Can the Raelian Movement be defined as a religion?

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Claude Vorilhon founded his movement, the International Raelian Movement (IRM), in 1977 in Geneva, after publishing an account of his encounters with extraterrestrials. The Raelian Movement was the successor to the first MADECH movement: Mouvement pour l'Accueil Des Élohim Créateurs de l'Humanité (Movement for the Welcoming of the Elohim Creators of Humanity). I will just note a few points here. We see a paradox at first sight: we have to explain here that the Raelian Movement is indeed a religion, whereas from the moment it appeared on the media scene, the Movement itself refused to be considered a religion and then called itself "an atheist religion".

The ambiguity stems from the fact that, since around the 1960s, "religion" has been contrasted with "spirituality", a term that would better designate a movement that allows the free cultivation of an individual quest, without fitting into the restrictive traditional mold. The primary target is Christianity whose faithful are said to have blindly obeyed a manipulative, obscurantist clergy who have hijacked its message. Joining various social and cultural protest movements against hierarchies, authority, traditional morality and immobilism, the followers of these new movements claim to be "spiritual" rather than "religious". Their aim is to demythologize the great narratives, in the spirit of the post-modern condition, in order to enable the individual to realize his or her full physical and psychic potential without constraint.

For observers, however, these movements do function as religious groups in the sociological sense of the term. Typical of recent decades, Rael's movement is held as a saucer/ufology religion and listed as such in the literature on the subject, all the more so as it is the world's largest ufology group with around 120,000 members spread over a hundred countries (mainly France, Canada, Africa, and Japan). It makes a mockery of the

spiritual constructs of previous generations, while at the same time constructing a system that takes on all their characteristics, as I shall try to demonstrate.

I will first compare its specific features with the classic definition of religions, and then show how it follows in the footsteps of several religious traditions, as do almost all new religious movements, which are new only in the date of their creation.

The term religion designates a specific symbolic system based on beliefs and rituals aimed at communication with a higher power or powers, acts that delimit a sacred space and time. The term also designates the community that shares doctrine and rituals, whatever its size. One should not ask whether a particular group "is a cult" or a "religion", because insofar as even a small group corresponds to the definitions of religion, it can be considered a religious group.

Catherine Albanese gives a similar definition that is even easier to remember. A religion is defined by 4 C's: "Religion is a system of symbols (creed, code, cult) through which a people (community) orients itself in the world by referring to both ordinary (profane) and extraordinary (sacred) meaning and values." (Albanese 9). We will therefore be talking about: 1: creed, 2: code, 3: cult, 4: community and I will add three more C's: 5: control, 6: conflict, and 7: culture.

1- Creed, Belief

Explanation of the origins of the world, of life, and of the continuation of life, of the afterlife, etc., all the teaching, the knowledge available to the religious leader, which the faithful must acquire, or at least in part, etc. This is transmitted either orally, through the so-called Holy Scriptures and/or hundreds of theological texts, or simply from master to pupil, without writing, by simple oral transmission. The creed explains the group's cosmogony. The Scriptures, in the sense of sacred texts, of the Movement are the Bible and Claude Vorilhon's three books. The first two books record his exchanges with envoys from the Elohim in 1973 and 1975; in the second, he also recounts his life. The third book, published in 2001, is entitled *Let's Welcome the Extra-Terrestrials*.[1]

The Book that Tells the Truth explains how on December 13, 1973, while out for a walk

[1] All quotations are taken from the 2017 edition of Rael's two original texts.

on the Puy de Lassolas near his home in Clermont Ferrand, Claude Vorilhon saw a flying saucer land near him, from which emerged a humanoid man about 1.20 meter (*4 feet*) in height, "slightly slanted eyes, long black hair and a small black beard", who was dressed in a "green jumpsuit covering his whole body in one piece, and while his head appeared to be in the open air, a strange halo surrounded him." (Vorilhon, 14) The creature explained in French (because he "speaks all the languages of the world", 14) that he comes regularly to our planet and had come this time expressly to speak with Claude Vorilhon, about whom he already knew everything, and whom he had telepathically brought to Le Puy. Above all, he explained that he had to talk to him about the Bible, which he had bought a few days earlier by telepathy.

The two individuals then climbed into the spaceship for a lengthy revelation on the mysteries of life and the Bible. To Claude Vorilhon's "Why me?", the creature replied: "We needed someone from a country where new ideas are well received and where it's possible to express them. France is the country where democracy was born" [which cannot fail to flatter the French public, but is a historical error], and, the creature continues, "we needed someone who was a freethinker without being anti-religious. As the son of a Jewish father and a Catholic mother, you happened to be the ideal link between two very important peoples in world history. Not being a scientist, you will keep things simple and uncomplicated." (16-17) The talks lasted six days, one hour a day. The creature, an Eloha, confesses to having come on a mission "to see where mankind stands and to watch over them. They are the future, we are the past." (18)

This civilization of the Elohim is 25,000 years ahead of our own world in scientific terms. The following chapters explain everything that seems incredible, in the original sense of the word, in the Bible, book after book. Yet the Bible is the book of truth, slightly distorted, but not too much, by the copyists who "could not conceive of such things technologically and could only attribute to the mystical and supernatural what was written."

The message goes on to explain that it is thanks to the high technology of the messenger's companions, the Elohim, that we can explain everything that seems supernatural in the Bible since the very beginning of our planet's existence as a liveable space. There is no creation ex nihilo, but simply a shaping of planet Earth "covered with waters and thick mists." (20). The Elohim, a term which in Hebrew means "those who came from the sky", created everything from plant cells or cells taken from themselves to clone the first humans "in our image" (23). It was their artists who chose the colors, the

mountains, the shapes of the animals and so on.

The people of Israel deserve to be called the chosen people because they were chosen in a contest "by the scientific jury as the most successful terrestrial humanoid type in terms of intelligence and genius... they were the chosen people by the teams of creators assembled to judge their work. Indeed, you have seen the number of geniuses this race has produced." (25)

The Flood is explained by the Elohim's jealousy of human progress, but a small group of Elohim, who had been exiled by the others, warned Noah, who built a rocket in which he enclosed a couple of each species (27). Moses on Sinai actually saw a rocket "and the description he gives corresponds to what a primitive from Brazil would do today if we landed there." (31) His staff, which enables him to gush out water in the desert, is no more than a "water table detector". (33) If Samson's hair, once cut, deprives him of his strength, it's because hair is the antenna of telepathy, and once it has grown back, he regains his power and telepathically summons his friends, the creators, who then destroy the temple (39). The multiplication of the loaves by Elisha (II Kings IV: 42-44) and then by Jesus: simply dehydrated protein packets, like those taken by our cosmonauts, brought to us by the Elohim (44). Jonah's whale: a simple submarine that was able to cast him safely ashore, which would have been impossible to a marine animal (54).

As in most of the new religions that refer to him, Jesus is seen as eminently perfect, but then exploited. For the messenger, he is absolutely useful because he "had to spread the truth of the biblical writings throughout the world, so that they would serve as proof when the age of science would explain everything to mankind." (63) When he walks on water, it's thanks to an anti-gravitational ray that cancels out the effects of gravity (68).

Chapter 5 explains how the end of the world unfolds. The messenger takes up the scenario from the Book of Revelation, and will return to it in the second book (192) (we will come back to this vision at the end of the report). The beginning of the end was ushered in by the Hiroshima bomb, whose explosion marked Year 1 of the Movement (noted aH). As in many religions born after the Catholic Church, this Church is presented as the Obnoxious Beast of Babylon that will be destroyed. Here we find the same accusations as with Luther and the Jehovah's Witnesses.

In the first part of the revelation, the messenger criticizes the Church for inventing lies to keep the faithful in ignorance. Here, Rael takes up a criticism voiced by the Gnostics,

who believe that the institution, the Roman ecclesia, betrayed the Christian message. The messenger asserts, “This is the end of those who make people believe in original sin and turn man into a culprit, of those who set traps for the one who will spread the truth at the time of the "Gate" of the Pisces, the entry into Aquarius, in an attempt to save the Church as it existed by ousting the righteous.... Like those who, because they were convinced that they were defending something true without seeking to understand, crucified Jesus for fear of seeing themselves ruined and annihilated at the time of the passage into the Age of Pisces.” (75) The "errors of the Church" are repeated on p. 78... The Church has become too rich. The cardinals get rich and leave the people in poverty, and they impose stupid rules such as Lean Friday (79).

The messenger tells him that from now on he must bear the name Rael, which means "light of God", or "light of the Elohim": “You will be our ambassador on Earth, and we will only officially disembark in your embassy. RAEL can be translated simply as "messenger".” (84-85) One of Rael’s missions will then be to build this embassy, in other words, to bring about a kind of terrestrial Zion (like the New Jerusalem that descends from the heavens at the end of the Book of Revelation) to enable the Elohim to land and settle among humans when they have truly progressed. A whole chapter in the second book is addressed to the people of Israel. Rael asked the Israeli government to give him a plot of land and help him build the embassy, “otherwise, as two thousand years ago, it will rise elsewhere, and if it rises elsewhere you will be scattered again.” (162)

Despite the kind words about Jews found in Rael’s texts, and his name that can be read as included in that of the country "Is-Rael", his request went unanswered. This refusal could be what led Rael to openly criticize Israel’s policy towards the Palestinians in *Raelnews*, but perhaps that’s not the reason, as the Movement is very much involved in denouncing the oppression of people around the world in general.

The Movement continues to ask various countries for the possibility of acquiring a plot of land that would then benefit from legal extraterritoriality and could not be overflown, like any other embassy. The aim is to prevent military aircraft from bombing the Elohim embassy.

2- Code

The rules the believer must obey to achieve the hopes of the creed. It can be a moral code, more or less complex, dietary code, sexual code... The code is the contract between

the faithful and their spiritual authority, most often transmitted by a religious authority (sacred texts, catechism, various regulations...). In contract we find the idea of exchange: if we respect such and such a rule, we will obtain such and such a benefit, otherwise we will be punished.

The Raelian code is given in the first book of 1973, from chapter 6 onwards, and in the book of '75. Chapter 6 details "The New Commandments", i.e. Geniocracy, humanitarianism, world government, and the mission of the adepts. The first is to place in position of power only geniuses, i.e. particularly enlightened and understanding individuals, even if they have no formal education (86), through the strict application of democratic principles, without corruption in particular. Humanitarianism consists in putting into practice the sharing of wealth, notably by abolishing individual property, but without establishing communism (88). In fact, it's about applying what is prescribed in Leviticus (25:8, 14-16, 23): buy the land according to the complicated rhythm of the jubilee (seven times seven years, 49 years) and the land will return to God, for the inhabitants are only hosts (89). The world government will eliminate the need for war. The mission for each follower: to build the Elohim's embassy: a residence in a country with a mild climate, comprising seven guest rooms, each with its own bathroom, a conference room, a dining room, a swimming pool, all in the middle of a walled park. The building is very precisely described, and one has the impression of reading the biblical injunctions about the temple in Jerusalem (90-92).

Seven commandments are given in the second message in the same form as the Ten Commandments: "You will present yourself at least once before the Guide of Guides (Rael) for the cellular transmission... You will think at least once a day of the Elohim your creators. You will seek ... to radiate their message around you. You will donate, at least once a year, one hundredth of your income... You will invite at your place, at least once a year, the Guide of your region to your table and you will gather the interested persons." In the event of the disappearance of the Guide of Guides, the new leader will be appointed by the previous one. He will be the guardian of the embassy. "You, Rael, are our ambassador", decrees the messenger (160).

In addition to these commandments, the Movement "teaches values based on absolute non-violence and respect for human rights as defined by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (...) These values concern freedom, respect, and fraternity (...), and contribute to the development of the human being. They commit each individual to feeling fully responsible for their actions. Applying these values is the key to the survival

of humanity and the emergence of a new society. They are: responsibility, absolute respect for life, self-respect, respect and love for others, sharing, democracy, non-violence, world peace." (from a 2-page leaflet presenting the Movement)

There are still other practices to be observed: it is advisable to fast once a week. This means skipping two meals, but drinking plenty of water. This is part of the hygienic rules for purifying the body. Fasting can be practised on any day, or sometimes during a seminar in the form of sensory fasting. This goes beyond the medical aspect, as fasting should enable you to find yourself, before making contact with others. My interviewees explained to me that they experienced this as a kind of monastery life, with a great deal of spirituality to deepen their personal development. "Our spirituality is expressed through our values, to live in harmony with others, thanks also to the awakening of the senses, to everything that surrounds us. We believe in the unity of the world, plants and people. We are not into the idea of colonizing planets."

The Movement does not believe in healers, and its members use conventional medicine. Their strong belief is that the individuals must take responsibility for themselves, and when they encounter problems, they must find the solution within themselves.[2] The Elohim have not intervened on our planet since their act of creation. They will only return when called upon.

3- Cult or ceremony

Here the term "cult" is to be taken in the sense of ritual, or ceremony.

Rituals (a set of rites) realize the creed in the sensible world and define a sacred space and time, both spiritually and physically. Ritual involves the body, not just the heart/soul as in the creed.

The Raelian Movement, obeying its first commandment, practices a baptism called "cellular plan transmission". The soul doesn't exist; it is replaced here by the genetic code, a vibration specific to the individual. There is no family transmission. Only consenting adults over the age of 18 can be baptized, although exceptions can be made

[2] This assertion can be found in many new religious movements, which are the antithesis of the social policies of old institutions, such as the Catholic Church. This conviction is similar to that of Protestantism, which places greater responsibility on individuals, even if Protestants organize humanitarian actions as well. In any case, many of the new groups reject social welfare and claim to give power back to individuals through certain practices. They can be seen as vectors of capitalism: the state should not have to pay the weak and incompetent. This promise of empowerment is characteristic of the new spiritual scene.

from the age of 15 if the person is deemed to understand the process and is determined to undertake it. The baptized person's name is then entered in a register. This is the reason behind the well-known Raelian practice of handing out in the streets requests for deletion from Catholic baptismal registers: you cannot appear in more than one baptismal register.

The ritual unfolds as follows: the Guide of Guides places his hands on the adept's head and telepathically transmits his cellular plan to the Elohim's great computer. This computer is described in the second message on p. 153. At the "hour of reckoning", the Elohim Council will decide whether or not the individual deserves a new life on earth. If so, they will take a cell that has been archived and clone the person. "It is possible to recreate a dead being from a cell of that being, because it contains the physical and intellectual blueprint of the being of which it is a part." (140)

However, this does not mean making the person eternal, as this would create a problem of overpopulation on earth. Rael recounts how, on his second journey, he was given the opportunity to witness the making of his mother, and then to witness his own reproduction. (152-53) The Guide of Guides can pass on his power of transmission to a Bishop-Guide in a manner similar to that of Catholic apostolic succession.
Baptisms take place four times a year according to the Movement's festive calendar:
- First Sunday of April: the celebration of the first man on earth.
- August 6: Hiroshima, marking a new era that will be noted as aH (2018 = 72 aH, until August).
- October 7: Rael's second encounter with the Elohim.
- December 13: the celebration of C. Vorilhon's encounter with the Eloha.
And in obedience to the 5th commandment, the follower regularly welcomes friends and people interested in the message to explain it to them.
As long as there is no embassy, there is no specific place of worship. As we know, the French 1905 Law only recognizes the existence of a place dedicated exclusively to ritual and community practice as a criterion for determining whether or not a simple social group is a religious association, but this absence of a place of worship is typical of many religious groups, not necessarily very new ones. In Protestantism, several groups reject the concept of a specific place, believing that it is a betrayal of God to imagine him present only in a certain building. The Quakers and the Amish (two groups born in the 17th century) refuse to accept any specific and permanent place of worship, instead meeting in each other's homes to pray, or in the case of the Quakers, to wait for the spirit to manifest itself, which it may well not do during the gathering. More recent than these,

the Baha'is (born in Persia in the 19th century) also have no place of worship and meet in each other's homes. They have a few sanctuaries around the world, but these are not intended to host regular gatherings.
Of course, you might think that Raelians have no place of worship because there aren't enough of them, but that would be a mistake, as there are enough of them in some regions to build some. So, in practice, they gather in small groups locally on Sundays, at one of their homes, as they don't live in a community. The gathering lasts between one and two hours. It is held at 11 a.m. to attempt telepathic contact with the Elohim. "We close our eyes, feel our being so as to be in a state of communication, with love for others, and tell the Elohim that we love them, that they can count on us. This part of the gathering lasts about ten minutes, and is a kind of communion. It is a personal practice and involves no constraints. We meditate only if we want to, preferably in the morning, to be in harmony with infinity." (Conference in Bordeaux, spring 2017)

Furthermore, they have opted for a large-scale gathering characteristic of our times: annual seminars called "Happiness Academies", either international in various cities, as in Okinawa in June 2018, or at continental level. They are then organized by Continental Guides (one per continent). These major gatherings feature workshops, meditation practice, and so on. There is one per country over two days, attended by around 200 people. They take place in hotels with large conference rooms.

4- Community

The term essentially concerns the group that shares the other 3 Cs, and without which we couldn't speak of a constituted religion. The community is what validates the relevance of rituals, giving them a resonance that private rituals only partially achieve. More and more communities of interest are being formed, outside any geographical context, often completely virtually.

In the case of the Raelian Movement, there is indeed a precise, registered community that meets regularly, as we have seen with their rituals. This community, however, is not inward looking; on the contrary, its mission is to advance humanity as a whole, and to this end it is involved in a variety of humanitarian actions that have been deemed "unconventional" by some, but in the Raelian context they make sense. Therefore, "One Minute for Peace" will be an individual and collective meditation to harmonize the planet, because the brain is a powerful transmitter that can, through its vibrations, make a group's aggressiveness bleat. At the moment (spring 2018), this meditation is aimed at

helping the two Koreas to resolve their disputes.

This is in line with the Paradism project, which aims at working politically and socially to bring about a political, economic and social system that will lead to the advent of world peace and an earthly paradise. The IRM is leading numerous campaigns to get all countries to ratify the nuclear non-proliferation treaties (read in *Raelnews*). In Paradism, people will no longer need to work, because robots will carry out the work. Humans will be free to cultivate themselves, have a good time and do good around them.

Other operations for mankind: "Clitoraid" is not, as its name might suggest, a call to unbridled clitoral pleasure, but a campaign to denounce excision and help restore the clitoris of mutilated women. "Aramis" defends the rights of sexual minorities. Other operations seem more fun. "SexEdDay" is a program that calls on governments to implement early sex education. It has been much criticized, but it corresponds to UNESCO recommendations and also to the Toubon report of November 20, 2017, on the rights of the child, as well as to the Declaration of Principles on "Multifaceted education on emotional life and sexuality: children's right to be informed", issued by the European network of ombudspersons for children (ENOC).[3]

Along with cloning, sexuality is indeed Rael's trademark, and this is what gives it its originality on today's religious scene. The IRM advocates free sexuality between consenting adults, and the Raelians I know have assured me that they are very vigilant on this point, contrary to what may be said about them. They claim to respect the laws of the

[3] ENOC promotes the integration of comprehensive Education for Children's Emotional and Sexual Life into the development of children's rights and well-being. The current task of improving the quality of CRSE aims to make it more relevant to the real issues and questions regarding children and adolescents. There are many, often conflicting, sources of information on sexuality, and only a small number of them offer reliable, age-appropriate facts. CRSE helps children explore and encourage positive ideas about themselves and their sexual and reproductive health. It includes information and discussion on a wide range of topics; family life, relationships, cultural and gender roles, contraception, childbirth, sexually transmitted diseases, body integrity, but also human rights, sexual and gender diversity, equality as well as prejudice, discrimination and sexual violence. Children and young people need to be aware of the risks of sexual exploitation and violence so they can recognize and protect themselves as much as possible, while identifying and accessing sources of support. The aim of comprehensive Education for Emotional Life and Sexuality is to support the sexual health of all children, including in early childhood education. This reinforces children's rights, health, safety skills, knowledge, positive self-image and body confidence. This education needs to take place in early childhood, but also at home. Professionals need clear information and guidelines on how to support children and their parents appropriately in education about bodies, relationships and sexuality. https://enoc.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/ENOC-position-statement-on-CRSE.pdf (consulted May 12, 2018)

country in which they live, and told me, “I am French before being Raelian.” They made a point of reaffirming their conviction, “Rael does indeed speak of sexuality, but in the sense of sensuality, of sensory meditation. He advocates sensual and sexual education not limited to procreation. He is not asking us to organize orgies.”

5- Control and organization

The code and creed given by the religion’s founder, or elaborated by the community, inevitably imply a control of the followers in order to ensure their compliance with said code and creed. This social control gives the group’s leaders considerable power over their members, except in the relatively few highly horizontal and democratic religious movements. The establishment of a hierarchy is one of the means used by many religions to control followers.

Rael has established a Catholic-style **hierarchy** (despite his criticism of this mega-institution).

Level 0: members who are simply baptized and at the beginning of their involvement.

Level 1: those who can speak a little about the Movement’s messages.

Level 2 (the bulk of the membership): those who are able to talk to more than a dozen people about the Movement’s messages, and who become "animators".

Level 3: Guide Assistants, those who can give lectures but cannot conduct transmissions.

The next level up is the Guides’ College. The Guides’ College is an international body made up of Priest-Guides and Bishop-Guides. Above them all: an international leader, the Guide of Guides, the Prophet, Rael in this case, elected for seven years by the College of Bishop-Guides. There could be new candidates, but that hasn’t happened yet. He is the only one to have been in physical contact with the Elohim, and he claims to be the Last Prophet, the last to have met the Elohim. Above them, the Elohim are keeping watch, including seven hundred eternals who have “the duty to take care of everything for the others who don’t have to work.” They train two hundred and ten trainees (98).

Finally, we should mention the control of members by their superiors through two specific councils:

- the Council of Discipline meets to examine cases of people who do not respect the instructions given by the guide;
- the Council of the Wise: for people who publicly disregard the messages and teachings, and who drink or smoke in public (in their private lives, members can say and do what they like).

These two councils provide for the exclusion of the member deemed to be at fault, and

this can go as far as suppressing the cellular transmission done at baptism, but only Rael could decide on the sanction. Of course, apostasy can also occur. Some will then publicly criticize the group, leading to the inevitable conflicts.

6- Conflicts

Religious groups build walls around themselves to define their identity against that of other groups. As soon as a community invents its own definition, its own identity, it does so against other communities, and this can lead to conflicts. In the case of the Raelian Movement, as in almost all religious groups, conflicts arise from complaints by former members who claim to have been cheated, exploited, and so on. Or for defamation cases...

7. **Commerce**

Conflicts in religious groups, as elsewhere, most often revolve around the question of money, the C of Commerce... Rael is not known for any financial exploitation of its members. My informant from Bordeaux explained this to me in October 2017:

"All the teachings are free and all the books can be downloaded free of charge from the website rael.org.
Maitreya's speeches are all available free of charge on YouTube. When we organize an event, since we don't have any real estate belonging to the Raelian Movement, we ask people to contribute to the cost of renting the room.
- It cost approximately 100 euros for the week for The Happiness Academy in OKINAWA. [I checked on April 27, 2018, the registration fees for the congress, the Happiness Academy, to be held in Japan from June 9 to 15: 9000 yens for local members, new members, outsiders, i.e. around 69 euros and 21,000 yens for active members.]
- 110 euros for the week in Italia (for the European continent) .
- In France, I am in charge and I have decided that the Raelian Movement pays, so it is free for everyone.
People who want to get involved in the organization are asked to contribute 11% of their income.
- 3% is used to publicize the messages in the country (associations in each country)
- 7% goes for building the embassy (IRM)
- 1% goes to Rael who has no income (Raelian Foundation).
This request for a contribution is by no means compulsory; it is simply recommended,

and each member then gives according to his or her ability and motivation.It is the same with wills: committed members (known as "active") are asked to donate their assets on their death, as best they can and according to the legal restrictions of the country (children's share, etc.).

As I said, the two main values are responsibility and freedom, so everyone is free to act according to his or her own conscience. Personally, for France, this is the direction I am trying to take as the person in charge.

There is no pressure, no obligation, no guilt - everyone does their best. We try to have the best possible time when we are together, laughing, having fun and feeling good.

This well-being is at the heart of our teaching and we are also more likely to be more numerous and to see people again when we share a good time." (Interview Bordeaux October 2017)

7- Culture and religious/spiritual tradition to which Rael belongs

Culture can be defined as: "the production of symbolic systems, imaginary representations and institutions specific to a society" (Roy 2008, 56). Religions function like sponges, absorbing various elements and recomposing them each in their own way. In this way, Rael synthesizes several of our culture's traditions:

- faith in science, superior technology, genetics, robotics, and utopia in its science-fiction variation, which is an offshoot of the great biblical currents of:
- millenarianism and messianism,
- associated with an anthropocentric conception of divinity,
- all supported by the prophetic word of divine revelation.
- Rael also criticizes the very source of these beliefs: Christianity, and Catholicism more specifically.

Here again, he follows a well-known line, dating back to the Enlightenment, that of criticism of the clergy and Christian mythology (a project also championed by several 20th-century Christian theologians such as Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976) (see Flaherty 590), who believed that only the message of Christianity should be retained, and that supernatural events should be forgotten. By explaining that all the supernatural phenomena in the Bible actually have a rational origin, the action of super-powered humans, ufologists continue this work of grooming the Bible, while, of course, proposing another myth, which is typical of the process of establishing a religion.

- Faith in science and fascination with UFOs

Fascination with science goes back to the Greeks, and has been strongly activated since the Renaissance. The belief that science, combined with spirituality, can lead us to a perfect world. Great utopian tradition, very active since the 19th century and the acceleration of scientific discoveries, science fiction, and so on.

In the so-called revealed religions, **revelation** is colored by the culture of the prophet, or mystic, who receives and transmits it. Rael's message from the Elohim is in harmony with discoveries about genetic manipulation and the saucer phenomenon, which is very much in vogue in French and Western society in general.

The cellular plan transmission, or Raelian baptism, was only conceivable because we were able, in the twentieth century, to achieve genetic manipulation and even cloning, that of a sheep in Edinburgh. The use of genetics can be found in the Qur'an of the Black Muslims, or Nation of Islam, led by Elijah Muhammad (1897-1975) in the USA, which interprets the slavery and exploitation of black people through the genetic manipulation performed by a certain Yaccub, who created the diabolical white race from the perfect black race. Shortly after the birth of Dolly the sheep (1996), a Raelian woman, Brigitte Boisselier, announced, in 2000, that she had cloned a human, but this research was not carried out within the framework of the IRM itself, which insists on this. The Movement constantly reaffirms its respect for French legislation, which expressly prohibits cloning.

As for the revelation of the Elohim, it comes in the form of a flying saucer, and so, in fact, it comes from outer space, as do the revelations of the majority of religions, which, after all, set themselves the task of managing contact with the transcendent, who is indeed "in the heavens", i.e. extraterrestrial. The special feature here is that the messenger travels in a spaceship and not simply on the clouds in a vision. This technologized message has become audible to a large number of people since the Second World War. Indeed, belief in UFOs is the product of both:
- considerable advances in post-war science, which made it conceivable that we could be visited from other planets as the two superpowers embarked on their own conquest of the stars;
- and the Cold War, which gave rise to a whole host of theories about the enemy's technological capabilities. The fear of invasion by the Russian or American enemy, which would inevitably come from the air, was easily transferred to the fear of invasion by other, more or less aggressive, but technologically superior peoples. As we know,

many American films like "The Invaders" are nothing more than metaphors for an invasion by the USSR.

The revelation Rael claims to have received from the two messengers who arrived by spaceship concerns our world today. Higher intelligences judge our society, in the great prophetic tradition. But while traditional prophets generally criticize human behavior and threaten extreme punishment, the Elohim have a slightly different discourse: the messenger warns humans that if they continue to be aggressive, they will self-destruct, but the Eloha repeats that humans have now reached a truly impressive level of intelligence and science. Man is on the verge of surpassing his creators, and this is why Rael wants to set up Geniocracy to bring about an earthly paradise more quickly, the Paradism presented above.

Since the '50s, there have been numerous accounts of UFOs, of abductions by ETs, and of saucer travels, almost always including the return to earth to spread the news. Since France is one of the countries where the phenomenon is taken very seriously by the gendarmerie and researchers, Rael has been able to easily find sympathizers who appreciate the message transmitted by the ETs. For them, the message is easily acceptable, since it offers solutions to the crises we're going through, and above all clarifies almost all the mysteries of our religious tradition.[4]

- Fascination with UFOs and their messengers should not, however, be seen as a new phenomenon: it is in fact the most recent manifestation of an old religious tradition, that of Theosophy, founded by the Russian Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (who established it as a Theosophical Society in 1875), which believes in the great Brotherhood of Ascended Masters, bringing together the great geniuses of mankind (Buddha, Jesus, Lao Tzu, Confucius, Socrates, Leonardo da Vinci...). These masters would continue to guide us from their retreats either in the heavens or in highly sacred spaces on our planet. Rael met several of them on the planet of the Elohim in 1975: Moses, Elijah, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad (150). Many new religious movements, including all ufologists, descend from Theosophy and place themselves under the protection of various elevated Masters. Rael's Elohim are just one manifestation among many.

To firmly anchor his movement in today's society, Rael regularly appoints new Masters,

[4] While ufology is mainly a Western phenomenon, there are also examples in other parts of the world, such as Japan where a new religion, Kofuku no kagaku (Happy Science), uses the same religiosity including ancient astronaut theory, etc. Franz Winter (e-mail April 7, 2018, NRM scholars, addressed to Ben Zeller).

the "Honorary Guides of the Raelian Movement". To date, there are eighty “men and women who are not Raelians, but who, like Raelians, dedicate their lives to changing the world by reducing violence, denouncing injustice and government manipulation, eliminating god-related taboos and promoting human rights.”
https://raelnews.org/honorary-guides (consulted April 15, 2018)

- In the doctrinal apparatus of the Raelian Movement, theosophical roots join the biblical millenarian and messianic tradition. Millenarianim or millenialism is a belief in a radical reversal of the order of things, because things are no longer bearable. The concept is formulated in various passages of the Bible, most notably in the Book of Revelation. Here for Rael, the future radical transformation will be carried out thanks to the intervention of ETs, but it does not imply a violent and horrible apocalypse if humans are reasonable.
Rael thus adapts very old convictions that are still very active, particularly within American fundamentalist evangelicalism. For Rael, it is obviously not a question of adopting biblical literalism like them, but of sharing their conviction that “we are living in the end times” and that only the good and righteous will be saved by God or ETs before the horrors of the apocalypse. This phenomenon is called "rapture". Millions of evangelicals, including prominent figures like current Vice President Mike Pence,[5] are convinced that they will be teleported, taken directly to heaven to escape the horrors of the final holocaust. What the Raelian Movement is proposing is identical in every respect. Either humans lose their aggressiveness and continue to progress scientifically towards the Golden Age, aided by the Elohim who will then no longer need to intervene and will disappear, or we continue the race to war and prepare our own destruction. In the latter case, the Raelians will be saved by the ETs, who will airlift them and transplant them to their own planet.

This millenarian pattern can be found in many religions, particularly among colonized and evangelized peoples. Rael’s project has been compared by Richard Landes to Melanesian cargo cults, which arose from the arrival of Europeans in vast ships laden with plenty of wonders, but also with brutal oppression. These cults pray for the return of the ships with their ancestors and all possible material goods (see Rigal-Cellard 2012). Rael similarly imagines that a superior society has already come to bring us science and intelligence, and that it will enable us not to return to the Golden Age, but to make it

[5] See Andy Borowitz’s satire based on Pence’s well-known religious convictions. “Pence Asks Jesus to Rapture Him Up Before Mueller Can Indict Him”. *The New Yorker*. December 1, 2017.

happen in the years to come.

In the Bible, the millennium will be followed by the Last Judgment, when the figure of the Messiah returns once and for all. Rael claims to be the new Messiah, and has even declared himself the brother of Jesus, the son of Yahweh. He has also tinged his messianism with Buddhism, which is the exogenous tradition most welcomed in our society, and calls himself Maitreya. In some branches of Buddhism, this term means the Buddha of the future, the one who will work for the salvation of the whole humanity.

- The anthropocentric conception of the biblical god

For a large number of Christians, God is invisible but present, inconceivable in his immensity, but nevertheless an anthropomorphic father figure, a vision that stems from the biblical affirmation that man was created in God's image, that God communicates with his creatures, cares about their problems, sent his son, and so on. Rael makes a mockery of such a conception, of such a god, since in his view it is quite simply human beings who created us, and not an impalpable spirit.

Several religions have tried to explain this paradox, most notably the founders of Mormonism, whose arguments Rael takes up (just as they had, as he later did, denied original sin). Following the meaning in Hebrew, they also take the term Elohim in Genesis as referring to a plurality; for Mormons, God was simply a man who had deified himself, which any man could also do, since the Bible affirms that we were created in his image. Continuing the line of reasoning, early Mormons claimed that Jesus was the fruit of a carnal union between a flesh-and-blood man and Mary, which Rael translates as a union between an Eloha and Mary.[6] Not only is the anthropomorphism of the biblical god not denied by Rael, but it is actually reinforced by the pluralism of the superior beings that are the Elohim, and God remains improvable "in the present state of our knowledge", according to the formula used to validate a miracle by the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, thus confirming this group's position in the field of religion. We then realize that what seems fanciful and folkloric to us in the new movements, which we refuse to consider as religions, actually functions, like in the movements we accept without question as religions because, even if we do not adhere to them, over the centuries the latter have ended up permeating our culture to the point where their supernatural elements have become commonplace and acculturated.

[6] This closeness to Mormonism is reflected in the vision of genesis shared by both groups: no creation ex nihilo but an arrangement of primordial chaos.

Conclusion

We are dealing here with intra-worldly religions (salvation is no longer to be expected in the extra-worldly, after death): religions now offer recipes for happiness here below, rather than in the hereafter as in Catholicism. Rael is a full participant in this movement: the individual can find happiness here below, but it depends exclusively on his or her own responsibility. Man is not born with original sin, but is responsible only for their own actions. The Raelian IRM, which claims to be the most scientific of all since it believes it has purified religious texts of their irrational and supernatural dross, finally gives these texts a new lease of life, adapted to the expectations of a certain public - expectations that are very traditional, even though their followers deny it: desire for earthly happiness, omnipotence, immortality... It is remarkable that it is the Bible, the book that was "nerfed" by the ’68 generation, that finds itself explained and thus revalorized by Rael.

His movement is indeed a religion in the sociological sense of the term, and is thus recognized by all the NRM specialists who have studied it. My own study, based primarily on Rael’s texts and my interviews with French Raelians, then on university studies on the subject, has enabled me to place the Movement in the great tradition of religions that seek an explanation for our presence on earth, for our life after death, and seek to provide codes for achieving happiness here below.

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