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Quest for Spiritual Culture: An Exploration of the Urantian Paradigm of Spirituality

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When we gather together like this, it seems appropriate that we consider the state of our planet and ask what we, as bearers of an epochal revelation, are doing about it. The Urantia Book describes a paradigm of spirituality which is fundamental to the social development of normal worlds. We're going to explore that paradigm this morning. We'll look at how the Lucifer rebellion has retarded its implementation on our world; and we'll look at how the seraphic planetary government is mobilized in support of it. The result should be a very practical understanding of how we each can support this paradigm, and thus participate cooperatively in the transformative tasks of the fifth epoch.

Religionists often view entanglement in the institutional affairs of government, economics, industry and civil culture as detracting from more important personal spiritual pursuits.

Medieval Christianity taught that the authority of the state and all the institutions of this world were an ordained punishment for the sin of Adam. Radical Calvinism took the position that true believers had been mandated by God to control sin by means of civil institutions. Conservative Islam seeks to place social and governing institutions under the control of the clergy.

And while good men and women of faith struggle valiantly throughout the world, trying to serve humanity as best they can, the fact remains that the world is desperately short of compelling visions by which a spiritual transformation of its institutions might even be contemplated.

We live today in a world where we are struggling to keep the basic human institutions of marriage and family intact. It is not surprising then, that we would find great confusion and difficulty in attempting to achieve meaningful personality integration at higher levels of social complexity.

It is helpful to think of "institutions" as *co-ordinating* mechanisms. In a world of active, creative personalities there need to be means for coordinating their activities so they may be mutually sustaining where possible and, hopefully, not mutually destructive. In today's world, the ways in which we affect each other's activities are changing rapidly. When the rate of change exceeds the rate at which coordinating institutions can adapt and remain effective, a threshold is crossed where social breakdown begins to appear.

As the world continues to flirt with this threshold, the magnitude of the potential difficulties seems overwhelming. Global ecological problems whose solutions will require an unprecedented level of international cooperation loom on the horizon. Fledgling institutions of world government, developed to prevent catastrophic wars between superpowers are finding themselves unable to prevent regional civil wars rooted in ethnic conflict. And throughout the developed world, the breakdown of that most basic and fundamental of all human institutions, the family, continues to accelerate.

There has been great success in building military, economic, and industrial systems, but a failure to advance systems which are inherently social and moral. We have utterly failed to match the astonishing accomplishments of our heads and hands with a comparable development of our hearts.

In Paper 92 we are told that, "Modern man is confronted with the task of making more readjustments of human values in one generation than have been made in two thousand years."

In Paper 99 the revelators describe our time as "psychologically unsettled", characterized by "the economic upheavals, moral crosscurrents, and sociologic rip tides of the cyclonic transitions of a scientific era."

The popular mentality is again filled with apocalyptic fears and expectations.

Historian Oswald Spengler, in his book "The Decline of the West" comments on our tendency to equate cultural crisis with apocalypse; to become so overwhelmed by the magnitude of change taking place that we lose the ability to rationally process it and end up projecting metaphysical meanings onto events we observe in the world around us. Spengler goes on to point out that "crisis" is the normal state of Western Civilization.

You may recall the story about Mahatma Ghandi's return to India after his first visit to England. He was asked by a reporter what he thought of Western civilization and he replied that -- he thought it would be a good idea.

Over the next half century, human society will undergo yet more profound changes. It will experience a radical demographic transformation, be challenged by unforeseen effects of ecological neglect, experience fundamental shifts in the global balance of economic and political power, and cope with nearly continuous technological change. These transformations are inevitable -- the forces which compel them are already in place -- but what the outcome will be, no one knows.

It is such a complex system of inter-related factors that no one can reasonably predict its likely state at any point in the future. It is impossible to know whether the twenty-first century will usher in an era of human advancement and global integration, or a period of conflict, environmental degradation and human tragedy on a scale that overshadows anything which has previously occurred -- The planet is literally "quivering on the brink."

Broad social trends, such as rising levels of education, attempts to stabilize an emerging international economy, rapid increases in literacy world-wide, and the growing economic and social liberation of women, are examples of powerful forces with unknown potentials for transformative change. The information revolution with its ability to profoundly affect public opinion, is spreading globally far more quickly than did the industrial revolution. And it is clear that the majority of the social, economic and political effects of this revolution have yet to appear.

The underlying forces which determine all these trends however, are human processes driven by human decisions being made on a daily basis. We may not be able to predict the future, but we certainly are shaping it through the choices we make on a moment by moment basis.

The general consensus of opinion held by individuals who attempt to study these trends and their implications, is that the long-term social and ecological health of our planet will be determined by decisions made in the next 25 years or so -- during the lifetime of virtually every person in this room; each of us will participate in determining the outcome.

Czech President Vaclav Havel has commented that "Nothing short of a new spiritual vision of global dimensions will save human civilization."

Exploring the Urantian Paradigm of Spirituality

Most of us would be in agreement that The Urantia Book provides such a vision. But how do we go about applying the ideas in this book to the problems of our world? How do we get from ink and paper to an advancing civilization ruled by spiritual wisdom? While the revelators have generously provided us with a comprehensive overview of the cosmic context within which the present planetary struggle is taking place, the challenge of effectively applying this information lies before us today.

The Urantia Book describes religion as "the mighty lever which lifts civilization from chaos."

But we are also told that *institutional* religion "cannot afford inspiration and provide leadership in this impending world-wide social reconstruction." We are told that "Only the real religion of personal spiritual experience can function helpfully and creatively in the present crisis of civilization."

And it is this "real religion of personal spiritual experience" along with The Urantia Book's portrayal of the ideals of cosmic citizenship, which holds such great hope for transforming human institutions. With these concepts, The Urantia Book profiles a paradigm of spirituality unlike that of any existing religion or philosophy in the world today. It links personal spiritual development to meaningful personality integration resulting in the brotherhood of man.

The grand panorama of a personal cosmos is first laid out in the Foreword of The Urantia Book. The revelators make it clear to us that the future of the cosmos involves a discovery and exploration of the new realities which actualize when personalities interact with each other in creative ways.

As the revelation unfolds we are told something about the cosmic purpose of all this personality experience -- preparation for creative participation in the communities of personalities which comprise the mortal corps of the finality, communities of personalities who have experientially, over the long journey to Paradise, discovered, explored, and developed their potentials for working together creatively for the Father's purposes.

We are told about our ascent through the "psychic circles" which involves *cosmic socialization and the realization of universe citizenship*.

Social integration and spiritual growth are inseparable in the Urantia Book's paradigm of spirituality. In this paradigm, the locus of spirituality is *in the relationships between personalities*.

This revelation describes relationships between persons, from the Paradise Trinity down to those which we sustain with our family members, as the living realities within which the continuous discovery and exploration of an infinite cosmos takes place.

In Paper 103 a Melchizedek admonishes us to "Remember that in the religion of all ages the experience which is paramount is the feeling regarding moral values and social meanings, not the thinking regarding theologic dogmas or philosophic theories."

Just as information about the material world makes impressions on the conscious mind through the eyes

and the ears during the process of looking and listening, so do spiritual values make their impressions on the superconscious mind during the process of reflective personality interaction.

In a loving, caring, "authentic" exchange with another personality the superconscious functions of mind are mobilized in a state of dynamic receptivity, open to the discovery of divine values which the immediate moment holds as potentials.

Imagine for a moment that you are engaged with another person in an effort to solve a problem. You're sincerely seeking the best possible outcome. As you engage in this discussion, you try to do your best thinking; you simultaneously attempt to be conscious of the moral and ethical values in the situation.

You try to phrase your communication in a caring and loving manner. The interaction is free from any effort to psychologically or emotionally manipulate the other. As you communicate you are trying to remain "conscious of consciousness" -- you've mobilized your best resources and while applying them you are still actively evaluating -- seeking to discern even higher values.

You may even attain a level of involvement where you actively seek to bring an understanding of the Father's will into the interaction -- you're sharing the inner life with God as you participate in this relationship.

This experience in which the personality engages in a choice-making dance with the meanings and values of the cosmos, is the living process by which we open ourselves up to spiritual guidance.

The Midwayers comment that, "Every time man makes a reflective moral choice he immediately experiences a new divine invasion of his soul."

This living process of relationship is where the fruits of the spirit appear. It is where we apply the higher levels of the golden rule. It is where we implement Jesus' great commandment. It is where Jesus' brotherhood of the kingdom is experientially discovered.

This is the paradigm of spirituality which the apostles failed to grasp!

And I ask today, "Do we get it?" Have we really gained any more understanding than the Apostles had regarding the profound implications of Jesus' teachings about the kingdom of heaven?

In Paper 170 the Midwayers comment that "...to his apostles Jesus always taught the kingdom as embracing man's personal experience in relation to his fellows on earth and to the Father in heaven." "The kingdom of heaven," said Jesus, "is a spiritual *relationship* between God and man."

Given this paradigm of spirituality, and the Apostle's difficulty in grasping it, appreciate the remembrance supper.

This sacrament which Jesus initiated has the potential for invoking a social context in which it is possible to experientially discover that which he was unsuccessful in communicating to his followers.

The remembrance supper is an intimate social activity. Through the employment of this sacrament we are encouraged to attempt to become conscious of our personal relationship with the Father as well as our relationships with our fellows, and to merge these into an experiential wholeness catalyzed by a shared appreciation of the Master's life.

Said the Master on the occasion of that first remembrance, "Every soul who attains the realization of this united nature of God and man shall live forever. And this bread of life which I give to all who will receive is my own living and combined nature. The Father in the Son and the Son one with the Father--that is my life-giving revelation to the world and my saving gift to all nations."

In the context of the remembrance supper our souls can experientially feel the spiritual state of personality integration which The Urantia Book indicates needs to be actualized as a cultural reality on a broad scale.

A Melchizedek refers to the remembrance supper as "... the practice of the presence of God which eventuates in the emergence of the brotherhood of man."

The Midwayers comment that by establishing this sacrament, "the Master sought to set man's reborn soul free upon the joyous wings of a new and living spiritual liberty."

This "religion of personal spiritual experience," the Urantian paradigm of spirituality, *is* creative participation in a progressive culture of integrated mortal-divine personality association. It contains an ideal of daily living in which every single encounter with another person is an opportunity to participate directly in the spiritual transformation of the world.

Recovering from the Lucifer Rebellion

Once we begin to appreciate the critical importance of the relationship between mortal personality and the personality of the universal Father, we can more fully appreciate how the Lucifer rebellion has affected human institutions.

Item number one in the Lucifer manifesto was a denial of the *reality* of the universal Father. And even today, tens of thousands of years later, there is still confusion in the world regarding whether or not this essential relationship with the Father is real, or merely a conceptual illusion.

The long-term repercussions of failing to establish a spiritual basis for social evolution may be seen when we compare the state of our institutions with those described for a normal world in a post-Adamic epoch. Failure to establish a relationship with the Father significantly reduces an individual's chances of perceiving and implementing values which transcend self-interests. And it is from such an impoverished set of values that many of our world's institutions derive their character.

Recovery from the Lucifer rebellion requires elevation of the values by which the people of our world conduct their affairs. On the level of planetary institutions and culture, the realization of full recovery is limited only by individual free-will decision making processes which choose and actualize values within the cultural milieu on a moment-by-moment basis. It's the ultimate democracy and we cast a vote each time we make a choice of values which affect a human interaction.

The trial of Timothy McVey for the Oklahoma City bombing may have settled his legal status, but the task of repairing the damage he did - emotionally, psychologically, socially, spiritually - will continue to challenge the affected individuals and community for many years to come. And so it is likely to be with the recovery from the Lucifer rebellion.

We can get an idea of how the universe authorities are dealing with this situation by observing the focus of the last three epochal revelations. Each of them has represented an attempt to re-establish a spiritual foundation on the planet from which cosmic citizenship might develop.

Machiventa Melchizedek dealt with the very basic dynamics of the relationship with God - its faith-grasp by the mortal mind.

Jesus continued the process with a revelation of the nature of the Father's personality and his love for each individual. Each of these revelations aimed at restoring the integrity of this underlying relationship between the individual and God. Jesus, with his teachings about the kingdom, also laid the groundwork for a fuller appreciation of the interpersonal nature of reality.

The Urantia Book furthers this process with its revelation that this emerging network of spiritualizing personality relationships is a vital part of the living cosmos.

The primary task of the fifth epoch seems clearly laid out before us -- fostering the development in our world of a cosmic foundation of spiritualized personality relationships. This is the essential infrastructure which must be in place before a meaningful spiritual culture can evolve.

Upon such a foundation, men and women will more easily discover those higher values of universe socialization and cosmic citizenship by which our institutions might truly be transformed.

Mortal Support of Seraphic Ministry

There are indications in the book that the number of seraphim devoted to this task is enormous. I suspect that almost everyone in this room, at one time or another, has felt a deep desire to assist our unseen friends in some small way in their task of planetary enlightenment, to support the plans they no doubt have implemented relative to this revelation.

In attempting to get a useful idea of what cooperation with the revelators and their seraphic associates involves, we can study the way in which seraphic involvement in human affairs is described in The Urantia Book. With that knowledge it should be relatively easy for us to recognize what we need to do to support and reinforce their efforts. If we could accomplish this and foster the growth of a readership in which each individual is actively seeking cooperative engagement with the program being implemented by the planetary government, we might be able to do a great deal in terms of helping "apply spiritual pressure from above" to the problems of our day.

So how do the seraphim work?

They are "mind stimulators," continually seeking to promote circle-making decisions in the mortal mind. They "operate from the outside inward, *working through the social, ethical and moral environment* of human beings." This network of spiritualizing interpersonal relationships is real. It forms a morontia environment in which the seraphim are able to minister to participating minds and souls.

In Paper 196 we're reminded that, "The human mind does not create real values; human experience does not yield universe insight. Concerning insight, the recognition of moral values and the discernment of spiritual meanings, all that the human mind can do is to *discover, recognize, interpret, and choose.*"

It is the Seraphim who make spiritual values "visible" to the superconscious, as it functions in the social, ethical and moral environment of interpersonal communion.

In The Urantia Book we are encouraged to *pray* for values; we are told such praying indicates that religion "has evolved to that level where the human mind recognizes the reality of beneficent powers or beings who are able to enhance social values and to augment moral ideals..."

From the ministry of the Mighty Primary Supernaphim who facilitate the relationships between the diverse residents of Paradise, to the Primary Seconaphim who facilitate relationships between the Ancients of Days, the Trinity and the Creator Sons, on down to the Home Seraphim who function within the relationships between your family members, the ministry of the Infinite Spirit is continuously fostering the value-potentials inherent in personality associations.

These relationships -- our first living connections with the infinite cosmos -- are fragile, tenuous affairs which flicker back and forth from reality to unreality in accordance with the quality of values being implemented in any given interaction. This is the arena in which the seraphim labor to reinforce the faintest flickers of faith, to strengthen newly emerging souls and immediately begin integrating them with the culture of the spiritual cosmos.

At a conference like this we can actually feel this process taking place -- we feel spiritually invigorated and challenged to be our best in our friendships. New meanings and values appear in our relationships with each other on a daily, if not hourly, basis.

Consider for a moment some of the angelic orders which serve in this personal universe:

The Interpreters of Cosmic Citizenship

The Union of Souls

The Spirits of Brotherhood

The Ethical Sensitizers

The Social Architects

The Heart of Counsel

The Satisfaction of Service

The Quickeners of Morality

-- the list goes on and on. Just contemplating these names gives us a glimpse into the personal nature of the spiritual cosmos. This entire ministry of the angelic orders is focused on the spiritual enhancement of relationships between personalities.

The Master Seraphim of Planetary Supervision foster the development of human institutions by making higher values available to the mortals who participate in the work of those institutions. These seraphim minister *within* social groups -- the angels of the churches, the angels of the races, the angels of progress, the home seraphim. The *angels of enlightenment* are occupied, not only with the mental and moral training of individuals, but of small groups -- families, groups, schools, communities -- virtually any association of mortals persisting over some period of time seems to provide a context for seraphic ministry.

How do we support their work? Six quick action-points:

1. First and foremost is our personal relationship with the Father. The secret of Jesus' unparalleled religious life was his consciousness of the presence of God; and he attained it by

intelligent prayer and sincere worship--unbroken communion with God. God needs to become an integral part of *all* our processes.

2. We support seraphic efforts by cultivating a sensitivity to the divine values they attempt to bring to our attention.

3. We support their work by courageously choosing those values to shape our relationships with others -- "by decisions, by more decisions, and by more decisions."

4. We support seraphic services when we reinforce the higher value-choices we recognize being made by our fellows -- stabilizing and affirming existing values where appropriate; recognizing and reinforcing religious living in others.

5. We lay the groundwork for enhanced seraphic action when we provide spiritually useful information. Get The Urantia Book spread around the planet. Remember the parable of the sower. Jesus said that this parable was a hint as to what messengers of the kingdom might expect in their ministry from generation to generation as time passed. Don't assume that we'll always have the remarkable global transportation and communication infrastructure which we enjoy today. Maximize all available opportunities and resources for the spread of the revelation. Don't wait for things to happen -- *make* them happen.

6. Be involved; participate creatively in human associations. Rededicate yourself to service in your marriage and your family, your work community and your study group. The cultural icon of the monastic saint living in contemplative bliss aloof from the cares of less enlightened folk is no longer useful. Mother Theresa, Dag Hammarskjold, Vaclav Havel, countless men and women with high ideals, working in the inner city, in classrooms, in churches, struggling to revitalize our institutions -- these are the new icons of the applied spirituality of the fifth epoch. The benign virus of love is not going to invade the sentimental emotion stream of humanity unless we're out there helping to make the personality connections necessary for its transmission.

By dedicating ourselves to such a program, by choosing the highest values we can recognize in any given situation, we can serve as conduits through which the higher values of the spiritual world may be passed to the mortal world and incorporated into planetary institutions.

"True religion," a Melchizedek tells us, "is the devotion of the self to the service of meaningful and supreme values."

This vision is ennobling. Your family, the local school board on which you serve, your kid's soccer team, the youth group at your church, the working group at your office -- When you realize that these are all arenas in which the seraphim are laboring to achieve a spiritual transformation, the most commonplace tasks of daily life take on cosmic significance and become worthy of our best efforts. This is how the religion of personal spiritual experience can become "the mighty lever which lifts civilization from chaos."

Conclusion

In closing, I would like to ask you to take a deep breath, and take a moment to look around you. Impress upon your mind the image of this beautiful room and the hundreds of readers sitting around you. Recall the moments of worship, insight and love which you have experienced here -- impress these realities into your memory.

And as you serve in the years to come, when you run into difficulty or feel overwhelmed by circumstances, reflect back on this moment, a time in which you sat in assembly with a gathering of universe conscious citizens of Urantia. In your times of challenge, rest assured that many of these individuals are valiantly serving the Father's purposes in their own corners of the world, in their own sets of challenging circumstances.

Look ahead as well, to a reunion on the mansion worlds, where we can reminisce about the Urantia adventure, deepen our friendships, and perhaps be launched on the universe career in the company of cherished friends from the mortal adventure.

And as you leave here today, and see your fellows streaming out of the doors of this auditorium, appreciate the fact that they are on their way to Africa, Asia, the Pacific; to Europe, to North and South America, carrying a heightened understanding of the kingdom of heaven to be planted in the families and human associations of our world.

May God richly bless each and every one of you with unlimited opportunities to participate in the spiritual transformation of our world.