

Living the Real Religion of Jesus

Finding God for oneself. The direct spiritual experience that inevitably flows from *living* the real religion of Jesus, as well as the inspiration and growth that invariably permeate us when we adopt the true teachings of Jesus as the mainspring of identity, activity, and energy, are by no means a passive legacy that anyone could possibly acquire through wishing or aspiring, nor some kind of daydream that would descend upon us at tranquil moments in order to infuse a rosy glow that we could aspire to radiate to others. Slogans, procedures, and ceremonies are all entirely irrelevant, for: “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*].

If we examine this statement with care and attention, it becomes exceedingly clear that the real religion of Jesus most emphatically *includes* belief, but that this sincere belief, by itself, neither circumscribes nor constrains *the dynamic reality*, the intense mobilization, the whole-personality commitment, that the true teachings of Jesus call forth and require. After all, “*seeking for a knowledge of the will of the Father in heaven*” is not just a process of analysis, inference, or contemplation, for the will of the Father inevitably and intrinsically immerses us in a social context: active association and engagement with many other human beings who, like us, *also* have obligations to God the Mother, the Supreme Being, the sum and synthesis of emerging finite perfection which it is our privilege to join in fostering. Further, the task of consecrating the energies of living “*to the unselfish service of the brotherhood of man*” is not an abstraction that enjoins us to invent an intellectual paradigm. During Jesus’ second discourse on religion, he declared:

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*]

The supernal experience of finding God cannot be compressed, condensed, or confined so as to fit within the covers of a book, nor be delimited by the intellectual adaptations required to read and understand it. Our experience of finding God can and must be personal, mindal, and spiritual, and we should remain intensely aware that God is not just an infinite being who resides on distant Paradise, but also an active presence who pervades and animates all reality, whether material, mindal, or spiritual, as well as all intelligent beings who inhabit our planet Urantia and every other living environment dispersed throughout the grand universe.

As we cooperate with and seek to inspire numerous other human beings, we are also seeking to enhance and cooperate with God's presence within them, as well as his plans for their destiny and the destiny of our tumultuous and troubled planet Urantia. None of these aspirations and efforts can conceivably be constrained or circumscribed by the doctrines or theological theories that swirl around God's children on Urantia as a consequence of the congealed authority that various exponents of religious tradition propound and proclaim. To the contrary, as the Midwayer Commission tells us, "**the religion of the spirit consists in progressive revelation and ever beckons [us] on toward higher and holier achievements in spiritual ideals and eternal realities**" [*the Midwayer Commission, 1731:2 / 155:6.4*].

A. We all accept the goal of finding God for ourselves. How shall we do this? Do you believe that there are many possible approaches and, if so, what factors lead you to this conclusion? What steps do you recommend, at least as possible contributions to a personal progression that may be stimulating and inspiring?

The religion of personal spiritual experience. It is abundantly obvious that the real religion of Jesus transcends the level of matter, even though matter is a crucial and necessary component of the trio of finite realities that provide a framework for personal experience on our planet Urantia (*i.e.*, matter, mind, and spirit). On the other hand, we cannot be equally categorical in appraising the degree to which the real religion of Jesus transcends the level of mind, even though the phrase "personal *spiritual* experience," if read strictly and literally, demonstrates that it does. The paradox that we cannot evade is that although spirit is not mind and most certainly transcends it, mind is nonetheless the channel for the expression of spirit in human experience. As a Melchizedek tells us, there is no alternative:

Always must man's inner spirit depend for its expression and self-realization upon the mechanism and technique of the mind. Likewise must man's outer experience of material reality be predicated on the mind consciousness of the experiencing personality. Therefore are the spiritual and the material, the inner and the outer, human experiences always correlated with the mind function and conditioned, as to their conscious realization, by the mind activity. **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 — emphasis added: the sentence in bold type]*

At first glance this intrinsic entanglement of mind and spirit may seem to be a narrow philosophic point, one that has few implications for our current purposes, but such an impression is essentially an illusion and perhaps even a delusion. To be sure, our planet does not lack for traditional religionists who congratulate themselves that their spiritual impulses and practices are not only entirely independent of all other aspects of human life, but so intrinsically superior as to be exempt from rational analysis and objective comparison.

We may be tempted to smile at all that, but the wiser and more productive strategy is to reflect that the true challenge of the religion of personal spiritual experience is to find appropriate methods that will enable us to overcome and transcend the tendencies of inherited culture, the conventions of society, and even the diverse characteristics of language itself, so that we can enhance our receptivity to and respect for true spiritual experience — the realm of human life that can inspire and unify all of God's children, all human beings who share our planet Urantia. In Jesus' second discourse on religion, he explained:

Every race of mankind has its own mental outlook upon human existence; therefore must the religion of the mind ever run true to these various racial viewpoints. Never can the religions of authority come to unification. Human unity and mortal brotherhood can be achieved only by and through the superendowment of the religion of the spirit. Racial minds may differ, but all mankind is indwelt by the same divine and eternal spirit. The hope of human brotherhood can only be realized when, and as, the divergent mind religions of authority become impregnated with, and overshadowed by, the unifying and ennobling religion of the spirit — the religion of personal spiritual experience.

The religions of authority can only divide men and set them in conscientious array against each other; the religion of the spirit will progressively draw men together and cause them to become understandingly sympathetic with one another. The religions of authority require of men uniformity in belief, but this is impossible of realization in the present state of the world. The religion of the spirit requires only unity of experience — uniformity of destiny — making full allowance for diversity of belief. The religion of the spirit requires only uniformity of insight, not uniformity of viewpoint and outlook. The religion of the spirit does not demand uniformity of intellectual views, only unity of spirit feeling. The religions of authority crystallize into lifeless creeds; the religion of the spirit grows into the increasing joy and liberty of ennobling deeds of loving service and merciful ministrations. ...

Never forget there is only one adventure which is more satisfying and thrilling than the attempt to discover the will of the living God, and that is the supreme experience of honestly trying to do that divine will. And fail not to remember that the will of God can be done in any earthly occupation. Some callings are not holy and others secular. All things are sacred in the lives of those who are spirit led; that is, subordinated to truth, ennobled by love, dominated by mercy, and restrained by fairness — justice. The spirit which my Father and I shall send into the world is not only the Spirit of Truth but also the spirit of idealistic beauty. [*The Midwayer Commission, 1732:1 -2,4 / 155:6.8-9,11*]

The temptation to construct a social, cultural, and political context that embodies and advances one's own mental outlook upon human existence is a widely shared impulse, perhaps even amounting to a cultural imperative. For example, the warfare endemic throughout the middle years of the 7th century caused the armies of Islam to advance through Syria, Palestine, Egypt, and the coastal regions of north Africa, and this was most certainly accompanied by effort to evangelize on behalf of Islamic beliefs — although, in fairness, we should concede that this took place gradually, mainly as a result of social pressures occurring in everyday life and individual appraisals of advantages and benefits, not by immediate compulsion. (The new rulers were content to levy a special tax on persons who observed other faiths — mainly Judaism and the divergent strands of Christianity that different groups of believers espoused at the time.)

Islamic military conquest then traversed the Straits of Gibraltar so as to dominate almost all of Spain, followed by the opportunistic incursions into France that occurred from time to time until 732 CE, when the troops of Charles Martel (the grandfather of Charlemagne) repulsed the Islamic invaders during the battle of Poitiers-Tours. Almost as if to intensify the campaign to preserve and expand the domains of Christendom, these impulses percolated through the decades that led to the year 800 CE, a period when the troops of the Emperor Charlemagne conquered the pagan Saxons* and converted them to Christianity by force of arms.

Well, I shall refrain from recounting the adventures and misadventures that can be linked with the Crusades or with the tumultuous upheavals that stemmed from the Protestant Reformation, except to note that in the middle years of the 16th century, German Protestants and Roman Catholics cast aside their mutual hatreds just long enough to conduct coherent and effective joint action that served to eradicate their common enemies, the Anabaptists.

If we accelerate to the early years of the 19th century, it is useful to bear in mind that for the Emperor Napoleon, the most important advantage of organized, institutional religion — or, at least, the Roman Catholic version — was that it tended to make his subjects docile and obedient, a perspective that he appears to have shared with the

* Persons who lived in the region of north central Germany that is still called Saxony.

Emperor Constantine.* This, however, did not guarantee support from those who upheld the tradition of ecclesiastical authority, for popes, cardinals, and bishops seldom saw fit to promote the projects of the Emperor Napoleon — and sometimes quite to the contrary.†

Several generations later, during the final one-third of the 19th century, European powers carved up sub-Saharan Africa to their political and economic advantage, and the various episodes of military conquest triggered the ensuing trek of Christian missionaries who sought to convert the indigenous inhabitants. Although it is difficult to appraise the net balance of advantages and disadvantages, these evangelization campaigns clearly represented cultural imperialism in tandem with and as a corollary to political imperialism.

The missionaries who operated in the British Empire were almost invariably Protestant, whereas Roman Catholic clergy assumed such tasks in the colonial dominions of France, Belgium, and Portugal. In the French Empire these evangelical efforts involved at least an implicit paradox, for the Third Republic was avowedly secular and sought to disentangle itself from the overtones of the active partnership with organized, institutional religion that had pervaded the preceding royal and imperial regimes. Nonetheless, the civil officials of the French Empire could not and did not impede the efforts of Roman Catholic missionaries in sub-Saharan Africa, for French law and tradition recognized their right to hold and express religious views, as enshrined in Article 10 of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen (August 26, 1789): “No one should be disturbed on account of his opinions, even religious, provided their manifestation does not upset the public order established by law.”‡

Please permit me to emphasize that I have not subjected you to this brisk, selective, and highly subjective excursion into highlights of history in order to foster intellectual insights that might illuminate these events. The main point is far more general: Religion almost invariably follows the flag, at least from very broad perspectives. Further, we need to bear in mind that the various strands of Christianity embody cultural and social assumptions that are closely associated with the traditions, norms, and experience of persons who live in Western countries. This is the cogent explanation that we find in Part III of *The Urantia Book*, as credited to two Melchizedeks (or perhaps the same one):

* In Constantine’s case, this objective seems to have been more aspirational than actual, for many professional Christians of his day were fractious and bumptious, and the Emperor found it exceedingly difficult to foster harmony among them.

† A friend of mine once pointed out that Napoleon ended up crowning himself during the ceremony in Notre Dame (December 1804), but had nonetheless insisted that the pope travel to Paris in order to sit on the dais behind him. This, my friend declared, was a division of responsibility: The pope took care of canon law, and he, Napoleon, took care of the cannon.

‡ Here is the original wording in French: « *Nul ne doit être inquiété pour ses opinions, même religieuses, pourvu que leur manifestation ne trouble pas l'ordre public établi par la Loi.* »

As the original teachings of Jesus penetrated the Occident, they became Occidentalized, and as they became Occidentalized, they began to lose their potentially universal appeal to all races and kinds of men. Christianity, today, has become a religion well adapted to the social, economic, and political mores of the white races. It has long since ceased to be the religion of Jesus, although it still valiantly portrays a beautiful religion about Jesus to such individuals as sincerely seek to follow in the way of its teaching. It has glorified Jesus as the Christ, the Messianic anointed one from God, but has largely forgotten the Master's personal gospel: the Fatherhood of God and the universal brotherhood of all men. [A Melchizedek, 1084:10 / 98:7.11]

The Christian religion is the religion about the life and teachings of Christ based upon the theology of Judaism, modified further through the assimilation of certain Zoroastrian teachings and Greek philosophy, and formulated primarily by three individuals: Philo, Peter, and Paul. It has passed through many phases of evolution since the time of Paul and has become so thoroughly Occidentalized that many non-European peoples very naturally look upon Christianity as a strange revelation of a strange God and for strangers. [A Melchizedek, 1011:16 / 92:6.18]

These social and cultural associations of Christianity are highly problematic, for it would be ludicrous to assert that the insight and inspiration that we have inherited from the revelators are benefits exclusively aimed at persons who happen to live in the Western world. After all, the fifth epochal revelation enshrines God's love and the active ministry of our spiritual superiors for the entirety of Urantia and for everyone who shares our troubled planet with us! Further, the spiritual future of all humanity is intensely inter-linked with the religion of personal spiritual experience that Jesus taught and proclaimed.

B. In section 2 of Paper 99, a Melchizedek declares: “Only the real religion of personal spiritual experience can function helpfully and creatively in the present crisis of civilization” [a Melchizedek, 1087:4 / 99:2.1]. As we endeavor to embody, encourage, and advocate the religion of personal spiritual experience and simultaneously seek to stimulate active interest in the teachings of *The Urantia Book*, how should we avoid or at least diminish the possible impression that our efforts are actually intended to promote the traditional tenets and practices of organized, institutional Christianity? Would it be wise for committed readers of *The Urantia Book* to make emphatic statements disavowing these motives, and then repeat such assurances every so often? What would be the advantages and disadvantages of doing that?

The presence of God. In the final analysis, God is in, around, over, under, and through us. Although this includes the fact that a Thought Adjuster lives in the mind of each human being who is conscious of right and wrong, that definitely does not exhaust the reality of God's presence. After all, a Divine Counselor tells us in Paper 1: "In Him we all live and move and have our being."* On the other hand, in Paper 5 he concedes: "It is well-nigh impossible for human logic and finite reason to harmonize the concept of divine immanence, God within and a part of every individual, with the idea of God's transcendence, the divine domination of the universe of universes" [*a Divine Counselor, 69:1 / 5:5.6*]. This may be as far as we should go, for this second statement suggests that attempting to probe the philosophic implications is not likely to be productive.

Nonetheless, we can acquire a modest grasp of these profound insights by reflecting that God is the ultimate source of matter, mind, and spirit. This, in turn, implies that the entire realm of finite reality constitutes eloquent evidence of the active presence of God. To enhance our understanding, we could note that it is the immanence of God the Mother, God the Supreme, that sums up, synthesizes, and cumulates the entire spectrum of finite experience — most assuredly including all the decisions and choices we make while living on our planet Urantia.

From a more analytical perspective, we will find it exceedingly difficult to reach a balanced and accurate understanding of the presence of God unless and until we transcend the traditional tendency to interpret the word *God* solely as a reference to God the Father. Not so, for in section II of the Foreword, a Divine Counselor declares: "GOD is a word symbol designating all personalizations of Deity" [*a Divine Counselor, 3:19 / 0:2.6*]. After several intervening paragraphs, he states that in the fifth epochal revelation, the word GOD is used with the following seven meanings:

1. *God the Father* (the Universal Father).
2. *God the Son* (the Eternal Son).
3. *God the Spirit* (the Infinite Spirit).
4. *God the Supreme* (the Supreme Being).
5. *God the Sevenfold* (Deity personality anywhere actually functioning in time and space).
6. *God the Ultimate* (the eventuating God of supertime and transcended space).
7. *God the Absolute* (the experientializing God of transcended superpersonal values and divinity meanings).

* This crucial teaching occurs thrice: (1) a Divine Counselor, 29:6 / 1:5.16; (2) a Divine Counselor, 35:4 / 2:1.11; and (3) a Melchizedek, 1155:4 / 105:2.11. For a detailed explanation, see the footnote on page 211.

Since the human mind is subject to and limited by time and space (the fundamental characteristics of finite reality), we cannot form coherent concepts about the current roles of God the Ultimate and God the Absolute. On the other hand, we can and should understand that “God the Sevenfold” is a collective term that includes the work of the Creator Sons and of the Creative Mother Spirits, their active partners. In section VIII of the Foreword, the Divine Counselor explains:

The grand universe is the threefold Deity domain of the Trinity of Supremacy, God the Sevenfold, and the Supreme Being. ...

The Creator Sons in the Deity association of God the Sevenfold provide the mechanism whereby the mortal becomes immortal and the finite attains the embrace of the infinite. The Supreme Being provides the technique for the power-personality mobilization, the divine synthesis, of *all* these manifold transactions, thus enabling the finite to attain the absonite and, through other possible future actualizations, to attempt the attainment of the Ultimate. The Creator Sons and their associated Divine Ministers are participants in this supreme mobilization, but the Ancients of Days and the Seven Master Spirits are probably eternally fixed as permanent administrators in the grand universe. [*A Divine Counselor, 12:1-2 / 0:8.10-11 — emphasis added: the sentence in bold*]

We are already quite familiar with the role and responsibilities of our Paradise Creator Son Michael of Nebadon, for he conducted his seventh and final bestowal in the human form of Jesus of Nazareth. Further, the active ministry of the Spirit of Truth is *his* presence and therefore the presence of God. During Jesus’ farewell discourse after the Last Supper, the apostle Thomas declared that the apostles would follow Jesus that very night if he would show them the way. In reply, Jesus declared: “**Thomas, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man goes to the Father except through me. All who find the Father, first find me**” [*the Midwayer Commission, 1947:6 / 180:3.7*]. In Paper 182, the Midwayer Commission associates this reply to Thomas with many other statements of Jesus that are equally inspiring:

The Master, during the course of this final prayer with his apostles, alluded to the fact that he had manifested the Father’s name to the world. ... But when Jesus had finished his earth life, this name of the Father had been so revealed that the Master, who was the Father incarnate, could truly say:

I am the bread of life.

I am the living water.

I am the light of the world.

I am the desire of all ages.

I am the open door to eternal salvation.

I am the reality of endless life.

I am the good shepherd.

I am the pathway of infinite perfection.
I am the resurrection and the life.
I am the secret of eternal survival.
I am the way, the truth, and the life.
I am the infinite Father of my finite children.
I am the true vine; you are the branches.
I am the hope of all who know the living truth.
I am the living bridge from one world to another.
I am the living link between time and eternity.

[The Midwayer Commission, 1965:3-19 / 182:1.9-25]

Christ Michael's partner, the Creative Mother Spirit, ministers to us on her own behalf as the Holy Spirit, *after* she creates the practical framework for consciousness and choice via the unceasing efforts of the adjutant mind-spirits. All in all, it also seems quite reasonable to construe the complex ministry of the Mother Spirit as the presence of God, at least indirectly and by implication.

In section 3 of the Paper entitled, "**God the Supreme**" (*i.e.*, Paper 117), a Mighty Messenger explains the relationship between the Supreme Being and God the Sevenfold by stating that the sovereignty of the Supreme Being "**grows in and out of the acts and achievements of the Supreme Creator Personalities.**" On the other hand, the Mighty Messenger tells us that the Supreme Being "**is also self-evolved and self-derived ... a volitional, creative participant in his own deity actualization**" [*a Mighty Messenger, 1282:2 / 117:3.7*]. Later in the same Paper, in a section entitled, "**The Oversoul of Creation,**" the author calls attention to philosophic and symbolic implications that are complex and profound:

The great Supreme is the cosmic oversoul of the grand universe. In him the qualities and quantities of the cosmos do find their deity reflection; his deity nature is the mosaic composite of the total vastness of all creature-Creator nature throughout the evolving universes. And the Supreme is also an actualizing Deity embodying a creative will which embraces an evolving universe purpose.

The intellectual, potentially personal selves of the finite emerge from the Third Source and Center and achieve finite time-space Deity synthesis in the Supreme. When the creature submits to the will of the Creator, he does not submerge or surrender his personality; the individual personality participants in the actualization of the finite God do not lose their volitional selfhood by so functioning. Rather are such personalities progressively augmented by participation in this great Deity adventure; by such union with divinity man exalts, enriches, spiritualizes, and unifies his evolving self to the very threshold of supremacy. [*A Mighty Messenger, 1285:4-5 / 117:5.1-2*]

Up to this point, we have mainly interpreted God's presence in terms of its active influence on each individual. In parallel, we should understand that God's presence is also embodied in plans for the progressive growth and development of human society and civilization on inhabited planets such as Urantia, along general lines that a Mighty Messenger explains in Paper 52, "Planetary Mortal Epochs." Further, epochal revelations on an inhabited planet are at least partly intended to facilitate and stimulate these types of growth, as occurred during the original regime of the Planetary Prince and during the efforts that Adam and Eve carried out before they defaulted. (The fifth epochal revelation restored and revitalized this standard practice, whereas the bestowals of Melchizedek and Christ Michael were almost entirely devoted to spiritual and religious goals.)

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. The seraphic planetary government is clearly focusing on and fostering these outcomes — especially via the ministry of the master seraphim and the periodic contributions of the members of the reserve corps of destiny, as described in sections 6 and 7 of Paper 114 by the Chief of Seraphim.

In Jesus' second discourse on religion, he stated:

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 Midway Commission, 1732:5, 1733:1 / 155:6.12-13*]

Since this short excerpt from Jesus' second discourse on religion contains many intriguing implications, we should seek to interpret and explain them.

- C. Why is it more important for us to feel the presence of God than to know about the fact of God?
- D. Is finding God in one's own soul a precondition for discovering him in the souls of other human beings? Is this discovery entirely a mindal matter (*e.g.*, an intellectual conclusion), or might it also include realities that we can legitimately identify with the morontial level or with the broad realm of spirit? What degree of confidence can we associate with these conclusions?
- E. Please explain and interpret the idea of eventually discovering God in all the creatures and creations of a mighty universe. How do you associate this potential discovery with each of the three persons of the Paradise Trinity? To what degree would it also relate to the roles of God the Supreme (the Supreme Being), the ongoing active efforts of God the Sevenfold, or both?
- F. Why did Jesus commend the thoughtful contemplation of eternal realities? Please do your best to put such thinking in perspective, so as to compare it with the relative importance of actions and decisions. Is contemplation an end in itself, or are you inclined to believe that its main value lies in stimulating deeper understanding of God's presence and plans, as well as greater willingness to act in harmony with them?
- G. Please analyze and interpret Jesus' concluding sentence, "While the mind is not the seat of the spiritual nature, it is indeed the gateway thereto."

The mission and the time line. Shortly before Christ Michael left Salvington in order to begin serving as the Paradise Son who would bestow himself on Urantia in the human form of Jesus of Nazareth, his older brother Immanuel of Salvington, the Union of Days, the ambassador of the Paradise Trinity to the local universe of Nebadon, gave Michael detailed instructions on behalf of the Universal Father.* Although these instructions extend throughout sections 1, 2, and 3 of Paper 120 (*i.e.*, from page 1325 to page 1330 of the single-column edition), we shall concentrate on the following three paragraphs from section 3, which is entitled, "Further Counsel and Advice."

"3. In your relations to the social order we advise that you confine your efforts largely to spiritual regeneration and intellectual emancipation. Avoid all entanglements with the economic structure and the political commitments of your day. More especially devote yourself to living the ideal religious life on Urantia.

* This sentence paraphrases ideas that the author of Paper 120 (Mantutia Melchizedek) expresses in section 0 of that Paper, especially in paragraph 120:0.7 (1324:4).

“4. Under no circumstances and not even in the least detail, should you interfere with the normal and orderly progressive evolution of the Urantia races. But this prohibition must not be interpreted as limiting your efforts to leave behind you on Urantia an enduring and improved system of *positive religious ethics*. As a dispensational Son you are granted certain privileges pertaining to the advancement of the *spiritual* and *religious* status of the world peoples.

“5. As you may see fit, you are to identify yourself with existing religious and spiritual movements as they may be found on Urantia but in every possible manner seek to avoid the formal establishment of an organized cult, a crystallized religion, or a segregated ethical grouping of mortal beings. Your life and teachings are to become the common heritage of all religions and all peoples.” [*Mantutia Melchizedek, 1329:5-6, 1330:1 / 120:3.4-6*]

- H.** The Midwayer Commission states: “[Jesus] repeatedly refused to lay down laws regarding marriage and divorce, but many of Jesus’ early followers had strong opinions on divorce and did not hesitate to attribute them to him” [*the Midwayer Commission, 1581:1 / 140:8.14*]. For example: “What therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder” [*Matthew 19:6 and Mark 10:9 / Revised Standard Version*]. If Jesus really had propounded moral principles pertaining to marriage and divorce, would any such commandment of his have violated Immanuel’s instructions that in relation to the social order, he confine his efforts largely to spiritual regeneration and intellectual emancipation?
- I.** Did Christ Michael, while incarnate in the human form of Jesus of Nazareth, carry out Immanuel’s recommendation that he leave behind him “an enduring and improved system of *positive religious ethics*”? How do you appraise the net results up to now? Is it reasonable to believe that Jesus’ ethical teachings will eventually become the most widely accepted principles underlying the actions and aspirations of human beings who live on our planet Urantia? Why or why not?
- J.** In part, Immanuel stated: “As a dispensational Son you are granted certain privileges pertaining to the advancement of the *spiritual* and *religious* status of the world peoples.” In your view, were these remarks of Immanuel’s just permission for Jesus to emphasize the value and importance of personal (individual) religion, even though he undoubtedly realized that these teachings were too advanced for the great majority of human beings living in his era, or were these remarks, by implication, a strong recommendation of Immanuel’s that was closely associated with his responsibility to represent the Universal Father?

- K.** Did Jesus follow Immanuel’s instructions that he “in every possible manner seek to avoid the formal establishment of an organized cult, a crystallized religion, or a segregated ethical grouping of mortal beings”? Did these instructions apply solely to Jesus himself, or also to his followers? How do you interpret the fact that in subsequent generations, those who revered Jesus of Nazareth as the incarnate Son of God **did** establish an organized cult, a crystallized religion, and a segregated ethical grouping of mortal beings? Did these actions of theirs create permanent patterns that, in your opinion, will persist for all time, or do there seem to be good reasons to hope and believe that the existing structure of organized, institutional Christianity is temporary and will eventually yield to patterns of observance and belief that are far better attuned to the ideals that Immanuel espoused and, by implication, the Father’s plan?
- L.** In the final sentence of the excerpt, Immanuel told Michael: “Your life and teachings are to become the common heritage of all religions and all peoples.” Please endeavor to explain how this will happen and how long the transition will take.

If we are to understand the full implications of the instructions that Immanuel of Salvington imparted to Christ Michael on behalf of the Universal Father, we cannot neglect crucial differences in how they implicitly approached time and duration, thereby contrasting with patterns that usually prevail among human beings. In other words, we must resolutely set aside human tendencies to appraise events in terms of a single life or several generations — or even a few centuries.

To put all this in context, it may be helpful for us to bear in mind that Christ Michael’s bestowal on Urantia in the human form of Jesus of Nazareth was the seventh and final occasion during which he appeared as distinctly different types of beings living in his local universe — in effect, a series of temporary and transient identities that he adopted at irregular intervals over a period of almost one billion years.* When Jesus of Nazareth exclaimed on the cross, “It is finished,”† he may have been referring to the end of the entire series of seven bestowals, not just the final moments of human consciousness while he was living on Urantia.

On the other hand, his epochal mission in the human form of Jesus of Nazareth clearly called on him to promote more advanced levels of spiritual awareness and religious observance on our planet Urantia, while emphasizing personal (individual) religion

* Gavalia, the Chief of the Evening Stars, narrates these extraordinary events in Paper 119, “The Bestowals of Christ Michael.” For a table that provides a brief overview, see page 17 above.

† The Midwayer Commission, 2011:1 / 187:5.5.

rather than any set of beliefs or practices handed down from tradition or savoring of group authority. Nonetheless, Christ Michael was vividly aware that amidst previous epochal revelations on Urantia, entrenched impatience had made major contributions to the failures of the first and second. Further, he had most assuredly absorbed and internalized the general principles that an Archangel of Nebadon explains in section 6 of Paper 81:

Man should be unafraid to experiment with the mechanisms of society. But always should these adventures in cultural adjustment be controlled by those who are fully conversant with the history of social evolution; and always should these innovators be counseled by the wisdom of those who have had practical experience in the domains of contemplated social or economic experiment. *No great social or economic change should be attempted suddenly.* Time is essential to all types of human adjustment — physical, social, or economic. **Only moral and spiritual adjustments can be made on the spur of the moment, and even these require the passing of time for the full outworking of their material and social repercussions.** The ideals of the race are the chief support and assurance during the critical times when civilization is in transit from one level to another. *[An Archangel of Nebadon, 911:5 / 81:6.40 — emphasis added: the sentence in bold type]*

Therefore when Jesus delivered his first discourse on true religion, he did not hesitate to blend in candid predictions:

Until the races become highly intelligent and more fully civilized, there will persist many of those childlike and superstitious ceremonies which are so characteristic of the evolutionary religious practices of primitive and backward peoples. Until the human race progresses to the level of a higher and more general recognition of the realities of spiritual experience, large numbers of men and women will continue to show a personal preference for those religions of authority which require only intellectual assent, in contrast to the religion of the spirit, which entails active participation of mind and soul in the faith adventure of grappling with the rigorous realities of progressive human experience.

The acceptance of the traditional religions of authority presents the easy way out for man's urge to seek satisfaction for the longings of his spiritual nature. The settled, crystallized, and established religions of authority afford a ready refuge to which the distracted and distraught soul of man may flee when harassed by fear and tormented by uncertainty. Such a religion requires of its devotees, as the price to be paid for its satisfactions and assurances, only a passive and purely intellectual assent. *[The Midwayer Commission, 1729:3-4 / 155:5.8-9]*

- M.** Please analyze and explain the extended phrase, “a higher and more general recognition of the realities of spiritual experience.” In your view, do the words “more general recognition” suggest awareness among human beings living on Urantia that is broader and deeper in a conceptual sense, more widely shared, or perhaps both?
- N.** A refuge is usually considered advantageous and helpful, as implied by the word *refugee*. In this excerpt, however, it is far from clear that Jesus’ phrase “a ready refuge” embraces overtones that are more positive than negative. How do you analyze the implications?
- O.** The same sentence also evokes circumstances whereby the soul of man is “harassed by fear and tormented by uncertainty.” During the interval of approximately 2,000 years since Christ Michael completed his bestowal in the human form of Jesus of Nazareth, have “[t]he settled, crystallized, and established religions of authority” consistently endeavored to assuage this fear and uncertainty, or have they sometimes operated in ways that exacerbated or intensified them? If you believe that both outcomes have occurred in varying proportions, please describe the patterns that you perceive.

Jesus appears to have doubted that the preceding two paragraphs sufficed to warn the apostles of the intense challenges that they, their successors, and heirs would inevitably encounter whenever they sought to promote his real religion instead of some extemporized blend of the story *about* him with stereotypical doctrines pervaded with group authority and aimed at uniformity of belief. After all, it is reasonable to infer that Christ Michael could have drawn on his personal knowledge of events that had occurred over extended periods on inhabited planets in either or both systems in distant constellations of his local universe of Nebadon where other System Sovereigns had rebelled.* In any case, he added another two paragraphs that seem even more emphatic:

* In Paper 53, “The Lucifer Rebellion,” the author states:

In the universe of Nebadon, the domain of Christ Michael, there are ten thousand systems of inhabited worlds. In all the history of Lanonandek Sons, in all their work throughout these thousands of systems and at the universe headquarters, only three System Sovereigns have ever been found in contempt of the government of the Creator Son. [*Manovandek Melchizedek, 601:2 / 53:0.2*]

While there had been two previous rebellions in Nebadon, they were in distant constellations. [*Manovandek Melchizedek, 605:1 / 53:4.4*]

The Son of Man was confident of success, and he knew that his triumph on your world would forever settle the status of his agelong enemies, not only in Satania but also in the other two systems where sin had entered. [*Manovandek Melchizedek, 609:7 / 53:8.4*]

And for a long time there will live on earth those timid, fearful, and hesitant individuals who will prefer thus to secure their religious consolations, even though, in so casting their lot with the religions of authority, they compromise the sovereignty of personality, debase the dignity of self-respect, and utterly surrender the right to participate in that most thrilling and inspiring of all possible human experiences: the personal quest for truth, the exhilaration of facing the perils of intellectual discovery, the determination to explore the realities of personal religious experience, the supreme satisfaction of experiencing the personal triumph of the actual realization of the victory of spiritual faith over intellectual doubt as it is honestly won in the supreme adventure of all human existence — man seeking God, for himself and as himself, and finding him.

The religion of the spirit means effort, struggle, conflict, faith, determination, love, loyalty, and progress. The religion of the mind — the theology of authority — requires little or none of these exertions from its formal believers. Tradition is a safe refuge and an easy path for those fearful and halfhearted souls who instinctively shun the spirit struggles and mental uncertainties associated with those faith voyages of daring adventure out upon the high seas of unexplored truth in search for the farther shores of spiritual realities as they may be discovered by the progressive human mind and experienced by the evolving human soul. [*The Midwayer Commission, 1729:5-6 / 155:5.10-11*]

P. It is now luminously clear that the 2,000 years that have elapsed since Jesus lived on Urantia are a much shorter interval than the “long time” that he mentioned in the first sentence of the excerpt. In your opinion, how much longer will it take for the behavior that he described to diminish substantially and then eventually die out? If you wish to associate your answer with different proportions of human beings living on Urantia in a range of future eras, please feel free to do that.

Q. In the second paragraph of the excerpt, Jesus declares: “The religion of the spirit means effort, struggle, conflict, faith, determination, love, loyalty, and progress.” Shall we understand this candor of his as truth in advertising, or is Jesus implicitly recommending that believers focus on the importance and significance of the final three elements (*i.e.*, “love, loyalty, and progress”), while accepting the practical reality that early steps along the path are likely to include the first three factors (“effort, struggle, conflict”)? In your view, how do the eight elements of the series relate to each other? Do the middle two elements (*i.e.*, “faith, determination”) constitute a catalyst and fulcrum that can and should propel the believer onward?

R. If we examine the excerpt's second paragraph from an analytical perspective, it is clear that Jesus is contrasting the religion of the spirit with the religion of the mind. Further, the dashes that serve to link the initial phrases of the second sentence implicitly identify "[t]he religion of the mind" with "the theology of authority." Does theology automatically entail authority, or does this occur so often as to justify a broad association that seems accurate and persuasive?

If we analyze the world as it is and not as we would like it to be, it is clear that Christ Michael's epochal efforts to promote more advanced levels of spiritual awareness and religious observance on our planet Urantia currently remain more akin to idealistic aspirations than practical reality, at least in relation to the great majority of human beings who share the planet with us. Does this mean that his campaign has failed and that the mission he received from Immanuel has proven vain and unavailing? No, certainly not, for such reckless appraisals are far too strongly linked with characteristically human approaches to time and duration. The Midwayer Commission reassures us:

Mistake not! there is in the teachings of Jesus an eternal nature which will not permit them forever to remain unfruitful in the hearts of thinking men. The kingdom as Jesus conceived it has to a large extent failed on earth; for the time being, an outward church has taken its place; but you should comprehend that this church is only the larval stage of the thwarted spiritual kingdom, which will carry it through this material age and over into a more spiritual dispensation where the Master's teachings may enjoy a fuller opportunity for development. Thus does the so-called Christian church become the cocoon in which the kingdom of Jesus' concept now slumbers. The kingdom of the divine brotherhood is still alive and will eventually and certainly come forth from this long submergence, just as surely as the butterfly eventually emerges as the beautiful unfolding of its less attractive creature of metamorphic development. [*The Midwayer Commission, 1866:4 / 170:5.21*]

Nonetheless, the Midwayer Commission informs us that the various Christian denominations of our era actually are obstacles to the real religion of Jesus and the wholehearted acceptance of his teachings:

Ecclesiasticism is at once and forever incompatible with that living faith, growing spirit, and firsthand experience of the faith-comrades of Jesus in the brotherhood of man in the spiritual association of the kingdom of heaven. 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 — emphasis added: the sentence in bold type*]

- S.** In your view, what are the practical, conceptual, and/or spiritual factors that led the Midwayer Commission to declare that the Christian churches of the twentieth century were obstructing the commitment of believers to the real religion of Jesus and an accompanying desire to implement his teachings actively and energetically? In your view, are the obstacles that arise from the tenets and practices of certain branches or denominations particularly intense, or are you inclined to believe that the Midwayer Commission's remarks apply equally to all Christian churches? Do the implicit obstacles appear to be increasing or decreasing, or do you perceive a pattern that seems essentially static? Please identify any trends that you have noticed.
- T.** As you consider the unconscious obstacles that you have just sought to appraise, please reflect on whether they may implicitly conceal factors that turn out to be ironic or even paradoxical. Is it possible that some branches of the Christian faith that seem less objectionable and less oppressive will actually obstruct adoption of the real religion of Jesus for a considerably longer period of time, on the grounds that many believers associated with these denominations will see fewer reasons to abandon their previous loyalties and will be extremely reluctant to do that?

(June 24, 2019)