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To: 'Neal Waldrop - gmail'
Subject: Global Endeavor / Revelation Revealed / webinar on February 23, plans for March 2
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Dear fellow readers of *The Urantia Book* and friends of the Global Endeavor,

On Saturday, February 23, we conducted our ninth 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.”

Tumultuous theological debates among the early Christians

We began our discussion by returning to page 96 of *Revelation Revealed*, thereby launching our effort to grapple with and comment on the tumultuous theological debates that convulsed Roman society for more than a century. From 325 to 451 CE, Christian believers, theologians, and bishops argued intensively over numerous contending theories and doctrines about the nature and identity of Jesus of Nazareth, his relationship to the Father, and key aspects of the Trinity.

In brief, the Emperor Constantine sought to bring order out of chaos by convening the Council of Nicaea in 325 CE, a gathering during which approximately 300 bishops adopted the Nicene Creed that portrayed Jesus of Nazareth as having two natures, both divine and human. During the ensuing 50 years, however, contending views swirled from opposite directions: Some factions emphasized divine attributes almost to the point of obscuring Jesus’ identity as a human being, whereas others concentrated on the human side of Jesus, while denying that he shared the Father’s spiritual nature.

Nonetheless, the principle of two natures was ultimately reaffirmed at the Council of Constantinople in 381 CE, an outcome that required the active insistence of the Emperor Theodosius. Seventy years later, during the Council of Chalcedon (451 CE), participants adopted “the Chalcedonian Definition” (see page 98 of *Revelation Revealed*), doing so at the insistence of the Emperor Marcian. In this detailed document adopted at Chalcedon, the nature and identity of Jesus are explained in ways that became authoritative and traditional for most Christians, although the great majority of believers then living in Syria, Palestine, and Egypt never accepted it.

During our discussion, I pointed out that in section 1 of Paper 13, a Perfector of Wisdom describes the incarnation of the Paradise Sons as a secret of Sonarington, a universal mystery that is accessible only to those Paradise Sons who have passed through the process. Therefore it is not at all surprising that the early Christians found it extremely difficult to develop a coherent explanation. Even so, the early Christians were certainly not obliged to argue about these matters so intensely and so vehemently.

When I asked participants to explain what happened, one panelist focused on a sentence near the bottom of page 96 of *Revelation Revealed*: “Since Christianity had unquestionably morphed into a

religion *about* Jesus, Christian believers of that day found it necessary to define his nature and identity clearly and precisely.”

The others panelists agreed, but some of them believed it was also worthwhile to call attention to another sentence that appears earlier on the same page: “To [Constantine’s] chagrin, however, he rapidly discovered that many professional Christians of his day were fractious and bumptious, displaying a disarming tendency to exacerbate disagreements by hurling invective, instead of seeking to develop reasonable and perhaps subtle compromises that might enable them to reach agreement on key features of Christian belief and practice.”

One participant said he did not agree that Christianity is just a religion *about* Jesus. In part, he cited the many miracles and other events that are narrated in the gospels, while particularly emphasizing the parables of Jesus. Another participant agreed with this general point, but then called attention to the following paragraph from section 2 in Paper 149:

2. The second great blunder of the Master’s early followers, and one which all subsequent generations have persisted in perpetuating, was to organize the Christian teaching so completely about the person of Jesus. This overemphasis of the personality of Jesus in the theology of Christianity has worked to obscure his teachings, and all of this has made it increasingly difficult for Jews, Mohammedans, Hindus, and other Eastern religionists to accept the teachings of Jesus. We would not belittle the place of the person of Jesus in a religion which might bear his name, but we would not permit such consideration to eclipse his inspired life or to supplant his saving message: the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. [*The Midwayer Commission, 1670:5 / 149:2.4*]

Yet another panelist commented that Jesus did not teach his followers about his nature and identity because he did not want to foster a religion about himself that would tend to distract from his teachings. In effect, this interpretation corresponded to the explicit instructions of Jesus that the Midwayer Commission records in Paper 138, “Training the Kingdom’s Messengers”:

Said Jesus: “My kingdom and the gospel related thereto shall be the burden of your message. Be not sidetracked into preaching *about* me and *about* my teachings. Proclaim the gospel of the kingdom and portray my revelation of the Father in heaven but do not be misled into the bypaths of creating legends and building up a cult having to do with beliefs and teachings *about* my beliefs and teachings.” [*The Midwayer Commission, 1543:1 / 138:6.3*]

What the bishops were voting on

Quite a few historians have written lengthy works in which they seek to analyze and explain the bitter quarrels that inflamed and consumed many Christians during the 4th and 5th centuries. On page 97 of *Revelation Revealed*, I identified three scholarly works along such lines, including *Voting about God in Early Church Councils* by Ramsay MacMullen (2006). Surely the bishops who attended these councils, I

said, did not actually believe that their votes were going to change God! So what were they actually voting about?

One panelist remarked that the idea of human beings voting about God, the Creator, is preposterous. Another panelist commented that the bishops certainly did not think that their votes could explain or define God; this idea would be totally a heresy that conflicts with traditions of the Christian faith that are central and fundamental. Yet another participant commented that the various Roman Emperors were trying to control the activists and foster an agreed approach to religion.

Since no one seemed willing to answer the specific question that I asked, I finally decided to answer it myself: The assembled bishops were voting on the doctrines and creeds that would serve to create a framework for Christianity as they understood it — doctrines and creeds that they intended to impose on believers and enforce as a matter of ecclesiastical authority aimed at uniformity of belief.

The Chalcedonian definition

One participant praised the detailed definition of the nature and identity of Jesus that was adopted at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 CE. He believed that this document is relatively important, for it makes it clear that Jesus of Nazareth was both divine and human. This reality, in his view, has certain similarities to human beings, for in the ascendant life we too will be a combination of divine and human elements (thereby referring to human ascenders who have fused with their Thought Adjusters).

Another participant commented that the Chalcedonian definition is relatively sophisticated from an evolutionary standpoint. When I asked whether he thought that the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, and the adjutant mind-spirits had helped the bishops draft this statement, he appeared to take that for granted, responding, “How could it be otherwise?” On the other hand, he took issue with wording in the Chalcedonian definition that refers to “Mary the Virgin, the Godbearer.”

I agreed that the Chalcedonian definition includes many ideas that we consider positive and helpful, but pointed out that the decision to enforce it as a matter of authority and uniformity created a three-way split in the Roman world. The great majority of Christian believers living in Syria, Palestine, and Egypt had other views and considered imperial efforts to enforce this definition tyrannical and oppressive. In the middle of the 7th century, when Islamic armies attacked, these disaffected Christians did little to help imperial forces repel them. As a result, Islamic armies conquered these regions, proceeded across North Africa, and eventually seized almost the entirety of Spain.

The quest for uniformity

I asked whether tolerance and mutual respect simply were not part of the Roman lexicon. One participant responded that the Romans could be flexible in certain political matters if that seemed to be expedient. For example, they allowed subcultures to exist, provided that the groups concerned were obedient and respected Roman authority. On the other hand, he agreed that the Romans definitely did emphasize authority and uniformity, as we previously discussed in connection with my essay “Romanità.”

Another participant commented that it was an anachronism and overly simplistic to impose 21st century ideas about tolerance and mutual respect on the era that we were discussing. These concepts are ours; they had almost nothing to do with people living then.

As an additional resource that helps us understand the period, I cited comments by the Midwayer Commission in section 3 of Paper 195:

Even a good religion could not save a great empire from the sure results of lack of individual participation in the affairs of government, from overmuch paternalism, overtaxation and gross collection abuses, unbalanced trade with the Levant which drained away the gold, amusement madness, **Roman standardization**, the degradation of woman, slavery and race decadence, physical plagues, and **a state church which became institutionalized nearly to the point of spiritual barrenness**. [*The Midwayer Commission, 2074:4 / 195:3.9 — emphasis added: the phrases in bold type*]

After the webinar, I looked for additional ways to understand the quest for uniformity by delving into certain portions of historical works that I read in previous years. This led me to one paragraph that seems interesting and relevant. In brief, this paragraph appears to describe a negative concept of Providence, the view that God would punish the Roman Empire and Roman society “if they got it wrong”:

The vast majority of people at this time, educated and ignorant, believed in providential views of the world. They believed that wrong conduct or heretical belief stirred God to anger, and that such anger would be expressed in highly material terms, in earthquake and fire, invasion and military defeat, famine and pestilence. Unless evildoers or wrong-believers were suppressed, society might perish altogether. In order to destroy those malevolent groups, activists took steps that look worldly, political, and cynical, but we can never truly separate these political acts from their compelling underlying motivation, which was supernatural. However historians may use the term, no “secular world” existed independent of church and religion, and the Roman state, pagan or Christian, never was secular in any recognizable modern sense. Nor was there any such thing as “just politics.”

[SOURCE: Pages 26-27 of *Jesus Wars: How Four Patriarchs, Three Queens, and Two Emperors Decided What Christians Would Believe for the Next 1,500 Years* by Philip Jenkins. New York: HarperOne, 2010.]

Christian concepts of the Trinity

One participant commented that the idea of the Trinity was a crucial advance; if this concept had not been put forward, that would have been a grave defect. Another participant agreed in principle, while calling attention to the following paragraph from section 2 of Paper 104:

The conceptual grasp of the Trinity association of Father, Son, and Spirit prepares the human mind for the further presentation of certain other threefold relationships. Theological reason may be fully satisfied by the concept of the Paradise Trinity, but philosophical and cosmological reason demand the recognition of the other triune associations of the First Source and Center, those triunities in which the Infinite functions in various non-Father capacities of universal manifestation — the relationships of the God of force, energy, power, causation, reaction, potentiality, actuality, gravity, tension, pattern, principle, and unity. [A Melchizedek, 1146:2 / 104:2.6]

For clarity, I believe it is useful to reproduce an explanatory footnote that appears on page 99 of *Revelation Revealed*:

Here it is important to bear in mind that in traditional Christian theology, the phrase “the Holy Spirit” refers to the third person of the Trinity as Christians conceive it. In contrast, however, the revelators tell us that the third person of the Paradise Trinity is the Infinite Spirit, and they use the phrase “the Holy Spirit” to refer to the spiritual ministry that the Creative Mother Spirit of Nebadon carries out on her own behalf.

Our agenda on March 2

During the webinar on February 23, we began discussing the passage on page 99 of *Revelation Revealed* that describes controversy over how the Holy Spirit relates to the other persons of the Trinity as Christians understand it. Since the views we exchanged were only preliminary, that is where we will begin on March 2.

Subsequent pages of *Revelation Revealed* describe: (a) the split between Western and Eastern Orthodox Christians that occurred in 1054 and that has persisted ever since, because of different views of the Holy Spirit that have never been resolved; and (b) the unfortunate fate of the Spanish theologian and physician Michael Servetus, who was burned at the stake in Geneva in August 1553 because he denied Christian doctrines pertaining to the Trinity.

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, March 2:

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

Please be aware that the starting time is only approximate, for it usually takes us a few minutes to make the adjustments to the rather complicated software that cause all the participants to be viewed and heard correctly. In relation to the webinars on topic 8 that we have conducted up to now, live streaming in YouTube has usually begun at about ten minutes past the hour indicated above.

Regards, Neal Waldrop.

Chairman, the Committee for the Global Endeavor

[March 1, 2019 at 12:45 am]