

## RELIGION - WHAT IS IT?

I first became interested in trying to pin down a good definition of religion many years ago when I first became acquainted with the Urantia Book. I kept coming across definitions of religion and they differed. I had a favorite, a friend of mine had a different favorite, and so it went. I started collecting definitions from the Urantia Book. And I concentrated on actual definitions -- not how you got it or how it affected you or what the results were, but what it is. Most of the statements start with "Religion is --."

Let's start with Webster. Religion is --

1. The service and adoration of God.
2. One of the systems of faith and worship.
3. The profession or practice of religious beliefs; religious observances collectively; rites.
4. Devotion or fidelity; conscientiousness.
5. An awareness or conviction of the existence of a supreme being, arousing reverence, love, gratitude, the will to obey and serve, and the like; as, man only is capable of religion.

The last one seems the best to me, but personally I don't like any of them as well as the ones in the Urantia Book.

Before I get into the Urantia definitions, I would like to discuss two things which are involved in religion - belief and faith. Sometimes it seems difficult to distinguish between the two, and I have heard many people ask, "What is the difference?" One of the topics in our Topical Studies textbook is "Faith" and I collected some quotations which I think may be helpful. What they seem to boil down to for me is that belief is an intellectual thing -- it's something which your mind says is true, an acknowledgment of something that's true. But faith goes a step farther than that. Faith brings that truth to life; it affects the way you live. Faith becomes a way of living. It translates the belief, the mental attitude, into action -- doing something about your belief. I know some people who believe the Urantia Book and I know their belief in it is sincere. They will defend it, they will tell their friends about it, they will swear by it. But as far as I can see (and I grant you that none of us can be a fair judge of this), they have not translated their belief into the faith which will change their lives. They do not seem to be living in accordance with the teachings, though, I repeat, none of us can really judge this. Now for some Urantia Book statements on belief and faith.

"Belief has attained the level of faith when it motivates life and shapes the mode of living. The acceptance of a teaching as true is not faith; that is mere belief. Neither is certainty nor conviction faith. A state of mind attains to faith levels only when it actually dominates the mode of living. Faith is a living attribute of genuine personal religious experience. One believes truth, admires beauty, and reverences goodness, but does not worship them; such an attitude of saving faith is centered on God alone, who is all of these personified and infinitely more." p. 1114.

"Belief is always limiting and binding; faith is expanding and releasing. Belief fixates, faith liberates. But living religious faith is more than the association of noble beliefs; it is more than an exalted system of philosophy; it is a living experience concerned with spiritual meanings, divine ideals, and supreme values; it is God-knowing and man-serving. Beliefs may become group possessions, but faith must be personal. Theologic beliefs can be suggested to a group, but faith can rise up only in the heart of the individual religionist." p.1114.

"Faith leads to knowing God, not merely to a mystical feeling of the divine presence. Faith must not be overmuch influenced by its emotional consequences. True religion is an experience of believing and knowing as well as a satisfaction of feeling." p. 1142.

"The relation between the creature and the Creator is a living experience, a dynamic religious faith, which is not subject to precise definition. To isolate part of life and call it religion is to disintegrate life and to distort religion. And this is just why the God of worship claims all allegiance or none." p. 1124.

"Faith transforms the philosophic God of probability into the saving God of certainty in the personal religious experience. Skepticism may challenge the theories of theology, but confidence in the dependability of personal experience affirms the truth of that belief which has grown into faith.

"Convictions about God may be arrived at through wise reasoning, but the individual becomes God-knowing only by faith, through personal experience." p. 1124.

"Belief may not be able to resist doubt and withstand fear, but faith is always triumphant over doubting, for faith is both positive and living. The positive always has the advantage over the negative, truth over error, experience over theory, spiritual realities over the isolated facts of time and space. The convincing evidence of this spiritual certainty consists in the social fruits of the spirit which such believers, fathers, yield as a result of this genuine spiritual experience." p. 1125.

"Faith never shuns the problem-solving duty of mortal living.....Faith vitalizes religion and constrains the religionist heroically to live the golden rule." p. 1115.

"Since true religion is a matter of personal spiritual experience, it is inevitable that each individual religionist must have his own and personal interpretation of the realization of that spiritual experience. Let the term 'faith' stand for the individual's relation to God rather than for the creedal formulation of what some group of mortals have been able to agree upon as a common religious attitude." p. 1091.

Jesus, teaching the apostles. "When my children once become self-conscious of the assurance of the divine presence, such a faith will expand the mind, ennoble the soul, reinforce the personality, augment the happiness, deepen the spirit perception, and enhance the power to love and be loved." p. 1766.

"Genuine spiritual faith (true moral consciousness) is revealed in that it:

- "1. Causes ethics and morals to progress despite inherent and adverse animalistic tendencies.
- "2. Produces a sublime trust in the goodness of God even in the face of bitter disappointment and crushing defeat.
- "3. Generates profound courage and confidence despite natural adversity and physical calamity.
- "4. Exhibits inexplicable poise and sustaining tranquillity notwithstanding baffling diseases and even acute physical suffering.
- "5. Maintains a mysterious poise and composure of personality in the face of maltreatment and the rankest injustice.
- "6. Maintains a divine trust in ultimate victory in spite of the cruelties of seemingly blind fate and the apparent utter indifference of natural forces to human welfare.
- "7. Persists in the unswerving belief in God despite all contrary demonstrations of logic and successfully withstands all other intellectual sophistries.
- "8. Continues to exhibit undaunted faith in the soul's survival regardless of the deceptive teachings of false science and the persuasive delusions of unsound philosophy.
- "9. Lives and triumphs irrespective of the crushing overload of the complex and partial civilizations of modern times.
- "10. Contributes to the continued survival of altruism in spite of human selfishness, social antagonisms, industrial greeds, and political maladjustments.
- "11. Steadfastly adheres to a sublime belief in universe unity and divine guidance regardless of the perplexing presence of evil and sin.
- "12. Goes right on worshiping God in spite of anything and everything. Dares to declare, "Even though he slay me, yet will I serve him."

"We know, then, by three phenomena, that man has a divine spirit or spirit dwelling within him: first, by personal experience -- religious

faith; second, by revelation -- personal and racial; and third, by the amazing exhibition of such extraordinary and unnatural reactions to his material environment as are illustrated by the foregoing recital of twelve spiritlike performances in the presence of the actual and trying situations of real human existence. And there are still others.

"And it is just such a vital and vigorous performance of faith in the domain of religion that entitles mortal man to affirm the personal possession and spiritual reality of that crowning endowment of human nature, religious experience." p. 1108-9.

I'm sure you have noticed that in some of these quotations there were some good definitions and descriptions of religion, which is my main subject. But belief and faith and religion and the results thereof are so inextricably mixed up that it's practically impossible to separate them. For if faith involves a way of living, then that is religion. Time after time we're told that religion is personal, individual, a mode of living. This is not the common, secular definition of religion. Most people seem to think it is a system of beliefs, a creed, a set of rituals, and so on, as Webster defines it. But the Urantia Book changes that picture very definitely.

The quotations which I am using seem to break down naturally into three classifications -- first, the ones which emphasize that religion is a personal experience, a way of living -- second, some general definitions which do not emphasize the way of living, but cover other aspects -- and third, quotations regarding the religion of Jesus.

\* \* \* \* \*

First, let's look at the definitions which point out so clearly that religion is the life we live.

"But true religion is a living love, a life of service." p. 1100.

"Religion is not a specific function of life; rather is it a mode of living. True religion is a wholehearted devotion to some reality which the religionist deems to be of supreme value to himself and for all mankind. And the outstanding characteristics of all religions are: unquestioning loyalty and wholehearted devotion to supreme values. This religious devotion to supreme values is shown in the relation of the supposedly irreligious mother to her child and in the fervent loyalty of nonreligionists to an espoused cause." p. 1100.

"From one conference they (the apostles) emerged with the teaching that true religion was man's heartfelt loyalty to his highest and truest convictions.....

"They learned that, when religion is wholly spiritual in motive, it makes all life more worth while, filling it with high purposes, dignifying it with transcendent values, inspiring it with superb motives, all the while comforting the human soul with a sublime and sustaining hope. True religion is designed to lessen the strain of existence; it releases faith

and courage for daily living and unselfish serving. Faith promotes spiritual vitality and righteous fruitfulness." p. 1727

"True religion is a meaningful way of living dynamically face to face with the commonplace realities of everyday life." p. 1089.

"And religion ennobles the commonplace drudgery of daily living." p. 1094.

"Personal, spiritual religious experience is an efficient solvent for most mortal difficulties; it is an effective sorter, evaluator, and adjuster of all human problems. Religion does not remove or destroy human troubles, but it does dissolve, absorb, illuminate, and transcend them. True religion unifies the personality for effective adjustment to all mortal requirements." p. 2093.

"Religion inspires man to live courageously and joyfully on the face of the earth; it joins patience with passion, insight to zeal, sympathy with power, and ideals with energy." p. 1093.

"Religion is not a technique for attaining a static and blissful peace of mind; it is an impulse for organizing the soul for dynamic service. It is the enlistment of the totality of selfhood in the loyal service of loving God and serving man. Religion pays any price essential to the attainment of the supreme goal, the eternal prize. There is a consecrated completeness in religious loyalty which is superbly sublime. And these loyalties are socially effective and spiritually progressive." p. 1096.

"Jesus offered no rules for social advancement; his was a religious mission, and religion is an exclusively individual experience." p. 2083.

"This sermon was an effort on Jesus' part to make clear the fact that religion is a personal experience. Among other things, the Master said: '....The prophets have all taught you that Yahweh cares for his people, that God loves Israel. But I have come among you to proclaim a greater truth, one which many of the later prophets also grasped, that God loves you -- every one of you -- as individuals. All these generations have you had a national or racial religion; now have I come to give you a personal religion.'" p. 1629.

"While religion is exclusively a personal spiritual experience -- knowing God as a Father -- the corollary of this experience -- knowing man as a brother -- entails the adjustment of the self to other selves, and that involves the social or group aspect of religious life. Religion is first an inner or personal adjustment, and then it becomes a matter of social service or group adjustment." p. 1090.

"Religion cannot be bestowed, received, loaned, learned, or lost. It is a personal experience which grows proportionally to the growing quest for final values." p. 1095.

"The highest evidence of the reality and efficacy of religion consists in the fact of human experience; namely, that man, naturally fearful and suspicious, innately endowed with a strong instinct of self-preservation and craving survival after death, is willing fully to trust the deepest interests of his present and future to the keeping and direction of that power and person designated by his faith as God. That is the one central truth of all religion. As to what that power or person requires of man in return for this watchcare and final salvation, no two religions agree; in fact, they all more or less disagree." p. 1127.

"But a cult-- a symbolism of rituals, slogans, or goals -- will not function if it is too complex. And there must be the demand for devotion, the response of loyalty. Every effective religion unerringly develops a worthy symbolism, and its devotees would do well to prevent the crystallization of such a ritual into cramping, deforming, and stifling stereotyped ceremonials which can only handicap and retard all social, moral, and spiritual progress. No cult can survive if it retards moral growth and fails to foster spiritual progress. The cult is the skeletal structure around which grows the living and dynamic body of personal spiritual experience -- true religion." p. 966.

"Every time man makes a reflective moral choice, he immediately experiences a new divine invasion of his soul. Moral choosing constitutes religion as the motive of inner response to outer conditions." p. 2095.

"The morality of the religions of evolution drives men forward in the God quest by the motive power of fear. The religions of revelation allure men to seek for a God of love because they crave to become like him. But religion is not merely a passive feeling of 'absolute dependence' and 'surety of survival'; it is a living and dynamic experience of divinity attainment predicated on humanity service." p. 66.

"Religion is the revelation to man of his divine and eternal destiny. Religion is a purely personal and spiritual experience and must forever be distinguished from man's other high forms of thought, such as:

1. Man's logical attitude toward the things of material reality.
2. Man's aesthetic appreciation of beauty contrasted with ugliness.
3. Man's ethical recognition of social obligations and political duty.
4. Even man's sense of human morality is not, in and of itself, religious.

"Religion is designed to find those values in the universe which call forth faith, trust, and assurance; religion culminates in worship. Religion discovers for the soul those supreme values which are in contrast with the relative values discovered by the mind. Such superhuman insight can be had only through genuine religious experience." p. 2075.

So much for the first group. Now for the second. These are other definitions of religion that are given in the Urantia Book, but which do not emphasize that it is a way of living. Most of these, however, do bring out the fact that it is a personal, individual experience.

"Although religious experience is a purely spiritual subjective phenomenon, such an experience embraces a positive and living faith attitude toward the highest realms of universe objective reality. The ideal of religious philosophy is such a faith-trust as would lead man unqualifiedly to depend upon the absolute love of the infinite Father of the universe of universes. Such a genuine religious experience far transcends the philosophic objectification of idealistic desire; it actually takes salvation for granted and concerns itself only with learning and doing the will of the Father in Paradise. The earmarks of such a religion are: faith in a supreme Deity, hope of eternal survival, and love, especially of one's fellows." p. 1141.

"....the religions of revelation are always characterized by a belief in some Deity of final value and in some concept of the survival of personality identity after death." p. 1007.

"One of the most amazing earmarks of religious living is that dynamic and sublime peace, that peace which passes all human understanding, that cosmic poise which betokens the absence of all doubt and turmoil. Such levels of spiritual stability are immune to disappointment." p. 1101.

"Religion is valid only when it reveals the fatherhood of God and enhances the brotherhood of men." p. 1572.

"Always keep in mind, true religion is to know God as your Father and man as your brother." p. 1091.

"In answer to Thomas's question, 'Who is this God of the kingdom?' Jesus replied: 'God is your Father, and religion -- my gospel -- is nothing more nor less than the believing recognition of the truth that you are his son. And I am here among you in the flesh to make clear both of these ideas in my life and teachings.'" p. 1590.

"Religion is the exclusively spiritual experience of the evolving immortal soul of the God-knowing man, but moral power and spiritual energy are mighty forces which may be utilized in dealing with difficult social situations and in solving intricate economic problems. These moral and spiritual endowments make all levels of human living richer and more meaningful." p. 1739.

"Religion is faith, trust, and assurance." p. 1104.

"Religion is society's adjustment, in any age, to that which is mysterious." p. 1004.

"Religion is a revelation to man's soul dealing with spiritual realities which the mind alone could never discover or fully fathom." p. 1641.

"Religion is man's supreme experience in the mortal nature, but finite language makes it forever impossible for theology ever adequately to depict real religious experience." p. 2096.

"Religion is man's supreme gesture, his magnificent reach for final reality, his determination to find God and to be like him." p. 2096.

"In a high civilization, art humanizes science, while in turn it is spiritualized by true religion -- insight into spiritual and eternal values. Art represents the human and time-space evaluation of reality. Religion is the divine embrace of cosmic values and connotes eternal progression in spiritual ascension and expansion..... True art is the effective manipulation of the material things of life; religion is the ennobling transformation of the material facts of life, and it never ceases in its spiritual evaluation of art." p. 2080.

"Science lives by the mathematics of the mind; music expresses the tempo of the emotions. Religion is the spiritual rhythm of the soul in time-space harmony with the higher and eternal melody measurements of Infinity. Religious experience is something in human life which is truly supermathematical." p. 2080.

"Religion is not grounded in the facts of science, the obligations of society, the assumptions of philosophy, or the implied duties of morality. Religion is an independent realm of human response to life situations and is unfailingly exhibited at all stages of human development which are postmoral. Religion may permeate all four levels of the realization of values and the enjoyment of universe fellowship: the physical or material level of self-preservation; the social or emotional level of fellowship; the moral or duty level of reason; the spiritual level of the consciousness of universe fellowship through divine worship." p. 68.

"Religion is the experiencing of divinity in the consciousness of a moral being of evolutionary origin; it represents true experience with eternal realities in time, the realization of spiritual satisfactions while yet in the flesh." p. 1104.

"True religion is that sublime and profound conviction within the soul which compellingly admonishes man that it would be wrong for him not to believe in those morontial realities which constitute his highest ethical and moral concepts, his highest interpretation of life's greatest values and the universe's deepest realities. And such a religion is simply the experience of yielding intellectual loyalty to the highest dictates of spiritual consciousness." p. 1115.

"True religion is the act of an individual soul in its self-conscious relations with the Creator; organized religion is man's attempt to socialize the worship of individual religionists." p. 1616.



\* \* \* \* \*

And now I've come to the quotations which I have classified as the religion of Jesus - the third group. There are many more, but these few are enough to give you the flavor.

"In the earthly life of Jesus, religion was a living experience, a direct and personal movement from spiritual reverence to practical righteousness." p. 2089.

"The religion of Jesus does not seek to escape this life in order to enjoy the waiting bliss of another existence. The religion of Jesus provides the joy and peace of another and spiritual existence to enhance and ennoble the life which men now live in the flesh." p. 2063.

"The religion of Jesus fosters the highest type of human civilization in that it creates the highest type of spiritual personality and proclaims the sacredness of that person." p. 2063.

"You, as did his apostles, should the better understand Jesus' teachings by his life. He lived a perfected life on Urantia, and his unique teachings can only be understood when that life is visualized in its immediate background. It is his life, and not his lessons to the twelve or his sermons to the multitudes, that will assist most in revealing the Father's divine character and loving personality." p. 1581.

"Jesus' religion consisted not merely in believing, but in actually doing, those things which the gospel required. He did not teach that the essence of his religion consisted in social service, but rather that social service was one of the certain effects of the possession of the spirit of true religion." p. 1769.

"The Hebrews based their religion on goodness; the Greeks on beauty; both religions sought truth. Jesus revealed a God of love, and love is all-embracing of truth, beauty, and goodness.

"The Zoroastrians had a religion of morals; the Hindus a religion of metaphysics; the Confucianists a religion of ethics. Jesus lived a religion of service. All these religions are of value in that they are valid approaches to the religion of Jesus. Religion is destined to become the reality of the spiritual unification of all that is good, beautiful, and true in human experience." p. 67.

"Christianity has dared to lower its ideals before the challenge of human greed, war-madness, and the lust for power; but the religion of Jesus stands as the unsullied and transcendent spiritual summons, calling to the best there is in man to rise above all these legacies of animal evolution and, by grace, attain the moral heights of true human destiny." p. 2083.

"Religion is ever and always rooted and grounded in personal experience. And your highest religion, the life of Jesus, was just such a personal experience: man, mortal man, seeking God and finding him to the fullness during one short life in the flesh, while in the same human experience there appeared God seeking man and finding him to the full satisfaction of the perfect soul of infinite supremacy. And that is religion, even the highest yet revealed in the universe of Nebadon — the earth life of Jesus of Nazareth." p. 1128.

\* \* \* \* \*

What more is there to say? The highest religion — the earth life of Jesus. His religion, his life, made him the unified, balanced personality he was — an inspiration to all of us to try to go and do likewise. When you have a few moments in the near future, I'd like to recommend that you read again (as I know you have many times before) "The Acme of Religious Living" on page 1101. This is the kind of person the religion of Jesus made him. Although the average mortal cannot hope to attain the high perfection of character which Jesus acquired, still we can try, and possibly succeed in some degree, if we translate belief into faith, and let our religion become our daily way of life.

Marian Rowley

MTR  
4/3/61