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To: Neal Waldrop - gmail (nealwaldrop606@gmail.com)
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Dear fellow readers of *The Urantia Book* and friends of the Global Endeavor,

On Saturday, December 7, we conducted our twenty-sixth 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.” As a practical matter, however, our entire discussion pertained to page 6 of my essay “Living the Real Religion of Jesus” (June 24, 2019), a text that I am sending to you as the second attachment to this message.

Our next webinar in this series will occur on **Saturday, December 14.**

Christianity’s close links with Western society and culture

As the webinar on December 7 began, we referred once again to the two paragraphs at the top of my essay “Living the Real Religion of Jesus” consisting of excerpts from Paper 92 and Paper 98 in which a Melchizedek offers candid remarks about Christianity’s close links with Western society and culture:

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]

I had previously sent the participants a document containing four questions that relate to the two excerpts shown above. These four questions read as follows:

1. Please analyze and comment on the Melchizedek's statements that: (a) the teachings of Jesus "became Occidentalized"; and (b) since the time of Paul, Christianity "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."

2. In your view, what are the factors that led the Melchizedek to declare that Christianity "has become a religion well adapted to the social, economic, and political mores of the white races"? Please interpret this statement by analyzing each of the three dimensions that the Melchizedek identifies (*i.e.*, social, economic, and political).

3. The second excerpt begins with the Melchizedek's statement that "The Christian religion is the religion about the life and teachings of Christ" How does this differ from a much more general remark that the Melchizedek most emphatically did not make, a statement whereby he would declare that the Christian religion IS the teachings of Christ? Do the key differences solely pertain to the word *about*, or do there appear to be other factors that are at least equally important?

4. Please identify and analyze those aspects of Christianity that can be traced to:

- a. The theology of Judaism.
- b. Certain Zoroastrian teachings.
- c. Greek philosophy.

During the preceding webinars, participants answered the first three questions, and we also began discussing sub-question 4a on the aspects of Christianity that descend from the theology of Judaism. Therefore we returned to that topic on December 7.

Aspects of Christianity that descend from Judaism

One participant commented that although we previously called attention to the atonement doctrine, we had not talked about the whole notion of sacrifice, which had led to the idea of atonement. Sacrifice, in his view, was a key feature that was imported into Christianity from Judaism, even though Jesus now became the Lamb of God and the ultimate sacrifice to appease the King-Judge who was God. In effect, the apostle Paul and other leaders decided that the Father nature would take second place to the King-Judge nature that had come over from Judaism, and sacrifice became all important — else we would not have an atonement doctrine in the first place.

In addition, he said, sacrifice makes its appearance in the general practice of Christians throughout the past 2,000 years, as reflected in the custom of making a pilgrimage to show one's devoutness. During the previous year, he said, he had a meal in Berlin with someone who happened to be from the town of Santiago da Compostela in Spain, and this person had affirmed what many of us might well have suspected: For those who live in a place that is a popular destination for pilgrimages, this practice amounts to a great business opportunity.

In reply, I commented that the concept of a pilgrimage became very important in many countries that were Christian in the Middle Ages. The most notable classic of early English literature is called *The Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer. It is actually written in Middle English and therefore is not immediately accessible to us now, who are readers of Modern English. But Chaucer wrote these stories about people who were making a pilgrimage to Canterbury; and it is very clear from the stories that their religious motivations were not consistently at a high level. In fact, some of the stories are raucous and ribald. Nonetheless, it is fair to state that the concept of a pilgrimage was an important form of reverence and belief for perhaps one thousand years of the Christian tradition.

Another participant called the idea of sacrifice a huge topic, while stating that propitiation (the approach that the other participant had focused on) was only one of the possible motivations. In addition, he said, there is expiation aimed at the forgiveness of sin, an effort to reconcile oneself with the deity. The Jewish people lived with their God in a covenant; they believed that Yahweh would be faithful to them if they were faithful to Yahweh. The idea that sacrifice was primarily aimed at appeasing an angry God is, in his view, an anachronistic conclusion about how the concept was applied in Christianity; it does not do justice to the original Jewish context.

I thanked him for this explanation, but then stated that our focus is how the ideas of sacrifice inserted themselves into Christianity. What happened ultimately in terms of the understandings of Christians and the teachings of Christian leaders was the idea that Jesus died on the cross for our sins, and that his death on the cross created a pathway that allows believers to go to heaven, in the traditional phrasing. This belief has not been set aside; to the contrary, it remains an integral and important part of the Christian tradition.

I then asked participants to begin considering an excerpt from pages 112 and 113 of *Revelation Revealed* concerning the books of the Old Testament and, in particular, their misleading portrayal of key events associated with the history of the Hebrew people. (Although this excerpt appears in a document that I have attached this message, I believe it will be helpful to readers to insert the full text below.)

(introductory paragraph)

In terms of content and substance, the paramount concerns associated with the Old Testament stem from the distortions and misrepresentations that the Hebrew priests propounded during their exile in Babylon, while conducting their systematic editing of previous writings. These efforts of the Hebrew priests ultimately produced “a fiction of sacred history” that has been “disastrously exploited by both Jewish and Christian writers” [*a Melchizedek, 1071:3-4 / 97:8.5-6*].

(excerpts from The Urantia Book)

The custom of looking upon the record of the experiences of the Hebrews as sacred history and upon the transactions of the rest of the world as profane history is responsible for much of the confusion existing in the human mind as to the interpretation of history. And this difficulty arises

because there is no secular history of the Jews. After the priests of the Babylonian exile had prepared their new record of God’s supposedly miraculous dealings with the Hebrews, the sacred history of Israel as portrayed in the Old Testament, they carefully and completely destroyed the existing records of Hebrew affairs — such books as “The Doings of the Kings of Israel” and “The Doings of the Kings of Judah,” together with several other more or less accurate records of Hebrew history. *[A Melchizedek, 1070:4 / 97:8.1]*

When the Jewish priests returned to Jerusalem, they had already completed the writing of their narrative of the beginning of things. Soon they made claims that this recital was a recently discovered story of creation written by Moses. **But the contemporary Hebrews of around 500 B.C. did not consider these writings to be divine revelations; they looked upon them much as later peoples regard mythological narratives.**

This spurious document, reputed to be the teachings of Moses, was brought to the attention of Ptolemy, the Greek king of Egypt, who had it translated into Greek by a commission of seventy scholars for his new library at Alexandria. And so this account found its place among those writings which subsequently became a part of the later collections of the “sacred scriptures” of the Hebrew and Christian religions. And through identification with these theological systems, such concepts for a long time profoundly influenced the philosophy of many Occidental peoples. *[Solonia, 838:3-4 / 74:8.11-12 — emphasis added: sentence in bold type]*

All modern religions have seriously blundered in the attempt to put a miraculous interpretation on certain epochs of human history. While it is true that God has many times thrust a Father’s hand of providential intervention into the stream of human affairs, it is a mistake to regard theologic dogmas and religious superstition as a supernatural sedimentation appearing by miraculous action in this stream of human history. The fact that the “Most Highs rule in the kingdoms of men” does not convert secular history into so-called sacred history.

New Testament authors and later Christian writers further complicated the distortion of Hebrew history by their well-meant attempts to transcendentalize the Jewish prophets. Thus has Hebrew history been disastrously exploited by both Jewish and Christian writers. Secular Hebrew history has been thoroughly dogmatized. It has been converted into a fiction of sacred history and has become inextricably bound up with the moral concepts and religious teachings of the so-called Christian nations. *[A Melchizedek, 1071:3-4 / 97:8.5-6]*

After participants took turns reading this material, one participant focused on wording in the excerpt indicating that Christian writers had sought “to transcendentalize the Jewish prophets,” thereby contributing to the process whereby secular Hebrew history was “converted into a fiction of sacred history.”

I commented on several aspects that seemed problematic at best. One element, I said, has to do with the conviction among many Christians that the Bible and everything it contains is an infallible work, completely correct. Then, if that is the case, the various stories about Hebrew history are factual, and

the narrative provides a concept of how God intervenes in human history in a very selective way in order to help a particular group of people. This creates the impression that God actively intervenes in human affairs of a political character, and it contributes to the overtones of “the chosen people” syndrome that participants partly discussed during the preceding webinar.

In particular, I called attention to the sentence in the second excerpt that I highlighted in bold: “**But the contemporary Hebrews of around 500 B.C. did not consider these writings to be divine revelations; they looked upon them much as later peoples regard mythological narratives.**” If this was the fairly common view of Jewish believers in the centuries that led to the birth of Jesus, why did later Christian believers take all of these stories about the history of Israel and Judah to be fact?

One participant replied that he was not sure that the actual difference between fact and myth was very important at that time. The idea of a fact is a very modern conception. Facts *per se* did not really exist before the 16th century. In his view, historical facts were extremely malleable, to put it mildly; there was no real dividing line between what we call fact and what we call myth.

This analysis, I said, seemed to be the view that in ancient times, the distinction between facts and myths was rather hazy. If so, however, that was not the case at the time of the Protestant Reformation or subsequent reading of the scriptures in the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries. Various Christian believers who were intent on studying the scriptures regarded all these stories as factual.

The panelist responded that those ideas that were prevalent in the 16th and 17th centuries became gradually outdated and outmoded when actual scientific investigation proceeded into the history of the Jewish people. That included archaeology, it included textual criticism. So those ideas were prevalent because they had no competitors. They consistently lost ground as more and more actual research was conducted.

A different participant said he did not believe it is fair to characterize everyone who dwelt on this planet before the 1600s as being ignorant about the existence of facts and what they signify. He called attention to the following paragraph about the apostle Thomas:

If Jesus and his work had not been genuine, it could not have held a man like Thomas from the start to the finish. He had a keen and sure sense of *fact*. At the first appearance of fraud or deception Thomas would have forsaken them all. [*The Midwayer Commission, 1562:6 / 139:8.12*]

Yet another participant commented that the idea that the hand of God is in civilization is clearly a valuable concept that the revelators support, in part by stating that the Most Highs rule in the kingdoms of men. The real difficulty with any such notion, he said, is that none of us is competent to know exactly how that hand operates in human history. The viewpoint of the Most Highs must embrace tens of thousands of years, whereas we are lucky if our viewpoints embrace a century at a time.

I then cited a very specific example of the idea that God was on the side of a particular military struggle, an example that is highly embarrassing to us now. In the 1860s, the United States went through a terrible civil war. I said I was not going to recount the events of that war, but was interested in the psychology of believers in Christianity on both sides. Unfortunately, Christian leaders on both sides were inclined to cite different portions of the Bible, with the overtones that God supported *them*. In other words, they alleged that they could deduce that God was in favor of the cause of the Union, or that God was in favor of the cause of the rebellious states in the South. Furthermore, the argument about God being in favor of particular social systems included the issue of slavery — whereby some sincere believers and religious leaders in the southern part of the United States read portions of the Old Testament that talked about slavery and used them as evidence that God is in favor of slavery. In their view, this meant that God would give victory to their arms in the field and their rebellion against the northern states that remained faithful to the U.S. Constitution.

A different participant commended previous remarks that had focused on the difference between sacred and profane history. He called that a bias and a misrepresentation of what he believes God to be. God has his plans and does rule in the kingdoms of men; but as another participant had said, we have no idea how, when, or where he does that. In his view, both Christianity and Judaism had transcendentalized the prophets, elevating them to the point where their moral pronouncements became spiritual laws. On that basis, he said, one can find a justification for anything in the Bible, even murder. If you are willing to be quite selective, so as to pick a particular line or statement that serves your purpose, you can find what you want to find in the Bible and can find a prophet who said it. This, in his view, is intellectually and spiritually dishonest, completely lacking in spiritual integrity.

Another participant focused on the question of providence, citing the following two excerpts from *The Urantia Book*:

Paul's cult of Christianity exhibited its morality as a Jewish birthmark. The Jews viewed history as the providence of God — Yahweh at work. [*The Midwayer Commission, 1340:5 / 121:7.7*]

To realize providence in time, man must accomplish the task of achieving perfection. But man can even now foretaste this providence in its eternity meanings as he ponders the universe fact that all things, be they good or evil, work together for the advancement of God-knowing mortals in their quest for the Father of all. [*A Mighty Messenger, 1306:7 / 118:10.18*]

I commended his attention to the idea of providence, commenting that the revelators' portrayal of the epochal revelations as a series, and their portrayal of God's plans for our planet Urantia and for the universe of universes, does represent a policy that can correctly be described as providence. The difficulty that we have in this connection has to do with interpreting the stories of the Old Testament that amounted, in effect, to asserting that God was acting on behalf of the Hebrew people in their struggles with their neighbors, followed by the conclusions that Christians subsequently reached that God was on their side in the wars that they were fighting.

The same participant said that in the interest of diversity, he wanted to present a different perspective on the question of secular versus sacred history. He then read the following statement that he had prepared in advance:

The Hebrew Bible treats the secular history of the Hebrew tribes in an analogous manner to how *The Urantia Book* deals with planetary and cosmic history. Neither of the two ignores secular history, *i.e.*, there is a good deal of historical/semi-legendary/legendary detail in the Old Testament. (Whether or not all of those details are demonstrably factual is another matter.) The significant point here is that the purpose of the formulation of sacred history in the Hebrew Testament is identical to the purpose of the fifth epochal revelation: that is, to communicate the fact that a purely secular conception and understanding of human origin and destiny is false and destructive. There is no separation between the secular and the sacred, historically speaking, in the sense that secular reality only exists in the context of the sacred — that is, because of the reality of its divine origin and destiny. The Hebrews knew and understood their divine origin and destiny (and that of all nations) because they accepted the terms of the covenant that was offered to them by Yahweh as described in their sacred history.

Second: The sacred history of the Jews, as preserved in the Torah, created and supported their self identity and enabled them to persevere as a people so as to overcome repeated occupations and military defeats over the centuries. Crucially (and amazingly), this perseverance even flowered as a diaspora in the form of two hundred synagogue-based communities throughout the Roman Empire and therein “provided the cultural centers in which the new gospel of the kingdom of heaven found initial reception, and from which it subsequently spread to the uttermost parts of the world” [*the Midwayer Commission, 1333:6 / 121:2:4*]. In addition, the self-understanding of the Jewish people in large part due to their shared historical identity as being in a covenantal relationship with God promoted “[t]he centralization of the Jewish temple worship at Jerusalem [which] constituted alike the secret of the survival of their monotheism and the promise of the nurture and sending forth to the world of a new and enlarged concept of that one God of all nations and Father of all mortals. The temple service at Jerusalem represented the survival of a religious cultural concept in the face of the downfall of a succession of gentile national overlords and racial persecutors” [*the Midwayer Commission, 1333:8 / 121:2:6*].

PERSONAL COMMENTS. The preceding statement by a particular participant does indeed contribute to pluralism and diversity, and he was amply entitled to express these views. On the other hand, my own personal views, when linked with my responsibilities as the moderator, make it important for me to call attention to the apparent contradiction between the ideas that he expressed and a number of insights appearing in the passages from *The Urantia Book* that participants considered earlier in the webinar. For example:

Secular Hebrew history has been thoroughly dogmatized. It has been converted into a fiction of sacred history and has become inextricably bound up with the moral concepts and religious teachings of the so-called Christian nations. [A Melchizedek, 1071:4 / 97:8.6]

In addition, I am particularly concerned about the following sentence in the first paragraph of the statement by the other participant: “There is no separation between the secular and the sacred, historically speaking, in the sense that secular reality only exists in the context of the sacred — that is, because of the reality of its divine origin and destiny.” I hope that the following reflections of mine will serve to explain my concern.

— All aspects of the finite level respond to God’s creative intent (the divine plan), but his plan projects cosmic reality in three realms that are interrelated but distinct: matter, mind, and spirit.

— If we were to associate the other participant’s phrase “the sacred” with the category of spirit, it could not possibly explain matter or mind, nor subsume either of them. Quite to the contrary, for in section 6 of Paper 103, a Melchizedek tells us: “Man experiences matter in his mind; he experiences spiritual reality in the soul but becomes conscious of this experience in his mind” [a Melchizedek, 1136:1 / 103:6.6].

— If factors pertaining to secular history were entirely a function of the category that the other participant calls “the sacred,” then it would be difficult to explain why “the angels of nation life” have missions and purposes that are separate and distinct from those associated with “the religious guardians.” [Reference: The Chief of Seraphim, 1255:6-7 / 114:6.7-8.]

— The Supreme Being’s role of summing up, unifying, and perfecting finite reality is not just a matter of spiritual values and spiritual energies, aspects that we can associate with the personal identity “God the Supreme.” In contrast, a Mighty Messenger states:

The Supreme Being is the unification of three phases of Deity reality: God the Supreme, the spiritual unification of certain finite aspects of the Paradise Trinity; the Almighty Supreme, the power unification of the grand universe Creators; and the Supreme Mind, the individual contribution of the Third Source and Center and his co-ordinates to the reality of the Supreme Being. [A Mighty Messenger, 251:1 / 22:7.11]

— For all these reasons, among others, I cannot accept the other participant’s assertion that “secular reality only exists in the context of the sacred.”

(end personal comments of mine)

Another participant remarked that he had sought to examine the question of truth versus facts and, in doing so, had focused on the following excerpt from section 1 of Paper 155 that consists of statements by Jesus:

My kingdom is founded on love, proclaimed in mercy, and established by unselfish service. My Father does not sit in heaven laughing in derision at the heathen. [The Midwayer Commission, 1725:3 / 155:1.2]

In comparison, he said, he had found passages in the Christian scriptures that seem to indicate the exact opposite, the idea that the Father IS laughing at people in other national groups. From his perspective, he interpreted providence as the Supreme Being making adjustments based on what is occurring in the universe of universes, then mentioned the Lucifer rebellion as a case in point.

A different aspect of “acculturation”

I stated that I wished to interject a different thought based on the term “acculturation” that had been mentioned during previous webinars: the concept that the ideas of the teachings of Jesus and the evolution of Christianity were influenced by the culture of Western countries, and necessarily changed because of that. I then turned to a case in Christianity that actually represents an acculturation to the practices of the pagan civilizations, as well as a distinction from the principles of Judaism.

Judaism maintained a strong prohibition against what is called “graven images,” the idea that representations of human beings or animals were not allowed. The Christians, however, did not accept that as an inheritance from Judaism; and very rapidly their desire to portray Jesus, his mother Mary, and various saints generated images that were revered.

These images, on the one hand, can be defended in traditional Christian theology as an evocation of the spiritual purpose underneath; and traditional theologians, both in the Latin West and in the Orthodox East, maintain very strenuously that believers are not worshipping the image, they are venerating the spirit associated with the image and perhaps expressing the hope that the spiritual power of the individual represented will be helpful to their cause in a spiritual sense.

Now as a practical matter, this veneration of images became extremely controversial at a major stage of the history of the Eastern half of the Roman Empire, which emphatically did not fall in the year 476 CE. People in our day call it the Byzantine Empire, but in fact it was simply the Eastern half of the Roman Empire that continued.

In the middle of the 600s, the Eastern half of the Roman Empire was under assault from the Arabs, who were coming from the East and were attacking the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire, the Byzantine Empire, Constantinople. The Arabs, like the Hebrew tradition, preserved the prohibition on images, and the Byzantine armies were losing or at least in great danger of being overrun.

So in the Greek Orthodox civilization of the Eastern half of the Roman Empire, which we call Byzantine, there was a movement that we subsequently have called iconoclasm: The veneration of icons was challenged. Different Emperors of the Byzantine Empire came out in favor of the veneration of icons, or the elimination of them. People were killed over this. This era of iconoclasm and conflict, wherein the supporters of icons were sometimes called iconophiles, went on for several generations, until the late 700s.

Now the underlying point that I was seeking to make is that the tradition of venerating images was a departure from the tradition of Judaism and was actually carried forward from the practices of pagan religions. Further, the veneration of saints and images of saints became extremely controversial in the 16th century whereby many Protestant analysts and clergymen attacked the Roman Catholic practices of art depicting saints, especially the Virgin Mary, and used arguments derived from the tradition of Byzantine conflict over icons. (As far as I know, the word *iconoclasm* is the only word from Byzantine history that has entered the English language; but it is there, and it literally means an attack on icons.)

One participant interpreted the controversy over images that occurred during the Protestant Reformation by associating it with our preceding topic, the sacred history of the Hebrew people and Judaism's well documented disapproval of any sort of art. From his perspective, he doubted that Christianity would ever have penetrated the West if it had not accommodated the Greek appreciation for beauty, including art.

A different participant drew on his upbringing in a Polish Catholic family, stating that one of the iconic images in Polish Catholicism is Our Lady of Czestochowa, also known as the Black Madonna. He said it had been very clear to him, both in catechism and in other Catholic teachings, that he was being told that we believers do not venerate the statue or an image; instead believers are venerating the symbol, what is behind the image. Although he commented that this is a difficult concept to get across to anyone, let alone to children, he believed that the point was made and that these practices are not idolatry, but the use of an image to evoke reverence. In his view, the image called Our Lady of Czestochowa, the Black Madonna, is something that galvanizes the Polish psyche around a religious national identity, something that is laudable and part of their culture and important in keeping the Polish people together — people who have obviously had to deal with much tribulation through the years and centuries. Further, he wondered whether the Black Madonna may involve some kind of superconscious symbolism that implicitly refers to the Mother Spirit.

I then asked another participant a rather prosaic question, one associated with the view in Roman Catholicism that some saint is in charge of a certain field of life or can at least be helpful in regard to it. I then cited a particular example, a spiritual being called "Saint Christopher." There is a question as to whether this was a real person or simply a legend; we do not know. In any case, the example I wanted to ask about has to do with the belief that Saint Christopher will protect people from accidents while they are traveling. This in turn is often associated with the idea of putting a little statue of Saint Christopher on the dashboard of one's automobile so that one will not get into an automobile accident.

The other participant responded that he had experienced this as a 12-year-old riding in a car at 80 miles per hour with a statue on the dashboard. He remembered his friend's mother saying, "You know, we've got Saint Christopher, he'll protect us." It did not ring true to him even then, but he believed that the underlying idea of symbolism is important. He cited the following statements by a Brilliant Evening Star:

In religion, symbolism may be either good or bad just to the extent that the symbol does or does not displace the original worshipful idea. And symbolism must not be confused with direct idolatry wherein the material object is directly and actually worshiped. [A Brilliant Evening Star, 946:7 / 85:3.5]

Therefore the worshipful idea should transcend the symbol, the icon. Roman Catholic practice, however, had also included another saint to whom you could pray in order to help you find something you had misplaced or lost. The cacophony of all these saints really had not rung true to him. He was glad that he found *The Urantia Book* to sort out all these factors in his mind, even though he was never really confused because he had never accepted the popular explanation of these many practices.

In reply, I said he had implicitly described a major share of the concerns expressed by the Protestant reformers in the 16th century, to the effect that there were too many superstitions relatively prevalent among Roman Catholic believers and the hierarchy of the time, while maintaining that these beliefs actually had the net effect of detracting from the reverence due to God.

The influence of Zoroastrian teachings

We proceeded to consider aspect 4b of question 4:

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4. Please identify and analyze those aspects of Christianity that can be traced to:
 - b. Certain Zoroastrian teachings.
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One participant cited information contained in *The Urantia Book*, to the effect that Zoroaster was in contact with some of the Melchizedek missionaries who came to his area of Persia. Further, from about 650 to 500 BCE, the Jewish people had direct contact with the Persian, Zoroastrian culture. He believed that a considerable amount of the Melchizedek tradition passed through Zoroastrianism on to Judaism, and on into Christianity. In addition, there appears to be evidence that some of these traditions entered Christianity directly in certain areas of Persia where Christianity took hold. Many of the underlying ideas have to do with eschatology, the cosmic battle between good and evil. The idea that the good guys are fighting the bad guys and that the bad guys are actual personalized demons came into Judaism, and then into Christianity, from Zoroastrianism. In addition, the Zoroastrian teachings contributed the idea of a resurrection and a judgment, which passed through late Judaism

and on into Christianity. He thought that Christianity also inherited many Zoroastrian ideas via the religion of Mithras.

I asked about the common perception in Christianity that the good guys have only a narrow edge over the bad guys and that we are always in danger of being overcome by the devil, who is portrayed as a very powerful figure. Another participant commented that what was lost in all this was the notion that good is a positive reality and indeed overpowering, whereas evil is only a negative reality. Teachings about the seven Master Spirits were another element of Zoroastrianism that did not reach Christianity.

I then sought to associate the legacy of a battle between good and evil with the parallel question of the very common superstitions still pertaining to witches and wizards and ghosts and goblins. We commemorate all this on the 31st of October every year, and children go from house to house collecting candy. I wondered whether this continuation of beliefs in witches and wizards and ghosts and goblins amounts to an emanation of the old mores, primitive religion, or may also be influenced by the Zoroastrian teachings about the struggle between good and evil.

One participant called these superstitions a mixture of all of the above, although he thought that a great deal of it is just entertaining myth — something new, something different from the sort of flatness of secular society. At this point in human evolution, he was not sure how many people really believe these stories or consider them anything more than entertainment.

The contributions of Greek philosophy

4. Please identify and analyze those aspects of Christianity that can be traced to:
 - c. Greek philosophy.
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One participant said it is important to realize that without the influence of Greek philosophy, there would be no such thing as Christian theology. Judaism, *per se*, did not have a theology as we understand it; it had a religious practice. As Judaism was exposed to Hellenistic influences, it did begin to develop a theology, but nothing like the theology that Christianity developed because its relationship to Hellenistic influence was much stronger. He then proceeded to read the following excerpt from *The Dictionary of Christian Thought*:

“Christian theology is inherently Hellenic because it could not exist as a discipline without the kind of intellectual curiosity that was unique in ancient Greece. The ancient Egyptians said that Greeks were like children, always asking why. The Jews asked why do the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper, but this arises out of a practical concern over the justice of God and did not incorporate a more generic exploration of what we call now theodicy. ... Greek contrast between being and becoming, the intelligible and the sensible, the soul and the body, with the soul and the intelligible becoming more important and primary, have played rich and diverse roles in Christian thinking. So the idea that the Christian can progress toward holiness and union with God has often included the idea of spiritual mastery of the bodily passions in a fashion similar to that of the Stoics. Not only intellectual ideas but

also the practice of Christian spirituality was based on Greek ideas of soul, spirit, and body and how one can essentially ascend from the flesh to the spirit. Those are all Greek philosophical concepts that can be traced back primarily to Plato, and of course later neo-Platonic thinkers developed that in a way that was totally within the Christian tradition.”

I commented on the distinction between Judaism as mainly consisting of a set of practices or observances, compared with the tradition in Christianity of developing doctrine and creeds and very explicit teachings — a set of practices that the other participant had associated with the Hellenistic and subsequently Greek philosophic tradition. Therefore I asked whether the complex process of developing a theology of the Trinity and of Jesus’ identity should be considered a cultural outgrowth of Greek philosophy.

Another participant said that although he does not have direct knowledge of this, he could not imagine any other origin and that discussion at the Council of Nicaea in 325 CE seemed to display these characteristics. In addition, he said, the Greek idea of proportion and proportionality had entered Christian thought. In this regard, he cited remarks by a Universal Censor that appear in section 7 of Paper 16:

Man’s choosing between good and evil is influenced, not only by the keenness of his moral nature, but also by such influences as ignorance, immaturity, and delusion. A sense of proportion is also concerned in the exercise of virtue because evil may be perpetrated when the lesser is chosen in the place of the greater as a result of distortion or deception. The art of relative estimation or comparative measurement enters into the practice of the virtues of the moral realm. [*A Universal Censor, 193:6 / 16:7.7*]

Preview of our webinar on December 14

When we begin our discussion on December 14, I will ask participants to return to question 4c concerning aspects of Christianity that descend from Greek philosophy in order to compare its contributions and its tendency to make fine distinctions with the Roman insistence on uniformity of belief and practice. In other words, I will ask them to analyze and comment on how these two factors influenced Christianity as the religion developed.

After that, participants will read and comment on the analytical paragraph appearing in the middle of page 6 of my essay “Living the Real Religion of Jesus.” They will then respond to formal question B, as presented at the bottom of the same page:

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?

If time permits, the panelists will then begin reading and discussing the initial pages of the section of my essay headed “[The presence of God,](#)” which starts on page 7 of my essay.

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, December 14:

- Pacific Time Zone: from 11:30 am to 1:30 pm.
- Mountain Time Zone: from 12:30 to 2:30 pm.
- Central Time Zone: from 1:30 to 3:30 pm.
- Eastern Time Zone: from 2:30 to 4:30 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 time stated.

Regards, Neal Waldrop.
Chairman, the Committee for the Global Endeavor
[December 14, 2019 at 2:38 am]