

# Spiritual Fellowship Journal

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## **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.

### The Need for a New Vision of Spiritual Reality

Contemporary theology in many ways recognizes the need for a more relevant view of spiritual reality. Dr. Walter Brueggemann, professor of Old Testament at Columbia Theological Seminary, has an interesting and insightful article in the October, 1995 issue of *Theology Today* entitled "Preaching as Reimagination." Among the sixteen theses he presents and develops are the following:

- *Ours is a changed preaching situation, because the old modes of church absolutes are no longer trusted.*
- *Along with the failure of old modes of articulation, we now face the inadequacy of historical-critical understanding of the biblical text as it has been conventionally practiced.*
- *We now know (or think we know) that human transformation (the way people change) does not happen through didacticism or through excessive certitude but through the playful entertainment of another scripting of reality that may subvert the old given text and its interpretation and lead to the embrace of an alternative text and its redescription of reality.*
- *The invitation of preaching (not unlike therapy) is to abandon the script in which one has had confidence and to enter a different script that imaginatively tells one's life differently.*

Dr. Brueggemann goes on to say, "Nothing seems to be reliable as it used to be....I believe people are haunted by the question of whether there is a text (and an interpreter) that can say something that will make sense out of our pervasive nonsense. It is my conviction that neither old liberal ideologies nor old conservative certitudes nor critical claims made for the Bible will now do."

Clearly, the most perceptive people in our society recognize that the traditional view of spiritual reality has lost its unquestioned relevance. There is a hunger and unprecedented search for spiritual meaning that makes sense in our contemporary world. *The Urantia Book* authors acknowledge the heroic ministry of Jesus' apostles who "went out and turned the whole Roman Empire upside down," and then comment, "But religious leaders [today] are making a great mistake when they try to call modern man to spiritual battle with the trumpet blasts of the Middle Ages." (U. B. p. 2077) Ministers today are seemingly on the horns of a dilemma: either they are challenged to dress up the old doctrinal cliches of the past, or they must strike out with

creative reimagination as Dr. Brueggemann suggests.

There is, however, a higher synthesis to this dialectical process. It is found in the Fifth Epochal revelation—*The Urantia Book*—that is rooted in the historic truths of the Christian faith, while at the same time it presents a new, enlarged view of spiritual reality that is harmonious with contemporary scientific and cultural knowledge, and furnishes the ground for a new era of creative spiritual imagination and growth. The best hope of a renaissance in the Christian faith, in my judgment, rests on its discovery. -MJS

### Americans Search for Spirituality

We are repeatedly reminded that we live in a secular society. In recent decades we have experienced an erosion of values and a decline in our sense of security. The threat of a nuclear holocaust, the Vietnam war, the pervasive use of drugs, and the rise in crime and violence have undermined our confidence in our materialistic-secular civilization. There is a growing longing for something more substantial. Western Civilization is searching for a new dimension of spirituality. Phyllis Tickle in *Rediscovering the Sacred: Spirituality in America* (Crossroad, 1995, \$19.95) observes that the sale of religious books has gone up 59% since 1992, and a Gallup study predicts the demand for books on spirituality will increase by 82% by 2010.

There is a noticeable distinction in contemporary society between religion and spirituality, between religious institutions and spiritual reality. Today's interest in the sacred, the transpersonal, does not run along traditional lines. Traditional religious institutions are on the decline—this, according to the 1994 Barna Survey Report (*Virtual America*), includes the shrinkage of Evangelicalism in the United States. People are searching for spirituality outside of the church or synagogue. Tickle believes that if the present day church is to seriously engage in the contemporary search for a new dimension of spirituality, it must be more intentionally critical of its own interpretations of religious life. Slight course corrections will not be enough; Americans, Phyllis Tickle thinks, are groping toward a second reformation, a transforming spiritual encounter that has the potential of bringing a renaissance in contemporary religion.

As readers of *The Spiritual Fellowship Journal* will recognize, this has been our basic theme since we started publishing the Journal in 1991. We believe mainline Christian Churches, through evolutionary experience, are poised to discover the transforming spiritual vision presented in *The Urantia Book*. With this discovery of the Fifth Epochal Revelation, these churches will not only regain their spiritual relevancy, they will become *frontline* churches in our culture.

-MJS

## The Historical Jesus

The present day quest for the historical Jesus is the third wave of critical theological research in modern times to search for the Jesus behind the New Testament picture. It is, in essence, a secular, academic approach using an impressive array of disciplines: cultural anthropology, history of religions, political economy, sociology of religion, psychology of religion, studies of peasant societies, purity societies, patriarchal societies, honor-shame societies, and various literary methods.

All of this research for the historical Jesus is rooted in the rise of modern secularism with the loss of the credibility of the Biblical record. The obvious inconsistencies and contradictions of the gospel stories have undermined doctrinal claims of infallibility. Many theologians are, therefore, attempting to construct a picture of Jesus on credible secular foundations: scholarly research and religious experience. They point out that there are religious prophets and ecstasies, paranormal healers, and enlightened teachers in many religious traditions.

As a historical report, the resurrection story and claims of divinity lack credibility in our secular society, but as a metaphorical narrative of religious experience of the early followers of Jesus, they make sense and are truths which are verified in the religious experience of many people today. Metaphor, Marcus Borg points out, is the first language of religious experience. Later these visions are converted into concepts and doctrines. These doctrines are then projected into ontological pictures of reality such as the Christian view of the Trinity.

Through this process of theological reasoning, the contemporary Christian can avoid the stumbling blocks of doctrine about Jesus which are troublesome and can at the same time affirm the religion of Jesus. In what sense, then, are the gospels revelatory? To deny that Jesus said, "He who has seen me has seen the Father," "I and the Father are one," "I am the light of the world," or "I am the way the truth and the life," is to deny the revelatory nature of Jesus' personal testimony about himself recorded in the gospels. Many of the faithful regard this contemporary academic theology as the leaven of secular humanism. They maintain that this tells more about 20th century theologians than about the authentic historical Jesus.

The best answer to this dilemma, I believe, is found in *The Urantia Book's* Life and Teachings of Jesus. It gives a coherent and believable picture of the life and teachings of Jesus which basically affirms the gospel story. Furthermore, it purports to be a new and authentic revelation, not merely a metaphorical testimony of the early church. And, I believe, there is considerable internal evidence of its revelatory nature.

The *Urantia Book* picture is a much more satisfying and reasonable picture of the life and teachings of Jesus than we find in contemporary theological writing about the historical Jesus. It is my conviction that *The Urantia Book* narrative

will eventually be recognized as the most reliable description of Jesus and his teachings available to humankind. This recognition is destined to trigger a renaissance in Christianity, and a revitalization of spiritual values throughout the entire world.

-MJS

## The Mystery of Mind

Roger Penrose's book, *Shadows of the Mind: A Search for the Missing Science of Consciousness*, published by the Oxford University Press, 1994, explores the mystery of the mind and goes a long way to refute any materialistic explanation. Dr. Penrose, Rouse Ball Professor of Mathematics at Oxford, is a formidable mathematician and physicist who is probably best known for the Hawking-Penrose singularity theorems in General Relativity.

The mystery of mind has intrigued philosophers down through history. René Descartes, the great seventeenth century philosopher, thought mind was an indestructible substance or reality, while others like David Hume regarded mind as simply an association of ideas, a bundle of experiences, without enduring substance.

The relationships between mind and body have been viewed in many ways. Descartes thought there was interaction between the two. Gottfried Leibniz rejected the interaction theory and postulated a parallelism or preestablished harmony between body and mind. Benedict Spinoza and Immanuel Kant regarded the mind and body as two aspects of a common reality; and there have been many other explanations.

*The Urantia Book* authors, as in so many other areas of knowledge, present the most reasonable and holistic explanation of this mystery known to me. Stated in an over-simplified way, there are three basic universe realities: matter, mind, and spirit. Mind can be associated with both matter and spirit; in fact, mind is the bridge between the two. The dynamics of these reality systems is well stated on p. 1275:

In the evolutionary superuniverses energy-matter is dominant except in personality, where spirit through the mediation of mind is struggling for the mastery. The goal of the evolutionary universes is the subjugation of energy-matter by mind, the co-ordination of mind with spirit, and all of this by virtue of the creative and unifying presence of personality. Thus, in relation to personality, do physical systems become subordinate; mind systems, co-ordinate; and spirit systems directive.

A complete reading of *The Urantia Book* will give a unique and comprehensive understanding of the interrelationships of physical systems, mental systems, and spiritual systems of reality. I believe it is destined to raise the holistic functioning of human personality to a new and higher level.

-MJS

# Toward a Global Theology

Sue Tennant

*Adapted from a talk given at the opening of the first free standing Taoist Temple in Canada*

Ladies and gentlemen, it is a great pleasure for me to be here on behalf of the World Interfaith Education Association of Canada. This is a great day for the faith community of Taoism and it is also a great day for religion in Canada. I deeply appreciate your inviting members of *other* faith communities to join in this moment of celebration.

The World Interfaith Education Association (WIFEA) is a multifaith organization in Canada dedicated to fostering respect and understanding among the people of all religions through education. When a new religious community flourishes, I think all people of faith can be morally encouraged and spiritually strengthened. When pluralism, particularly religious pluralism, prospers in any country, I believe the world is positively influenced and enriched.

We live in one of the most faith diverse regions in the world. In 1991, when secretary-general Javier Perez de Cuellar retired from the United Nations, he donated his collection of memorabilia from all over the world to the Museum of Civilization in Ottawa. When he was asked why he did this, he said he regarded Canada as an inspiring model for the future. Canada, he observed, is a prosperous, multicultural society with a strong commitment to individual rights and pluralistic democracy. If he is right, and Canada is a model for the future, then how we manage the challenge of religious diversity in our country may be an inspiration to others.

## Peace and Religion are Related

Harmony among the religions has been strongly linked to world peace. The famous Swiss theologian, Dr. Hans Kung, is best known for his recent work on the declaration of a global ethic, which was adopted in 1993, in Chicago, by the Parliament of the World's Religions. This was a centenary celebration of 100 years of Interfaith Dialogue and was attended by over 6,000 religionists from around the world. Four years ago, I heard Dr. Kung speak at the United Nations to a special assembly on world peace. He said,

There will be no peace among the nations until there is first peace among the religions. [Then he added that] there will be no peace among the religions until there is dialogue among the religions.

Given the insidious prejudice, persecution and violence which has gone on in our world, often in the name of religion, this made sense to me. What also made sense was that Canada, with its multicultural demographics and tolerant policies, could be an ideal test ground for developing inter-religious harmony.

I would like to take this opportunity to reaffirm the essential role religion plays in society and to encourage support for interfaith education and co-operation wherever cultures cross. It has been my experience that many people are cynical about organized religion. No need for the crutch of religion, they say. And they want no part of religion's saying one thing and doing another. Their lives are just fine, thank you very much. Increasing numbers of religious people choose not to become members of organized faith communities. And given the great diversity of beliefs and practices and the tendency of one religion to assert its superiority over the others, many people fail to see how religion does anything but cause hostility and conflict in our world. For the record, I'm strong on religion, true religion—faith in God and service to one's fellows—and every religion that I study enriches that fundamental truth in unique ways. When I speak for religion, I mean to speak for the truth and goodness of all religions.

## Religion is Basic to Survival

I believe society cannot survive long without religion. Religion attempts to satisfy our deepest yearnings and anxieties. Even though the United Nations has ranked the quality of life in Canada as among the highest in the world, we are very much part of a world still plagued by fear and ignorance, and the basic instincts of self-preservation. Our problems are complex, they are inter-related and they are accelerating rapidly. So much so, that many of us feel quite overwhelmed, confused and powerless to improve either ourselves or our world. If our problems were only material, they might be solved by better technology; if our problems were only economic, they might be solved by better commerce and trade. If our problems were only political they might be solved by more efficient government. But it seems to me that the root of our problems is spiritual. It is not knowing who we are, why we are here, where we are going, and to whom we belong that feeds our deepest fears and anxieties. Only religion has the spiritual resources to offer answers to these profound human questions. Only religion has the courage and conviction to affirm the existence of an unseen but personally experienceable Reality and only religion identifies the human being as spiritual with transcendent possibilities. Religion offers a compelling rationale for goodness, truth, and beauty. It challenges us to higher moral thinking and ethical living. It enriches our lives with new meanings and new values.

Religion offers the individual person stability and poise in the midst of disaster. When all our hopes are dashed, when dreams are broken, when adversity strikes, it is the citadel of the spirit within which remains unassailable. Life in today's world is beset by change. We live in a sea of economic uncertainty. Massive dislocation and social reconstruction pervades society. Our world is shrinking with instant communications and global trade and travel. We experience upheavals daily. If ever people needed the hope of something permanent in their

lives, the security of some transcendent identity and purpose, it is now, at the end of the 20th century. Religion offers hope and comfort and speaks to us of eternal realities.

### **The Strength and Enrichment of Diversity**

Many people perceive the differences in religion to be a problem. I believe there is strength and enrichment in diversity. Religions evolve in different parts of the world at different times in history. It seems natural and healthy to have so many different religions in a multicultural world. Religions differ because people differ. We differ in culture, race, gender, temperament, disposition, and inherited capacities. We differ profoundly in our life experiences and we differ in how we think and what we believe. Our differences reflect our uniqueness as individuals. We come into the world as tiny miracles, marvelous, one-of-a-kind, never-to-be-repeated packages of genetic potential. We are in fact irreplaceable and have unique contributions to make to the world. In this diversity, who but God, who but the Source of all things and beings, could possibly speak with wisdom and authority for all of us?

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*For the record, I'm strong on religion, true religion—faith in God and service to one's fellows—and every religion that I study enriches that fundamental truth in unique ways.*

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If religions differ so greatly, is there nothing we have in common? After twenty years of studying religion and people, I think I am starting to understand something fundamental about truly religious people, in spite of their different beliefs. They are *devoted* people. Religionists are *wholehearted* people, dedicated to what they view as supremely valuable. *Religionists are devoted wholeheartedly to supreme values.* In my experience, their devotion is dependable, reliable, and most often, loving and compassionate. Their devotion is self-forgetful. Even the devotion of supposedly irreligious parents for their children, or an atheist for a social cause, borders on the religious. When this devotion is misguided it produces fanaticism and, of course, that's one of the unfortunate down sides of religion. But having discovered what I think is the essential quality of religious people, it is easy for me to see how religionists profoundly impact the world. The power of effective religious leadership can change the course of history. And it is also easy for me to understand, when supreme values become distorted, how impossible it is for some religionists to get along.

The religions of authority can only divide men and set them in conscientious array against each other; the religion of the spirit will progressively draw men together and cause them to become understandingly sympathetic with one another. The religions of authority require of men uniformity in belief, but this is impossible of real-

ization in the present state of the world. The religion of the spirit requires only unity of experience—uniformity of destiny—making full allowance for diversity of belief. The religion of the spirit requires only uniformity of insight, not uniformity of viewpoint and outlook. The religion of the spirit does not demand uniformity of intellectual views, only unity of spirit feeling. The religions of authority crystallize into lifeless creeds; the religion of the spirit grows into the increasing joy and liberty of ennobling deeds of loving service and merciful ministration. (U. B., 1732)

In nature, diversity ensures versatility and versatility ensures survival. This may also be true of religion. Many elements of society are converging for increased effectiveness and efficiency to survive. In his book, *The Global Paradox*, futurist John Naisbatt writes about the impending convergence of communications technologies which will facilitate a new global code of conduct to protect basic human rights. Over time, he says, all communities will be held to the same standard of behavior. Those that do not do so will be held to account by the rest of the international community. When the world is watching, he observes, a community's behavior is influenced by the anticipated reaction of its economic allies. If economic power is the leverage of social action, is not moral power the leverage of religious ecumenism? And does not the world appear to cry out for bold moral and spiritual leadership?

Because our differences are so great, the possibilities of misunderstandings multiply and anger and resentment fuel conflict. Our nuclear capability can destroy our planet and civilization as we know it. What I believe the world needs is a strong unified voice that speaks to the issue of violence with a new democratic model of tolerance and respect. But can the religions teach what they do not yet practice? According to Alan Falconer, Director of the World Council of Churches' office of faith and order, churches are at least partly to blame for our severely divided world. "On the whole the division of the churches has reinforced the divisions in our society. The world is crying out for unity and we offer no sign—a counterwitness to our words."<sup>1</sup> If religionists are to inspire this necessary understanding and respect among religions then they must begin to learn the art of dialogue. They must co-operate and fellowship with one another at every opportunity. Strong moral ties and humility must bind religionists to work toward common goals and ideals.

Some theologians, religious leaders, and lay people are frequently blind to the obstacles they themselves erect...The humble approach to human knowledge is meant to help as a corrective to the parochialism that blocks further development in religious studies. Taking the humble approach reminds us that each person's concept of God, the universe, even his or her

own self is too limited. To some extent, we are all too self-centered. We overestimate the small amount of knowledge we possess. To be humble means to admit the infinity of creation and to search one's place in God's infinite plan for creation.<sup>2</sup>

### **World Interfaith Education Association**

In Canada, the World Interfaith Education Association is working to bring interfaith education into the public education system. An interfaith curriculum is being developed which offers young and old an informed overview of the beliefs, practices, and histories of the world's religions. The goal is to broaden the *conceptual* knowledge base with ideas about religion and an appreciation of how it is valued by others. Such programs are now carried on successfully in the United States, Great Britain, and Australia and one will soon be launched in Edmonton.

But equally important is to broaden the *experiential* knowledge base. WIFEA plans to initiate programs and events, much like the Multifaith Festival of the Family last year, which actively engaged people with others from diverse backgrounds in practical ways. When individuals are actively involved with others, co-operating for a common cause, trust and respect develop. Paradigm shifts occur through personal association. Individual attitudes and behavior are transformed. Interfaith education becomes a natural pluralistic democracy.

If our society, with its many diverse religious/cultural groups, can conceive and evolve a functioning pluralistic *religious* democracy, an association whose concern is the well-being of the whole society and one in which each member has an equal voice, I believe that religion can regain much of its former credibility. I think a show of solidarity with other religions in the age long quest for peace and good-will among the earth's peoples can attract strong public support. The dream of peace and fraternity is inherent in all the world's religions and when all people of faith regard themselves and all others as the beloved children of God and members of one human family, then the right spirit will exist in which to solve our problems.

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*Living with diversity is not easy. To leave the comfort of a like-minded community with its predictable values and lifestyles and venture into the multicultural world takes some courage, or at least a sense of adventure.*

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Religions promulgate. People are inspired by a teaching or a leader. They gather together when they think in similar ways and then unite to achieve common goals and that's how religions begin. They grow in power by organization. It's instinctive for like-minded people to stick together. The old adage that "birds of a feather flock together" is particularly true when it comes to religious communities. But

throughout history we see how a higher synthesis results in progress, how competition gives way to co-operation and results in greater vitality and security. The primitive family becomes the clan which eventually becomes the tribe, and when many tribes compete and hostilities threaten extinction, tribes become nations. Nations, in turn, form international associations, and if we follow this process to its logical conclusion, some day we can hope to see a true union of nations, a real government of humankind.

Living with diversity is not easy. To leave the comfort of a like-minded community with its predictable values and lifestyles and venture into the multicultural world takes some courage, or at least a sense of adventure. It takes conscious determination and effort to learn and grow amidst cultural and religious differences. But if we love God and this world, we soon discover a new and exciting dimension of goodness and truth residing in the hearts of others. It is not long before we realize, "What does it matter that differences persist, as they will, for we are *all* children of God."

Someday religionists will get together and actually effect co-operation on the basis of unity of ideals and purposes rather than attempting to do so on the basis of psychological opinions and theological beliefs. Goals rather than creeds should unify religionists. (U. B. p. 1091)

In my experience, no teaching resonates more strongly in the human soul than the teaching that our minds are indwelt by the divine spirit of God. This inner light, which all religions acknowledge, uplifts our thinking and leads us into new ways of compassion and service to others. Personal spiritual experience is the fact around which religions can discover kinship; and interfaith associations are the experiential journey in which increasing spiritual fraternity is realized. We share the journey with all people of faith and as our experience expands, so does the power of openness, listening, reflecting, communicating, ambiguity, diversity, teamwork, and universal spiritual ideals. The road ahead is long and straight, and progress is not always easily perceived. But to all who will take forward steps, the Interfaith journey does promise *hope* for a better future and exciting opportunities for making a better world.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Disciple*, January, 1996, p. 39

<sup>2</sup> Templeton, John M. *The Humble Approach*. New York:

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# Paradise: The Recentering of Theology

Byron Belitsos

## Introduction

Be it fact or metaphor, the sense that the cosmos has a *center* is a primal intuition of humankind. Myths in numerous cultures depict this Center as the *source* of creation. Scientific observation in the Newtonian tradition also evokes the notion of a centered universe; Newton's theory of universal gravitation pictures all objects as falling toward, or rotating around, various centers. Even the singularity theorem in modern cosmology provides a metaphor of a center-point of absolute cosmic unity from which space-time and matter-energy unfold.

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*Many of the postulates of contemporary science, if considered from a theological perspective, call forth the notion of a universal source and center from which the primal wholeness of the universe takes on its characteristic of unity.*

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Many of the postulates of contemporary science, if considered from a theological perspective, call forth the notion of a *universal source and center* from which the primal wholeness of the universe takes on its characteristic of unity. In other words, if the universe is truly One, if it arises from a single mathematical "point" that is ancestral to gravity, space-time, and mass-energy, wouldn't this imply that it must have some central theological and cosmological characteristic around which this source-point is unified and organized? To understand the universe in such a holistic manner requires a blend of philosophical theology and scientific cosmology—of truth and facts. This stereoscopic depth-vision portrays God as the source and center of both the physical and spiritual universes; it projects a God of physical fact and philosophic truth—a cosmically theocentric universe. In the article which follows, we should like to present evidence for what I call a **cosmo-theocentric model of the universe**. This dual concept of a divine center serves as a cosmic porthole, if you will, between fact and truth. The notion of a Cosmic Center also provides a point of contact—a causal nexus—for God's action in the natural world and a primary support for a new cosmological theology.

## Cosmic Perspective

Our understanding of the universe has progressed from geocentrism through heliocentrism to a vastly enlarged view of the cosmos. We can see clusters of galaxies that appear to rotate around a so-called Great Attractor that is 300 million light years away—and beyond that, an even Greater Attractor. The recent discovery of the so-called Great Wall in both the northern and southern skies gives evidence of a remarkable large-scale structure, of an inexplicable lumpiness of galactic matter. It also confirms that galaxies are distributed

in space like a disk—a Supergalactic Plane. Even at these unbelievable distances in the cosmos, scientists are finding overwhelming evidence of symmetry and emergent order at all levels of the organization of matter. Cosmic powers of self-organization are on display from the quantum level to the level of galaxy clusters. What kind of structure will we find at the final level?

Based on new observations of deepest space, astrophysics may well be on the verge of a breakthrough that opens the possibility of a Final Attractor. The most disconcerting revelations in recent years is the discovery of a large-scale *sideways* motion of galactic structures that is in competition with the *outward* movement of the "Hubble flow" which may provide the explanation for the baffling large-scale structures. This new data is so far "almost impossible to reconcile with any known model of the universe."<sup>1</sup> And recently, large-scale motions of almost unimaginable proportions have been discovered. "If it's right, the implications are horrendous," says Joel R. Pollack at the University of California at Santa Cruz concerning these new observations reported in mid-1994. "It means all of the ideas are wrong."<sup>2</sup>

The astronomical search for greater and greater attractors continues. This progression suggests that there may be a Final Attractor—a universal center of gravity of the whole universe. Such a Final Center would be capable of drawing *all* the galaxies of space—all the Great Attractors of all galaxy clusters—in grand rotation around itself.

## Myths of a Cosmic Center

Beyond the converging implications of astrophysics, the great historian of religion, Mircea Eliade, noted that a "symbolism of the center" is pervasive in myths and rituals throughout all cultures and times:

Every microcosm, every inhabited region, has what may be called a "Centre;" that is to say, a place that is sacred above all. It is there, in that Centre, that the sacred manifests itself in its totality...[The] symbolism of a Mountain, a Tree or a Column situated at the Centre of the World is extremely widely distributed.<sup>3</sup>

In cultures that have a conception of three cosmic regions—some equivalent of heaven, earth, and hell—the "centre," or *axis munde* as Eliade sometimes calls it—provides the point of intersection of those regions. Like Jacob's ladder in the Old Testament, the hierophany allows a breakthrough to other planes of existence *by virtue of its access to the center of all things and beings*. Eliade points out, however, that such a Centre was not envisioned with the single, "secular," geometrical implications that it has to the Western scientific mind. For each microcosm there may be several such Centres.

Traditionally, Christianity has always had a problem envisioning a geographic location of heaven; it was vaguely described as "up there" or "where God is." From what point in the cosmos did God initiate the causal chain of existence?

## *Recentering of Theology,*

And how can God be both transcendent and immanent? For post-modern men and women these questions and answers tend to become language games. Modern relativity theory has given us further reason to reject the notion of a divine center. Einstein has shown conclusively that space cannot have a discrete center in the sense of Euclidian geometry. You cannot go in a straight line to the center of space-time; there is no absolute reference point in space-time.

Topologically, if there is a center of the cosmos in any sense other than metaphor, it must be located wholly outside of space-time as such. A centered cosmos must be dimensional *beyond* the four dimensions of Einstein's space-time. Perhaps *this* extra-dimensional center is "the dwelling place of God." Such a concept would also match the mythical symbolism of the "Centre" outlined by Eliade, where the body of knowledge of sacred things that constitutes a sacred center comes *from outside of profane (secular) space*.

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A unique blend of such paradoxical concepts is offered by *The Urantia Book* to which we now turn. *The Urantia Book* presents both the fact and the truth of a universe center. It reveals that a singular, factual, "heavenly," Cosmic Center exists; this holy center is fully outside of space-time, and yet is paradoxically *inside* the natural universe as its absolute gravitational center and, amazingly, as the very "nucleus" of each quantum unit. It is therefore a "fact" of the fifth dimension, if you will, and yet an omniscient "truth" in Einstein's four-dimensional space-time.

### **The Central Isle of Paradise**

In the *Divine Comedy* Dante sings of the poet who travels through hell and purgatory, and is eventually granted permission to ascend to the empyrean. His guide through the heavenly spheres is Beatrice. In the highest heaven, the poet is finally brought face to face with the Trinity, where the poet sees the nine orders of angels in the form of nine circles, spinning around the brilliant point of God's light at the very center. Standing in utter loneliness before the divine luminosity, and gazing at its holy center, he observes that God's light becomes three concentric circles shining as if a halo around His countenance.

Within its depthless clarity of substance  
I saw the Great Light shine into three circles  
In three clear colors bound in one same space.<sup>4</sup>

In one uncharacteristically poetic passage *The Urantia Book* represents the Trinity in a comparable way, as symbol-

ized by concentric spheres: "The personal presence of the Universal Father is immediately surrounded by the personal presence of the Eternal Son, while they are both invested by the unspeakable glory of the Infinite Spirit." (U. B. p. 118)

In *The Urantia Book*, God as Father is analogous to Dante's "Great Light that shines into three circles." The Father is "logically" primal—and central—in relation to the co-equal Mother-Son and Infinite Spirit. (*The Urantia Book* even presents the symbol of the Trinity as three concentric circles, azure in color.)

The Father is primal in relation to the Trinity, and he is also the "First Source and Center" of all other things and beings, whereas the Son and the Spirit are designated as the "Second Source and Center" and "Third Source and Center" respectively. The Primal Father has many phases of manifestation. In one phase, the Father is the source and center of the physical cosmos, by virtue of being the First Cause of its universal gravitational and energy center. This great center is called "Paradise;" *The Urantia Book* appropriates the multivalent term "paradise" from the scriptural and artistic traditions of Christianity and gives it a very different, modern twist.

God is the source of Paradise—what *The Urantia Book* calls the eternal, central, motionless "Isle of Paradise," or "Eternal Isle." Paradise is "from eternity;" it is actually causeless. But *The Urantia Book* uses the language of causation as a "philosophic concession...to the time-bound, space-fettered, finite mind of man, to the impossibility of creature comprehension of eternity existences..." (U. B. p. 6)

The Isle of Paradise is absolutely unique in the cosmos. It is the truly *holy center* of the universe of universes: "Paradise is the center of the force-energy activation of the cosmos—the universe position of the First Source and Center..." (U. B. p. 1149) Amazingly, while it is both "physical"—a "central material object"—yet it is also a time-space transcendent body composed of an "absolute" material found nowhere else:

The eternal Isle is composed of a single form of materialization—stationary systems of reality. This literal substance of Paradise is a homogeneous organization of space potency not to be found elsewhere in all the wide universe of universes. It has received many names in different universes, and... [we] have long since named it *absolutum*. This Paradise source material is neither dead nor alive; it is the original nonspiritual expression of the First Source and Center; it is *Paradise*, and Paradise is without duplicate.

It appears to us that the First Source and Center has concentrated all absolute potential for cosmic reality in Paradise as a part of his technique of self-liberation from infinity limitations, as a means of making possible subinfinite, even time-space, creation. But it does not follow that Paradise is time-space limited just because the

universe of universes discloses these qualities. **Paradise exists without time and has no location in space.**

(U. B. p. 120) [Emphasis added]

Timeless and spaceless, Paradise is also, we are told, absolutely at rest and motionless. *The Urantia Book* has a great deal to say about the nature of space that is beyond the scope of this article. The concept of space is of course all-important in any cosmology. One amazing claim after another about cosmology emanates from *The Urantia Book*. Some of these are genuine predictions in the sense that they are verifiable or falsifiable by scientific observation. Perhaps the chief of these is that all extant galaxies are actually *in procession around an absolute center of gravity*. We have seen that recent astrophysical research on the “peculiar motion” of galaxies could lend itself to such a conclusion. This universal rotation around the Holy Center of Paradise is due to the fact that the eternal Isle “is the center and focal point of *absolute material gravity*.” (U. B. p. 125) {Emphasis added}

Intervening between observable galaxies and the Paradise Center is a central material creation, which *The Urantia Book* calls the central universe, or “Havona.” Out beyond the central universe are galaxies that rotate around the central universe in a counter-clockwise ellipse, which in turn is also rotating around Paradise. These are organized as seven massive galaxy clusters known as the “seven superuniverses.”

Your solar system and other worlds of time are not plunging headlong, without chart and compass, into unmapped space. The local universe to which your system belongs is pursuing a definite and well-understood counterclockwise course around the vast swing that encircles the central universe. This cosmic path is well charted and is just as thoroughly known to the superuniverse star observers as the orbits of the planets constituting your solar system are known to Urantia (our world) astronomers. (U. B. p. 165)

Scientists who have contemplated *The Urantia Book* have wrestled long with its controversial claim of a universe Center, around which all material creation rotates. It obviously flies in the face of a key principle of relativity, the contention that there is no unique physical reference frame in the universe, nothing motionless by which to measure other motions.

Yet there are many points of contact with modern cosmology. For example, Paradise as presented in *The Urantia Book* is not unlike the theoretic *singularity* of modern physics. In a sense, it is the ontologization of the singularity. Paradise is conceived as the “absolute” forerunner and source of matter-energy, gravity, and space. Is this all that unlike current notions that space-time and all other properties of the cosmos unfurled from some “point” outside of space-time? Yet the differences with today’s physics are manifold; Paradise — as the onto-singularity — is more than a mere mathematical construct. We are told that Paradise continues to exist — it exists

“from eternity” and always will exist — even after the expansion of space-time from the theoretic singularity. Paradise is depicted as the center — the stationary nucleus — of all matter-energy, the absolute source of gravity, and the focal point of space. It’s rather a different entity than Milton’s lost Paradise, or the garden Paradise of Genesis, or Hawking’s Big Bang singularity!

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### **The Paradoxical Mystery of Paradise**

God is portrayed in *The Urantia Book* as the Source and Center of both *spiritual reality* and the material universe. God is *factually* resident at the center of the cosmos: “The absolute personality of Deity exists on...Paradise.” (U. B. p. 5) “The Universal Father is cosmically focalized, spiritually personalized, and geographically resident at this center of the universe of universes.” (U. B. p. 118) Energy and spirit, fact and truth — all things divergent in the time-space universes — become one in the presence of the Father on Paradise.

How did Paradise “arise” in eternity? In the “eternal past,” *The Urantia Book* discloses that the first transaction was what modern theologians might call God’s *kenosis*. Kenotic activity in this sense signifies God’s choice to self-limit his unqualified infinity. He accomplishes this by “absolutizing” the Son, the divine Other. The Eternal Son is the *absolute of personality*. Simultaneously with this stupendous transaction, God became first cause of the *absolute of his non-spiritual selfhood*. In this eternity-moment: Paradise flashed forth from the Father. In the final eternity-transaction, this duality is resolved perfectly in the “eternity-appearance” of the Infinite Spirit, the harmonizer and unifier of the absolutes of spirit (the Son) and matter (Paradise). Thus the Trinity, in *The Urantia Book* formulation, has an absolute non-spiritual co-ordinate — Paradise.

In a very important sense, Paradise is also the absolute *paradox*. Waxing paradoxical, *The Urantia Book* depicts Paradise as “the geographic center of infinity.” (U. B. p. 126) Elsewhere the text says: “The Isle of Paradise has a universe location but no position in space.” (U. B. p. 7) In another passage Paradise is depicted as the largest material body in the universe, yet it is *outside of space and time*. In other passages, we are told that Paradise is the nucleus both of the whole physical cosmos, and of each ultimate particle of the cosmos. Thus, the concept “Paradise” stands for a *radical* one-to-many, whole-part dynamic in the cosmos.

*Recentering of Theology, cont.*

Its dynamism of paradox is worthy of the famous “the one and the many” dialectic of Plato’s dialogue *Parmenides*, or Hegel’s dialectical method in his *Logic*.

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*But among the startling declarations about Paradise, perhaps the most outrageous is this statement: Paradise is the Source and Center of the whole cosmos by virtue of being its energy source and gravity center, but it also interpenetrates the cosmos at the smallest scale as the nucleus of each indivisible part.*

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But among the startling declarations about Paradise, perhaps the most outrageous is this statement: Paradise is the Source and Center of the whole cosmos by virtue of being its energy source and gravity center, but it also interpenetrates the cosmos at the smallest scale as the nucleus of each indivisible *part*. In other words, the claim is that Paradise is at one and the same time *the nucleus of each ultimate material unit* of the cosmos, and yet, is also the source and center of Infinity—the totality of the physical (and spiritual) cosmos! How is this conceivable? In the final analysis, it is humanly inconceivable and utterly paradoxical:

It is will-nigh impossible for human logic and finite reason to harmonize the concept of divine immanence, God within and a part of every individual, with the idea of God’s transcendence, the divine domination of the universe of universes. (U. B. p. 69) But never can a creature understand how it is that this unity becomes duality, triunity, and diversity yet while remaining an unqualified unity. (U. B. p. 1261)

It turns out that Paradise is paradigmatic of a radical, holographic whole-part relation that pervades all levels of reality. This feature of Paradise allows us to conceive of a special form of *panentheism*, to be considered later. The whole-to-part dynamics underlying *The Urantia Book’s* cosmology is paradoxical and holographic, following the contours of the Paradise-concept. Not surprisingly, its *theology* follows the same complex dualistic-unity pattern, and the result is a radically pantheistic teaching. From this point of view, the theology of *The Urantia Book* can be restated as “God is in each one and each one is in God.” In one summary statement, we are told that “the creature not only exists in God, but God also lives in the creature.” (U. B. p. 45) This is held to be one of the secrets of the mystery of divine transcendence and immanence, according to *The Urantia Book*. It is also a central principle of the cosmo-theocentric model of the universe presented here.

Does contemporary theological cosmology or natural theology in any way ratify these claims? As a vehicle to get at this question, we will next consider existing theories that support the notion of the universe as “in” God. After this, we will turn the cosmic tables and look at ways in which today’s science-theology dialogue conceives of God as *in*

each and every part of the universe.

### The Universe “in” God

Given the triumphs of modern science, one wonders what is left for God to do that is not already determined by natural law or self-organizing natural processes. But if we are to build a robust theological cosmology, a place must be created for “divine action in the world” which does not unduly contradict or override causal relationships shown by science to be intrinsic to the natural order, yet does not fall into the pantheistic fallacy of identifying these natural laws and processes *as* God.

The deistic God of the European Enlightenment is dualistically separate from the world, and acts only as an *ex nihilo* creator. Deists of those days and on up to Steven Hawking conceive of a God who sets in place the world’s “initial conditions” and laws of operation, and then retires from the cosmic stage of action. But this is unsatisfactory if we are to conceive of God as relational, as lovingly and actively involved with his creation and his creatures. The Christian theological tradition known as *creatio continua* addresses this richer notion of God’s ongoing engagement with his world following the *creation ex nihilo*. *Creatio continua* seems especially relevant in the light of the modern understanding of the universe as dynamic, unfinished, indeterminate, and in a state of emergence. “*Creatio continua* suggests the presence and immanence of God at the heart of nature.”<sup>5</sup>

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What sorts of models have been suggested for understanding continuing creation? In Biblical Christianity, God is totally transcendent and yet immanent in his creation in mysterious ways: “Thou dost cause the grass to grow for cattle and the plants for man to cultivate. When thou sendest forth thy Spirit, they are created; and thou renewest the face of the ground.” (Psalm 104: 14 & 30). And as wholly transcendent to his creation, God is capable of contravening natural processes in extraordinary divine acts such as the sending of manna to the Hebrews, or in the birth and resurrection and healing miracles of Jesus. Thomistic metaphysics offers the somewhat more sophisticated notion of a First Cause which acts instrumentally through secondary causes both in nature and in human activity.

The rise of earth sciences, evolutionary biology, and thermodynamics in the 19th century and Einsteinian cosmology in the twentieth has opened a new avenue for understanding *creatio continua*.

A growing number of theologians now stress the dynamics, indeterminacy, and novelty of nature (including human nature) as critical loci of God's participation in the universe. In this perspective God is continuously creating the world anew, guiding and urging mankind toward fulfillment and consummation in the Spirit.<sup>6</sup>

It is in this connection that an entirely novel concept of causality has come into being. For several hundred years, reductionistic Western science has carried forth its project of attempting to predict the macroscopic states of natural systems through an exclusive attention to the understanding of their parts. But this method assumes a linear relationship of causality between parts and the behavior of the whole. We now know that there are a myriad of complex, non-linear natural phenomena that do not yield their secrets to such a reductionist program. These systems exhibit a striking characteristic of non-reducible hierarchical ordering. And these complex, chaotic and "dissipative" phenomena are inherently unpredictable, though deterministic. A new model of causality is therefore required. Numerous scientific disciplines (as diverse as meteorology and neuro-immunology) have found it necessary to adopt a holistic, "downward," or top-down model of causality. In many cases, this new holism simply replaces reductionistic "bottom up" explanations; in others, it complements them.

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One notable attempt to inscribe such complex systems into a new cosmological theology is that of scientist and theologian Arthur Peacocke. He has proposed a model of God's action in the world in which a transcendent God influences the *system-as-a-whole* of complex systems, *constraining* the total system in ways that determine the behavior of the parts toward whatever ends God purposes. In other words, the general state of the total world-system is influenced by God so that its holistic state becomes a "top-down" causative factor on the subsystems that comprise it. The divine causal influence comes from outside the system, as it were; therefore God's "shaping" activity can be accomplished without contravening the natural laws of the systems. Peacocke directly compares this causal action of God to our understanding of how the total brain state determines bodily activity:

My suggestion is that a combination of the notion of Spring, 1996

top-down causation from the integrated unitive mind/brain state to human bodily action...with the recognition of the unity of the human mind/brain/body event...together provide a fruitful clue or model for illuminating how we might think of God's interaction with the world...In this model, God would be regarded as exerting continuously top-down causative influences on the world-as-a-whole in a way analogous to that whereby we in our thinking can exert effects on our bodies in a top-down manner.<sup>7</sup>

Our thinking directly influences our bodies toward implementing our intentions. This according to Peacocke is roughly analogous to the way God interacts with the world. The key difference is that the "I" of personal subjectivity by definition does not transcend our bodies ontologically, whereas God's subjectivity by definition does transcend the natural world. It is notable that Peacocke speaks of God's personal agency in terms of "centering" influence:

When we act as personal agents, there is a unitive, unifying, **centering** constraint on the activity of our human bodies.... God is here being conceived [also] as a unifying, unitive, and **centering** influence on events in the world.<sup>8</sup> [Emphasis added]

For Peacocke, the world is "in" God; God transcends nature, but acts upon it as a centering, unifying influence—and in some sense *is* its center. With this in mind, how can we conceive of God as being somehow "in" each part of the cosmos while yet fully transcendent in some manner perhaps resembling Peacocke's model?

### God in Each Part of the Universe

Many proposals have been advanced in recent years for explaining how quantum indeterminacy provides an opening for divine action in the world, for a genuine *creatio continua*. Among these, I have found the model advanced by theologian and philosopher of science Nancy Murphy to be the most compelling. As a balance to top-down models of divine causality, it provides a most serviceable approach to the notion that God is "in" each part of the cosmos.

We saw earlier that the Newtonian reductionistic model of reality melted away in the realization that most natural systems are complex, that is, non-reducibly hierarchical, and, in the case of chaotic systems, inherently unpredictable yet determinate. Nancy Murphy grants that "going to the top"—Peacocke's top-down causation or whole-part constraint model—is the right move if we are to understand how God might influence such hierarchies. But another move is possible; Murphy shows how the "bottom-most level"—i.e., quantum events understood as ontologically indeterminate—allows for a "bottom-up" model of divine causation which is yet radically distinct from Newtonian reductionism. In fact, Murphy suggests that "we turn to a bottom-up account as the most plausible supplement to Peacocke's top-down approach."<sup>9</sup>

### *Recentering of Theology, cont.*

Unlike chaotic systems, quantum events are both unpredictable (though governed by probability equations), and indeterminate. Following most physicists, Murphy chooses to see them as *ontologically* indeterminate. But how does one interpret the real meaning of ontological indeterminacy in quantum events? Murphy eliminates from consideration (1) the pantheistic option that explains quantum events as somehow “self-caused,” (2) the nihilistic option that quantum events are totally random and undetermined, and, finally, (3) Einstein’s preferred option which holds that hidden variables are somehow at work. What remains? The only option left, amazingly, is “divine determination [of quantum events]...To put it crudely, God is the hidden variable.” Murphy calls this, boldly, “God’s bottom-up causation.” God can manipulate initial conditions at the quantum level, producing effects at higher levels as God chooses.<sup>10</sup>

We now have a locus for *creatio continua*. The upshot of Murphy’s analysis is clear. God is “in” each and all parts of his creation, *indeed at the scale of individual quantum events*. How does God act within electrons in ways that are consistent with what we call natural law? “God acts within the regime of law by actualizing, at chosen times, one or another of the built-in potentialities of each subatomic entity.”<sup>11</sup> Nancey Murphy provides a bottom-up model that allows the participation of a transcendent God in each and every part of his creation.

### **Paradise and the Cosmos**

Comparable forms of top-down and bottom-up divine action are embedded in *The Urantia Book’s* concept of Paradise. First, God acts on the physical cosmos through its Paradise Universal Center: “As a physical controller in the material universe of universes, the First Source and Center functions in the patterns of the eternal Isle of Paradise, and through this absolute gravity center the eternal God exercises cosmic overcontrol of the physical level...throughout the universe of universes.” (U. B. p. 24) This is the general mode of the top-down action of God in the physical cosmos. And there are many other forms of top-down causality emanating through Paradise—acting via numerous intermediate agencies—presented in *The Urantia Book*.

And second, Paradise acts from the bottom-up through its *fractal* pieces, the ultimatons. We have seen previously that Paradise is *non-spacial*, and that “space exists relative to Paradise...Paradise exists at the focus of space.” (U. B. p. 1156) Moreover, the physical presence of Paradise at the focus of space is manifest *in space* as the instantaneous grasp of gravity *at the level of the ultimatons*. (Again, we refer here to the form of gravity denominated as “absolute gravity.”) This means that the universal overcontrol of the First Source and Center extends to the quantum level of matter. And this is but one of the implications of the disclosure that each ultimatons has the Universe Center as its nucleus. According to math-

ematician Philip Calabrese, the claim that each ultimatons is upheld by Paradise gravity means that “presumably, this is the true strong force.” In this connection, Dr. Calabrese also suggests that the Paradise-concept may be the secret behind the phenomenon of nonlocality:

Contemporary quantum mechanics...is confronted now-a-days by experiments described as “non-local reality” phenomena.... Perhaps the answer to this conundrum is not “non-local” reality, but rather “omni-local” reality, the omni-presence of Paradise...in and near space.<sup>12</sup>

In view of this speculation, an obvious area for further research is physicist David Bohm’s concept of an implicate order underlying quantum indeterminacy. Could it be that the true “hidden variable” behind ontological indeterminacy is the presence of Paradise?

### **Paradise: Mythology, Science, and Theology**

Although the concept of Paradise presented in *The Urantia Book* is novel, this article shows that evolutionary thought has envisioned pieces and parts of this master cosmological concept.

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*A modern theological perspective on the Big Bang singularity would also locate it in “sacred space”; even the most materialistic cosmologist would agree that the point of origin of the universe must be outside of space-time.*

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From comparative mythology, we know that a “symbolism of the Centre” is universal in prescientific cultures: in mythical thought, where a Center arises, there sacred space *is*. The hierophany cannot originate from within profane, three-dimensional space. A modern theological perspective on the Big Bang singularity would also locate it in “sacred space”; even the most materialistic cosmologist would agree that the point of origin of the universe must be outside of space-time. But no cosmology that I know of claims that the singularity of physics plays a *creatio continua* role as universe source and center. And nothing in thermodynamics points to an ongoing Source that reverses the “entropy arrow of time” and exists outside of time.

We have seen that some of the disclosures of *The Urantia Book* about science could be falsifiable by observation. Perhaps most important is my claim that the large-scale streaming of galaxies toward “attractors” may be evidence of universal rotation around an absolute gravity center. And it is not unthinkable that experimental particle physics may disclose the existence of ultimatons—beyond the obvious heuristic function of that concept.

Finally, the cosmo-theocentric theology of *The Urantia Book* offers exciting support for the panentheistic perspectives now emerging in theology. The teachings that Paradise—the dwelling place of God—is also the nucleus of the smallest

units of the cosmos, is not unlike Murphy's argument that God is indeed the "hidden variable" behind quantum indeterminacy. God also acts through his holy center as transcendent to his universe, not unlike the top-down causality of Arthur Peacocke.

In the final analysis, the ultimate validation of the stereoscopic vision underlying cosmo-theocentrism is religious experience. It is here, in sacred space, that we recognize *the fact* that we are in God, just as we intuit *the truth* that God is the First Source and Center of each of his children and of our universe—indeed our Holy Center.

<sup>1</sup> "Unraveling the Universe," *Time*, March 6, 1995, p. 84.

<sup>2</sup> "Galaxies in Motion," *Chronicles of Higher Education*, April 4, 1994.

<sup>3</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism*, (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1969), pp. 39-40.

<sup>4</sup> Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy: Volume III: Paradise*, trans. Mark Musa, 33-115-17.

<sup>5</sup> Robert John Russell, "Cosmology, Creation, and Contingency," in *Cosmos as Creation*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), p. 182.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, p. 185

<sup>7</sup> Arthur R. Peacocke, "God's Interaction with the World: The Implications of Deterministic 'Chaos' and of Interconnected and Interdependent Complexity," in *Chaos and Complexity: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action*, (Berkeley: Center for Theology and Natural Sciences, 1995), p. 285

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, p.

<sup>9</sup> Nancey Murphy, "Divine Action in the Natural Order: Buridan's Ass and Schrodinger's Cat," in *Chaos and Complexity: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action*, (Berkeley: Center for Theology and Natural Sciences, 1995), p. 339.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, p. 342

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, p. 350

<sup>12</sup> Philip G. Calabrese, Ph. D. "The Kingdom of God and The Cosmology of *The Urantia Book*." [A paper presented at Scientific Symposium III for Readers of *The Urantia Book*, Oklahoma City, OK, on July 5, 1994.]

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## Death, the Final Frontier

Richard I. Bain

In the original Star Trek series, Captain Kirk informed us at the beginning of each show that space is the final frontier. This may be true for our civilization, but isn't death the final frontier for us as individuals? Even if we have some idea of what death is about and what lies beyond, it is nevertheless an impenetrable and absolute barrier for the living. Death is a leap into a totally unfamiliar existence, from this familiar world of things and people. But is it the leap that we fear so much? I used to think that death is highly overrated as an object of fear until I realized that death is both a destination and a process. The destination may cause some anxiety because of the uncertainties it holds, but it is anticipation of our journey to this destination which often induces the most fear.

Modern medicine can be a great blessing for some, but it can be a two edged sword for those people reaching life's end. The power to heal includes the ability to prolong life even when the wisdom of doing so is questionable. Dr. George M. Burnell<sup>1</sup> tells of his mother who was in the last stages of Alzheimer's disease. She had a pacemaker and would soon require an operation to replace the battery. The doctor decided that it would be better if the battery were not replaced so his mother could slip away naturally and so save her and his family from further suffering. He was contacted by the District Attorney's office who told him that the pacemaker company, fearing a lawsuit if his mother died, had filed a complaint. Dr. Burnell consulted with the hospital's ethics committee who supported his decision not to replace the battery. The District Attorney's office indicated that they would not actively pursue the case. He did not hear from the pacemaker company again, but he did hear from their lawyer who now worked for a right-to-life group. The group threatened to bring a suit against the doctor if he didn't replace the battery. Leery of a long, costly, stressful, and possibly futile court battle, the doctor gave in and authorized replacement of the battery. His mother's condition continued to deteriorate and she died a year after the battery replacement. The right-to-life group won; common sense and mercy lost.

It would be wonderful if everyone could have an easy death; go to sleep one evening and not wake up the next morning. A retired doctor once lamented to me that, before antibiotics, pneumonia carried away many terminally ill older people, but the invention of antibiotics enabled the medical system to keep them alive, sometimes to suffer a long and painful death. Is it progress when the advances of modern medicine enable a sophisticated medical team to keep a brain-dead body alive indefinitely, or even worse, to keep a conscious, suffering person alive despite the wishes of the person or the person's family?

*Death, The Final Frontier, cont.*

There was a time when many people died at home, surrounded by their families. Today we may spend our final days surrounded by strangers who control our bodies, but who are often either too busy, too stressed out, or too burned out to spare us any compassion. Even in a medical facility we may not be able to escape severe pain. Medical personnel are trained not to over-medicate so they may withhold pain killing medication from a cancer patient in his or her final stages of life for fear of addicting the person to the narcotics used for pain control. Small wonder that so many people are asking doctors to assist them in ending their lives.

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### **Euthanasia, a Slippery Slope**

Webster's *New Collegiate Dictionary* defines euthanasia as: "The act or practice of killing individuals...that are hopelessly sick or injured." Euthanasia is not just one issue. It's many issues, ranging from living wills and not using extraordinary means to keep a person alive, to giving a person in a coma an overdose of sedatives. For the purpose of discussion, I identify the following categories:

#### **I. Passive Euthanasia**

- A. Withholding life sustaining treatment from conscious person at their request.
- B. Withholding life sustaining treatment from an unconscious person in accordance with the provisions of a living will.
- C. Withholding life sustaining treatment from an unconscious person at the request of family or the person's predesignated decision maker.

#### **II. Active Voluntary Euthanasia**

- A. Giving a person the necessary means and instruction to end their lives.
- B. Giving a deliberate overdose of prescription drugs or using other means to end the life of a conscious person who requests the procedure but is unable to do it for themselves.
- C. Causing the death of a person in a coma who requested the procedure before the coma occurred.

#### **III. Active Involuntary Euthanasia.**

- A. Causing the death of a person in a coma who did not previously request this but whose family or decision maker make the request.
- B. Causing the death of a person in a coma who did not prerequisite this and who has no fam-

ily or designated decision-maker to make this decision for them. Sometimes known as mercy killing.

I have tried to list the various types of euthanasia in order of difficulty in dealing with the ethical issues. Passive euthanasia might be thought of as death by benign neglect. Our laws have changed to accommodate this option, and our social mores are evolving toward acceptance, but there are those who still disagree on religious grounds. In fact, conservatives have called euthanasia a "slippery slope," no doubt fearing that it will not stop at passive euthanasia. They are right.

Option II, active voluntary euthanasia, is the frontier we struggle with today. This is the social arena where Dr. Kevorkian and others are doing battle with the law and society. Some groups, such as the Hemlock Society, prefer to call this option (when performed by a doctor) physician assisted dying, whereas the right-to-life groups prefer to call it assisted suicide. Getting this option legalized may be very difficult with the present level of opposition, but the Dutch have found a way to allow physician assisted dying without making it legal.

Physician assisted suicide (or dying) is not legal in The Netherlands, but it is practiced and doctors who follow certain guidelines are not prosecuted. The guidelines include: review of the case by other doctors and repeated requests for assistance in dying by the patient. Also, the doctor must insure that the individual is not suffering from depression. But even this last stipulation is now in question since the government recently declined to press charges against a Dutch physician who assisted a severely depressed woman to commit suicide. Some ethicists have expressed concern that we now seem to be slipping backwards on the "slippery slope." Have the Dutch authorities stretched public acceptance to its elastic limits? What are the limits? Where can we find guidance on this subject?

### **The Christian Perspective**

Christians of all persuasions are vigorously debating the issues concerning euthanasia. While the most strident voices emanate from conservative Protestant churches and the Catholic church, quieter voices from other segments of the Christian community are engaged in earnest debate and asking to be heard. In a recent article<sup>2</sup>, John Burgess, a Presbyterian theologian, discusses the problem of euthanasia from a moderate Christian perspective. Burgess says that Christians must examine the issues in light of the scriptures, and in consideration of the effects on the Christian community of which the individual is a member. In considering the reasons against euthanasia, he points to the possible redemptive value of pain and suffering to the individual and to the Christian community. He feels that coping with pain and suffering in a supportive Christian



community can deepen the faith of the individual and the community as well. Regarding the problem of individual rights versus the will of the Christian community he says, "On the one hand, Christians will respect others' autonomy.... On the other hand Christians will seek to persuade others of the truth they find in Christ; they will even seek to promote it in public policy." Burgess makes another point about the legalization and promotion of euthanasia and doctor assisted suicide. If we legalize and approve these two, will we be encouraging the disabled and aged to take their lives to avoid being a burden on society and their families? Burgess's article reveals the delicate balancing act that the moderate Christian churches must do on this issue, and the difficulty moderate Christians face in trying to answer 20th century questions using theology from the Middle Ages.

The attitude of Dr. Leslie D. Weatherhead, a retired British clergyman, seems typical of that of liberal Christians. In one of his books<sup>3</sup>, he makes his attitude abundantly clear with the following remark: "If proper safeguards are strictly imposed.... I for one would be willing to give a patient the Holy Communion and stay with him while a doctor, whose responsibility I would thus share, allowed a patient to lay down his useless body and pass in dignity and peace into the next phase of being."

### **Your Answer Book?**

I used to have a colleague who kidded me about my study of *The Urantia Book*. When a tough moral or ethical question would come up in conversation he would ask, "What does *Your Answer Book* say about that?" Wouldn't it be convenient for students of *The Urantia Book* if they could flip open the book and find answers to questions such as the morality of euthanasia spelled out in detail? But, like Jesus, the authors of the book refrain from dealing with such social questions. Suicide is brought up a few times, but usually only as an anthropological fact regarding past cultures. In the case of Judas's suicide, the authors say, "...this renegade mortal...committed the final act in the drama of fleeing from the realities of mortal existence—suicide." (U.B. p. 1567) Note, however, that Judas was not a terminal cancer or AIDS patient trying to avoid a slow and painful death. They really don't address suicide under these circumstances, and their restraint is understandable. Any value judgment made might be in harmony with the mores of one age or culture, but not of another.

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Spring, 1996

us decide the issues. It is our world, and ultimately our personal decision as to what will be acceptable in making these judgments. What shall be our guiding principle in these cases? It seems to me that the most worthy general principle is to do what is in the best interests of the individual first, but at the same time being mindful of what is in the best interests of society. Hopefully, the interests of the individual will coincide with the interests of an enlightened society. This leads to the real question which is: What *is* in the best interests of an individual?

### **The Two Sides of the Coin**

Patiently bearing our suffering may develop our characters, but is there a point beyond which suffering is no longer of value? Do we have the moral right to end our lives? The right-to-life proponent says that all human life is sacred and that only God can determine when we are to die; if we practice euthanasia, we are playing God. They tell us that suffering is God's will so we should bear it and not interfere. And of course they know God's will based on their interpretation of the Bible by their particular Christian sect. If they do indeed know God's will, it would be foolhardy to argue with them. But if their belief is incorrect, then they are promoting needless suffering for innocent people.

On the other side of the question are the folks who say, "Look, when old Rover was blind, deaf, and in pain, I had the vet put him out of his misery. I hope someone does it for me if I can't do it for myself." Just one problem, it's legal to end Rover's suffering with a needle, but if you do it to his owner, the jury might call it murder. Can we really compare putting our pet to sleep with mercy killing of a human being? People have constitutional rights, souls, and other attributes that animals do not possess. You can buy a book that will give you the lethal doses of various drugs. Groups like the Hemlock Society work to get euthanasia legalized. Do some people too easily accept euthanasia and assisted suicide? Should we draw a line and say, "You may not go beyond this line?"

### **Change: Painful but Necessary**

You would have to live on a remote island to ignore the euthanasia and assisted suicide issues. Dr. Kevorkian has had plenty of media attention while he tweaks the noses of the authorities with his actions. We may be a bit leery of endorsing his campaign; we may not be comfortable with his bold assisted suicides. It takes time for the mores to evolve and encompass new ideas. This is the social flywheel that prevents society from being jerked back and forth and torn asunder by the engines of change. The ethical issues to be resolved are complex and many.

In an article in *TimeLines*, John A. Pridonoff<sup>4</sup> cautions that the recent court victories for the pro-euthanasia movement in Michigan and Washington could create serious divisions in society as has happened with the abortion issue

*Death, The Final Frontier, cont.*

after the Roe vs. Wade decision. He advocates bringing as many people as possible into the process to reduce the divisiveness between euthanasia advocates and opponents. There will be some tough issues to deal with. Can a doctor or minister whose religious beliefs preclude euthanasia be supportive of a person who chooses it? These issues need to be resolved, but there is even more that we need to do.

Withholding life support is generally legal now and seems to be accepted by most people, and doctors are increasingly adapting to this situation. But what happens when and if physician assisted dying becomes a legal option? Dr. George Burnell, in a *TimeLines* report<sup>5</sup>, points out that few doctors have the training or even the vocabulary to discuss this new responsibility they may have to take on. Deliberately ending a life is counter to the philosophy of much of their training. Further, few doctors know the right drugs and dosages to euthanize someone. It is obvious that training courses will have to be set up to deal with this gap in knowledge. And doctors are not the only ones who will need training. Ministers must learn to support those who are trying to decide on euthanasia, or have already decided, and to help the person's family deal with the decision. People in both professions may need support groups to help them cope with the stress. Ministers and doctors will also have to serve on committees to decide who is a candidate for assisted dying and who isn't. What will be their criteria for such decisions?

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*It is obvious that what is an acceptable quality of life to one person is unacceptable to another. The will of the person must be honored; only the individual can decide what is acceptable to him or her and what constitutes an acceptable quality of life.*

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### **Respecting the Human Will**

We have heard much debate about the quality of life of terminally ill people. Unfortunately, this quality is as difficult to determine as what is in the best interests of the person. Part of the problem is that—at least in the case of a person who is conscious and mentally competent—one person may be willing to suffer intense pain and die naturally, while another may wish to die as soon as the pain becomes troublesome. It is obvious that what is an acceptable quality of life to one person is unacceptable to another. The will of the person must be honored; only the individual can decide what is acceptable to him or her and what constitutes an acceptable quality of life. But if the person is in a coma, who could decide to terminate the person's life? Even if they had expressed such a wish in a living will, it would not be legal. Will the laws eventually allow a surrogate decision maker or ethics committee to make such decisions?

### **The Involuntary Euthanasia Frontier**

When I was part of a church visitation program, one of the people I visited in nursing homes was a man who was a retired engineer. He was intelligent and talented, but a stroke had seriously impaired his ability to speak and move about. Almost every time I visited him, he expressed, in his halting fashion, the wish to die. But he was one of the lucky ones there. Others lay mute and unmoving, eyes fixed on the ceiling. Or perhaps their hands fluttered slightly and they moaned unceasingly. Some could be sustained for months or even years like this. Some were mercifully unaware of anything; others were trapped in a living hell, isolated in a body that was only a prison for the spirit and mind. These are the most tragic ones, wishing to die, unable to die. It is a great temptation for a doctor or nurse to give such people a drug overdose if they can do it without being detected. If a person kept their pet alive under such conditions, surely we would wonder at their cruelty. Yet the mores of our society mandate that we keep these people alive, stored in nursing homes like old furniture in warehouses, placed conveniently out of sight so we don't have to see their anguish and despair. Involuntary euthanasia may be a line that we can't cross now, but mercy demands that we eventually legalize involuntary euthanasia to free them from a fate worse than death. Are we wise enough to explore this final frontier? With care, concern, and caution, we can. We must.

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<sup>1</sup> Burnell, George M., M.D. *Final Choices: To Live or to Die in an Age of Medical Technology*. New York: Plenum Press, 1993.

<sup>2</sup> Burgess, John P., "Can I Know that My Time Has Come?", *Theology Today* (July, 1994)

<sup>3</sup> Weatherhead, Dr. Leslie D., *The Christian Agnostic*, Abington Press (1965)

<sup>4</sup> Pridnoff, John A. "Courts Busy, Still no Affirmative Law." *TimeLines*, Newsletter of Hemlock Society, (July-August, 1994)

<sup>5</sup> Burnell, George M. "Chapter Leader, Physician Join Hemlock Board." *TimeLines* (July-August, 1994)

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## *The Urantia Book* *and Spiritual Renewal*

### **My Odyssey of Peak Experiences**

**Meredith J. Sprunger**

Our lives are shaped by our peak experiences. These episodes of transcendence are sometimes difficult to explain, but most people have a sense of the ministry of a Reality above and beyond themselves which is bringing meaning to their lives: "...at every crossroad in the forward struggle, the Spirit of Truth will always speak, saying, 'This is the way.'" (U. B. p. 383)

My search for knowledge and truth started at an early age. I have a vivid memory at the age of four of a compelling urge and deep hunger to know more about life. I was standing outside on the south side of our house in bright sunshine. I recall saying to myself, "There is something about life that I do not understand, but I'm going to find out."

These prayers of the heart take years to integrate our minds and fashion our lives. Along the way critical or peak experiences stand out in our memory. The death of my mother when I was about nine, and the death of my father a year and a half later, were rugged reality probing confrontations. I recall sitting in our front room during the home funeral service of my father looking out of our picture window at a herd of cows grazing in the sunshine, and saying to myself, "Now I'm like those cows with no one to care for me but God."

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*These prayers of the heart take years to integrate our minds and fashion our lives. Along the way critical or peak experiences stand out in our memory.*

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An aunt and uncle took me to live with them at their home in the country. When I was around thirteen, we went to the Mennonite Church in Berne, Indiana to hear the community chorus sing Handel's Messiah. I was so carried away by the spiritual grandeur of the lyrics and music that I became acutely aware of my own finitude and insignificance. When we got home, I went up to my room and prayed fervently, "Lord, make me a part of something more important and significant than myself!" Little did I realize that one day I would have the privilege of being one of the pioneers associated with the Fifth Epochal Revelation.

My central interests have always been nature, philosophy, and religion. As I struggled with the decision of what course of study I would pursue in college, I was drawn to a career as a naturalist. Since I was without parental guidance, I tried to think objectively. Reasoning that my attraction to

nature was a passing adolescent fancy, I attempted to make a more mature, conventional choice. Since I was always interested in the "why and wherefore" of things, I thought that chemistry fit this description. Knowing, however, that I did not want to spend my life in a laboratory, I settled on chemical engineering.

Although I got the highest grade in chemistry of any freshman chemical engineering student at Purdue that semester, I knew that I did not want to be an engineer. So I turned to my first love and transferred to the School of Forestry. Here I felt comfortable but more and more the idea of philosophy and religion seemed to be calling to me. Comments my uncle made about ministers led me to think he regarded them as "parasites" on society. The idea occurred to me that I could earn my living as a forester and engage in ministry as an avocation. So I wrote Mission House Seminary asking if I could enroll in the seminary after graduating from the School of Forestry. Their reply was, "No, you should have a liberal arts major to enter the seminary." This was a devastating blow to my life plan. What should I do? What was God's will? I walked late nights under the full moon in pasture fields near the agriculture campus trying to decide. It was an agonizing decision, but finally I felt confident that God was calling me to transfer to Mission House College (now Lakeland), major in philosophy, and enter the seminary.

My life pilgrimage proceeded somewhat normally through Mission House Theological Seminary, B.D., Princeton Theological Seminary, M. Th., a pastorate at Trinity United Church of Christ, and earning a Ph. D. in psychology from Purdue. In 1950 I took a position teaching psychology at Elmhurst College and a pastorate at Highland Avenue United Methodist Church in Chicago. The pressure of these two new positions plus the daily 25 mile drive through Chicago traffic began to take their toll. Being a hearty person with considerable ego-reinforcing courage, I plunged on until my physiological and psychological energy reserves were exhausted. Suddenly my ego invulnerability was shattered. I was thrown into the physical exhaustion and psychological depression of battle fatigue. Only those who have experienced the engulfing depth, anguish, and hopelessness of such depression can know what it is like. It is a psychological-spiritual event that tests the depth of the soul. It will either leave you a wounded and broken individual or a transformed and stronger person more in tune with spiritual reality

While it was the dark night of the soul, it was also the transforming peak experience in my life. Stripped of all my ego-defenses and rationalizations, I was faced with either giving in to despair or surrendering my ego-defenses and giving myself completely to God regardless of consequences. I saw this as the only option with which I could identify. My life had been dedicated to God before but now I had faced the ultimate test. The restructuring of my inner life was slow but sure. I had a better understanding of what it means to be

*Odyssey of Peak Experiences, cont.*

spiritually born again. I had passed through the tempering fire of testing and knew the spiritual invincibility of being a son of God. Much later my experience resonated with a passage I read in *The Urantia Book*:

But long before reaching Havona, these ascendant children of time have learned to feast on uncertainty, to fatten upon disappointment, to enthuse over apparent defeat, to invigorate in the presence of difficulties, to exhibit indomitable courage in the face of immensity, and to exercise unconquerable faith when confronted with the challenge of the inexplicable. Long since, the battle cry of these pilgrims became: 'In liaison with God, nothing—absolutely nothing—is impossible.' (U. B. p. 291)

In 1952 we took a pastorate at Grace Church in Culver, Indiana. I found that my spiritual insights and growth took on a new dimension. After several years of working out sermons and papers formulating my own spiritual experience and emphasizing the religion of Jesus rather than the religion about Jesus, I realized that a new spiritual approach was needed in mainline Christian theology. I tentatively outlined a couple of books which needed to be written, but I shied away from the discipline required to write these books. After some time of trying to avoid commitment to this project, I realized that in loyalty to this inner leading a decision had to be made.

To seek the will of God in making this decision I spent hours under the stars in our back yard in Culver. It seemed clear to me that a new theological-spiritual orientation was needed in understanding our Christian faith, and that God was leading me to move in this direction. I finally expressed my willingness to make the commitment to undertake this project. Not long after I made this decision, *The Urantia Book* was placed in my hands. I promised the friend who gave it to me, Judge Louis Hammerschmidt, that I would evaluate it. Its table of contents turned me off; I thought it would be a waste of time to read it. After months of procrastination, I started reading in its Life and Teachings of Jesus. I did not find what I expected to find. It confirmed and greatly enhanced the New Testament story. Often I read with tears streaming down my cheeks. When I finished reading the book, I realized that the basic ideas I had decided to write about were here presented much better than I could possibly formulate them. I had the pervasive sense that my whole life had been prepared for this new vision of spiritual reality: The Fifth Epochal Revelation. The rest of my life has been a postscript and postlude to this climaxing peak experience of my spiritual pilgrimage.

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## *Issues and Answers*

This feature presents controversial issues for thought and debate.

### **Values: Learn Them or Lose them**

**C. Bud Bromley**

In some local papers a while ago there appeared a brief report headlined, "**Committee Rejects Plan to Teach Values in School.**" This decision is, of course, a value judgment which itself determines the way values are taught in our schools. We urgently need to reconsider the shortsightedness of such a decision. Our educational system, consciously or unconsciously, always teaches some kind of values. We need to be clearly intentional about which values we do in fact teach. How can any group exist as a cohesive group if it does not have a clearly understood core of common values? And how shall such values continue to be cherished, if they are not taught, first at home and in the religious groups of our choice, but also in the public schools? We will fall apart as a country if we cannot agree upon a minimum core of *essential public values*, and teach those values vigorously in our schools.

If that seems like an unduly strong statement, then consider this: the increasing number of crimes on our streets clearly indicates an increasing number of people who lack even the minimum values needed to be acceptable citizens in our communities. How many of such unacceptable citizens are we willing to tolerate in our society?

All people are motivated and guided by some kind of values. These standards and objectives may undergird or destroy the welfare of individuals and society. Over the centuries humankind has learned to live by a basic core of values which is conducive to the well being of all people. Each generation must relearn these constructive ideals.

Disraeli once remarked that "History teaches us that we do not learn what history teaches us." The illusion that we can avoid teaching values is a perfect example of just such a failure. One need not be a historian to know that the people who first chose to emigrate to this country did so, for the most part, because they chose to leave their homes rather than desert their most cherished values. Who were the men who wrote our Constitution? Men who placed little emphasis on values? No! The authors were determined to preserve certain core religious and political values. Who are the veterans who have fought to preserve this country? Men and women uncommitted to higher values? No! We fought to preserve the ideal of democracy, as opposed to the "ideal" of totalitarian rule. And note: whether Jew, Christian, or atheist—black or white—management or labor—Democrat or Republican—we all fought together. On December 6th, 1941, we were still bickering among ourselves like brothers and sisters. But on

December 7th, we were united like a family, because there was a common core of values which we all held dear. And now, half a century later, we see the same unity in protecting and defending these ideals in the Middle East.

The ill-conceived notion that we “must not teach values” reflects at least two major errors of thinking. The first is the notion that in a democracy everyone’s values are of equal worth. Our judicial system is an eloquent testimony to the error of such thinking. A working democracy requires the values of shared power, and shared respect. The idea that just a few people should rule and have all the power with no respect for the masses beneath them has no place in our political philosophy. Our society should not respect persons who want all of their rights without accepting any of their responsibilities. Many adult “rights” are not rights at all; they are privileges which must be earned by proving one’s self to be trustworthy. The deliberate despoiler is not deserving of a decent citizen’s rights. And we should teach these ideals of good citizenship to our children. We must ever keep in mind the powerful groups (and blinded zealots) who would destroy us by extolling the viruses of vicious “values.” We can remain immune to false values if, and only if, we know clearly what our own core values are. Some values are worth more than others, and we should have the insight and courage to say so.

The second error of thinking is the failure to distinguish public values from private ones. It is at this point that we can be sympathetic with minority groups for being wary about the values which might be taught in public schools. A set of common values should not contain those which are unique to any one group, such as Christianity, Judaism, or Islam. It is natural for people to have their own unique group values, but these are their shared private values, not to be pressed upon captive audiences in the public schools. (This is not to say that children should not learn about the values of others; mutual respect requires some degree of mutual understanding. But “learning about” is quite different from being told to “believe in.”) Fortunately, virtually all groups occupying a respected place in America do share a set of common public values. A public value which allows special groups to maintain their private values is the democratic policy of pluralism in our society. For example, we can and do change political parties-in-power and live peaceably with many philosophical and religious views without having a revolution.

Is it not reasonable to believe that we can arrive at a common set of core public values? How would we do this? One way would be to have a committee representing the diverse cultural groups of our society to arrive at a core set of public values to be taught in our schools. The committee selecting a core of common public values would need to be very cautious about infringing upon private values, such as personal religious values. But we must be even more careful not to allow a vacuum of positive public values. Without

such positive values, destructive ones are likely to move in. Pre-Nazi Germany appeared to be a civilized nation. It had produced major works of music, remarkable philosophers, outstanding scientists, and renowned theologians. But history demonstrates that totalitarianism did move in. In the absence of a core of clear-cut common values, it could happen here. Those who don’t know what they stand for are likely to fall for anything.

A panel of members would need to be chosen as representative of the wide range of diverse cultural, ethnic, and religious groups in America. But it should not include those whose “values” are destructive of society rather than supportive. Nor should it include those whose values are “parasitic”, rather than productive. That is, groups which have deliberately accepted “values” (purposes) that are demonstrably destructive to the institutions of the majority of society should not be represented. The objection here is not to intelligent dissenters; they usually stimulate progress. Rather, the objection is to people or groups who would, in the pursuit of their own “rights,” wantonly and callously disregard the reasonable rights of others. “Democracy” does not mean that we have to tolerate those whose values are destructive, and with whom we dare not share power. This our citizens—present and future—must clearly understand.

Despite the difficulties involved, I see no reason why a representative group cannot and should not be allowed to recommend a set of core values to be taught and reinforced in our public schools. I believe that a core of such common public values does in fact exist and should be strongly supported by all of our institutions. These values must be somewhere taught, or everywhere lost.

For those interested in how such a set of core values might be arrived at, I strongly recommend a most meticulously written book by Dr. Raymond B. Cattell, *A New Morality from Science: Beyondism*. It deals with the scientific search for behaviorally defined values, that is, the search for objective values by methods which have come to be accepted as reliable— methods of re-verifiable, carefully impartial observation and sophisticated statistical analysis.

For those interested in a deeply thoughtful religious approach to finding intelligent spiritual values which make good sense in the modern world, values which follow from facts and truths of a profound spiritual view of the cosmos, I highly recommend *The Urantia Book*. Both of these books can challenge and stimulate the thinking of anyone willing to read them.

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# Significant Books

## *The Humble Approach* New Revised Edition

by John M. Templeton

Continuum Publishing Co. 1995, pp. 172

John Templeton is known primarily for his financial investment prowess, yet it is his reputation as a man of spirituality that has made him one of the most respected personalities of the twentieth century. He is founder of the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion and has long labored to promote research in the deep links between science and religion.

In *The Humble Approach* Templeton emphasizes and elaborates on the basic attitudes of humility and open-mindedness needed by scientists and theologians to discover new vistas of truth and reality. "Why do millions of people think theology has become obsolete, when no one thinks physics or astronomy can become obsolete? That is the subject of this book, *The Humble Approach*. Theology was called the queen of the sciences in ages gone by and can deserve that title again when it adopts the humble approach." (p. 4)

We are living, Templeton observes, in "the blossoming time of man." There is an exponential increase in knowledge and invention. If we are humble enough to become open-minded searchers "more revelations about God's universe will probably be discovered in the next century than in all the millenniums before." (p. 11) Egotism and dogmatism are our worst enemies.

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Some theologians, religious leaders, and lay people are frequently blind to the obstacles they themselves erect....Some do not want even to consider the possibility of a future of progressively unfolding spiritual discoveries....The humble approach to human knowledge is meant to help as a corrective to the parochialism that blocks further development in religious studies. Taking the humble approach reminds us that each person's concept of God, the universe, even his or her own self is too limited. (p. 2)

We are in need of a new theology based on our enlarged view of the cosmos and an expanded concept of history—a

theology not yet taught in the seminaries. This could serve as the basis of a "new, unprecedented religion." (p. 32) Our view of God is much too small and we must find ways to "avoid the most common pitfall of theology: the attempt by man to put limits on God." (p. 38) Templeton believes God is ready to give us new revelation if we will open our minds and search for it. He reprimands some clergy for unwittingly encouraging religious strife by working for political and social goals rather than purely spiritual ones.

Templeton proposes that Humility Theology initiate a new research program to discover and verify laws of the spirit (values) that are just as empirically and practically demonstrable as the laws of matter.

The main purpose of the Templeton Foundations is to encourage enthusiasm for accelerating discovery and progress in spiritual matters and in knowledge about the unlimited creative spirit. In conclusion, we don't think we've really discovered what to do yet. All of this is in the embryonic stage, in the formative stage, maybe about the same stage as many sciences were two centuries ago. That's very important to remember in the humble approach. (p. 139)

This is a stimulating book recommending an attitude toward the search for truth that theologians could well adopt. To the degree that this becomes a reality, the discovery of the Fifth Epochal Revelation may be the most important event of the twenty-first century.

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## *EarthCurrents*

### **The Struggle for the World's Soul**

by Howard A. Snyder

Abingdon Press, 1995, pp. 334

"*EarthCurrents* is an exercise in cultural analysis, viewed globally. It focuses particularly on the years 1990-2030. The thesis is that eight global trends are shaping what and how the world's peoples believe, and thus are touching all our lives." (p. 11)

Howard Snyder presents a provocative analysis of eight global trends: Online—The New Shape of Global Culture; Global Web—The Emerging World Economy; Gender Power—The Feminist Revolution; Fragile Greenhouse—The Environment at Risk; Vital Strings—DNA and Superstrings; Electric Minds—Artificial Intelligence and Virtual Reality; Western Decline—America's Final Hour?; and New World Order—Global Culture or Clash of Civilizations.

The second section of the book describes six global worldviews: Global Economics—A Pragmatic Worldview; Quantum Mystery—A New Scientific Worldview?; Life on a

The Spiritual Fellowship Journal

Living Planet—The Gaia Worldview; Divine Design—God in the Shadows?; The Force of Fate—Determinism Revisited; and Postmodernism—The Death of Worldviews?.

The third section of *EarthCurrents* discusses the strength and weaknesses of contemporary worldviews and presents an argument for an updated Christian worldview. A viable worldview, Snyder observes, must be coherent—it must account for the connectedness of all things and beings. Order (purpose), surprise (indeterminism), and beauty are indelible marks of the universe and human society. They are basic to a coherent view or reality.

“What, then, makes a worldview credible, believable? Three things, at least: How it squares with our experience; the influence of other people who believe it...; and its ability to answer questions and provide meaning.” (p. 260) Furthermore, such a worldview must have story—a narrative with meaning—as well as history, and truth. This world story must be comprehensive, ecological, have personal meaning, and be transforming and purposeful. Such a world story cannot be invented, but be “something really there.” All these qualities are found in the Christian story.

The center and meaning of this story is Jesus Christ. Christian theologies have often remade and tailored the religion of Jesus to fit their own fads and philosophies. There is hope that the church will again discover the authentic Jesus. This could result in a greatly expanded universe view that Snyder calls “the Seventh Dimension.” Snyder’s analysis of world culture is insightful and his appeal for the rediscovery of the authentic Jesus is a central emphasis in the message of *The Urantia Book*.

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*But paganized and socialized Christianity stands in need of new contact with the uncompromised teachings of Jesus; it languishes for lack of a new vision of the Master’s life on earth. A new and fuller revelation of the religion of Jesus is destined to conquer an empire of materialistic secularism and to overthrow a world sway of mechanistic naturalism. Urantia is now quivering on the very brink of one of its most amazing and enthralling epochs of social readjustment, moral quickening, and spiritual enlightenment. (U.B., p. 2082:7)*

## *Psalms Today*

### **God’s Co-workers**

We thank you, our Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you use lowly mortals as co-workers in establishing your kingdom on earth.

When the learned, the self-righteous, and the powerful thwart your progressive and liberating purposes, you welcome the aristocracy of the common people to carry out your plans.

We rejoice also, Universe Father, that your Spirit of Truth inspires and works through leaders who are open to creative experience and serve in the actualization of eternal values.

These transcendents and forerunners of humanity are governed by internal standards of truth and energized with a vision of the beauty of creation and the perfection of spirit reality.

They are your representatives dedicated to serve the common good and the larger purposes of planetary destiny.

We thank you for these prophets of a new day, these workers in your kingdom bringing peace and goodwill, justice and well-being to your people.

Our problems and suffering are alleviated through their ministrations, and our lives are blessed by their service.

The crushing weight of a burdened soul,  
the crippling anxiety of a troubled mind,  
the constant pain of a diseased and broken body,  
the dehumanizing restraints of social injustice, are  
attended to and relieved by the intelligent and caring  
devotion of your ministers of mercy.

All of the resources of an advancing civilization are made possible by your divine plan of evolutionary development and discovery;  
they are your gifts of grace!

Glory and honor, praise and thanksgiving fill our hearts and well up in our souls, Universal Father; you have our love and devotion in time and eternity! (45)

(More Psalms today...)

## A New Paradigm of Reality

Savior of humankind, enlighten our confused and beleaguered society with a vision of reality that will inspire and transform its citizens. Our traditional sectarian standards have been found wanting. The value-constructs of yesterday are outworn and threadbare. We hunger for a larger and more encompassing revelation of universe truth and spiritual insight. May your Almighty and Supreme leavening power of growth give us the wisdom and courage to phase out obsolete and decadent folkways. We pray that your Spirit of Truth will illuminate our hearts and minds to create new styles of living and reformed social institutions that more perfectly actualize your will and way. Your partnership in our troubled society transforms its meaning and destiny. We confidently place our lives and fortunes in your hands, knowing that the resources of a vast universe are structured for the ultimate salvation and victorious ascendancy of your mortal creation. We rejoice and praise you, Universe Father, for the triumph of this bitter sweet adventure on the planets of time and space! (55)

## Integrity

Thank you, Universal Father, for making me who I am.  
Help me to accept myself with all of my imperfections.  
Motivate me to grow toward your divine perfection.  
May I turn from the weakness of ego aggrandizement to the strength of creative service.  
I am repelled by the tender-mindedness that needs the approval of others at any cost.  
I will not be manipulated by adulation and flattery!  
Establish me on the solid rock of your Reality.  
Root me in the fertile soil of your nurturance.  
May I develop that Supreme spiritual tough mindedness which is grounded in truth and enacted in love.  
Grant me the stamina to carry on your mission in the midst of troubles and difficulties without the encouragement of approval or success.  
I serve with confidence and joy, for I know that your purposes are destined to victorious ascendancy and universe Supremacy! (131)

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## Urantia Book Resources

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*.

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 *Concordex* and *Paramony* can be purchased from The Good Cheer Press, P. O. Box 18764, Boulder, CO 80303.

An exhaustive *Urantia Book Concordance* was published by the Urantia Foundation in 1993. If your local bookstore does not carry *The Urantia Book* or *The Urantia Book Concordance*, they can be ordered from the Urantia Foundation, 533 Diversey Parkway, Chicago, IL 60614. The Urantia Foundation also publishes French, Spanish, and Finnish editions of *The Urantia Book*.