

Neal Waldrop

From: Neal Waldrop [nealwaldrop@earthlink.net]
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To: Neal Waldrop - gmail (nealwaldrop606@gmail.com)
Subject: Global Endeavor / Revelation Revealed / webinar on April 20, plans for April 27
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Dear fellow readers of *The Urantia Book* and friends of the Global Endeavor,

On Saturday, April 20, we conducted our eleventh webinar based on topic 8 of *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.”

Theology: its value and limitations

During this webinar, we analyzed and discussed page 103 of *Revelation Revealed*, thereby enabling the participants to discuss the value and limitations of theology as it may contribute to spiritual belief and practice — predominantly based on the six excerpts from *The Urantia Book* that are cited on that page. In these six excerpts, the revelators declare:

[1] Religious experience, being essentially spiritual, can never be fully understood by the material mind; hence the function of theology, the psychology of religion. [A *Divine Counselor*, 69:1 / 5:5.6]

[2] Psychology may indeed attempt to study the phenomena of religious reactions to the social environment, but never can it hope to penetrate to the real and inner motives and workings of religion. Only theology, the province of faith and the technique of revelation, can afford any sort of intelligent account of the nature and content of religious experience. [A *Melchizedek*, 1107:7 / 101:2.17]

[3] Religion persists in spite of revolutionary changes in religious beliefs. Theology does not produce religion; it is religion that produces theologic philosophy. [A *Melchizedek*, 1130:3 / 103:1.4]

[4] When theology masters religion, religion dies; it becomes a doctrine instead of a life. The mission of theology is merely to facilitate the self-consciousness of personal spiritual experience. Theology constitutes the religious effort to define, clarify, expound, and justify the experiential claims of religion, which, in the last analysis, can be validated only by living faith. [A *Melchizedek*, 1141:4 / 103:9.6]

[5] While personal religion precedes the evolution of human morals, it is regretfully recorded that institutional religion has invariably lagged behind the slowly changing mores of the human races. Organized religion has proved to be conservatively tardy. **The prophets have usually led the people in religious development; the theologians have usually held them back.** [A *Melchizedek*, 1128:2 / 102:8.6 — *emphasis added: sentence in bold type*]

[6] Theology may fix, formulate, define, and dogmatize faith, but in the human life of Jesus faith was personal, living, original, spontaneous, and purely spiritual. This faith was not reverence for tradition nor a mere intellectual belief which he held as a sacred creed, but rather a sublime experience and a profound conviction which *securely held him*. His faith was so real and all-encompassing that it absolutely swept away any spiritual doubts and effectively destroyed every conflicting desire. Nothing was able to tear him away from the spiritual anchorage of this fervent, sublime, and undaunted faith. [*The Midwayer Commission, 2087:5 / 196:0.5*]

Highlights of the discussion

Reading through these excerpts led to the many stimulating and intriguing insights that the panelists exchanged. The summary that follows below cannot possibly do justice to all their remarks, but I have done my best to present highlights that may be useful to our readers and viewers.

As you read them, please bear in mind that these highlights represent a range of opinions voiced by individual panelists. Taken as a whole, these statements and comments attest to our practical theme of pluralism and diversity, not any effort to foster or adopt unified conclusions that might bespeak a single viewpoint.

— Living spiritual experiences are sometimes so sublime that they cannot be described in words. As implied in the second excerpt, the technique of revelation is theology, the province of faith.

— A key feature of positive and helpful theology is to avoid judging others and keep oneself from becoming a bully or exerting a kind of greed on the spiritual or religious level. In effect, helpful theology requires respect for facts, meanings, and values in proper balance, while seeking to represent a spiritual connection between the human and the divine.

— Theology is a group endeavor, individuals working together with other individuals, a sociological phenomenon. Theological ideas do not spring up from nothing in the mind of a given individual; they are the product or outcome of dialogue.

— Remarks about theology are social insofar as words are automatically social, but personal experience with God is not automatically a social matter. The quest for God occurs on a personal level.

— One question pertaining to theology has to do with the premise of authority. If conformity and uniformity are enforced on the basis of authority, that would be an adverse effect of certain types of theology.

— The religions of authority have done a great deal of good in the world, but this has come at a high cost, the cost of actual personal experience. The actual experience of finding God is always personal. Striving for God consciousness can be shared socially, but it is discovered in the personal realm of reality, producing a peace that passes understanding.

— There is no personal spiritual experience outside of the social context. Spiritual experience necessarily involves socialization as human beings; it is impossible to be self taught. Authority is not intrinsically a theological phenomenon; it is a human phenomenon that operates in any human context. All prophets have existed with the consciousness of their social environment; all theologians have been inspired by prophets.

— The authentic experience of hearing God’s voice, the Thought Adjuster, does not originate in any social context. The experience of hearing it is transcendent and personal. It is super-sociological, super-theological, and super-spiritual. Theology could make an expository record, but that record would not be the experience.

— Subsequent fusion with the Adjuster is new every time it happens; it cannot be explained sociologically. I believe that the Thought Adjuster concept will end up saving Urantia and will do that when people truly accept it.

— The source of personality in the universe is the Universal Father. Fusion with the Thought Adjuster is personal but not individual; it is personal because it comes from the community of divinity that we call the Trinity. The personal level is, by definition, social, because the Trinity is composed of three beings. Living faith is a personal faith and can be experienced only in the context of other personal beings.

Analyzing an additional excerpt

After the participants discussed the six passages from *The Urantia Book* that are reproduced on page 103 of *Revelation Revealed*, I read the following paragraph from section 9 of Paper 195 and then asked them to comment on it.

Primitive man lived a life of superstitious bondage to religious fear. Modern, civilized men dread the thought of falling under the dominance of strong religious convictions. Thinking man has always feared to be *held* by a religion. When a strong and moving religion threatens to dominate him, he invariably tries to rationalize, traditionalize, and institutionalize it, thereby hoping to gain control of it. By such procedure, even a revealed religion becomes man-made and man-dominated. Modern men and women of intelligence evade the religion of Jesus because of their fears of what it will do *to* them — and *with* them. And all such fears are well founded. 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*]

In part, I asked participants whether from some perspectives, theology has operated as a formula for gaining control of deep spiritual impulses, an effort to settle for “a deal” that is “good enough” and that does not “[demand] that men dedicate their lives to seeking for a knowledge of the will of the Father in heaven and [require] that the energies of living be consecrated to the unselfish service of the brotherhood of man.” After all, I remarked, adopting the real religion of Jesus forces a very

substantial change in one's value system. Will his approach eventually gain converts and be the fulcrum for much higher levels of spiritual experience on our planet Urantia?

One participant replied that he saw no way around this, although these changes will take much longer than we would like. This will not be a one-time choice, but the accumulated choices of persons that occur individually, one at a time, over thousands of years. This will happen but will depend on the willingness of people to forgo selfish inclinations and embrace others, regardless of how unpleasant and difficult this may seem.

While participants proceeded to discuss the net damage inflicted by the worldwide illusions that we call materialism and secularism, one person cited the following incisive statements by the Midwayer Commission, as presented in section 8 of Paper 195:

[S]ecularism is not the sole parent of all these recent gains in the enlargement of living. Behind the gains of the twentieth century are not only science and secularism but also the unrecognized and unacknowledged spiritual workings of the life and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth. [*The Midwayer Commission, 2082:1 / 195:8.9*]

Yet another participant called attention to remarks of Dr. Martin Luther King, to the effect that science has made the world a neighborhood, but that religion and ethics have failed to make it a brotherhood. He believed that the activities of study groups should be reconceived so as to embody a horizontal axis whereby the various study groups seek to cooperate with each other, AND ALSO a vertical axis whereby study groups endeavor to cooperate with the work of the master seraphim, while embracing their energy and aims.

In reply, I commended his insights and took the opportunity to point out that an analytical study guide on the work of the master seraphim is available on the website of the Committee for the Global Endeavor (www.globalendeavor.net). In addition, I noted that the work of the master seraphim is the spiritual model for our plan for the Global Endeavor, an extremely ambitious initiative that will enable readers of *The Urantia Book* to seek to promote the progressive growth and development of society and civilization as a whole — an effort that will encompass spiritual and religious aspects, but certainly not be limited to them.

Our agenda for April 27: Augustine versus Pelagius

During our webinar on April 27, panelists will analyze and react to several pages of *Revelation Revealed* narrating an intense controversy that occurred in the early decades of the fifth century — contention that pitted Pelagius, a relatively obscure British monk who was then preaching in Rome, against Augustine, bishop of Hippo in north Africa, an ecclesiastical superstar whose extant works in Latin have made him the most prolific author who ever wrote in that language and, not incidentally, the most influential theologian who lived and taught in Western Europe during Christianity's first few centuries.

Nonetheless, the teachings of Pelagius emphasizing the essential goodness of human nature and the freedom of the human will are considerably closer to the revelators' views than the doctrines that Augustine proclaimed and promoted. For example, Pelagius denied the idea of original sin and the need for infants to be baptized, whereas Augustine asserted that human beings could not attain righteousness by their own efforts and were totally dependent upon the grace of God, while emphasizing the role that he associated with the organized, institutional church. Further, Augustine's extended struggle with Pelagius and Pelagianism eventually led him (Augustine) to repulsive teachings that amount to predestination — convictions that clearly influenced John Calvin and, through him, the entire spectrum of Evangelical thought among Protestant Christians.

A personal introduction

During the final few minutes of the webinar on April 20, I provided the following personal introduction to our webinar on April 27.

My original hope when we started the webinar today was that we would reach the discussion of the controversy between Augustine and Pelagius. We did not; we will do that next week.

I would like to introduce it slightly by commenting on this person Augustine. Now in the Christian tradition, he is commonly identified as "Saint Augustine." I will not do that because to use the title "Saint" involves accepting the authority of the organization that conferred it upon him. But in any case, Augustine of Hippo, the bishop of that city, was a towering figure in the early history of Christianity, probably the paramount theologian in the western half of the Christian tradition; but I would ask you to bear in mind who this person was.

Augustine of Hippo was a noble Roman; he came from a wealthy family background. His family was not of the extremely wealthy category that would have made his family eligible for the Senate as conceived in imperial Rome, but they were wealthy persons. He, Augustine, his family background, was associated with the principle of authority, Roman authority, Roman hierarchy, Roman uniformity. And I would ask you to bear this in mind when we talk about the conflict with Pelagius.

Augustine did not come to these matters fully with an open slate. To the contrary, he was *Roman*. He identified with these traits that we discussed in my document "Romanità"; and that background needs to be part of our understanding of the conflict between Augustine and Pelagius.

Pelagius looked at the potential of human beings for direct relationship to God without necessarily being constrained by the efforts of authority of the group, specifically the authority of organized, institutional religion. He disagreed with the concept of original sin; he disagreed with the concept of the baptism of infants. And these teachings of his, Pelagius, made him a pariah in his generation; Augustine disputed them vehemently. And so now, in effect, we have an example of an extremely important controversy involving the rights of the individual, the individual's relationship to God, and, contrariwise, the authority proclaimed by the organized, institutional church then, and indeed now.

So I leave you with that as a preview of some of our discussion next week. I appreciate the comments about theology and many rich and intriguing comments that all of you have shared with us; and I greatly look forward to our webinar next week. Thank you, ladies and gentlemen.

PRACTICAL FACTORS

1. Since the recordings of our previous webinars remain available on YouTube, you could watch any or all of them whenever you wish. Here is the link that would take you to the specific location on the Internet:

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC_6QHPLuABZojhdjE8XJRQg

As a workaround that would help you if you do not have this link immediately to hand, you could log onto the main site for YouTube and then search for “Global Endeavor.” The results would include a reference to our programs, although it may not appear at the top of the list.

2. Here is the standard time line that applies to all our discussions, including the next webinar on Saturday, April 27:

- Pacific Time Zone: from 12:00 to 2:00 pm.
- Mountain Time Zone: from 1:00 to 3:00 pm.
- Central Time Zone: from 2:00 to 4:00 pm.
- Eastern Time Zone: from 3:00 to 5:00 pm.

Please be aware that the starting time is only approximate, for it usually takes us a few minutes to make the adjustments to the rather complicated software that cause all the participants to be viewed and heard correctly. In relation to our preceding webinars associated with topic 8, live streaming in YouTube began at about ten minutes past the hour indicated above.

Regards, Neal Waldrop.
Chairman, the Committee for the Global Endeavor
[April 26, 2019 at 7:45 pm]