



THE
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THE RELIGIOUS CHALLENGE OF THIS AGE

It seems to me that we all construct a philosophy of living of one sort or another. It's part of the natural mental function of integrating our expanding consciousness. The great *challenge* is to construct one with certain characteristics and based upon certain concepts. And the great *promise* is that such a philosophy of living will mightily help in furthering the religious evolution of all mankind, and in a way that the book cannot do by itself and that we cannot do without the book.

"... to construct a new and appealing philosophy of living ..."

To meet this challenge, such a philosophy of living must be both *new* and *appealing*. It must be new; not just a patching of new bits of truth onto an old philosophical structure, but a new philosophical structure. And it must be appealing; not just true or beautiful, but good — effectively attractive. Others must be able to relate to it; it must satisfactorily address their true needs. From this consideration alone, it seems unlikely to me that the formalized religions of the world will be successful in meeting this challenge if they insist on holding fast to their old and (to many) unappealing philosophy.

"... out of the enlarged and exquisitely integrated modern concepts of cosmic truth, universe beauty, and divine goodness."

To meet this challenge, such a philosophy of living must be *constructed out of* these concepts. Such a philosophy of living is not contained in the book, but is to be based on our experience with the teachings in the book. It is constructed out of interactive experiential study; becoming intellectually familiar with the teachings, applying them to life situations, and formulating a philosophical conception of how all this fits together in practice; and then cycling back through this experience again and again.

While we all, by nature, construct a philosophy of living, we will not all be able to meet "the religious challenge of this age." There are some requirements:

"... farseeing and forward-looking men and women of spiritual insight who will dare ..." And this is a formidable list of prerequisites. "Farseeing" implies broad experience and wisdom. "Forward-looking" implies a well-developed sense of direction and a positive motivation. "Spiritual insight" implies a sincere love of God and diligent efforts to find him. And to "dare" implies a profound assurance in the success of the undertaking in the face of all obstacles. All this adds up in my mind to *robust faith* — even approaching the faith of Jesus. It amazes me that we "mere mortals" can even aspire to such a thing. Such is the power potential of the religion of Jesus in our lives!

But if and when we are successful in constructing such a philosophy of living, the results will be invaluable. It will "... attract all that is good in the mind of man and challenge that which is best in the human soul." I observe that the book, alone, seems to attract this and that in the mind of man: some coherence, some confusion; some stability, some strange isms. And it seems to challenge a broad range of soul inclinations, from family loyalty to personal glorification. I am greatly pleased at the prospect of a "self-selecting" device, such as this philosophy of living, that would attract only the good and challenge only the best. It would save us no end of trouble.

An important corollary to all this is that the book itself will neither so attract nor so challenge (not on a broad scale; not in our generation); but an appropriate philosophy of living developed from the teachings of the book will do both.

What a great promise! And what a challenge!

And how are we to accomplish this? How are we to meet this challenge? "Truth, beauty, and goodness are divine realities, and as man ascends the scale of spiritual living, these supreme qualities of the Eternal become increasingly co-ordinated and unified in God, who is love."

As always, so it seems, the answer is love. Nowhere does it say that "revelation is the greatest thing in the universe," but we are told repeatedly that *love* is! Nowhere are we told to derive our authority from the

fact of revelation, but we are advised that "by their fruits you shall know them." And Jesus gave us but one commandment: to love one another, "even as I have loved you." Indeed, we must "dare to depend solely on Jesus."

So let us love to learn of God, and let us learn to love each other. And out of the mental contemplation of our experience with divine love will emerge this philosophy of living, with which to attract and challenge our fellows abroad in the world.

—John Andrews
Juneau, Alaska

WHY?

We are sometimes faced with the ultimate paradox. Just when we're explaining the loving nature of God to an agnostic, he ruins our day by asking, "How can this loving God stand by while innocent children suffer?" Mankind has struggled with this question since the beginning of recorded history. The early Jews believed that we suffer because we have sinned; God punishes us

for our transgressions. In the Old Testament we read about Job's struggle with this question. For the Hindu, the answer to the question is Karma; we reap reward or suffering in this life to a degree determined by our previous life here. If we are suffering, we must have bad karma. Every religion seems to have devised some answer to the question, but not everyone sees the suffering as some sort of punishment. St. Francis of Assisi is reported to have said that the truly afflicted are those who have never been afflicted. How does *The URANTIA Book* see this problem?

In simple terms, it seems to say that we suffer because we live in an evolving, imperfect, time-space universe and it exists because God so willed it. So, it's all God's fault, right? But could it be that we have some responsibility for what happens to us? And what about what St. Francis said? Does it have any merit? Is affliction always bad? Does it have any value? Does the value more than offset the sum of the suffering?

Another question that we can ask is why the imperfect level of the finite must exist in the first place. The book tells us that any non-personal reality which now exists was once a part of the reservoir of all potential reality, the Unqualified Absolute. Are all potentials within the Unqualified Absolute destined to be actualized, or only those that God so chooses to actualize? If all potentials are destined to become actuals, then the finite (time-space) level of reality was an inevitability. *The URANTIA Book* does not seem to tell us specifically the answer to this. However, we are informed, "... so must the promulgation of finite reality be ascribed to the volitional acts of Paradise Deity and to the repercussional adjustments of the functional triunities." (*1158:2) This says that the appearance of finite reality definitely involved an act of will by God. As to whether God could have obtained the same results in a different way, the book informs us that God always does things in the most perfect manner. If there were a better way to do such things, then God would do it that way. In this sense then, the finite may still be said to be inevitable. But is its imperfection necessary?

Further on we read, "But to attain perfection as an evolutionary (time-creative) experience implies something other-than-perfection as a point of departure. Thus arises imperfection in the evolutionary creations. And this is the origin of potential evil." (*1159:4) As the finite creation may be said to be inevitable, and its imperfection necessary, so then also must there be potential evil in such a finite creation.

If we grant the inevitability of the finite and potential evil, why must the potential evil become an actuality?

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One answer is the free will that the creatures must be endowed with to allow them to choose between evil and good. If mortals are imperfect, then it is almost certain that they will err either consciously or unconsciously. If we include natural catastrophes as evil, then the imperfect nature of the finite also harbors potential evil which is likely to become actual.

Given the inevitability of the foregoing, our minds still circle back to the question of why the innocent suffer. If God is not to blame, then who is? On page 1649, Jesus gave three reasons for affliction:

1. Some are afflicted because of years of wrong living.
 2. Some afflictions are due to accidents of time.
 3. Some afflictions are due to mistakes of forebears.
- Jesus further tells us that the natural order of the world was upset by certain rebellious traitors. He goes on to say, "Intelligent application would enable man to overcome much of his earthly misery." (*1661:6)

We should recall that evil only exists as a potential until we actualize it; our free will actions all too often give reality to evil that was only potential. Human beings are responsible for a large part of human misery. We must also bear in mind that we are suffering the effects of a double default on this planet; we are thousands of years behind where we should be in our progress because of this. This may seem unfair, but on page 619 we are informed that we are part of a cosmic family and sometimes the whole family must suffer because of the misconduct of a single member. This is one of the inevitable consequences of family life; we share the good as well as the bad. The other source of suffering, the accidents of time, is simply an inevitability of the imperfect nature of our finite existence. Nevertheless, as Jesus pointed out, we could go a long way toward eliminating many of these accidents. If we build a city on a geologic fault line and it is destroyed by an earthquake, whom shall we blame? If a person abuses a child but the mother doesn't speak up about it and the neighbors don't want to get involved, whom shall we blame? Consider the case of someone who dies from a painful and dreaded disease for which we have no cure. Perhaps we would have a cure if mankind had put the money and effort into medical research that has gone into waging war and preparing for war. All of this suggests that we ask ourselves two questions. First, how much of our suffering are we ourselves responsible for? Second, can we expect God to continuously interfere with the natural laws to protect us from suffering?

Another area that deserves examination in the question of good and bad is our perceptions. Our perceptions strongly affect our idea of what is good or bad.

Two people might undergo the same experience and have nearly the same physical sensations, yet one calls the experience bad, and the other calls it good. Consider a camping trip. For one person the trip is a succession of discomforts and a terrible experience, but for another person the trip is a return to nature, an escape from the pressures of city life and a time of total relaxation. How we perceive an experience depends on hereditary predispositions, expectations, our self-image, and other factors. We can change our perceptions. If we resolve to look for the positive meanings in life experiences we will perceive fewer bad experiences in our lives. If we can see all experiences as learning opportunities, this insight will go a long way toward giving us a more positive view of life.

There are those who may ask why God could not have obtained the desired results in a different way. We are told that God can and does create perfect beings with free will (such as the Havona natives) but that something unique and otherwise unobtainable comes about as the one-time mortals ascend through the finite creation. As we pass through the ascension experience in liaison with our Thought Adjusters, a new creature of great value appears who embodies the perfection of the Thought Adjuster and the character forged by the mortal partner while grappling with the difficulties of the ascension experience. This valuable new being could not have originated in any other way. The same can be said about the whole evolving time-space creation and the Supreme. Only by evolving from imperfection to relative perfection could the resulting unique, perfected, finite level of existence somewhere come to be. In *The URANTIA Book* we read, "Is courage — strength of character — desirable? Then must man be reared in an environment which necessitates grappling with hardships and reacting to disappointments." (*51:5) It is evident that we need some hardships and disappointments.

Finally, we would benefit by looking beyond the immediate situation and even beyond the present life to see the results of meeting the trials of life with a positive attitude. When we are finalizers and look back over our ascension careers, perhaps we will be thankful for all of the opportunities for growth that we have had. We are told, "And there is compensation for these trials, delays, and disappointments . . . I will only call attention to the enhanced careers of those mortal ascenders, the Jerusalem citizens, who, by withstanding the sophistries of sin, placed themselves in line for becoming future Mighty Messengers . . ." (*619:3) We should remember that we will be agondonters. Because we live on a sphere that is in spiritual isolation, we have learned to believe without

seeing. As agondonters, we will be able to function in situations of isolation. Though we seem to suffer greater problems in our mortal lives than those on planets with a more normal history, it is because of this very situation that we can develop unique talents. With these unique talents we can better serve the Father and our fellows in our future careers. Perhaps we should join St. Francis in recognizing the value of our afflictions. Perhaps the wise person would call them opportunities rather than afflictions.

—Dick Bain
St. Petersburg, Florida

WHY DO BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO GOOD PEOPLE?

Why does God let so many people suffer, and why does he allow sin to occur?

For most people who are suffering unduly, simple faith might not be enough as an answer. We often need some logical reasoning to substantiate on the intellectual level what is the only true answer on the spiritual level. To answer the above questions, let us take the example of someone choosing to do evil.

As readers of *The Urantia Book*, we know that the Father's plan consists of giving freewill to lowly creatures like us in order that we may gain irreplaceable experience through maximum accomplishment. As human beings, perfection is not our lot at birth, but our eternal destiny. The Father's plan for personal evolution must then allow each of his children to decide for

himself what he will or will not do. Such decisions will obviously result from previous planetary history, social context, and heredity, but it remains a fact that we are free in our actions, be they good or bad, conscious or unconscious.

It is easy to understand, then, that there must be a stage in the evolution of a universe when someone on some planet happens to do something wrong. And victims of such actions might be innocent people just as are victims of an earthquake. We must accept this as part of the Father's plan. Not that he planned every good or bad thing which is happening. No! His plans are as perfect as they originally were. But we live in the realm of time and space, where the potential of evil must coexist with our own freewill. This is so that we may acquire a kind of wisdom which can only be gained from the experience of adjustments to one's hardships. To accept this as part of the Father's plan requires only one thing: FAITH!

Faith which is freely given to anyone who will want to use it as a tool permitting the daily realization of sonship with our spiritual Father. And this is love. Not bad things.

In conclusion, I would like to suggest that we can profit right now, during our material existence, from even our most severe difficulties if we just keep a positive attitude. And this comes about through the acquisition of wisdom, a type of irreplaceable experience which will always be ours during our ascending career through eternity.

—Gilles Laverdure
Greenfield Park, Québec

*"Physical status may handicap mind, and mental perversity may delay spiritual attainment, but none of these obstacles can defeat the whole-souled choice of will." (*740:2)*
