

Spiritual Fellowship Journal

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Liberalism and Religion**
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**Concepts of Salvation:
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More Psalms Today

Sharing a Gift Beyond Words

The Church and the Kingdom

***The Urantia Book* and Religious Institutions**

The Spiritual Fellowship of Students of The Urantia Book

A Spiritual Leadership Network Interested in *The Urantia Book* as a Resource in Living,
Creative Service, Teaching, Preaching, and Writing.

Guiding Network Principles

1. We believe *The Urantia Book* can make a significant contribution to the stimulation of spiritual creativity in churches, synagogues, and other religious institutions and their people.
2. We believe that at the present stage of spiritual development it is wise for ministers, priests, and rabbis to use *The Urantia Book* as a resource for preaching and teaching rather than referring to the book itself or directing attention to it. Almost every concept in *The Urantia Book* can be associated with some theologian, philosopher, or scientist in the past or present.
3. We believe that, although one should not be secretive about interest in *The Urantia Book*, one should use discretion in recommending it to people. The light of enhanced truth can frighten and blind as well as guide and illuminate.
4. We believe *The Urantia Book's* claim to a revelatory source and status is not germane to its usefulness in the presentation of spiritual truth. Truth has an inherent appeal, regardless of its source, and can be used to enrich one's preaching, teaching, and living.
5. We believe the Spirit of God works among us in a differential and evolutionary manner; therefore, we recognize that for whatever reason some clergy may not wish to read and critically evaluate *The Urantia Book*. This diversity should in no way stand as a barrier to our mutual respect, fellowship, and love.
6. We believe the leavening process of creativity stimulated by *The Urantia Book* should be ecumenical in nature.
7. We believe *The Urantia Book* will eventually be recognized by the great majority of the world's religious leaders as one of the most constructive spiritual messages our world has received since Jesus' ministry on earth.

Network Recommendations

1. Read the entire *Urantia Book* to get its sweeping universe view of reality. Many of us started reading the book at Part IV, The Life and Teachings of Jesus. If you should like to get a quick overall view of the book you might read "The Gift of Revelation," a twenty-two page summary of the basic facts and truths of *The Urantia Book*.
2. Have the *Concordex* of *The Urantia Book* available to help in researching topics on which you are preaching or teaching.
3. Use the *Paramony*, which is a parallel and harmony of the Bible and *The Urantia Book*, to locate *Urantia Book* material on the Biblical text you are using in sermon preparation.

***The Spiritual Fellowship
Journal***

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About the Editors

Meredith Sprunger is a United Church of Christ minister, and college teacher, retired. He served pastorates in the Midwest and taught at Elmhurst College and Indiana Institute of Technology. Merlyn Cox is a United Methodist minister serving in the North Indiana Conference.

Editorials

The Fullness of Time

What is happening to the field of religion today? We are all aware that we are living in transitional times. In spite of the heroic attempts to bring spiritual relevance and power to traditional religious institutions, there is a sense of frustration and futility in the life of the church. Mainline churches are no longer mainline in our culture. We seem to have lost some indefinable aspect of centrality in our society.

The key to understanding what is happening in the church is found, I think, in the dynamics of cultural change. The major transition periods of history are characterized by a breakdown in the traditional social and religious customs and usages. The old orthodoxies lose their relevancy and a spiritual vacuum is created. There follows an increased hunger and search for spiritual meaning and reality. Cults and new religious movements flourish until a fresh vision of spiritual reality inspires the dedication and loyalty of the main body of the culture.

Such a condition of spiritual hunger characterized the civilization into which Jesus was born. There was a deep longing for spiritual identity and nurture. The mystery religions of the time attracted large numbers of people. Theologians have called this period "the fullness of time." It was an era prepared for a new revelatory breakthrough.

It appears that we are living in a similar period today. There is a general recognition among thoughtful people that the time-honored structures of our religious institutions are becoming increasingly irrelevant to the actual conditions and needs of our world. Large numbers of people are unsatisfied with the ministrations of traditional religious institutions and search earnestly for spiritual reality elsewhere.

There is a general recognition among thoughtful people that the time-honored structures of our religious institutions are becoming increasingly irrelevant to the actual conditions and needs of our world.

In this spiritual wasteland we have experienced an explosion of the occult. New and refurbished cults abound. Gurus and mystics are fashionable. Everything from channeling to mind-altering drugs has become epidemic. Everywhere people are searching for a soul-satisfying experience of spiritual reality.

Scholars have labeled our times variously as the post-Christian, post-modern, or post-industrial age. All of the expressions of profound dissatisfaction with traditional

modes of religious observance are rooted in a world-wide cultural revolution which is forcing contemporary humanity to search for new and more adequate spiritual foundations. We appear to be experiencing a new "fullness of time." I believe our world is being prepared for a new revelatory encounter, and in the next five hundred years a great portion of our world will recognize *The Urantia Book* as a new epochal revelation. As this enlarged vision of spiritual reality leavens human creativity, our planet will experience "one of its most amazing and enthralling epochs of social readjustment, moral quickening, and spiritual enlightenment" p.2082.

Hopefully, the Christian Church will not follow the path of Judaism in rejecting or ignoring revelatory renewal. Our Clergy Network is committed to the task of leavening the church with the insights of the Fifth Epochal Revelation so that she once again will have a central ministry in our culture.

-MJS

The Dynamics of Empowerment

After our survival and safety needs are taken care of, the most important concern of human beings is empowerment for living. We need physiological nourishment to furnish the material energy underlying all of our activities. To transcend the mere animal level of human living we need also to be energized and nourished by the value or spiritual level of reality.

Our metaneeds are not ephemeral appendages to life, but are rooted in human biology and psychology. They are universal and not merely the product of social conditioning. ... When these values are not actualized in our lives we become frustrated, maladjusted, and ill. We are cut off from our fully human empowerment.

Twentieth century psychologists and psychiatrists like Carl G. Jung, Viktor Frankl, O. Herbert Mowrer, Henry A. Murray, Roberto Assagioli, Abraham H. Maslow and others have emphasized the overriding importance of this source of human empowerment. These values have been variously denominated as "transpersonal," "meta," "being," and "spiritual" values. Our metaneeds are not ephemeral appendages to life, but are rooted in human biology and psychology. They are universal and not merely the product of social conditioning. Metavalues are the ground of human personality. They are intrinsic, supracultural, transpersonal, and related to Ultimate Reality. When these values are not actualized in our lives we become frustrated, maladjusted, and ill. We are cut off from our fully human empowerment.

To become creative and productive we must have a healthy, living connection with the source of all wisdom and power. The branches cannot bear fruit unless they have

an organic connection with the vine and root system. The Supreme Being is this divine energizing influence undergirding creativity, competence, and achievement. This is the source of all empowerment.

We seek meaningful actualization and fulfillment as individuals and as a planet. How is divine empowerment mediated to us? Every person is unique. "The love of the Father absolutely individualizes each personality as a unique child of the Universal Father, a child without duplicate in infinity, a will creature irreplaceable in all eternity." (p. 138) Each person has natural abilities in some kind of activity or service. What is your deep motivation? Which activities do you find creative? Where do you find ideal play in which you lose yourself?

The Indwelling Spirit of God has an ideal plan and purpose for our lives. This is not necessarily a specific vocation but an optimal plan of development and service. As we sincerely strive to follow this divine calling, we will experience enthusiasm and empowerment. In optimizing this fulfilling activity, we need to ask ourselves how this creativity can be most helpful to others. It is the constructive and helpful work that is important, not our ego inflation. "When you feel important, you lose energy to the wear and tear of ego dignity so that there is little energy left to do the work. Self-importance, not work-importance, exhausts immature creatures; it is the self element that exhausts, not the effort to achieve. You can do important work if you do not become self-important; you can do several things as easily as one if you leave yourself out." (p. 555) Creative work is an empowering joy. Burnout is ego-exhaustion.

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When we actualize the Indwelling Spirit's plan for our lives, we initiate a partnership. This divine-human partnership is endlessly empowering. It is the exciting adventure of evolving our souls and serving humankind. It is the satisfying, self-forgetting absorption in work that is more important than ourselves. We can fine-tune our energy alignment by meditation and contemplation. But we open ourselves to the source of all power through self-transcending worship. In this life-long partnership, we are not the senior partner, but we are endlessly grateful to be associated with a loving helper of infinite resources.

Our daily capacity for creative work is a function of being. Based on the caliber of our native endowment, it depends on the openness and dimension of the channel connecting us to the source of human empowerment. Just as the qual-

ity and diameter of the wire of conduction linked with a dynamo determines the flow of electricity, so the quality and magnitude of our soul's connection with the Almighty Supreme determines the amplitude of our empowerment. This is not an introspective preoccupation, but a self-forgetting, reality oriented, even tough-minded, dedication to loving service. Our personality potential is a function of our spiritual maturity.

One of the most effective ways of expanding soul growth and concomitant empowerment is unselfish service. Our empowerment grows as we help others, contribute to truth, beauty, and goodness on our planet, and create that which will make the world a better place in which to live. "Service—more service, increased service, difficult service, adventurous service, and at last divine and perfect service—is the goal of time and the destination of space." (p. 316) Service is the channel through which we are actualizing the will of God, expanding our potential of empowerment, and implementing our greatest source of happiness and fulfillment.

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Next to factualizing soul growth along with mastering the cosmic circles of personality development and the loving service of our family and associates, probably our most important concern should be the spiritual rejuvenation and empowerment of our planet. Our world is suffering from environmental pollution, social confusion, economic insolvency, and moral decadence. We desperately need the creative renewal of the Fifth Epochal Revelation. *The Urantia Book* is Christ Michael's saving answer to our spiritual isolation and confusion. This enlarged vision of reality will initiate one of the "most amazing and enthralling epochs of social readjustment, moral quickening, and spiritual enlightenment" ever experienced on our world.

-MJS

Spiritual Courage

Courage and wisdom are the key actualizers of progress. Most people in critical situations exhibit a surprising amount of physical courage. Not many of us are willing to express opinions or initiate actions requiring mental and spiritual courage. It is much easier to keep quiet rather than to do anything which might trigger opposition or cause others to think less favorably of us. We feel more comfortable going along with generally accepted opinions and behavior. It is a rare individual, indeed, who has the courage to take action in the search for truth or justice which may threaten to exclude them from their in-group.

As a retired cleric, I find it interesting to observe the mental and spiritual courage of ministers. Many of us take pride in speaking and acting boldly as long as it is within the tolerance parameters of our peers and parishioners. Occasionally we are even willing to challenge these limits—but not too far. Our reputation and livelihood are at stake.

Today in mainline theological circles it is permissible to criticize the church, to refute the doctrine of the literal inspiration of scripture, and to challenge almost any theological position. We are always careful, however, to make such criticisms within certain boundaries of the Christian community. There are still subtle, unwritten parameters at any given time within which it is intellectually respectable and spiritually permissible to read, study, write, and speak.

Over the years as I have shared The Urantia Book with my peers in ministry, interest is shown until they hear that it claims to be revelatory. Then a cloud of noncommitment and fear covers the entire topic

Thirty-five years of experience has taught me that anything purporting to be new revelation is not within the boundaries of current theological-institutional religious respectability. Over the years as I have shared *The Urantia Book* with my peers in ministry, interest is shown until they hear that it claims to be revelatory. Then a cloud of noncommitment and fear covers the entire topic—never mind that the book may contain an unparalleled account of the life and teachings of Jesus, a breath-taking view of reality, and superior spiritual wisdom. Those ministers who do summon the courage to read and critically evaluate it, do so covertly.

Many generations from now their successors will marvel that this seminal book of spiritual enlightenment was not immediately recognized. We should not be surprised. This has been the historic reaction to epochal revelation on our world. Evolution is slow but sure. Those of us who have been blessed with this discovery can only be thankful for our good fortune.

-MJS

"The call to the adventure of building a new and transformed human society by means of the spiritual rebirth of Jesus' brotherhood of the kingdom should thrill all who believe in him as men have not been stirred since the days when they walked about on earth as his companions in the flesh." (1114:4)

"Service—more service, increased service, difficult service, adventurous service, and at last divine and perfect service—is the goal of time and the destination of space." (316:5)

Interface:

The Church and the Kingdom

"Dearly beloved, the church is of God, and will be preserved to the end of time... All, of every age and station, stand in need of the means of grace which it alone supplies." So begins the order for Confirmation and Reception into one of our major protestant churches. It rings with authority and it echoes the fundamental conviction that God has called a covenant people to share the Good News with all the earth.

With the trend toward the privatization of religion, and the suspicion of institutional religion, one can either take solace in the perspective that the church is timeless and will survive our human frailties, or one can question our too-easy identification of the institutional church with the church universal and invisible—even with the Kingdom of God itself.

I think it is possible and even necessary to do both: I draw strength from the transcendent view of the church as the universal and invisible fellowship of believers; and I am at times dismayed by the facile and commonplace identification of the institutional church with the Kingdom of God.

Protestants may wish to withhold the keys to the spiritual kingdom from the outward and visible church, but in their structures, doctrines, and common beliefs, the deviation maybe less than we claim. The clergy often act as if evangelism, the making of disciples, were the same thing as getting people to "join the church," despite their theoretical disclaimer to the contrary. Laypersons, on the other hand, are often not aware of the need for such a disclaimer.

Protestants may wish to withhold the keys to the spiritual kingdom from the outward and visible church, but in its structure, doctrine and common belief, the deviation maybe less than we claim.

Such an identification is reinforced by an abundance of sermons addressing the need to become more active and dedicated to the church, as if this were the final measure of discipleship. Stirring addresses and hymns concerning the church triumphant sound hollow in an age where the church is still shamefully divided and desperately seeking an institutional fix for its woes. And despite all the helpful aspects of the church growth movement, the increasing passion for statistical analysis and head counting sound much like the institutional equivalent of whistling in the dark. The proclamation of the glories of the church is a poor substitute for the Good News.

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The early church helped to paved the way to such an identification of church and kingdom when the expected parousia was long delayed. The church became the here and now substitute for the delayed kingdom—realized eschatology within the bounds of its control. And for all its strengths, Paul’s image of the church as the body of Christ can easily lead to such a misunderstanding in practice, if not in theory.

The church and the Kingdom of God are hardly the same. Even the heathen can tell that the church is not the same as the kingdom of God, and no doubt that is why more than a few have not entered therein. We need to make clear that, even at its best, the church is but pale reflection of the eternal Kingdom.

The church need not take itself so seriously in order to take it’s mandate seriously. The church need not pretend to be so glorious in order to have a glorious task. If the church has any glory, it is not a glory of its own, but a reflected glory—one that comes from humbly losing itself in self-forgetful service and worship.

We seem not to appreciate Karl Barth’s affirmation that faith “has to do with the Kingdom and nothing at all to do with the church.” Until we do, our defensive and self-justifying posture will only obscure all the more the Good News to which we are called to bear witness.

We seem not to appreciate Karl Barth’s affirmation that faith “has to do with the Kingdom and nothing at all to do with the church.” Until we do, our defensive and self-justifying posture will only obscure the Good News to which we are called to bear witness.

The Urantia Book makes it clear that, while the church has been the best exponent of Jesus’ lifework on earth, it has fallen far short of the living spiritual fellowship Jesus envisioned for his followers. In fact, “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.” (p. 2085)

The survival of the church as we know it is a secondary issue compared to the certain triumph of the Kingdom of God. As John said to the Israelites who prided themselves on their heritage, “Do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our ancestors’; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham.” *The Urantia Book* holds out the great hope that the church will grow out of its “larval stage” and will be transformed by, and proclaim more clearly, the true Gospel to the whole earth: the Gospel of Jesus rather than the Gospel about Jesus. If it fails to do so, God will, no doubt, raise up new prophets and a people who will.
-Merlyn Cox

The Urantia Book and Spiritual Renewal

This feature is written by ministers. Since The Urantia Book at this point in time is potentially controversial, the name of the author is sometimes withheld so as not to interfere with his or her rapport in ministry.

Sharing A Gift Beyond Words

I remember one day several years ago sitting in the church office looking over the lectionary lessons for the coming week. As I read and re-read the Gospel text, I experienced that renewed sense of the truth and reality of Christ behind the text that often comes with serious and prayerful study. At the same time, however, I felt very strongly, almost palpably, the veil of history and human interpretation that hung like a shroud between myself and the fullness of that reality. I found myself desiring deeply and fervently for some way to see behind that veil. I recall vowing that I would give *anything* to have a truly accurate account of *just one day* of Jesus’ life and teachings. At that moment it did not seem unreasonable or disrespectful to pray for more than the Scriptures could give.

Some weeks later I received a mailing inviting clergy to borrow a copy of *The Urantia Book*. I had never heard of it before and would normally have tossed such an invitation in the waste basket. But I was impressed by its calm and assured tone, and because of the aforementioned event, among others, I sent for a copy and anticipated its arrival.

The day it arrived I sat down and began looking through it, reading from various sections, particularly those dealing with the life and teachings of Jesus, and those dealing with the philosophy of religion and religious experience. The ring of truth was so strong and immediate that it both startled and intrigued me.

The day it arrived I sat down and began looking through it, reading from various sections, particularly those dealing with the life and teachings of Jesus, and those dealing with the philosophy of religion and religious experience. The ring of truth was so strong and immediate that it both startled and intrigued me.

I have come to believe that there is an inner “knowing center,” a kind of epistemological intuition, that registers the truth of things beyond immediate reason or perception. In mechanistic terms, it is like having a built in truth meter that registers from “0” to “100.” And at that moment, I found myself in the strange situation of having the needle immediately registering near the top concerning a matter

about which I was so inherently skeptical. Since I trusted no one more than myself to be critical of supposed revelatory material, this came as a remarkable surprise. I had no accounting for it; it was just there. And the more I read, the closer the dial came to being “pegged.” Within a couple of hours I found myself, on the one hand, convinced and mysteriously assured that the book was what it appeared to be, while at the same time I knew that another level of critical study and testing would have to follow. Would the two methods converge in their findings?

They have. The book indeed invites such critical study, and nothing I have ever read has been both so challenging and so endlessly rewarding. It seemed almost overwhelming at first, with each page bringing new questions as well as new insights. But the conviction also grew that patient study would always yield even more. It has. After careful and systematic study of every page and chapter many times over, it still continues to yield fresh, life giving insights.

I have never ceased to be awed by this, and I still have no adequate words to describe it— although I have dusted off a few, like *thrilling*, that I had long abandoned as too emotional to engender trust.

So how does one deal with such a discovery? I had prayed and vowed I would give anything for a truly accurate record of just one day in the life and teachings of Jesus, one that revealed his true innermost thoughts and meaning. *What was I to give in return, then, for a record of his whole life, day by day, not to mention a magnificent universe and spiritual cosmology?* I felt like a thirsty soul looking for a cup of cool refreshing water who suddenly found himself looking out upon a great fresh lake that stretches beyond the horizon. How do you respond to such a thing? Will you even allow yourself to believe it, and if you do, how do you communicate it with others who are still inwardly convinced that such a thing cannot exist?

For me, simply accepting it was the first act of thanksgiving and commitment. Great declarations and human gestures in response to such an amazing gift somehow seemed pretentious and out of keeping. Beyond that, of course, there is the desire to live a life worthy of the magnificent calling and destination revealed in this revelation. And finally there is the desire to share it with others. Few things could ever be as satisfying as sharing it with family and friends and those I love. At the same time, I once wondered if I would be able to share it with anyone. I was well aware of the suspicions and assumptions that both our secular age and our tradition-bound religions have produced. I decided I would simply continue to give thanks, to become a diligent student, and as opportunity afforded, seek to share it with others in much the same way that Philip did with Nathaniel regarding his belief in Jesus—by inviting them to *come and see*.

-Merlyn Cox

The Second Enlightenment: Liberalism and Religion

An essay by Bill Granstaff

Epochal revelations are frustrating. They are frustrating because, unlike personal spiritual revelations, they are by definition revelations meant to transform and enhance *every* individual’s spiritual life. Thus those of us who espouse this revelation find ourselves living a very paradoxical existence. I use the word “paradoxical” because, while we marvel at *The Urantia Book’s* transformation of our own perspectives, we may sometimes find ourselves troubled by the huge numbers of our preoccupied and disinterested brethren. Due to this revelation’s immediately personal spiritual focus, its macro-sociological consequences may be many years away. Therefore, many of us find ourselves struggling with a demon of sorts. Now of course, this is not one of those Halloween demons that lifts us up above our beds, scares our mothers, or makes our skin change color. Rather it is a mind demon that whines and scoffs. It whines for some truly momentous world event that would undeniably validate the Truths of the Urantia Book, while it scoffs at the subjective validation we get from our own souls.

Thus those of us who espouse this revelation find ourselves living a very paradoxical existence. I use the word “paradoxical” because, while we marvel at The Urantia Book’s transformation of our own perspectives, we may sometimes find ourselves troubled by the huge numbers of our preoccupied and disinterested brethren.

I would wager that all of us in the Urantia movement have experienced this demon at one time or another. We deal with it as best we can. But there is in fact something afoot in the world—something that this demon might find very interesting. I am therefore writing this essay as a sacrifice to our communal “demon-of-the-whine-and-scoff.” There will be two acts in the sacrificial ritual: the first will consist of familiarizing our demon with a momentous world event; the second will present an appropriate context for interpreting this momentous world event, i.e., a context within which our demon will be compelled to recognize this event as the Supreme’s final macro-institutional preparation for the fifth epochal revelation. This essay will argue that (1) the planet has reached a consensus in favor of economic and political liberalism; (2) humanity’s three macro-institutional categories—economic, political, and religious—have a history of adopting each others’ essential canons, and that economic and political liberalism are largely results of just such an institutional osmosis; (3) it

is logical to induce from (1) and (2) that religion, being the only remaining macro-institutional category that remains largely authoritarian/non-liberal, will soon complement liberal political and economic institutions by adopting liberal principles also; and finally, (4) *The Urantia Book* is liberal religion.

The Event

In the summer of 1989 the Deputy Director of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff, Francis Fukuyama, published an article in *The National Interest* entitled "The End of History?," in which he raised an intellectual tempest by announcing the "...unabashed victory of economic and political liberalism" over all "...viable systematic alternatives" (p.3). He wrote: "What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of postwar history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government" (p.4).

Fascism emerged in the early twentieth century in response to liberalism's problems of political weakness, materialism, moral relativism, and lack of community spirit.

Fukuyama characterizes the twentieth century as a period of ideological struggle that pitted two alternative ideologies, fascism and communism, against liberalism. At the beginning of the twentieth century liberalism in Europe and the United States had many chronic problems. Fascists and communists blamed them upon liberalism's inherent contradictions. By fascist and communist lights these problems were the creation, not of inferior people, inferior decisions or non-liberal historical influences, but of the liberal structure and philosophy itself. Thus, these problems could not be resolved within the context of modern liberalism.

Fukuyama writes that fascism and communism arose as alternative systems. Fascism emerged in the early twentieth century in response to liberalism's problems of political weakness, materialism, moral relativism, and lack of community spirit. World War II and humanity's rejection of ultranationalism—with its promise of unending conflict—subsequently consigned fascism to history's proverbial dustbin. Communism, however, was a more serious challenge (p.9).

Marx asserted that liberalism's inherent contradictions were epitomized by the irreconcilable interests of capital vs. the interests of labor.(see Tucker 1978,192). Lenin and Stalin created one of world history's most profound social disasters, the Soviet Union, in the name of resolving this so-called liberal contradiction. But as we know today and as Fukuyama pointed out in his 1989 article, Marxism as an ideology has lost all credibility. Notwithstanding the

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Tiananmen incident, even communist China is moving in a liberal direction. China's southern province is a center of entrepreneurial activity and special enterprise zones have proliferated among its major cities.

And what of the contradiction Marx referred to—that of capital and labor? Fukuyama holds that it is largely resolved in the contemporary liberal welfare democracy. "Though there are rich people and poor people, capital and labor, the root causes of economic inequality have more to do with individuals' premodern cultural and social characteristics than with the underlying legal and social structure of our society, which remains fundamentally egalitarian and moderately redistributionist" (Fukuyama 1989, p.9). Fukuyama holds that the economic problems that remain subsequent to the planet's application of political and economic liberalism are solvable merely by "...economic calculation, the endless solving of technical problems, environmental concerns and the satisfying of consumer demands" (p.18). Fukuyama remarks wistfully that "Perhaps the very prospect of centuries of boredom at the end of history will serve to get history started once again" (p.18). But is "history" really over? Has humanity already discovered the most profound macro-institutional structures?

Even in the most advanced liberal democracies many of the problems that spawned fascism and Marxism, i.e., political weakness, materialism, moral relativism, lack of community spirit, and the huge gap between the rich and poor, remain as severe obstacles to the public good notwithstanding Fukuyama's "fundamentally egalitarian and moderately redistributionist" liberalism. Several problems have gotten decidedly worse since Fukuyama's 1989 article. It is important to note, however, that these problems' persistence in no way contradicts Fukuyama's fundamental observation, i.e., the planetary consensus concerning political and economic liberalism; instead, their presence implies that Fukuyama's social therapeutic scheme of "boring" "...economic calculation, the endless solving of technical problems, environmental concerns and the satisfying of consumer demands" may be incomplete. The implication is that "the end of history" may not have occurred. There is more significant history to make; but it is perhaps "history" of a different character. This new history is where *The Urantia Book* comes in. But before pursuing the nature of this new history, I must more carefully define one of this essay's most important terms.

If we assume that Fukuyama's fundamental thesis is correct—and I believe it is—that liberal economics and politics is now the accepted planetary norm, what has humankind finally accepted? Fukuyama never precisely defines liberalism (there may be no universally accepted definition); but a definition is required for the purposes of this essay. Robert Fowler writes that liberalism consists of three closely related principles: "(1) a commitment to skeptical reason, an affirmation of pragmatic intelligence,

and an uneasiness about both abstract philosophical thinking and nonrational modes of knowledge; (2) enthusiasm in principle (and increasingly in practice) for tolerance not only in political terms but much more obviously in terms of lifestyle and social norms; (3) affirmation of the central importance of the individual and individual freedom” (1989, p. 4).

...the world community has, in spirit if not in fact, adopted the liberal economic and political paradigm, and that there appear to be no more credible alternatives. This is a momentous world event by virtually any standard.

When Adam Smith wrote *The Wealth of Nations* in 1776 he articulated liberalism as applied to economics:

The natural effort which every man is continually making to better his own condition is the principle which keeps the economic mechanism in activity. The uniform, constant, and uninterrupted effort of every man to better his condition is the principle from which public and national, as well as private opulence is originally derived (qtd. in Morrow p.65).

Every man, as long as he does not violate the laws of justice, is left perfectly free to pursue his own interest his own way, and to bring both his industry and capital into competition with those of any other man, or order of men. The sovereign is completely discharged from a duty, in the attempt to perform which he must always be exposed to innumerable delusions, and for the proper performance of which no human wisdom or knowledge could ever be sufficient; the duty of superintending the industry of private people, and of directing it towards the employment most suitable to the interest of society (qtd. in Friedman p.20).

The United States Constitution and the Bill of Rights among many other Western national systems applied liberalism to politics. John Stuart Mill, in his famous essay “On Liberty” offered another very succinct canon of liberalism—subsequently known as the “Harm Principle.” This principle affirms that

...the sole end for which mankind is warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any one, is self-protection, and that the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant. He cannot rightfully be compelled to do or forbear because it will be better for him to do so, because it will make him happier, because, in the opinions of others, to do so would be wise, or even right. These are good

reasons for remonstrating with him, or reasoning with him, or persuading him, or entreating him, but not for compelling him, or visiting him with any evil in case he do otherwise.

To justify that, the conduct from which it is desired to deter him must be calculated to produce evil to someone else. The only part of the conduct of any one, for which he is amenable to society, is that which concerns others. In the part which merely concerns himself, his independence is, of right, absolute. Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign (qtd. in Diggs p.190).

Put very simply, nations that adopt essentially laissez-faire economic policy and liberal democracy articulate liberalism as applied to economics and politics.

...it would appear that the next phase of planetary social evolution and ideological conflict will concern the adoption of liberal principles by the third and final category of social institutions—the planet’s religious establishment.

With liberalism now more or less defined I can now conclude this section by pointing out that the scholarly community by and large agrees with one part of Fukuyama’s argument—that the world community has, in spirit if not in fact, adopted the liberal economic and political paradigm, and that there appear to be no more credible alternatives. This is a momentous world event by virtually any standard. But the event’s implications are likewise momentous, especially for those of us in the Fifth Epochal Fellowship. In the next section I will discuss these implications and the role that *The Urantia Book* may play in the world events that follow.

Feeding Time

Sociologists, historians, anthropologists, political scientists and others have arbitrarily divided humankind’s social institutions into three general categories: political institutions, economic institutions and religious institutions. Fukuyama presents a convincing argument that two out of three of the planet’s major social institutions—those of politics and economics—have adopted liberal norms and parameters. If I might be allowed the use of some inductive logic, it would appear that the next phase of planetary social evolution and ideological conflict will concern the adoption of liberal principles by the third and final category of social institutions—the planet’s religious establishment. And conveniently enough, it is at just this time that *The Urantia Book* appears. But before dealing with *The Urantia Book’s* role in this upcoming struggle I must answer a very important question concerning the feasibility of my implication/hypothesis. Would it be unusual for the world’s

three macro-institutions (political, economic and religious) to borrow philosophies and norms from each other?

In order to illustrate the precedent for this brand of institutional osmosis I will briefly highlight several important aspects of European political/economic and religious evolution. Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) undertook, principally in *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Politics*, to construct a science of the *polis*. He understood the polis or city/state as an association whose primary purpose was the formation of character—a means of creating quality citizens (Diamond 1976, p.79). For him the polis was an instrument by which the statesman could make the citizenry self-sufficient in goods, and fine-tune personality unification; it was as much concerned as any church with the virtue of its citizens (Diggs p.11-12). But it is important to emphasize that Aristotle and the Athenians of his time had no true religion worthy of the name. Their system of gods was more an intellectual creation than a standard for normative valuations. Thus Aristotle's concept of the polis naturally included elements that were soon to fall under other jurisdictions. There was absolutely no separation of political, economic or religious institutions.

Christianity radically transformed Aristotle's classic state concept. And it is here that we see an example of how a wholly religious concept modified a political/economic concept.

Christianity radically transformed Aristotle's classic state concept. And it is here that we see an example of how a wholly religious concept modified a political/economic concept. Saint Paul said "For ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (qtd in Diggs p.17), and later the Christian Church became the representative of the Word of God. Thus the Christian could quote Aristotle in arguing that civil law was subject to the judgment of higher authority; but in claiming that the way to salvation and virtue was in the Church, as distinguished from the state, he broke sharply with Aristotle's tradition of the polis. The Christian Church created the impetus for one of Western civilization's most important social norms—the separation of church and state. The function of the state was distinctly limited and a person's greatest good was to be found outside its jurisdiction—in the Church. Thus a religious concept profoundly changed the political/economic institutions.

Over several hundred years this separation of church and state, the Christian concept of all persons being equally the children of God, plus the slow modernization of Europe led to what is today called the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment's most important economic/political/philosophic result is called "liberalism." Liberalism was derived from the philosophies and attitudes of such great thinkers as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Adam Smith, Rene Descartes, the Baron de La Montesquieu, and later Jeremy Bentham and Fall, 1992

John Stuart Mill. The following point is very important: liberalism is the epitome of political/economic institutions borrowing important concepts from religious institutions. Liberalism has articulated in the political and economic sphere the vital Christian axiom that all men are equally children of God, and expanded it into the sentiments of basic white male equality and the three principles I advanced previously: (1) a commitment to skeptical reason and an uneasiness about both abstract philosophical thinking and nonrational modes of knowledge, (2) tolerance, and (3) affirmation of individual freedom.

Except for Locke—and even his case may be argued—none of the great European philosophical contributors to liberalism from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries was an orthodox Christian. But the classic liberal thinkers simply did not propose to separate religion from their liberal political and social thought. Indeed, for all of them religion was integral to liberalism, most commonly as a philosophical and/or practical base that would maintain a cohesive moral standard, a grounding for the social order (Fowler, p.10-11). Thus liberalism was designed to work hand in hand with religion to provide life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Liberalism by itself was never intended to do more than provide economic and political security and enfranchise the individual to make significant political and economic choices.

One of the most important political results of liberal thought was the subsequent overthrow of European monarchies and their replacement by liberal democratic political institutions. But it is at this point in European history that religious institutional influence changed in character. Whereas before, Christian theology drew political and economic progress forward via its axiom that all are equally the children of God, now, as a result of the Church's closeness to the European monarchical regimes—especially the Catholic states, it stood *against* the very forces of progressive liberal democracy that its influence had nurtured. And when the citizens, especially the intellectuals, overthrew these monarchies they also rejected the Church and Christianity (Warren W. Wagar, 1982).

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In 1835 a troubled Alexis de Tocqueville wrote: "Christianity, which has declared all men equal in the sight of God, cannot hesitate to acknowledge all citizens equal before the law. But by a strange concatenation of events, religion for the moment has become entangled with those institutions which democracy overthrows, and so it is often brought

to rebuff the equality which it loves and to abuse freedom as its adversary, whereas by taking it by the hand it could sanctify its striving” (1968, p.16).

Thus many Europeans could not separate Christianity’s spiritual message from its political and economic message, and, with the French Revolution and the Revolutions of 1848, the European Church and Christianity were severely discredited. While European intellectuals perceived Christianity and modernity as opposites and many European commoners saw Christianity as the monarchy’s prostitute, European religious institutions refused to accept liberalism’s invigorating principles enfranchising individual choice—the very principles that had grown naturally from Christianity’s own theology. The Church elected to become instead and in essence a thing apart. Liberalism, on the other hand, found itself standing naked, as it were, with its individualism and self-interest exposed and unmitigated by a relevant transcendent faith. And thus the stage was set for the horrors of the twentieth century.

Thus many Europeans could not separate Christianity’s spiritual message from its political and economic message, and, with the French Revolution and the Revolutions of 1848, the European Church and Christianity were severely discredited.

Shortly after the Revolutions of 1848, due to increasing industrialization, mobilization and information, heretofore unnoticed problems began to bubble to the surface. Karl Marx saw these problems as the result of internal contradictions of capitalism. That the problems might have had a spiritual cause likely never entered Marx’s thoughts. He was, after all, an intellectual. After WWI the fascists saw European society’s political weakness, moral relativism, and absence of community spirit. And once again the thought that a more relevant and efficient spiritual system might be the solution to European liberalism’s problems never occurred to European leaders. As far as the fascists and communists were concerned, Europe’s social pathologies’ only solution was a radically different political/economic system. Two world wars, a cold war, trillions of dollars, and many tens of millions of lives were squandered in the conflicts that followed. Thus, as Fukuyama has written, the twentieth century has experienced the costly trial and rejection of both fascism and communism as alternatives to liberalism. Liberalism has been declared, as of the dissolution of communism and the publication of Fukuyama’s article, the winner.

To summarize, I have described how European political and economic institutions were transformed by adopting superior religious concepts. There is thus precedent for these three institutions to carry on symbiotically—each nurturing the others. I have also shown that since liberalism’s birth

this symbiosis has changed in character. Now for the final element of my argument. Assuming for the moment that I am correct, that religion does sooner or later adopt liberal principles, what would this religion look like? I will now take Robert Boothe Fowler’s three liberal principles and apply them to the spiritual medium.

Liberal Principle #1:

“...a commitment to skeptical reason, an affirmation of pragmatic intelligence, and an uneasiness about both abstract philosophical thinking and nonrational modes of knowledge” .

Liberal Spiritual Principle #1:

Liberal religion will require a religionist to sincerely evaluate spiritual theories—theologies—in relation to his/her own experience. It would by no means require rejection of them all. It would require mutable theologies and careful validation of appropriate abstract thoughts by observation in the empirical world.

Liberal Principle #2:

“...enthusiasm in principle (and increasingly in practice) for tolerance not only in political terms but much more obviously in terms of lifestyle and social norms.”

Liberal Spiritual Principle #2:

Liberal religion will respect other religionists’ belief systems. And, with qualifications similar to those that liberalism requires of economics and politics will allow virtually complete spiritual freedom.

Liberal Principle #3:

“...affirmation of the central importance of the individual and individual freedom” .

Liberal Spiritual Principle #3:

Liberal religion would hold that the individual has the right to have his/her own concept of God. The individual’s own concept of God is hereby enfranchised by the world’s religious institutions.

The previous example of liberalism applied to the spirit medium should sound familiar. The liberal spiritual principles embody some of the most important spiritual concepts in *The Urantia Book*. I will now cite some specific examples that demonstrate how *The Urantia Book* validates and complements these principles.

Liberal Spiritual Principle #1/Urantia Complement:

The proof that revelation is revelation is this same fact of human experience: the fact that revelation does synthesize the apparently divergent sciences of nature and the theology of religion into a consistent and logical universe philosophy, a co-ordinated and unbroken explanation of both science and religion, thus creating a harmony of mind and satisfaction of spirit which

answers in human experience those questionings of the mortal mind which craves to know *how* the Infinite works out his will and plans in matter, with minds, and on spirit (*The Urantia Book* 1955, p.1106).

Reason is the proof of science, faith the proof of religion, logic the proof of philosophy, but revelation is validated only by human *experience* (p. 1106).

Liberal Spiritual Principle #2/Urantia Complement:

From this day, for the remainder of his natural life, Ganid continued to evolve a religion of his own. He was mightily moved in his own mind by Jesus' broadmindedness, fairness, and *tolerance* (my emphasis). In all their discussions of philosophy and religion this youth never experienced feelings of resentment or reactions of antagonism (p.1467).

Nathaniel most revered Jesus for his tolerance. He never grew weary of contemplating the broadmindedness and generous sympathy of the Son of Man (p.1559).

Liberal Spiritual Principle #3/Urantia Complement:

'But I have come among you to proclaim a greater truth, one which many of the later prophets also grasped, that God loves *you*—every one of you—as individuals' (p.1629).

The religion of the kingdom is personal, individual; the fruits, the results, are familial, social. Jesus never failed to exalt the sacredness of the individual as contrasted with the community (p.1862).

James Zebedee had asked, 'Master, how shall we learn to see alike and thereby enjoy more harmony among ourselves?' When Jesus heard this question, he was stirred within his spirit, so much so that he replied: 'James, James, when did I teach you that you should all see alike? I have come into the world to proclaim spiritual liberty to the end that mortals may be empowered to live individual lives of originality and freedom before God. I do not desire that social harmony and fraternal peace shall be purchased by the sacrifice of free personality and spiritual originality. What I require of you, my apostles, is *spirit unity*—and that you can experience in the joy of your united dedication to the wholehearted doing of the will of my Father in heaven (p. 1591).

And finally, the passage that ensures the liberal dignity of *The Urantia Book* itself:

Partial, incomplete, and evolving intellects would be helpless in the master universe, would be unable to form the first rational thought pattern, were it not for the innate ability of all mind, high or low, to form a *universe frame* in which to think. If mind cannot

fathom conclusions, if it cannot penetrate to true origins, then will such mind unfailingly postulate conclusions and invent origins that it may have a means of logical thought within the frame of these mind-created postulates. And while such universe frames for creature thought are indispensable to rational intellectual operations, they are, without exception, erroneous to a greater or lesser degree.

Conceptual frames of the universe are only relatively true; they are serviceable scaffolding which must eventually give way before the expansions of enlarging cosmic comprehension (p.1260).

The previous examples are merely representative of the overarching liberal spirit of *The Urantia Book*. The book's central concept, that each individual is indwelt by a fragment of the Father, validates liberalism's most profound principle—the importance of the individual—throughout eternity. The teachings of *The Urantia Book* are, in effect and in spirit, liberalism applied to religion.

Conclusion

So the stage has been set. Christ's first visit to Urantia transformed Europe's religious institutions with the message that every woman, man, boy, or girl was a child of God. Later this religious concept and the concept of the Christian Church as an institution of God led to a political event that revolutionized European history: the separation of church and state. Still later the world's political and economic institutions borrowed the salient Christian concept of spiritual equality and enfranchised individual political and economic liberty under the banner of liberalism. The results were astounding. As Fukuyama has pointed out, today, with the dissolution of communism virtually all the world's nations understand and accept in their various contexts political and economic liberalism. The Supreme has done its work well.

And now is the time for the Spirit of Christ to come full circle—from the religious institutions that taught spiritual equality, to political and economic institutions that supported the primacy of the individual, and now finally back again to the religious institutions which will one day enfranchise individual spiritual choices. This is where *The Urantia Book* answers a critical evolutionary need. Today, high politics and economics define liberalism in as many different ways as there are experts—and there are many experts. Although I believe it is inevitable, it could take many decades for a liberalism so loosely defined in terms of politics and economics to slowly seep into the religious establishment. For the liberal message to efficiently transform world religious institutions it must be sufficiently focused on the spiritual. *The Urantia Book* systematically defines liberalism in spiritual terms. The time for the struggle approaches.

Robert Booth Fowler writes that current membership in mainline Protestant churches—the churches attended largely by the educated elites in America, is well below their 1950's proportionate strength of the total U.S. population *and* in absolute numbers (1989, p.96). Further, these churches are losing a good number of their young adults (20-35 years old) "...because they are simply no longer interested in religion, certainly organized religion, though they normally claim to believe in God and even to have spiritual interests of some sort" p.22-23). Andrew Greeley comments that Catholics "...blithely practice a selective (or individualistic and subjective) Catholicism, choosing those parts of the religion they like and ignoring or even denouncing those parts they don't like" (1984, ch. 1).

Just as the Christian Church provided the inspiration for liberalism's transformation of the political and economic world, The Urantia Book expresses a liberalism that will inspire the transformation of the world's religions into institutions...

Liberalism is slowly seeping in, like it or not. But many of the people Fowler and Greeley describe are political leaders, managers of businesses, lawyers, doctors and educators who wander around in a spiritual nether world, making important decisions outside the context of salient *transcendent* faiths. The religion that these people are searching for is liberalized religion—the religion of Jesus—the religion described in *The Urantia Book*. Just as the Christian Church provided the inspiration for liberalism's transformation of the political and economic world, *The Urantia Book* expresses a liberalism that will inspire the transformation of the world's religions into institutions capable of answering the spiritual needs of a liberal world, and in so doing *The Urantia Book*/liberal religion will finally resolve the contradictions that have tormented so many souls in the twentieth century.

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Bill Grandstaff is a doctoral student in Political Science. He has worked as a writer, producer, and performer of contemporary music.

The Larger View

A contemporary rendering of Psalm 70

Help me, O God, to discern your will in the alternatives which confront me.

Your way is the evolutionary process undergirded by eternal reality;

Yours is the Supreme pathway which prevails, even through defeat.

Guide me in the way everlasting; orient me as I grope and stumble in my finite pilgrimage.

Deliver me from the deceptions of self-will and the illusions of sophistry whereby I misconstrue my interpretation of your guidance and my chosen pathway of service, as your directions for others.

Enlarge my appreciation of the complexity of the universe; and teach me the values of pluralism in your kingdom.

Illuminate my spiritual insight so that I may understand that those working on alternate courses of the dialectical nature of truth may each be following authentic aspects of your larger plan.

Lead me on the path of wisdom. In my impatience I am tempted to force the process of change and pressure the natural course of development.

Continue to teach me that good ends are never achieved through arbitrary, exploitative, or unethical means.

Open my awareness to the beauty of balance and the ugliness of extremes.

Your spirit of love speaks through personal contact and the fellowship of small groups.

Keep my soul warm with the personal touch.

I thank you, Heavenly Father, for your never failing guidance.

Your love is great, beyond measure; because of your indwelling presence, my life is filled with purpose and joy!

Concepts of Salvation: The Bible and *The Urantia Book* Compared

Kenneth T. Glasziou

Many students of *The Urantia Book* who come from a mainline Christian theological background regard the concepts of salvation in the Bible and *The Urantia Book* as symbiotic and mutually reinforcing. Others who identify with evangelical or fundamentalist traditions might disagree. It may be helpful in our discussion to try to understand this difference of opinion. Upon reflection, we see that it is not so much what the Bible says but how we interpret what it says that formulates Christian beliefs and Christian ethics.

Historically, concepts advanced by two individuals, St. Augustine (A. D. 354-430) and Bishop Irenaeus (A.D. 130-202), have had a dominating but somewhat opposing influence in the theological development of Christianity. Augustine's view of salvation was influenced by his belief that evil is not an entity in its own right but only a privation of good (*privatio boni*). Evil had its origin in finite beings with free will. Exercising this free will resulted in a dual fall: first in heavenly places (Lucifer), then with Adam and Eve. The sin of Adam and Eve was at the same time the sin of all of their descendants who are born in a state of guilt and condemnation that would merit the consignment of the entire human race to the eternal torments of hell.

Historically, concepts advanced by two individuals, St. Augustine (A. D. 354-430) and Bishop Irenaeus (A.D. 130-202), have had a dominating but somewhat opposing influence in the theological development of Christianity.

Augustine also reasoned "in the mysterious workings of God's grace, He has chosen some to be saved, the predestinated (including some who have led the worst lives) who are, by the goodness of God, led to repentance. But the rest of mankind...who are made vessels of wrath, are brought into this world for the advantage of the elect." (Contra Julianum Pelagianum, Bk. 5, Chap. 14—John 5:39 is cited in support) These basic teachings were carried on by Thomas Aquinas and revived in the reformation by Martin Luther and John Calvin, both of whom quoted extensively from Augustine and regarded him as presenting the best wisdom of the ancient church. The influence of these teachings persist up to the present times.

The somewhat opposing views of Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, pictured Adam and Eve as well-intended children in the Garden of Eden. Their sin was not a damnable revolt but rather an error in judgment calling forth God's compassion on account of their weakness and vulnerability. Man was

created as an imperfect and immature creature who has to undergo moral development and finally be brought to the perfection intended for him by his Maker. Instead of the Augustinian view of life's trials as being a divine punishment for Adam's sin, Irenaeus saw our world of mingled good and evil as a divinely appointed environment for man's progressive development.

The teachings of Irenaeus were pursued by the Hellenistic theologians of the Eastern Church centered in Constantinople, but did not develop theologically as did the Augustinian doctrines in Rome, and later during the reformation. In modern times, however, with the explosion of knowledge, particularly in science and logic, and the need to reconcile religious views with this new knowledge, the doctrines of Irenaeus have re-emerged and now appear to be having a strong influence on the formulation of much current theology.

The Irenaeian interpretation of the existence of evil is closely linked to the expectation of a continuing life after death. Whereas Augustine denied that evil is an entity in its own right and therefore developed no evolutionary strategy for overcoming it, the Irenaeian view is that God is gradually perfecting humanity whose full and perfect nature we may glimpse in Jesus. Evil, even malevolent and deadly evil, is not denied as a real entity but it is accepted as a fact of experience with the conviction that, in the end, it will be defeated and made to serve God's good purposes. The Irenaeian view is compatible with the concept of continued development in some future environment—a possibility inferred by Jesus' statement: "In my Father's house there are many mansions. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?" (John 14:2)

The difficulty with the implied Augustinian view of our instantaneous perfection after death is that it is by no means obvious that a highly imperfect person would remain the same person if instantaneously perfected. Also such a procedure would make all of our earthly efforts to progressively improve our spirituality virtually useless and meaningless. For could not have God created or transformed us into these perfect creatures in the first place and spared his children the anguish of their earthly experience? There is something obviously wrong with this instantaneous scenario of perfection.

The concept of progressive development subsequent to leaving our earthly existence raises the question of universal salvation. Does God wish to save all of his mortal children? If not, is there an implied premise limiting God's goodness? Paul writes in I Tim. 2:3-4, "God our Savior desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." But what are the consequences of some not desiring to accept salvation? Theologians who support the Irenaeian view suggest the possibility of either divine annihilation or the dwindling out of existence of those who refuse salvation.

The Urantia Book teaches the concept of progressive perfection of all those who sincerely wish to achieve the perfection that results finally in the attainment of the presence of the Universal Father. It also teaches that it is the Father's desire that all should be saved and no stone should be unturned in order to achieve this result. But free will belongs always to the individual personality and: "The final result of wholehearted sin is annihilation. In the last analysis, such sin-identified individuals have destroyed themselves by becoming wholly unreal through the embrace of iniquity. The factual disappearance of such a creature is, however, always delayed until the ordained order of justice current in that universe has been fully complied with." (p. 36:8) The final adjudication of such an individual must prove entirely satisfactory to all related personalities, and be so fair "as to win the approval of the sinner himself." (p. 615:5)

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The most basic concepts of salvation center around the meaning of the suffering of Christ on the cross. The Irenaean view of the suffering endured by Jesus during his agonizing death by crucifixion is that it was not, as such, willed by God but rather was the result of human wickedness, self-centeredness, and moral failure. In enduring this appalling event, Jesus was not placating a wrathful God but was his agent in overcoming evil with good. *The Urantia Book* also teaches that the crucifixion was the result of human wickedness and ignorance and it was the Father's will that Jesus submit to the natural outcome of this depravity.

In describing this tragic situation, Jesus said, "From olden times the prophets have perished in Jerusalem, and it is only befitting that the Son of Man should go up to the city of the Father's house to be offered up as the price of human bigotry and as the result of religious prejudice and spiritual blindness. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which kills the prophets and stones the teachers of truth! How often would I have gathered your children together even as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you would not let me do it! Behold, your house is about to be left to you desolate! You will many times desire to see me, but you shall not. You will then seek but not find me." And when he had spoken, he turned to those around him and said: "Nevertheless, let us go up to Jerusalem to attend the Passover and do that which becomes us in fulfilling the will of the Father in heaven." (p. 1872:4)

The Irenaean viewpoint sees the judicial murder of Christ as the focus of God's saving work and the turning point of man's salvation. It is the ultimate example of evil being transformed to a good purpose by Jesus' voluntary endurance of suffering as God's servant and agent. This view of suffering as being put to constructive use is continued in the later documents of the New Testament in which we are confronted with the extraordinary phenomenon of those early Christians rejoicing in the difficulties and persecutions of apostleship as permitting them to share directly in the sufferings of Jesus in his saving work (2 Cor. 1:5-6; I Peter 2:21-22). In the New Testament, evil and suffering are also seen as a preparation for our participation in the glory of God's kingdom (2 Cor. 4:17; I

Peter 4:13), and for our acceptance in full sonship with the Father in that Kingdom (Heb. 12:6-7).

Although not propounding the Irenaean interpretation as such, we find much support for it in the writings of Canon Ivor F. Church, Principal of the Anglican Theological College in Brisbane, Australia, who cites the parables of Jesus as being the best place to discover the real teachings of Jesus about the wrath of God. He also says that if we are patient and discerning enough and use the right critical tools, we can find the most characteristic form of Jesus' teachings. Canon Church accepts the view that the Gospels may also contain embedded material that reflects the minds of various teachers in the early church rather than the mind of Jesus in his authentic parables. This view is reiterated in the introductory remarks to the Catholic Study Edition of the Good News Bible which also refutes the divine dictation theory concerning Biblical writings that, as a consequence of the knowledge explosion, have come to be recognized more correctly as the "Word of God in the words of men."

Canon Church asserts that in parables such as the prodigal son, and in Jesus' acceptance of the despised tax collectors and notorious sinners of his contemporary society, Jesus was demonstrating the fact that the sheer goodness of God is beyond all imagining, and that his mercy knows no limits.

The Irenaean viewpoint sees the judicial murder of Christ as the focus of God's saving work and the turning point of man's salvation. It is the ultimate example of evil being transformed to a good purpose by Jesus' voluntary endurance of suffering as God's servant and agent.

The parable of the laborers in the vineyard is one in which the vineyard owner hires more and more workmen throughout the course of the day, but at the conclusion of the day's work, all laborers receive the same pay. To the complaints of one who was among those hired first, the vineyard owner responds, "Friend, I did you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius...Am I not allowed to do what I choose with that which belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?" (Matt. 20:13-16) In this parable Jesus is again illustrating the goodness of God who lavishes generosity on all mankind without discrimination, and incidentally rendering null and void the whole concept that the doing of good works entitles one to preconceived rewards from the Creator.

The parable of the prodigal son is one in which a wastrel son, having dissipated his inheritance in riotous living, in desperation decides to return to his father's household, there to beseech forgiveness and to request a place in the household as a servant. The father, however, when he sights the prodigal approaching from afar, does not stay home and wait to receive an apology and a plea for forgiveness, but quickly runs to greet his lost son to welcome him home as a loved and honored guest.

The same incredible outflowing of the Father's love is depicted in many other parables and in the Sermon on the Mount. The parable of the good shepherd is one in which the shepherd, when leading his flock of one hundred sheep to

new pastures, loses one of them. Having assured the safety of the ninety-nine, the shepherd sets out in search of the one that is lost, determined not to rest until the lost one is found. In this parable, along with that of the lost coin and the prodigal son, Jesus shows that it is both his and the Father's nature to go out in search of the lost sinner and never to be content until all who are lost are recovered. We do not fully comprehend the story of the good shepherd unless we recognize it as John's description of Jesus as the Good Shepherd who is fully willing to lay down his life for his sheep, an action which in the mind of Jesus has no association with the wrath of God, but was simply a commitment demonstrating the depth of love which he and the Father have for their mortal children. His followers can be assured that no measures will be spared to secure and maintain their security in the family of his Father-God.

...The Urantia Book reminds us that, "The affectionate heavenly Father, whose spirit indwells his children on earth, is not a divided personality—one of justice and one of mercy—neither does it require a mediator to secure the Father's favor or forgiveness. Divine righteousness is not dominated by strict retributive justice; God as a Father transcends God as a judge." (p. 41:4)

"The cross makes a supreme appeal to the best in man because it discloses one who was willing to lay down his life in the service of his fellow men. Greater love no man can have than this: that he would be willing to lay down his life for his friends—and Jesus had such a love that he was willing to lay down his life for his enemies, a love greater than any which had hitherto been shown on earth." (U. B. p. 2018:6)

Canon Church observes that some declare that the concept of God's infinite capacity for forgiveness contains an inconsistency in so far as it does insufficient justice to the nature of sin and sinful deeds. On the contrary, Church says, God's mercy and forgiveness, far from being a breach of the integrity of his character, is an integral part of his righteousness. In the Heavenly Father's relationship with his mortal children, love is always superior to and inclusive of justice.

Along the same vein, *The Urantia Book* reminds us that, "The affectionate heavenly Father, whose spirit indwells his children on earth, is not a divided personality—one of justice and one of mercy—neither does it require a mediator to secure the Father's favor or forgiveness. Divine righteousness is not dominated by strict retributive justice; God as a Father transcends God as a judge." (p. 41:4) In discussing the atonement doctrine, the book states: "The barbarous idea of appeasing an angry God, of propitiating an offended Lord, of winning the favor of Deity through

sacrifices and penance and even by the shedding of blood, represents a religion wholly puerile and primitive, a philosophy unworthy of an enlightened age of science and truth. Such beliefs are utterly repulsive to the celestial beings and the divine rulers who serve and reign in the universes. It is an affront to God to believe, hold, or teach that innocent blood must be shed in order to win his favor or to divert the fictitious divine wrath." (p. 60:3)

It is no easy matter to change overnight the familiar and established beliefs that have been accepted since childhood. In some instances the anguish of having to modify or discard such ideas could well cause more harm than good. The authors of *The Urantia Book* observe, "Sometimes error is so great that its rectification by revelation would be fatal to those slowly emerging truths which are essential to its experiential overthrow." (p. 555) And, "It has often been the error of the teachers of new truth to attempt too much, to attempt to supplant slow evolution with sudden revolution." (p. 1043:3)

Doctrinal belief in the inerrancy of scripture and the blood atonement theory have had an enormous influence upon the way the Bible has been interpreted by those who formulated traditional Christian theology. Many mainline ministers still struggle with this issue today.

Many of us know good Christian people whose sense of guilt is so overwhelming that to take away the thought that their sins can be washed away by the blood of Christ would be devastating. Among this group there are those who never think of God as being the wrathful God of Sinai, but look upon Him only as the infinitely good and merciful Heavenly Father revealed to them through Jesus. The inconsistency of these opposing concepts simply does not register. Both the emerging Irenaean-type theology and the teachings of *The Urantia Book* may be too much for some minds to adjust to during what remains of their earthly existence. Since they have already started out on the path that leads to the very presence of the Father, it may be better that they continue along their present road than be thrust onto an unfamiliar highway.

Doctrinal belief in the inerrancy of scripture and the blood atonement theory have had an enormous influence upon the way the Bible has been interpreted by those who formulated traditional Christian theology. Many mainline ministers still struggle with this issue today. Much of this traditional doctrinal theology has been increasingly challenged. Many of the emerging concepts associated with salvation take either a parallel or converging pathway with teachings in *The Urantia Book*. A paragraph from the book concerning the meaning of the cross in relation

to salvation appears to portray succinctly a meeting place for contemporary thought in the church:

“The cross forever shows that the attitude of Jesus toward sinners was neither condemnation nor condonation, but rather eternal and loving salvation. Jesus is truly a savior in the sense that his life and death do win men over to goodness and righteous survival. Jesus loves men so much that his love awakens the response of love in the human heart. Love is truly contagious and eternally creative. Jesus’ death on the cross exemplifies a love which is sufficiently strong and divine to forgive sin and swallow up all evil-doing. Jesus disclosed to this world a higher quality of righteousness than justice—mere technical right and wrong. Divine love does not merely forgive wrongs; it absorbs and actually destroys them. The forgiveness of love utterly transcends the forgiveness of mercy. Mercy sets the guilt of evil-doing to one side; but love destroys forever the sin and all weakness resulting therefrom. Jesus brought a new method of living to Urantia. He taught us not to resist evil but to find through him a goodness which effectually destroys evil. The forgiveness of Jesus is not condonation; it is salvation from condemnation. Salvation does not slight wrongs; it *makes them right*. True love does not compromise nor condone hate; it destroys it. The love of Jesus is never satisfied with mere forgiveness. The Master’s love implies rehabilitation, eternal survival. It is altogether proper to speak of salvation as redemption if you mean this eternal rehabilitation.” (p. 2018:1)

Further Reading

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Ken T. Glasziou, M. Sc., Ph. D., is a research scientist, retired, who is active in church work in Australia. He is author of Science and Religion: The New Age Beyond 2000 A.D.

Media and Values

Will *The Urantia Book* Inspire a New Religious Institution?

The Urantia Book is a profoundly religious document, yet many read it with little or no concern for its possible influence on the church. Many other readers are active in churches and synagogues, and have long speculated on how it may affect their organizations in the future. But consider another possibility: readers of *The Urantia Book* may one day be inspired to create a *new* religious institution.

“Every new revelation of truth...” says the *The Urantia Book* on page 966 “...has given rise to a new cult, and even the restatement of the religion of Jesus must develop a new and appropriate symbolism”. The use of terms like “cult” and “symbolism” come as a surprise to late twentieth century believers. These terms, however, simply refer to an organization of religionists who have created an updated and compelling symbolism that stands for their religious aspirations.

This new institution will grow from the bottom up, for “a religious cult cannot be manufactured.” It is my view that *The Urantia Book* will inspire a new cultism that is able to meet deep human needs that are essential to spiritual progress, while avoiding the dangers of “institutionalism.”

At the most basic level we are told, the cult “must... foster sentiment, satisfy emotion, and promote loyalty”; indeed, even “modern men...crave mystery and venerate the unknown.” Beyond these, more advanced needs await satisfaction—both social and spiritual. These needs will also be met by the “enhanced symbolism” of the new cult. This higher symbolism will be “predicated on the concept of the Fatherhood of God and pregnant with the mighty ideal of the brotherhood of man” and must be “based on the biologic, sociologic, and religious significance of the *home*.”

Religious institutions can and have retarded social progress. But the lack of a symbolism adequate for the needs of modern man, the lack of something “to belong to”, is a “regrettable” omission from the lives of many progressive modern believers, say the Book’s authors.

The fact that no religious organization has yet arisen among the reader/believers in *The Urantia Book* is puzzling, especially considering that cults grow naturally and unconsciously in religious soil. If I rightly interpret the crucial passages in the “Nature of Cultism” (pp 965-6), cult development is *inevitable*: “...every effective religion unerringly develops a worthy symbolism...”, and *necessary*: “The cult is the skeletal structure around which grows the living and dynamic body of personal spiritual experience—true religion.”

It would seem that a cult of the revelation, a new religious organization for readers of the *The Urantia Book*, will grow unless specifically thwarted.

Where Can I Belong

Many of us have discovered *The Urantia Book*, and not finding an inspiring spiritual fellowship, drifted elsewhere to meet this craving, while still adhering to a belief in the primacy of *The Urantia Book* teachings.

At least this was the case with me. As a young seeker for truth, newly introduced to the Book, I faced this dilemma sometime in 1978. I had just moved to Boulder, Colorado, a town where a solid, devoted study group existed. This progressive town in the foot of the Rockies was also the capitol city of a well-organized, fast-growing Vajrayana Buddhist cult.

The Book and the study group deeply satisfied my intellectual curiosity, but I spent most of my time with the Tibetan Buddhist community, which offered a beautiful, compelling, profound, and *updated* cult and symbolism, with plenty of intriguing mysteries. The study group provided rational answers to the ultimate philosophical questions, (though Buddhist philosophy was a fair match at times), but the Buddhist “sangha” and its practical religious teachings went much further in meeting my emotional needs.

And the sangha even went on from there. Our *Urantia Book* passage says that the new cult must, like the olden ones, “...foster sentiment, satisfy emotion, and promote loyalty; *but it must do more*: It must facilitate spiritual progress, enhance cosmic meanings, augment moral values, encourage social development, and stimulate a high type of personal religious living.” [My emphasis]. The Buddhist cult, at least temporarily, offered all of these qualities to me.

A similar list is given under “Institutional Religion” (1092), where the author outlines the purposes of group religious living. These should include “to glorify the potentials of family life,” “to encourage group worship,” “to provide wise counsel,” “to promote religious education,” “to spread...the essential gospel,” and seven other distinct activities.

None of these activities are certain to occur in the typical *The Urantia Book* study group— except religious education. Study alone cannot meet the criterion of a genuine religious group. *Urantia Book* study group environments all too often emphasize religious speculation, and some court with the danger of evolving into a “religion of the mind”, a passive and stagnant religion *about* the Book. On the positive side, study groups can become a preliminary step toward a religious organization or congregation.

What would a genuine religious institution based on *The Urantia Book* look like? At a minimum, it must apply and exemplify the Book’s teachings regarding religious groups. Its characteristics should include at least the following:

1. A congregation that deals with sin and evil by following Jesus’ three-step method of maintaining temporal order in the affairs of the kingdom. (1763)

2. “A form of religious collectivism that confines itself to the furtherance of religious causes.” (1087) i.e. a group of religionists that is “separate in function from all other groups”. (1091)

3. A growing “cult” based on applied love (965-66) that recognizes the real purposes in the socialization of religion (1092).

4. A “living temple of spiritual fellowship”(1747) that does not apply creedal pressure (1091) on its members.

5. A genuine community that refuses to countenance false forgiveness, but follows instead the truth & mercy process outlined on page 315 — “justice, fairness, patience, kindness, then mercy....”

6. A dynamic organization that is cognizant of the inherent dangers of religious institutionalism. (1092)

7. A living community of truth-lovers that is able to achieve profitable levels of religious and philosophic self-criticism. (1138)

First Steps

In my view, the growth of healthy religious organizations based on *The Urantia Book* is impossible without the first two elements in our list above: (1) the institutionalization of what I would call a *spiritual group process* and (2) the independence of the religious group from all other groups.

When religionists lack religious due process, there arises the specter of unresolvable conflicts — a condition that can jeopardize even the most straightforward activities. This is why Jesus very explicitly presents a spiritual grievance procedure in the “Sermon on Forgiveness” (1762-3), a passage that closely parallels Matthew 18 in the New Testament.

It amazes me how often we hear quoted the almost mystical passage concerning “when two or three are gathered together...”, and how little we hear quoted the practical and more challenging *first* part of the same sentence on the same page, in which Jesus refers to our legitimate right to “legislate regarding the conduct of the group.” Here he confers upon the religious group or congregation of believers the right to confront sin and evil according to its own discovery of group wisdom. Obviously, to carry out such a spiritual group process with justice and fairness, the religious group must be *separate* from all other groups. It must be immune to political pressure or secular concerns; it must stand in brilliant contrast to that secular world; indeed, it must create a “cult of mutual support” (965) for golden rulers who may then be inspired to spread the gospel of Jesus to the whole world.

For those of us looking beyond the contemporary church, and who long for a spiritual fellowship and institutional process based on the high spiritual truths of *The Urantia Book*, a new form of religious organization may be an ideal solution. Call it a new cult, a congregation, a religious collective, or a religious institution, this organization, with its “new and appropriate symbolism”, may be the most important spiritual development of our times!

-Byron Belitsos

MUSIC IN WORSHIP

Music, Missions, and Culture

When Christ called his disciples to “go forth and make disciples of all nations,” there ensued a missionary movement that continues to this day. Millions of young men and women have left their homes and traveled to foreign lands to share the gospel of Christ. Throughout the course of history music has proved exceedingly effective in gaining a hearing for the spoken word and in serving as a communicative vehicle of values.

Anthropology and ethnomusicology have demonstrated that music is a powerful carrier of culture. While missionaries were sincere in their desire to share the gospel, history has shown that they may have also shared cultural messages through music that were as destructive to many indigenous cultures as the measles and flu viruses their bodies carried.

While missionaries were sincere in their desire to share the gospel, history has shown that they may have also shared cultural messages through music that were as destructive to many indigenous cultures as the measles and flu viruses their bodies carried.

The celebration of the 500th year of the voyage of Christopher Columbus to America has given rise to a new understanding of the impact of missionary activities on indigenous cultures. Recent PBS programs on history and culture along with a number of commercially successful movies have cultivated a new popular understanding of the impact of Western culture over native peoples. Individuals are slowly becoming aware of the powerful and often negative influence of our cultural exports. This is especially true when such exports are attached to religion. The stark scenes in the popular movie *Mission*, which show Indian children playing violins, graphically demonstrate the role that music has had in missionary activities, and the havoc that it can cause within an indigenous culture. The message was given added poignancy when the same children were later enslaved or slaughtered for political expediency.

Christians are beginning to evaluate the cultural packaging of the gospel message through music. They are recognizing that the cultural implications of missionary activities are profound and lasting, and there are now many examples of indigenous musical forms being extinguished under the weight of Western music. Our own nation has witnessed the demise of many native Indian ceremonies and musical forms. Ethnologists have recently expressed concern that

we may be close to losing our native Hawaiian music, and it is indeed ironic that the largest storehouse of Hawaiian music now resides in Berlin.

From a theological perspective it is questionable that the wholesale cultural destruction and displacement of native cultures was what Christ had in mind when initiating the “Great Commission.” The Bible and *The Urantia Book* both celebrate the vast diversity of humankind. While there is unity in the message of hope, love, brotherhood, and the elements of service, there is great room for diversity of worship forms and music. We can and must expect great diversity of cultural expression. This diversity is not something to fear but celebrate, for it is an indicator of the power and versatility of the gospel to transform and inspire all of the peoples of the world. There is, after all, no specific blue print establishing the “correct” form or style of music in the religion of Jesus. Although it is mentioned many times that the disciples sang hymns with their worship, musicians today can only theorize about the content, form, and style of these hymns, and are unable to reproduce the music of that day with any degree of authenticity.

While attending a certain evangelical seminary, I was taught that Christ is the transformer of culture. The conservative theological dogmas of this church dictated its “acceptable norms” for a Christian culture. When this happens, the gospel tends to be associated with specific culture forms, and such religious groups often have trouble adjusting to progressive social change. *The Urantia Book* cautions against linking social, economic, or political trends with the gospel message:

Modern religion finds it difficult to adjust its attitude toward the rapidly shifting social changes only because it has permitted itself to become so thoroughly traditionalized, dogmatized, and institutionalized. The religion of living experience finds no difficulty in keeping ahead of all these social developments and economic upheavals, amid which it ever functions as a moral stabilizer, social guide and spiritual pilot. (p. 1088)

Modern religion finds it difficult to adjust its attitude toward the rapidly shifting social changes only because it has permitted itself to become so thoroughly traditionalized, dogmatized, and institutionalized.

Religion is only one of the many shapers and carriers of culture. “The greatest twentieth-century influences contributing to the furtherance of civilization and the advancement of culture are the marked increase in world travel and the unparalleled improvements in methods of communication.” (p. 909) The advent of the communication age and a growing sense of world community have brought to the forefront of popular discussion the issue of cultural dominance.

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What is of interest to me is how much of the popular discussion of cultural dominance has focused primarily on our 20th century materialistic experience. The concern for maintaining cultural identities throughout the world in the face of Western commercial exports has made headline news. Thousands of missionaries are contributing to this exportation of Western culture throughout the world. The increasing high-tech approach to missionary efforts incorporating mass-media methods are reaching incredibly large audiences. This contemporary commercialization of the gospel message is a serious concern for many mainline Christians.

We should remember, however, that indigenous cultural faith and forms are not easily wiped out by commercial, missionary, or evolutionary social changes. In fact, we appear to be entering an era of indigenous cultural resurgence around the world. Missionaries are astounded at the cultural resilience of indigenous religious practices in the face of strong oppression. Christianity appears to have survived the repression of the Communist era in the Soviet Union and China. In the former Soviet States the Orthodox Church can hardly accommodate the new flood of worshipers. In China there are enclaves of worshipers singing hymns brought to them by missionaries over 100 years ago.

The lesson from these examples is clear: indigenous cultures are difficult to destroy. Whenever missionaries bring a new religious faith into an indigenous culture, an accommodation takes place.

In Central and South America, after 500 years of dominance of the Catholic Church, there are indications that native celebrations with indigenous music remain intact today. Among North American Indians there has been a strong resurgence of Indian beliefs and a return to traditional expressions of worship, music and spiritual traditions. A recent rise of interest in "Aslan" and the celebration of ancient Aztec ceremonies has captured the imagination of Chicano youth. What is significant about this movement is that the music used to carry the teachings of this ancient religious cult is *rap music*—the sociopolitical language of inner city Afro-Americans. The use of a modern medium to express old ideas is a powerful method for sharing the message, and that message is being heard from the barrios of Los Angeles to the villages of New Mexico.

The lesson from these examples is clear: indigenous cultures are difficult to destroy. Whenever missionaries bring a new religious faith into an indigenous culture, an accommodation takes place. The new faith is adopted into indigenous expressions which result in worship forms that are unique to that culture. I have contemplated the meaning of these cultural-religious dynamics and have been profoundly impressed by the wisdom which *The Urantia Book* has to share with us as missionary ministers of the

gospel. Consider the following passages among many which could be selected:

The mortals of the realms of time and space may differ greatly in innate abilities and intellectual endowment, they may enjoy environments exceptionally favorable to social advancement and moral progress, or they may suffer from the lack of almost every human aid to culture and supposed advancement in the arts of civilization; but the possibilities for spiritual progress in the ascension career are equal to all; increasing levels of spiritual insight and cosmic meanings are attained quite independently of all such sociomoral differentials and the diversified material environments on the evolutionary worlds. (p. 63)

Eternal survival of personality is wholly dependent on the choosing of the mortal mind, whose decisions determine the survival potential of the immortal. When the mind believes God and the soul knows God, and when, with the fostering Adjuster, they all *desire* God, then survival is assured. Limitations of intellect, curtailment of education, deprivation of culture, impoverishment of social status, even inferiority of human standards of morality resulting from the unfortunate lack of educational, cultural, and social advantages, cannot invalidate the presence of the divine spirit in such unfortunate and humanly handicapped but believing individuals. (p. 69)

The philosophical foundation for missionary activity presented in *The Urantia Book* has important contributions to make to the contemporary church. It calls us to recognize the worldwide activity of the Spirit of God among all the peoples of the world. It suggests that indigenous forms of worship may not only be acceptable to God but may also have something to teach us as well. And finally, it challenges the very notion of the "salvation of the lost," that all nonChristians are damned, as the foundation of missionary effort.

In the foregoing observations this column has entered a minefield of challenges for contemporary Christians, both mainline and conservative. I believe we must ask ourselves hard questions about what theological and cultural messages are presented in our preaching and in our music. Music is in a unique position to help us with this evaluation because so often it is the primary carrier of theological messages to the people we serve. Therefore, I would like to continue this discussion in the next column which will be entitled "The Quest for Indigenization" in the hope that our discussion may contribute to the local church's outreach efforts both within its own neighborhood and throughout the world.

-Jack Rogers

The Power of New Spiritual Insight

Everett W. Sloffer

He who is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and he who is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much. (Luke 16:10)

Getting our priorities straight and integrated is the greatest challenge of human life. What things are of first importance and what things are only means to more significant ends? Is there a key principle which structures everything else in our lives? When Jesus was asked this question he replied that the first and greatest principle of living is “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” (Matt. 22:37) What does this mean? What are the implications of this statement?

A great many people sincerely believe that God is too busy running the universe to be concerned with the utterly small details of daily living.

One evening while I was listening to a friend addressing a small group, he made a statement which for me opened up the depth and breadth of this first and greatest commandment. He said, “Jesus sought the Father’s will even in his smallest desire.” This statement struck me with the power of a new spiritual insight, a serendipitous revelation. I think this sentence contains the conceptual power to unlock new doorways of understanding of life and love and work and play, of every moment of being. It does even more than that—it reveals to us a glimpse of the infinite nature of God. This sentence implies three things:

First, the will of God extends to every possible action and decision, to every moment of being;

Second, the will of God is the most liberating force in the universe; and

Third, the will of God calls us to act.

This sentence, “Jesus sought the Father’s will even in his smallest desire,” corrects three major religious and philosophical errors that have haunted us for centuries. A great many people sincerely believe that God is too busy running the universe to be concerned with the utterly small details of daily living. They believe that the will of God only applies to the big decisions, the big actions, the major circumstances of one’s life, that God doesn’t sweat the small stuff. This is the first error that sentence corrects, because it tells us that Jesus—a mortal of the realm, the most wholly consecrated mortal who ever lived—made his commitment to God wholeheartedly, without reservations or qualifications. This includes the “little things.”

In matters of the spirit there is no such thing as “small stuff,” for the simple reason that everything we do originates deep within our character, takes origin in our primary level of faith and in our most profound and enduring level of commitment. When that commitment reaches true levels of God partnership, as Jesus demonstrated again and again in his daily life, every act and decision becomes spontaneously spiritual.

Jesus demonstrated that there is always a Godlike way, even to do the small things. He exhibited the Universal Father’s will and way. Jesus knew that we live and move and have our being within God’s care. God not only runs the universe, but also has created ways to express his will everywhere and at every moment, not only to us as individuals, but also to all life. Jesus knew that the expression of the Father’s will is at every moment and in every circumstance perfectly coordinated with the progress of the entire unfolding of the universe, and that God does all of these things simultaneously without ever becoming tired or overworked. Jesus knew that as the expansion of the universe continues on into the deepest regions of infinity, God will still continue to do these things because there are no limits on the power of God. None.

We know that God’s way to express his will for each of us is through the action of the Spirit of God which so faithfully shares our inner life and experience. The activity of the Spirit of God in the mind of every sentient being in all creation is actualizing the will of God throughout the universe.

Those who think that God is too busy to be concerned even with our smallest desires simply do not understand that God really and truly is infinite. God is changeless and consistent. It is human beings who change. And the way we humans change is through the age-old cycle of discovery, comprehension, assimilation, and action. We are slowly—painfully slowly—discovering God’s higher ways. But our discoveries are not complete until they end in action, in a new and transformed way of living. If we really understood what God is like, we would not act the way we do. If we would give God all that we have, God will make us more than we are.

In matters of the spirit there is no such thing as “small stuff,” for the simple reason that everything we do originates deep within our character, takes origin in our primary level of faith and in our most profound and enduring level of commitment.

All of us are called upon to decide who we really are, what we stand for, and where we want to go. One of the great philosophical questions each of us will face is this: Does the end justify the means? For me the answer is clear: the end cannot, now or ever, justify the means for the simple

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reason that the nature of the means employed determines the quality of the ends produced. Ends and means do not belong to separate realms; they are in the same continuum. And I believe deep within my heart that the means are inseparably linked with the ends.

Having observed that the will of God extends to every possible action and decision, to every moment of being, the second insight this sentence reveals is that the will of God is the most liberating force in the universe. It could not be otherwise.

Has anybody ever said that Jesus was a robot? If Jesus held back nothing, if he attempted to harmonize even his smallest desires with the Father's will, the result would either have been a complete automaton or the most completely liberated human being who ever lived. There can be no in-between result. We know that Jesus, as a flesh-and-blood mortal of the realm, was able to achieve awesome levels of human growth. A person simply cannot achieve such levels of growth except through complete spiritual liberation. Any impediment to spiritual growth has the same effect as driving your car with the brake on all the time.

The vast majority of our brothers and sisters on this planet are still caught up in, and conceptually handicapped by, the ancient religious and philosophical error that says the ways of God are somehow limiting.

It is eternally true: the will of God always expands and never diminishes the human soul. God reaches into our hearts from the vast power of all infinity to fraternize with our newborn soul, and cradles it in the warmth and beauty of his love.

The vast majority of our brothers and sisters on this planet are still caught up in, and conceptually handicapped by, the ancient religious and philosophical error that says the ways of God are somehow limiting. They believe that if you give your life totally to God, that is the end of self-expression, the end of fun and pleasure, the end of relaxation and enjoyment. Somewhere in the idea of total commitment they see a permanent grimness, a life under the doleful harness of a tight and restrictive control, sort of like becoming a spiritual zombie. They see the will of God to mean maximum restraint, a goodie-two-shoes, glassy-eyed dullness that cannot take a meaningful part in the simple ups and downs of everyday life.

In the way Jesus lived his life we have come to know and understand that the will of God leads to maximum liberation. St. Augustine said, "Love God, and do as you please." Jesus told us that the truth would make us free and the more truth we understand the more free we become.

That single sentence tells us that we can do the will of God at every moment, in every occupation, in every circumstance. The religious life is not a separate sphere of activity, it is the sphere of living in which all other activities subsist. We are full-time religionists no matter where we work or what we happen to be doing at the moment. There is no negative price to commitment. It is the pathway to true freedom, abundance, and joy!

This brings us to the third major correction: the need to act. Jesus helps us understand the necessity to act, to carry out the meanings of what we have discovered. Action is required simply because decisions cannot be consummated until we act. Progress cannot be achieved until we take action. Action is the completion of decision. Action clears the way for new discoveries. When Jesus came to understand how a simple small desire related to the harmony of the universe as expressed in his Father's will, you can bet that he acted to conform his will to the Father's will.

There is no doubt in my mind that the proper technique of studying the life of Jesus is to live his teachings—not merely to study them and thank God for them, but to live them. To act. The question is when? If we have not already started, when do we start?

I have wrestled with this question in my own life many times. My desire is to be totally committed and the desire is unwavering, but in the sweat and grind of daily living I know that I am holding back. There is constant tension between my level of desire and my level of commitment. God is ever gently leading me forward, making sure that as I take each step there will be no lingering doubts or backward glances. He is patient beyond words. He knows for a certainty that in time, and with his help there will be continued progress.

If we are uncertain, let us turn to Jesus for inspiration. We can trade our mind for the mind of Jesus and ask: If Jesus were here right now, living my life, standing in my shoes, what would he do? How would he proceed? What would he say?

People generally understand Jesus' love, his mercy and compassion, his ministry. But in trading our mind for the mind of Jesus let us not forget that Jesus was also a person of resolute courage. He did not hesitate to rebuke even his closest associates when he saw that they were entering upon the pathways of cosmic error.

Let us act! Let us act as individuals and as a society. So what if we sometimes fail. What if we fail a thousand times if we know that when we at last succeed, we succeed forever.

Jesus sought the Father's will even in his smallest desire. So can we.

Everett Sloffer is a long time reader of The Urantia Book and a resource consultant to the Journal.

The Philosophy of the Spiritual Fellowship Journal

1. The Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of all people is the guiding principle of the Fellowship. We acknowledge and welcome as kindred spirits all individuals from any tradition who affirm this truth. Recognition of the religion of Jesus as the ultimate ideal of living is central in our thinking, but we seek to avoid all forms of coercive literalism and legalism.

2. The Fellowship is, therefore, ecumenical and non-sectarian in orientation. We invite into our Journal community all who recognize the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of humanity.

3. The Fellowship recognizes the key role of evolution and becoming in the development of individuals and congregations and seeks to encourage the positive growth of both. We should like to stimulate each person to visualize, articulate, and actualize supreme purposes and goals of living in accordance with their spiritual guidance.

4. The Fellowship seeks to foster the most inspiring intellectual, emotional, and service sentiments in each individual and religious community. We strive to facilitate spiritual growth, encourage a truly universal perspective, and stimulate the highest expression of personal religious living.

5. The Fellowship encourages the recognition and enhancement of the home as the key institution where the highest values of living are learned and the community in which the most loving and supportive relationships are experienced and nurtured.

6. The Fellowship seeks to promote the development of ritual and ceremony that symbolizes and celebrates the highest expressions of truth, beauty, and goodness, along with the supreme values of love and social service. These ministrations should dramatize spiritual loyalties, stimulate warm fellowship, and inspire a wise outreach ministry to the world.

7. The Fellowship affirms the mystery of *personal* and *epochal* revelation. We stand in awe at the incomprehensible love which God has for us imperfect, finite beings in bestowing a part of his own spirit essence to live with us and guide us toward reality and eternal life. We are confronted by the inexplicable efficacy of intercessory prayer and the mysterious integration and coordination of persons and events. We are challenged by the potential of the spirit mastery of our animal drives and urges and the reality of spiritual transformation. We believe *The Urantia Book* is one of the best expressions of this philosophy on our planet.

Urantia Book Resources

The rich mine of universe knowledge and spiritual wisdom found in the 2097 pages of *The Urantia Book* tends to overwhelm the reader with its encyclopedic profusion. A detailed table of contents helps make the book manageable, but one soon realizes that reference tools are needed to find information hidden in its pages.

Clyde Bedell (1898-1985), a widely recognized author and speaker in the field of advertising, over many years compiled an index-concordance of words, concepts, ideas, topics, and themes found in *The Urantia Book*. He published the first edition of the *Concordex* in 1971. The third edition came out in 1986 and has over 110,000 references. The *Concordex* is an indispensable research tool for finding passages and studying topics in *The Urantia Book*.

The Urantia Book reader also discovers information in many sections of the book which parallels Biblical material. Numerous young friends of the editor did not become interested in the Bible until they read *The Urantia Book*. The two books are mutually enhancing. Recognizing this close relationship, Dr. Duane L. Faw, Professor of Law emeritus of Pepperdine University School of Law, spent six years compiling a parallel and harmony of *The Urantia Book* and the Bible. The *Paramony* was published in 1986 and contains 25,000 cross-references revealing the similarities and differences between the facts and concepts of these two great books. Dr. Faw has been a teacher of adult Bible classes for 40 years and a certified lay speaker in the United Methodist Church for over 25 years. The *Paramony* is an essential reference tool for studying relationships between *The Urantia Book* and the Bible. A long time scholarly reader of *The Urantia Book* describes the *Paramony* as, “a well-structured volume, indispensable for those engaged in serious hermeneutics, particularly of the gospels.”

If your local bookstore does not carry *The Urantia Book*, it can be ordered from The Urantia Foundation, 533 Diversey Parkway, Chicago, IL 60614. The *Concordex* and *Paramony* can be purchased from the Good Cheer Press, P. O. Box 18764, Boulder, CO 80308.