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Gods From Space

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Gods From Space

Abstract

This is a film review of *Gods From Space* (2018), directed by Annalise Pasztor.



Gods from Space (2018), dir. Annalise Pasztor

Gods From Space is a 5-minute documentary film about the Aetherius Society, a religious organization built on the central tenet that all genuine spiritual leaders that have lived on Earth have extraterrestrial origins. They specify the origins of these visionaries: the Buddha, for example, is from Venus, and appeared on earth in order to promote sanity and virtue. The film portrays the religious organization as being markedly technologically progressive, having distinct appeal because of its embrace of contemporary scientific discovery. Members of the Aetherius Society developed the ability to harness the power of selfless prayer in special batteries, which can be made to discharge the energy of compassion whenever and wherever such energy is needed. Through prayer energy, harnessed in these batteries or through unmediated prayer, good will is spread throughout the world, staving off the spiritual illness of modern living.

The film presents the Aetherius Society as being explicitly futuristic. Beyond the galactic bent, the ability to condense the energy of prayer into a “physical expedient” is set in direct contrast to the destruction and pain that nuclear energy brings about. The presumption seems to be that only a religion up to date with the developments of technology is equipped to counteract the woes that accompany technological advancement. On first pass, this might seem dubious: if advanced technology is the problem, then it can hardly be the root of the solution (a *là* fighting fire with fire). But the documentary suggests a challenge to this: the Aetherius Society is *especially* equipped precisely because it has hi-jacked frightful machinery and uses it to spread good will, not destruction. Furthermore, the nuclear threat is just one manifestation of the widespread spiritual illness of our times. The documentary certainly emphasizes the nuclear, but primarily as an exemplar of greater malaise and more general looming doom, one manifestation among other possibilities. The religion is broadly preoccupied with catastrophe and avoiding it.

The sole solution to these woes, it tells us, is spreading good will. In a clip of an interview, the founder of the organization, Dr. George King, says that God himself is nothing more or less than good will. In this way, the religion resembles many faiths that make the cultivation of compassion a central objective. It also resembles many faiths in its emphasis on the extra-human source of spiritual wisdom. Whereas other religions emphasize the supernatural essences and origins of their spiritual leaders, the Aetherius Society asserts their extraterrestrial origins. To be sure, some cosmologies would not make such a distinction to begin with: supernatural and extraterrestrial are essentially the same when the human world is taken to be coexistent with the corporeal realm. But where some worldviews fail to entertain such a distinction, it seems that the Aetherius Society takes on the contemporary, empirically informed distinction between the supernatural and the extraterrestrial and then collapses it. In either case, the figureheads are non-

human, non-earthly, temporary visitors that show up in order to guide humanity away from its own destruction. But in the latter case, they have physical origins.

There is a unique clarity in the approach of the Aetherius Society. Regardless of its unorthodox account of the origins of history's spiritual leaders, it succeeds in uniting, not dividing, the seemingly disparate and discordant faiths of the world under overarching doctrine: what matters most in avoiding the catastrophes of human life is spreading good will, an endeavor that needs the guidance of those who are not bound by the natural short-sightedness of humanity.