the first Thursday in May as the official day for presidents to issue proclamations asking Americans to pray.

Yet judicial interpreters of the later half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have felt little connection to the Founders, and like minded leaders. Viewing the Constitution as a "living document," some judge's have used a phrase from a letter penned by Thomas Jefferson to the Danbury Baptists to drive out religious ceremonies, monuments, prayer, and Bible reading from the public forum.

**Mark Alexander** writes, "Thomas Jefferson, a vigilant though skeptical Anglican, made clear ... in his obscure but maliciously misconstrued 1802 letter to the Danbury Baptist Association. Far from calling for the coercive stripping of all religious influences from public life, Jefferson merely assured his Baptist constituents in Connecticut that their denominational practices were safe because our Constitution provided a "**wall of separation**" between church and state, which would prohibit the national government from recognizing Anglicanism as the national religion. (Notably, two days after writing that letter, Jefferson attended religious services in the House of Representatives.)"

Alexander also notes that former Chief Justice William Rehnquist taught, "The wall of separation between church and state is a metaphor based upon bad history, a metaphor which has proved useless as a guide to judging. It should be frankly and explicitly abandoned. ... The greatest injury of the 'wall' notion is its mischievous diversion of judges from the actual intention of the drafters of the Bill of Rights."

The group that brought the suit, Freedom From Religion Foundation, two years ago, alleged that the federal government violated the separation of church and state. Letters were sent from FFRF to governors and mayors urging them to abstain from participation in the NDP. A number of religious groups have countered with letters to government officials encouraging participation, in the wake of the ruling including the **Alliance Defense Fund**, and the **American Center for Law and Justice**, arguing that "Public Official should be able to participate in public prayer just as the founding fathers did..."



Bridgeport, Connecticut

## An Uncommon Sunday Santerian Stroll

by John M. DeMassa

*Michael Serfillippi reported to police a strange object he came across during Sunday stroll at Beardsley Park.*

Tapping the object with his boot he confirmed his guess: the head of a goat with horns, beard, and distinct facial features. Blood and other remains were absent but the skull was positioned with intention as Serfillippi explained.

This strange encounter followed on the heels of the equally odd discovery earlier in the month of two beheaded roosters found on Housatonic Avenue and Grand Street near a makeshift ritual site. A sheep's jawbone, coconut halves, snakeskin and a black cap were among the other articles found. Investigators have suggested that the ritual, known as the Santeria curse, targeted a Derby man involved in a legal dispute.

The goat's head was not definitively linked to any particular matter and apparently was removed before police arrived on Tuesday.

Bridgeport has seen an increase in occult activity according to paranormal investigator Sgt. James Myers. In addition to the incidents described, last year a human skull and beheaded chicken were found during a drug raid and the following month skulls were discovered at another ritual site at Mountain Grove Cemetery also linked to a Santeria curse.

**Santeria** is a syncretistic (mixed) religion from the Caribbean combining worship of the "head guardian" Orisha and elements of Roman Catholicism. The origin of Santeria dates to 1515 when trafficked slaves brought native beliefs from Africa to the Caribbean. Slaves baptized by Roman Catholic clergy blended their traditions to produce a constellation of Santerian saints. Guardians lesser than the head guardian or supreme deity were equated with common saints. For example, a lesser guardian known as Ogzzn became St. Peter and Ellegua became St. Anthony. Rituals were also modified but often involve the collection of blood from sacrificed animals such as chickens, which is offered to Orisha. The blood is thought to please the saints, bring luck and forgive sins. Rhythmic dancing is performed at rituals leading to possession by Orisha, according to Santerian beliefs. Priests and Priestesses, who receive oral tradition are trained for years, after which time they endure a time of isolation prior to service. Various objects such as charms, herbs, potions, musical instruments, and other materials are used by adherents.

Reverend Julus Laloi of Bridgeport, a Haitian-American, details Santerian practices observed in Haiti.

He is unaware of any kind of activity in Bridgeport but he recalls such practices in Haiti. Believing Haitians widely refer to these practices as a Satanic religion, according to Laloi.

"I believe that there are demonic spirits involved. In the voodoo ceremony you see people put fire in their mouths and people walking in fire. Bad spirits (demons) are influencing them. These people are inhabited by bad spirits. When the spirit comes out they no longer know what happened. They forget. Objects too appear to be inhabited by spirits. If somebody got the object a bad spirit is passed around. A voodoo priest can manipulate the spirit. Sometime the voodoo priest can lay down on the dead body, he removes the spirit and gives it to another. This is what people believe."

What about the rituals and sacrifices? What have you observed with this?

"With killing or sacrificing chickens people are into voodoo. Sometime the voodoo priest will heal somebody or curse somebody. The problem is people believe (in the power of voodoo) but if you don't believe nothing will happen to you and you can't be harmed. If you are a child of God you can't be harmed. If you are a servant of the Lord nothing can happen to you. If you are the temple of the Holy Spirit and serve God, nothing can touch you unless God gives permission. When someone dies people think in Haiti that they may not have naturally died. Perhaps it was a curse. The voodoo priest goes to the cemetery and extracts the spirit known as a zombie. The priest will use the spirit for his own ends. Again this is what they believe but demons are involved."

What would you say to the Santerian practitioners in Bridgeport?

"If I could say something to them, I would say one thing. In 2 Corinthians you must give an account for what you do in this body. (1 Corinthians 5:10: For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.) There are several other books. Anything you are doing will be judged. We are to love each other not curse each other. Rom 12:18. If at all possible be at peace with everybody. Cursing others is common in Haiti but you should live at peace with everyone. (Rom. 12:18: If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.)



## A Pagan Holiday

by John M. DeMassa

The first weekend of May brought the warm winds of spring, bright sunshine and a pagan celebration known as **Beltaine**. A writer for the Hartford Current, **Paula Jean West**, described the “lush green” of the day in the beautifully wooded Connecticut countryside. The event was held on Schreiber’s farm in Oxford drawing 200 attendees paying an admission fee of \$140 each. Musical performances and workshops were part of the festivities and a maypole dance representing unification of the masculine and feminine, according to pagan clergy. Reportedly, the workshops offered instruction in healing with crystals, crafting spells, using oils for therapy, storytelling, and dream interpretation. Musical acts span many cultures such as Native American, new age, rock and folk genres. Tarot card reading was also offered which practitioners believe speak to the major themes of our lives. The keynote speaker Z Budapest, founder of the Susan B. Anthony witches’ coven. The Beltaine Celtic festival, while unfamiliar to most, is similar to Halloween (or **Samhain**) where the former marks the midpoint of the spring equinox and the summer solstice and the later marks the midpoint of the autumnal equinox and the winter solstice.

At the **Susan B. Anthony Coven Number 1** website a manifesto or doctrinal statement is published. Followers are called to “fight for the right to control (their) bodies”, “secure...women’s spiritual strength,” embrace a coming “changing universal consciousness”, personal rediscovery of female supremacy, relationship with the “Creatrix.”

Reliable statistics on the number of neo-pagans nationwide are wanting as for those practicing witches or **Wicca** but estimates have been offered during a 30 year period (1972 to 2001: Table 1, 2). Two facts appear to be reliable despite the absence of reproducible figures. Firstly, the numbers appear to exceed 100,000 adherents and secondly since the 1970’s that number has measurably grown as suggested by **others**.

Statistics are also somewhat fuzzy on the number of neo-pagans in America but polls are available. A poll was conducted by Covenant of the Goddess (CoG) beginning in late July, 1999 that reported 768,400 Neo-pagans in the US and Canada in 2001.

Neo-paganism is an umbrella term consisting of **ancient polytheistic and pantheistic faiths** that have magical traditions. Included among the neo-pagan sects are Wicca, Magick, Druidism, Asatru, neo-Native American religion and others. The various sects appear to be syncretistic drawing from disparate sources ranging from European witchcraft, Norse

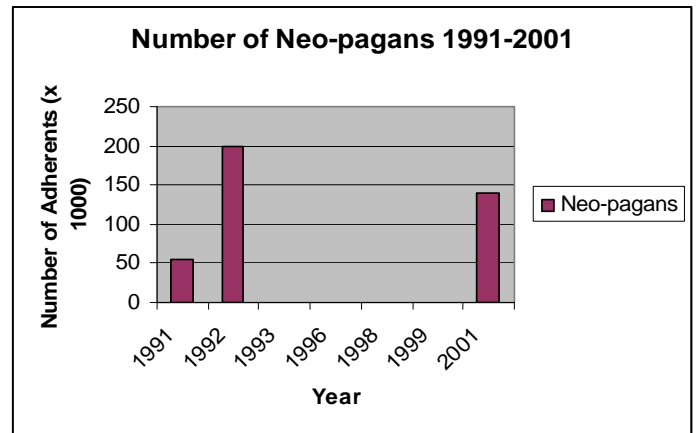


TABLE 2 REPORTED NUMBER OF ADHERENTS TO NEO-PAGANISM

mythology, Druidism, Egyptian, Greek, and Native American ancient religions. Also the forms appear to be synthetic creating new traditions from the old.

Christian views and critiques on witchcraft vary but fall into philosophical, theological and personal responses.

**Russ Wise** reviewing the rules of wicca, for example, charges that the *Wiccan Rede (or Consel)*, defined as a moral system in the **Neopagan** religion of Wicca, is often naïve in its conclusions. One wiccan teaching suggests “*Do what thou wilt, but harm none, commonly* stated, “As long as your actions don’t hurt anyone, you can do whatever you want.” According to Wise this outlook teaches that there are no consequences to ones actions as long as they do not hurt anyone. Such a position allows sexual expression with “dire consequences morally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually.” He teaches, “pre-marital sex, homosexuality, and other forms of sexual license are held in high regard and offered as personal choices for those who follow their own understanding.” Wise also explains that Wiccan followers feel they do not need forgiveness from God, or a need to repent. The Wiccan follower is to honor the goddess, be one with her, and bring healing to nature and people.

Wise believes the Christian is to witness to the Wiccan gently offering teachings from the Scriptures but clearly bringing out the authority of the Bible to ground arguments. It is also important to avoid accusing or misrepresenting Wicca with its many syncretistic positions. Sharing your faith in a kind manor is also recommended but emphasis on relationship with God is perhaps the key to any presentation.

A number of testimonies of **former witches** turned **Christian** are available. Shalom, a former witch explains, “After practicing magic for over 20 years, I never encountered any power like the power I encountered since I’ve been a Christian.” With the peace she’s always longed for, Shalom is hoping to help other Pagans and Wiccans find it too. She advises, “You can find forgiveness. [It] doesn’t matter what you’ve done. He’s still going to forgive all of that. There is hope.”

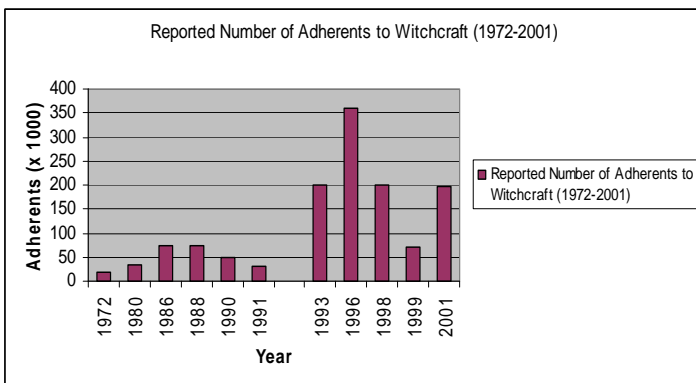


TABLE 1 REPORTED NUMBER OF ADHERENTS TO WICCA



The New England School of Theology  
FAIRFIELD, CT

BEGINNER

INTERMEDIATE

ADVANCED

*But grow in grace, and [in] the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him [be] glory both now and for ever. Amen.*

2 Peter 3:18

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All commentary and views are not necessarily held by all within the school community.

The New England School of Theology is offering an Introduction to Apologetics at our Fairfield location in the Fall of 2010. For more information and registration please contact Dr. John M. DeMassa

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