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## From Aliens to Cloning

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## **From Aliens to Cloning**

::James Beverley, FT's Religion Watch columnist  
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<http://www.evangelicalfellowship.ca/page.aspx?pid=1787>

### ***A growing movement claims that aliens began human life on earth and that eternal life is obtained through cloning***

Thanks to radical plans and announcements about human cloning, a Canadian franchise of a controversial new religious movement is getting world attention. The Raelians are in the news.

Scientists, politicians, ethicists, academics and religious leaders all over the world suddenly are taking Rael, their leader, very seriously. Raelians proclaimed that the first cloned baby was born on Dec. 26, 2002, a stunning announcement that led to 30 million hits on their web site in one day. The subsequent media hunt for "Clone Baby Eve" (with DNA proof to be provided) paused in January after a whirlwind of political protest and legal threats.

The Raelian Movement traces its origin to Dec. 13, 1973 when Rael (Claude Vorilhon) claims that he was contacted by an extra-terrestrial named Yahweh Elohim. Vorilhon, then a French journalist, describes Elohim as about four feet, with long dark hair, almond shaped eyes, and olive skin. He is said to have told Rael, "We were the ones who made all life on earth; you mistook us for gods; we were at the origin of your main religions. Now that you are mature enough to understand this, we would like to enter official contact through an embassy." The alien creature is said to have emerged from a UFO near Clermont-Ferrand in central France.

Raelians believe that humans are not created by God or random evolution but by a team of super-scientists who used DNA to create humans in their image. Humanity's fall is related to forbidden scientific knowledge being passed on to some early humans. Rael's mission is to provide the true message to the world and create an embassy in Jerusalem that can serve as a landing base for the extraterrestrials. Rael first advanced his message through an organization known as MADECH, founded in 1974.

Rael claims that the extraterrestrials took him to their planet on Oct. 7, 1975.

He told his followers that during his 1975 visit to their planet that he had sexual encounters with six female robots. It was also on that visit that he was introduced to cloning. The movement developed a Clonaid Program, directed by Brigitte Boisselier, and believes that human cloning represents the path to gaining eternal life.

According to Rael, the space creatures also taught the same message to Moses, Buddha, Muhammad and Jesus. However, that revelation got scrambled and distorted through history. For example, Jews and Christians believe that Elohim is one of the names of God in Genesis when actually it should be translated "those who came from the sky"—a clear reference to the UFO aliens.

The movement claims some proof for its ideology in the crop circle fad, claiming that many of the circle designs look much like the Raelian symbol. Their web sites link to other UFO sites and to the most popular crop circle web pages. They also have a strong antipathy towards Roman Catholicism, using very harsh language to call on the United Nations to investigate the Vatican for systemic abuse of children.

The Raelian movement's fame is almost exclusively related to their obsession with human cloning. While their religious claims are usually dismissed or mocked, their scientific pursuits on cloning are taken very seriously. Clonaid CEO Brigitte Boisselier, has a double doctorate in chemistry and worked for 12 years in a respected French chemical firm before moving to Quebec to work with Rael.

Boisselier announced the birth of "Eve" at a Florida news conference on Dec. 27. The scientist said that the baby, born the previous day, weighed seven pounds and was created through the use of DNA from the skin cells of the mother, an American citizen. U.S. journalist Michael Guillen was supposed to be given proof of the cloning but Rael stopped the verification procedures in early January. A Florida judge has ordered a Clonaid executive to appear in court to answer questions about the baby in question.

Understandably, most people see Raelian faith as bizarre. Furthermore, their ambition to incorporate human cloning into their religious practice is alarming. However, we should defend the civil and religious rights of Raelians, despite the group's controversial and eccentric views. They deserve the full protection of international law, like all humans.

One aspect Christians can easily understand: in the big picture, Rael's 60,000 followers are clearly searching for meaning and transcendence. Though his spacecraft theories are irrational, there is nothing strange about the group's longing for eternal life, a hope that can be anchored in Jesus.

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### **Raelian Web Sites**

- Home Page [www.rael.org](http://www.rael.org)
- Raelian UFO museum [www.ufoland.com](http://www.ufoland.com)
- Clonaid: the cloning company [www.clonaid.com](http://www.clonaid.com)

### **Cloning: Details and Ethics Web Sites**

- The Roslin Institute [www.roslin.ac.uk](http://www.roslin.ac.uk)
- Dolan DNA Learning Center [www.dnalc.org](http://www.dnalc.org)
- American Journal of Bioethics [bioethics.net/cloning.php](http://bioethics.net/cloning.php)
- U.S. President's Council on Bioethics [www.bioethics.gov](http://www.bioethics.gov)
- The Center for Bioethics and Human Dignity [www.cbhd.org](http://www.cbhd.org)
- The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada [www.evangelicalfellowship.ca/social/issue\\_viewer.asp?Issue\\_Summary\\_ID=26](http://www.evangelicalfellowship.ca/social/issue_viewer.asp?Issue_Summary_ID=26)

### **The Raelian Movement: Questions & Answers**

1. What does Rael think of himself?

Rael believes that he is the Messiah awaited by Old Testament Jews. He even claims that high-level rabbis in Israel have privately recognized his messianic status but the government refused to cooperate and accept Jerusalem as the embassy base. As a result, Rael states that Israel lost its chance for peace.

2. Why do Raelians want to establish an embassy for the space creatures?

Rael claims that the extra-terrestrials or Elohim do not want to scare humans by an unexpected visit. When planet Earth prepares an embassy for them then they know they will have "free air space and an official welcome."

3. Why does the Raelian movement claim to be atheistic? They use the term atheist with reference to their objection to traditional views of God. Their religious devotion is directed toward Rael, his mythological claims, and his deference to modern science.

4. Why have Raelians called for a boycott of products from France?

They object to the French government's bigotry against new religious movements, a claim that has real validity. They also make the bizarre claim that the French secret service was behind the deaths of

members of the Solar Temple. Members of the group actually took part in a well-orchestrated mass-suicide in Switzerland, France, and Quebec in 1994 and 1995.

5. Has Rael written any books?

He wrote *The Book That Tells the Truth* in French in 1974, followed by his best-seller *Extra-Terrestrials Took Me to Their Planet* in 1976. He has also authored *Let's Welcome Our Fathers from Space* (1979), *Sensual Meditation* (1980), and the more recent *Yes to Human Cloning*.

6. What is the prevailing scientific attitude to human cloning?

Most scientists, including Ian Wilmut who cloned Dolly (the famous sheep), are opposed to human cloning because of health risks and a belief that it is morally wrong. However, Italian embryologist Dr. Severino Antinori has announced plans to clone humans. The United States government is currently considering legislation banning human cloning.

7. What are the details on Dolly?

Dolly, the first cloned sheep, was born on July 5, 1996 as a result of research carried out by Ian Wilmut and other scientists at the Roslin Institute in Edinburgh. Dolly was cloned after 277 attempts. Dolly has since given birth to five lambs, conceived in the normal way. In early 2002 Dolly was discovered to have arthritis but is in general good health.

8. What is the Canadian government position on cloning?

The House of Commons has passed second reading to Bill C-13 "An Act Respecting Assisted Human Reproduction" which bans human cloning. The Bill currently reads: "No person shall knowingly create a human clone, or transplant a human clone into a human being."

9. Where does one find Christian reflection on cloning and bioethics?

The Center for Bioethics and Human Dignity, based in Bannockburn, Illinois offers impressive resources from a Christian perspective. John Kilner (Ph.D. Harvard), the Center's President, addresses major issues in bioethics in a series of edited volumes. The Center also provides good material on its web site (see Internet Resources sidebar). James C. Peterson's work *Genetic Turning Points* (Eerdmans) is a comprehensive study of the ethics related to human genetic intervention.