

Perspectives and prospects

IN OUR SERIES OF WEBINARS, we do our best to embody and demonstrate pluralism and diversity. Is that just a peculiarity of mine, or does it stem from motivations that are far deeper? To me, this commitment to pluralism and diversity bespeaks our firm intent to dismiss and reject the insistence on uniformity of observance and belief that has pervaded religion and spirituality in the Western world for the entire 2,000 years that have just ended. As a practical matter, you have clearly adopted this perspective, for all of you have cooperated with me in conducting our webinars entirely in this spirit. Therefore, in my role as the moderator, I have sought to stimulate you by asking questions, although I am quite willing to concede that many of them have been leading questions and that some of them may even have been tendentious, as one of you has asserted on more than one occasion. Nonetheless, I have encouraged you to express your own views and have emphatically sustained your right to do that, even when I do not agree with you on some specific feature of our deliberations.

Today, however, I shall depart from this standard pattern, mainly because I believe we have reached a point that justifies extended comments of mine. I assure you, however, that these remarks do not oblige you and that you are free to take issue with any aspect of them, at your discretion.

Today we are conducting our 28th webinar on topic 8 of my long discussion document *Revelation Revealed*, a topic that is entitled, “Comparing and contrasting the true teachings of Jesus with the traditional tenets and practices of organized, institutional Christianity.” As you are well aware, the many pages that remain ahead of us imply that we will still be immersed in this topic for quite some time, and this prospect is one of the key factors that led me to decide to speak to you in this vein.

After all, the revelation we are studying is not purely spiritual; it is spiritual, mindal, and material. The revelators did not solely exude an updated vision of goodness. To the contrary, they portrayed our planet and all mankind as benefiting from God’s loving ministry devoted to a balanced blend of truth, beauty, and goodness, on the understanding that personality creates the context for the choices and decisions whereby human beings accept or reject the possibility of eternal existence. A Divine Counselor tells us:

The great mistake of the Hebrew religion was its failure to associate the goodness of God with the factual truths of science and the appealing beauty of art. As civilization progressed, and since religion continued to pursue the same unwise course of overemphasizing the goodness of God to the relative exclusion of truth and neglect of beauty, there developed an increasing tendency for certain types of men to turn away from the abstract and dissociated concept of isolated goodness. The overstressed and isolated morality of modern religion, which fails to hold the devotion and loyalty of many twentieth-century men, would rehabilitate itself if, in addition to its moral mandates, it would give equal consideration to the truths of science, philosophy, and spiritual experience, and to the beauties of the physical creation, the charm of intellectual art, and the grandeur of genuine character achievement.

The religious challenge of this age is to those farseeing and forward-looking men and women of spiritual insight who will dare to construct a new and appealing philosophy of living out of the enlarged and exquisitely integrated modern concepts of cosmic truth, universe beauty, and divine goodness. [*A Divine Counselor*, 43:2-3 / 2:7.9-10]

In my opinion, these rather pointed remarks actually understate the case. If you pick up a copy of *The Urantia Book* and open it to the table of contents, a casual glance suffices to establish that religion is not the sole topic that the revelators analyze and explain.

For example, the revelators have given us considerable information about the material universe and how it operates, contents that can be broadly described as science. Further, in Part III the authors devote considerable attention to the history of humanity from a spiritual and social perspective. In Paper 52, “Planetary Mortal Epochs,” a **Mighty Messenger** tells us that our world is “a full dispensation and more behind the average planetary schedule” [*a Mighty Messenger*, 593:5 / 52:3.6]. Thus it is obvious that we the people of Urantia have a huge backlog of unfinished tasks.

With all this in mind, the revelators have explained in considerable depth, and with complete clarity, that life on Urantia and on other inhabited planets is *an evolutionary process* in which human beings are responsible for participating intelligently and actively. In other words, we the people of Urantia must take responsibility for our own planetary destiny, at least in large measure and to a very substantial degree. After all, we are not marionettes fastened to some set of strings that God is manipulating from a supposedly golden throne in heaven!

So why are we devoting such an extraordinary amount of time and energy to comparing and contrasting the true teachings of Jesus with the traditional tenets and practices of organized, institutional Christianity? At first glance this seems surprising, for my fundamental objective associated with *Revelation Revealed* was to seek to stimulate substantially greater interest in aspects of the fifth epochal revelation that have not been entirely neglected, but have seldom served as a basis for personal engagement and active effort.

From this perspective, why not accelerate rapidly through topic 8, so as to devote the savings in time and energy to aspects that reflect my broader interests and objectives? For example, topic 1 of *Revelation Revealed* provides considerable insight into the overall process of epochal revelation as it has unfolded on Urantia, and topics 3 through 6 consist of a detailed analysis of the idealistic and altruistic initiative that my colleagues and I refer to as the Global Endeavor. Further, topics 9, 11, and 12 are quite innovative; they appear likely to increase understanding of intriguing mindal and spiritual realities among readers of *The Urantia Book* who have not devoted substantial attention to these matters:

Topic 9. Comparing and contrasting the ministry of the guardian seraphim and the work of the master seraphim.

Topic 11. The ongoing evolution of the human mind as a crucial contribution to more advanced levels of society and civilization on our planet Urantia.

Topic 12. Promoting understanding of, loyalty to, and active cooperation with God immanent, especially via our close association with God the Mother, the Supreme Being.

To be sure, the idea of accelerating rapidly through the rest of topic 8 may seem sensible on the surface. Over the past few years, however, I have finally absorbed the net implications of the colloquial phrase, “You cannot get there from here.” In other words, I have come to understand that in order to carry out effective efforts to attract considerably greater attention and interest to aspects of the fifth epochal revelation that are innovative and at least relatively new, I must contend with certain preoccupations and interests among quite a few readers of *The Urantia Book* living in North America that would have to become less intense and less absorbing. In effect, colleagues, we are talking about readjustments that may eventually persuade them to reevaluate their personal loyalties, priorities, and attachments, as well as their existing commitments.

In seeking to explain this transformation as tactfully as possible, perhaps I have implicitly reverted to patterns of behavior that I sought to embody during my former career as an apprentice diplomat. Under the current circumstances, however, I realize that I cannot be quite as indirect and must instead identify the issues more explicitly. Perhaps the following excerpt from section 10 of Paper 195 will serve as an apt introduction:

The praiseworthy desire to preserve traditions of past achievement often leads to the defense of outgrown systems of worship. The well-meant desire to foster ancient thought systems effectually prevents the sponsoring of new and adequate means and methods designed to satisfy the spiritual longings of the expanding and advancing minds of modern men. Likewise, the Christian churches of the twentieth century stand as great, but wholly unconscious, obstacles to the immediate advance of the real gospel — the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. [*The Midwayer Commission, 2084:8 / 195:10.8*]

From these perspectives, I have concluded that I will not succeed in my efforts to stimulate active interest in aspects of the fifth epochal revelation that are innovative and new unless I can find ways to dispel, or at least to undermine and diminish, illusions that have appeared to be prominent among a significant number of readers of *The Urantia Book* living in North America — illusions effectively implying that the fifth epochal revelation is an outgrowth of Christianity, an appendix to Christianity, or perhaps even Christianity 2.0. Now since the statement I have just made is rather complicated, it may not have been luminously clear to you when you heard it so rapidly. Therefore I shall remedy that by subdividing the sentence:

— Is the fifth epochal revelation an outgrowth of Christianity?

No.

— Is the revelation an appendix to Christianity?

No.

— Well, then, does the fifth epochal revelation amount to Christianity 2.0?

No, most certainly not.

Thus my three answers are no, no, and no in that order, but you are entirely free to rearrange them in any other sequence that you happen to prefer.

Christianity's fundamental flaws

Although the various strands of Christianity include more of Jesus' teachings than any other organized, institutional religion, they also include a great deal that Jesus did not teach. The most deplorable accretion was the atonement doctrine that the apostle Paul invented, an appalling distortion that overshadows the entire Christian tradition, while also misrepresenting and perverting the nature and character of God. A Divine Counselor condemns this concept, and it is difficult to imagine any verdict that is more emphatic:

The barbarous idea of appeasing an angry God, of propitiating an offended Lord, of winning the favor of Deity through sacrifices and penance and even by the shedding of blood, represents a religion wholly puerile and primitive, a philosophy unworthy of an enlightened age of science and truth. Such beliefs are utterly repulsive to the celestial beings and the divine rulers who serve and reign in the universes. It is an affront to God to believe, hold, or teach that innocent blood must be shed in order to win his favor or to divert the fictitious divine wrath. ...

The bestowal of a Paradise Son on your world was inherent in the situation of closing a planetary age; it was inescapable, and it was not made necessary for the purpose of winning the favor of God. This bestowal also happened to be the final personal act of a Creator Son in the long adventure of earning the experiential sovereignty of his universe. What a travesty upon the infinite character of God! this teaching that his fatherly heart in all its austere coldness and hardness was so untouched by the misfortunes and sorrows of his creatures that his tender mercies were not forthcoming until he saw his blameless Son bleeding and dying upon the cross of Calvary! [*A Divine Counselor*, 60:3,5 / 4:4.4,6]

Since the Divine Counselor's rhetoric is elevated and eloquent, that factor may tend to obscure how intense and how pervasive these teachings are. In fact, they constitute the center and core of the traditional Christian faith, as is clear from colloquial statements such as these three: "Jesus died on the cross for our sins," "Jesus is my personal Redeemer," and "Jesus saves."* Further, the cross (or crucifix) serves as an omnipresent symbol that represents Christianity as a faith and as a tradition.

* The folk customs of the United States have sometimes caused the statement "Jesus saves" to appear on a bumper sticker (*i.e.*, on a sticker affixed to the rear bumper of an automobile). On at least one occasion, an aspiring humorist appended a handwritten scrawl saying, "... at the First National Bank."

As appalling as the atonement doctrine is, it was not the first major mistake that the early Christians made. To the contrary, on Pentecost Sunday the apostle Peter inadvertently launched a religion centered on the story of Jesus, a religion *about* him instead of a religion focused on his actual teachings. As the Midwayer Commission tells us in section 6 of Paper 138, Jesus explicitly warned his apostles about this:

Jesus endeavored to make clear to his apostles the difference between his teachings and his *life among them* and the teachings which might subsequently spring up *about* him. Said Jesus: "My kingdom and the gospel related thereto shall be the burden of your message. Be not sidetracked into preaching *about* me and *about* my teachings. Proclaim the gospel of the kingdom and portray my revelation of the Father in heaven but do not be misled into the bypaths of creating legends and building up a cult having to do with beliefs and teachings *about* my beliefs and teachings." [*The Midwayer Commission, 1543:1 / 138:6.3*]

Jesus also warned his followers against formulating creeds and traditions that would serve to guide and control believers:

"Your spirit unity implies two things, which always will be found to harmonize in the lives of individual believers: First, you are possessed with a common motive for life service; you all desire above everything to do the will of the Father in heaven. Second, you all have a common goal of existence; you all purpose to find the Father in heaven, thereby proving to the universe that you have become like him."

Many times during the training of the twelve Jesus reverted to this theme. Repeatedly he told them it was not his desire that those who believed in him should become dogmatized and standardized in accordance with the religious interpretations of even good men. Again and again he warned his apostles against the formulation of creeds and the establishment of traditions as a means of guiding and controlling believers in the gospel of the kingdom. [*The Midwayer Commission, 1592:1-2 / 141:5.3-4*]

It is clear that Jesus was advocating complete religious freedom, the individual's right to reach spiritual conclusions and formulate religious beliefs based on his or her personal experience. In contrast, the techniques that Jesus warned against amounted to monolithic practices aimed at promoting uniformity, a pattern whereby the group exercises authority over the beliefs and actions of individuals. This, of course, is exactly what happened.

That amounts to an irony, an anomaly, or even a paradox, for during Jesus' first discourse on true religion, he told the apostles and evangelists that the religion that he and they would soon proclaim in Palestine contrasted very substantially with the religion of authority that the religious leaders in Jerusalem maintained and promoted. The new religion, he said, "shall derive its authority from the fruits of its acceptance that will so certainly appear in the personal experience of all who really and truly become believers" [*the Midwayer Commission, 1730:0 / 155:5.12*]:

And Jesus went on to say: "At Jerusalem the religious leaders have formulated the various doctrines of their traditional teachers and the prophets of other days into an established system of intellectual beliefs, a religion of authority. The appeal of all such religions is largely to the mind. And now are we about to enter upon a deadly conflict with such a religion since we will so shortly begin the bold proclamation of a new religion — a religion which is not a religion in the present-day meaning of that word, a religion that makes its chief appeal to the divine spirit of my Father which resides in the mind of man; a religion which shall derive its authority from the fruits of its acceptance that will so certainly appear in the personal experience of all who really and truly become believers in the truths of this higher spiritual communion." [*The Midwayer Commission, 1729:7 - 1730:0 / 155:5.12*]

To make the contradiction even more obvious, we need to remember that those wielding ecclesiastical authority in the Jewish community of Palestine (*i.e.*, Annas, Caiaphas, and the other members of the Sanhedrin) eventually conspired to have Jesus executed, although they were compelled to resort to the Roman authorities in order to achieve their aims. Nonetheless, this riveting example of the flagrant abuse of ecclesiastical authority did not serve as a salutary lesson for the Christian tradition as it developed in subsequent centuries. To the contrary, Christian observance and belief has been dominated throughout the last 2,000 years by a self-selected and self-serving elite who have claimed and exercised the authority to tell others what they must do and what they must believe, while accompanying their peremptory instructions by assertions that disobedience would anger God and that he would punish them for it.

Now I realize that the Protestant reformers of the 16th century repudiated many accretions that had been propagated by the theologians and leaders of the Roman Catholic Church in the course of the preceding 1,000 years, such as the doctrine of indulgences and the many superstitions associated with Mary the mother of Jesus, for there is nothing in *The Urantia Book* that predicates or implies any spiritual role for her. On the other hand, the Protestant reformers emphatically reaffirmed the atonement doctrine, and they certainly did not abandon the traditional approach of centering Christian

observance on certain key events of Jesus' life (especially those celebrated on Christmas Day, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday*). In addition, the Protestant reformers did not disentangle themselves or their followers from the syndrome of clerical authority and theological uniformity that has pervaded the Christian faith ever since the Emperor Constantine and his successors adopted a range of imperial policies that eventually made Christianity the state religion of the Roman Empire. Further, in their zeal to reject the doctrinal accretions and self-serving abuses that had become embedded in Roman Catholic practice over the previous centuries, the Protestant reformers did not go far enough and did not reject them all.

One prominent example pertains to the dictatorial authority over marriage and family life that the Roman Catholic Church began asserting around the year 1000 CE. Up until then, marriage had remained a matter of folk customs that varied from place to place according to the practical circumstances of life then prevailing in the diverse domains where Western Christians lived. Although it would be rash to assert that all these customs were equally fair and equally effective, there was no crisis and no compelling reason to impose uniformity. In effect, marriage and family life were treated as civil matters that did not justify or require any active involvement of the organized, institutional church.

This diversity of custom and practices appears to have offended Roman Catholic theologians, for it did not gratify their addiction to ecclesiastical authority and doctrinal uniformity. From their autocratic perspective, it was annoying that folk customs and practices pertaining to marriage did not revolve around the church, nor reinforce clerical domination over civil society. Therefore Roman Catholic theologians and leaders began inventing, promulgating, and enforcing detailed procedural requirements and numerous practical restrictions[†] that made marriage impossible for persons who were even distantly related.[‡]

* In contrast, Jesus made the following explicit statement when he appeared to believers assembled in Phoenicia: “The fact that the dead rise is not the gospel of the kingdom” [*the Midwayer Commission, 2054:3 / 193:2.2*].

† By intervening so actively and aggressively in key features of human life that had previously been matters of custom and discretion, these theologians and leaders implicitly violated the prime directive of the home handyman: “If it ain't broke, don't fix it.” We will discuss these matters in considerably greater depth when we reach topic 10 of *Revelation Revealed*, “Dangers to the home and to family life that stem from the rising tide of self-gratification.”

‡ In the intriguing article “Here's the weird thing about a post-Christian Christendom” by Megan McArdle, the author stated: “The church kept banning marriages between more and more distant relations, up to sixth cousins, which smashed the tight kin-based networks common to agricultural cultures” (*The Washington Post*, November 7, 2019).

Although it is difficult to appraise the degree to which Roman Catholic theologians living around 1000 CE were motivated by theological reasoning and/or by factors that really did relate to the welfare of individuals and groups in civil society, there can be no doubt that one teaching that subsequently became traditional — the assertion that marriage is a sacrament instituted by Jesus Christ — is ludicrous on its face. On that basis, Jesus' parents Joseph and Mary could not actually have been married, for their family relationship could not possibly have stemmed from the supposed sacrament that their first-born son subsequently established! Further, the apostle Peter could not have been married either, even though two verses in chapter 4 of the Gospel according to Luke mention his mother-in-law (*i.e.*, Luke 4:38-39).

What also seems evident and indisputable is that the many rules and regulations about marriage that Roman Catholic clergy adopted and enforced had the net effect of earning the church steady and substantial income, as well as quite a bit of landed property that donors eventually decided to bequeath. After all, a lawsuit under canon law whereby a believer sought an annulment or requested an exemption from some onerous requirement had to be adjudicated in an ecclesiastical tribunal — proceedings that tended to be complex, time-consuming, and expensive. Further, the plethora of procedural requirements and practical restrictions pertaining to marriage, when combined with relatively short lifespans and high rates of infant mortality, led to many situations in which a landowner had no “legitimate heir” whom he could identify in his will. When he passed away, the property in question would automatically revert to his liege lord or to the crown ... *unless* the landowner decided to bequeath it to the church or to some religious institution such as a monastery, so as “to earn merit in heaven.” Under the circumstances of the Middle Ages, many of them did this, and the church grew extremely wealthy.

Now I realize that what I have said in the last few paragraphs may seem to evoke the archaeology of previous centuries of Christian observance and to have little relevance today. Not so, for all Christian denominations continue to claim authority over marriage and family life, thereby echoing and perpetuating the arbitrary decision of the Roman Catholic hierarchy to invade these key domains around the year 1000 CE.

For example, recent news reports indicate that the United Methodist Church operating in the United States has announced a tentative plan to become disunited in May 2020, in order to split into two denominations. Why? Because many traditional Methodists insist that marriage must be reserved for unions between one man and one woman, whereas many other Methodists, undoubtedly influenced by recent trends in civil society, appear to be willing to accept the concept that marriage can be predicated on the union of two persons of the same sex.

I shall not comment on the underlying substantive issues, for that is not my purpose today. To the contrary, my theme is closely associated with *process* and in this case, the two factors that the United Methodist Church, and all other Christian denominations, inherited from traditions of Christianity that became entrenched and pervasive long before the Protestant reformers of the 16th century endeavored to transform Christian belief and practice:

1. The premise that an organized, institutional church has the authority and right to adopt and enforce detailed rules and restrictions associated with marriage and family life. (*As previously explained, this conviction descends from arbitrary decisions that Roman Catholic theologians and churchmen made around the year 1000 CE.*)
2. The premise that all members of an organized, institutional church must conform to its specific doctrines and practices, even on matters that appear to be more closely related to social norms and customs than to the true teachings of Jesus. (*As we discussed at much earlier stages of our series of online seminars, this conviction descends from the traditions of authority and uniformity that have infected the Christian faith ever since it became the state religion of the Roman Empire.*)

In other words, the United Methodist Church could resolve its current dilemma — and thereby remain united — by deciding that the church will no longer adopt or enforce rules and restrictions pertaining to marriage, thereby withdrawing from this domain and enabling believers to pursue approaches that civil society authorizes. Alternatively, the United Methodist Church could resolve its current dilemma — and thereby remain united — by shifting toward pluralism and diversity, thereby abandoning the traditional insistence on authority and uniformity. If that were to happen, Methodist believers and members of the clergy could act on matters related to marriage and family life at their discretion and as they see fit.

Well, colleagues, I shall not conspire to delude you by predicting that either of these obvious solutions will actually be adopted.

The path forward

I am convinced that readers of the fifth epochal revelation should focus on the true teachings of Jesus instead of the traditions and doctrines that have grown up *about* him. Although you are undoubtedly familiar with the underlying principles, the following three excerpts seem to highlight the key factors:

The religion of Jesus does, indeed, dominate and transform its believers, demanding that men dedicate their lives to seeking for a knowledge of the will of the Father in heaven and requiring that the energies of living be consecrated to the unselfish service of the brotherhood of man. [*The Midwayer Commission*, 2083:2 / 195:9.6]

I have called upon you to be born again, to be born of the spirit. I have called you out of the darkness of authority and the lethargy of tradition into the transcendent light of the realization of the possibility of making for yourselves the greatest discovery possible for the human soul to make — the supernal experience of finding God for yourself, in yourself, and of yourself, and of doing all this as a fact in your own personal experience. And so may you pass from death to life, from the authority of tradition to the experience of knowing God; thus will you pass from darkness to light, from a racial faith inherited to a personal faith achieved by actual experience; and thereby will you progress from a theology of mind handed down by your ancestors to a true religion of spirit which shall be built up in your souls as an eternal endowment.

Your religion shall change from the mere intellectual belief in traditional authority to the actual experience of that living faith which is able to grasp the reality of God and all that relates to the divine spirit of the Father. The religion of the mind ties you hopelessly to the past; the religion of the spirit consists in progressive revelation and ever beckons you on toward higher and holier achievements in spiritual ideals and eternal realities. [*The Midwayer Commission*, 1731:1-2 / 155:6.3-4 — excerpted from *Jesus' second discourse on religion*]

It is not so important that you should know about the fact of God as that you should increasingly grow in the ability to *feel the presence of God*.

When you once begin to find God in your soul, presently you will begin to discover him in other men's souls and eventually in all the creatures and creations of a mighty universe. But what chance does the Father have to appear as a God of supreme loyalties and divine ideals in the souls of men who give little or no time to the thoughtful contemplation of such eternal realities? While the mind is not the seat of the spiritual nature, it is indeed the gateway thereto. [*The Midwayer Commission*, 1732:5, 1733:1 / 155:6.12-13 — likewise excerpted from *Jesus' second discourse on religion*]

On the other hand, an appropriate emphasis on personal (individual) religion does not mean that we should rule out suitable methods for group observances, for many people find group prayer and group worship inspiring and helpful. Inventing these new methods will challenge humanity's resources of imagination and originality, for group observances must cease to serve as an excuse that enables some self-selected elite to assert institutional authority and endeavor to enforce doctrinal conformity. A Brilliant Evening Star tells us:

Regardless of the drawbacks and handicaps, every new revelation of truth has given rise to a new cult, and even the restatement of the religion of Jesus must develop a new and appropriate symbolism. Modern man must find some adequate symbolism for his new and expanding ideas, ideals, and loyalties. This enhanced symbol must arise out of religious living, spiritual experience. And this higher symbolism of a higher civilization must be predicated on the concept of the Fatherhood of God and be pregnant with the mighty ideal of the brotherhood of man. [*A Brilliant Evening Star*, 966:1 / 87:7.6]

In the same section of Paper 87, he also states:

But a religious cult cannot be manufactured; it must grow. And those of no two groups will be identical unless their rituals are arbitrarily standardized by authority. [*A Brilliant Evening Star*, 965:7 / 87:7.3]

The old cults were too egocentric; the new must be the outgrowth of applied love. The new cult must, like the old, foster sentiment, satisfy emotion, and promote loyalty; but it must do more: It must facilitate spiritual progress, enhance cosmic meanings, augment moral values, encourage social development, and stimulate a high type of personal religious living. The new cult must provide supreme goals of living which are both temporal and eternal — social and spiritual. [*A Brilliant Evening Star*, 966:2 / 87:7.7]

During our previous online seminars, several of you commented on the importance of teachers and leaders who will seek to attract interest in the fifth epochal revelation and stimulate active commitment to the teachings of the revelators. I must tell you, however, that my personal reactions are really quite mixed; therefore I am compelled to equivocate and hesitate. If these teachers and leaders were to operate by means of the approaches and practices that have prevailed in the past, then my answer would be no, absolutely not.

— Instead, the role of a teacher must be reoriented and redefined. Rather than attempt to impart facts, theories, or interpretations, a teacher should endeavor to evoke, enhance, and reinforce a lifelong commitment to learning and personal growth, a commitment that features an inquiring mind and an active search for new meanings and values, a search that entails consistent and persistent exploration. In principle, this is not very different from what Socrates was endeavoring to achieve in ancient Athens.

— Further, the new-model leader must operate in ways that are cooperative, collegial, consensual, and inspiring, while abandoning and resolutely disavowing any inclination to exert authority, issue commands, or otherwise attempt to insist on uniformity of belief or practice.

On a far more general level, a Melchizedek declares: “There is great hope for any church that worships the living God, validates the brotherhood of man, and dares to remove all creedal pressure from its members” [*a Melchizedek, 1135:2 / 103:5.12*]. Although it may be overly optimistic to believe that any existing denomination of the Christian tradition will be able to remodel itself along these lines, we can be confident that these approaches will prevail during generations and centuries that succeed the current era.

Broader perspectives

I am not indifferent to the concerns that one of you expressed about the pitfalls of converting the fifth epochal revelation into an object of veneration and evangelizing on its behalf along the following general lines: “There is this amazing revelation, and you have to read it.” As a practical matter, however, such misadventures can easily be avoided if readers emphatically reject the illusion that *The Urantia Book* is a quintessentially religious work and that all the other topics that the revelators analyze and explain are just curiosities that they have interwoven for decorative embellishment or narrative variety.

Not so, for the revelators have implicitly restored and revitalized the standard approach to epochal revelation on an inhabited planet — a synthesis of many methods whereby the revelators do their utmost to advance and upgrade all aspects of society and civilization, not just spirituality and religion. After all, God chose not to create a perfect world for human beings to live in, for such circumstances would be no credit to us. Instead he offers us the opportunity to cooperate with him by doing all we can to foster the slow and gradual ascent of human traditions toward higher levels of material, intellectual, and spiritual achievement. Along the way, we will be obliged to overcome the accumulated backlog of unfinished tasks that still afflict us because of the Caligastia betrayal and the default of Adam and Eve. A Melchizedek has been exceedingly frank about the situation that affects us now:

Mechanical inventions and the dissemination of knowledge are modifying civilization; certain economic adjustments and social changes are imperative if cultural disaster is to be avoided. This new and oncoming social order will not settle down complacently for a millennium. The human race must become reconciled to a procession of changes, adjustments, and readjustments. Mankind is on the march toward a new and unrevealed planetary destiny.

Religion must become a forceful influence for moral stability and spiritual progression functioning dynamically in the midst of these ever-changing conditions and never-ending economic adjustments.

Urantia society can never hope to settle down as in past ages. The social ship has steamed out of the sheltered bays of established tradition and has begun its cruise upon the high seas of evolutionary destiny; and the soul of man, as never before in the world's history, needs carefully to scrutinize its charts of morality and painstakingly to observe the compass of religious guidance. The paramount mission of religion as a social influence is to stabilize the ideals of mankind during these dangerous times of transition from one phase of civilization to another, from one level of culture to another. [*A Melchizedek, 1086:4-6 / 99:1.1-3*]

Now even though the revelators have not explicitly informed us that during the third decade of the 21st century, we would be subjected to the multifarious online escapades of geeks, hackers, and trolls, it is quite possible that they really did foresee this. We can be confident that intelligent and insightful human beings will eventually find appropriate ways for us to overcome these particular challenges, along with many others.

Another Melchizedek (or perhaps the same one) informs us:

Man experiences matter in his mind; he experiences spiritual reality in the soul but becomes conscious of this experience in his mind. The intellect is the harmonizer and the ever-present conditioner and qualifier of the sum total of mortal experience. Both energy-things and spirit values are colored by their interpretation through the mind media of consciousness. [*A Melchizedek, 1136:1 / 103:6.6*]

Here I shall seize the opportunity to remind you of a statement by a Divine Counselor that we considered near the beginning of this essay: “The overstressed and isolated morality of modern religion, which fails to hold the devotion and loyalty of many twentieth-century men, would rehabilitate itself if, in addition to its moral mandates, it would give equal consideration to the truths of science, philosophy, and spiritual

experience, and to the beauties of the physical creation, the charm of intellectual art, and the grandeur of genuine character achievement” [*a Divine Counselor, 43:2 / 2:7.9*]. For these and other reasons, I am convinced that the revelators’ painstaking attention to the diverse interactions of matter, mind, and spirit is neither accidental nor casual. To the contrary, the revelators appear to be communicating crucial realities about the finite realm that humanity needs to understand and absorb. In the second paragraph of Paper 30, a Mighty Messenger comments:

It is not possible to formulate comprehensive and entirely consistent classifications of the personalities of the grand universe because *all* of the groups are not revealed. It would require numerous additional papers to cover the further revelation required to systematically classify all groups. Such conceptual expansion would hardly be desirable as it would deprive the thinking mortals of the next thousand years of that stimulus to creative speculation which these partially revealed concepts supply. It is best that man not have an over-revelation; it stifles imagination. [*A Mighty Messenger, 330:2 / 30:0.2*]

On the surface, the Mighty Messenger is simply stipulating that there are certain gaps in his description of the personalities of the grand universe, an explanation that would be entirely coherent and persuasive if he were defending a Ph.D. dissertation. If we consider this paragraph more deeply, however, we seize the underlying point that seems far more substantial: The revelators desire to stimulate creative speculation among the thinking mortals of the next thousand years, and it is reasonable for us to identify that as one of their fundamental objectives!

In sum, I believe that *The Urantia Book* is an integral part of recovering from the Caligastia betrayal and the default of Adam and Eve; I believe that it will contribute to an even longer series of adjustments that will eventually return Urantia to the ranks of inhabited planets entirely in good standing — planets that benefit from the visible presence of accredited representatives of the spiritual government of the universe of universes. If we examine all these factors from a cosmic perspective, we can certainly hope that human beings living on Urantia in distant future ages will justify the complete confidence of our celestial supervisors in the ultimate evolutionary triumph of the human race and the eventual vindication of the original plans and life patterns that the Life Carriers prepared.*

* A Life Carrier, 736:7 / 65:5.4.

Now since my last few statements have been rather complicated, they may not have been luminously clear to you when you heard them so rapidly. Therefore I shall remedy that by rearranging these statements in sequence:

— Shall human beings pursue and complete all the efforts that are required in order to recover from the Caligastia betrayal and the default of Adam and Eve?

Yes.

— Shall humanity embark on the even longer series of adjustments that will return Urantia to the ranks of inhabited planets entirely in good standing, so that our remote descendants will eventually benefit from the visible presence of accredited representatives of the spiritual government of the universe of universes?

Yes.

— Shall human life on Urantia progress in even more fundamental ways that will justify the complete confidence of our celestial supervisors in the ultimate evolutionary triumph of the human race and the eventual vindication of the original plans and life patterns that the Life Carriers prepared?

Yes, we can and do affirm that with complete conviction.

Thus my three answers are yes, yes, and yes in that order, but you are entirely free to rearrange them in any other sequence that you happen to prefer. Right now, however, you and I shall simply resume our series of intriguing online seminars.

Neal Waldrop

January 25, 2020