

Spiritual Fellowship Journal

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Eastern Orthodoxy and *The Urantia Book*

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Aphorisms on Prayer & Worship

More Psalms Today

The Spiritual Fellowship of Students of The Urantia Book

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

Guiding Network Principles

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

Network Recommendations

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

The Spiritual Fellowship Journal

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About the Editors

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

Editorials

The Question of Angels

In modern times mainline Christian theologians have had little to say about angels. The scientific-rational atmosphere of our culture has caused many of the faithful to regard angels as a figment of religious imagination. Like Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny, they are mentioned at Christmas and Easter but are not taken very seriously in everyday life.

Angels, however, have made a remarkable comeback, not because of the hundreds of references to them in the Bible, or through the endorsement of clergy, although two decades ago Billy Graham wrote a popular book about angels. The existence of angels has gained credibility primarily because they have been championed by the popular press and books in secular bookstores. Many people have experiences of help and guidance which they attribute to these heavenly helpers.

Christian theology has no systematic view of spiritual cosmology, a higher order of personalities, or life after death. *The Urantia Book* presents a systematic and credible picture of all of these that makes sense of the entire spiritual universe which must exist if life after death and the Christian concept of heaven have any validity. The description of the many categories of spiritual personalities from the Paradise Trinity to the various orders of angels gives a sense of authenticity and rational order to celestial reality. Guardian angels are assigned to individuals and the description of their responsibilities is a fascinating story.

No doubt because of the contemporary interest in angels, the October, 1994 issue of *Theology Today* is devoted to the study of angels. Reading these articles written by mainline theologians and comparing them with the orderly and meaningful picture of the mission of angels in *The Urantia Book* makes them appear threadbare and almost childish. People have a great hunger for this spiritual dimension of reality and, as we have seen, will create it if it is not available in religious institutions. The church desperately needs to discover the enlarged spiritual vision presented in *The Urantia Book*. When this happens there will be a renaissance in the Christian faith which will be the greatest stimulus to spiritual growth since Jesus' gospel precipitated Western Civilization.

-MJS

Science and Religion

There are signs that the historic conflict between science and religion may be changing. An article in the November, 1994 issue of *Omni* entitled "Science and Religion: Blurring the Boundaries" by Margaret Wertheim describes a growing body of theologians and scientists for whom religious faith and scientific reason are not incompatible. Robert Russell, who is both a scientist and a theologian, in 1981 founded the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences which is

located at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley. CTNS has received National Institutes of Health funding to examine the theological implications of the Human Genome Project. The Center, in addition to its academic activities, offers public lectures and provides training and guidance for Christian ministers of all denominations. Dr. Russell points out that no contemporary religion can afford to ignore science without becoming an anachronism. Modern science can provide "scope and insight for faith."

The November 14, 1994 issue of *The Wall Street Journal* reviewed *Of Pandas and People* by Dean Kenyon and Percival Davis. The book attempts to bridge the gap between evolutionists and creationists by presenting an "intelligent-design theory" of the origin of humankind. Critics see it as disguised creationism but the authors deny this accusation, affirming that both creation and evolution are involved in human origin.

Students of *The Urantia Book* will recognize how relevant and insightful *The Urantia Book* is in integrating these contemporary problems between science and religion. The authors describe the work of the Life Carriers in creating life on our planet and relate the evolutionary development of life forms, closely paralleling the scientific picture, culminating in the appearance of human beings. The book also presages contemporary developments like the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences in its superb integration of science, philosophy, and religion.

We are currently going through a time of questioning and debate regarding the nature of reality which Thomas Kuhn in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* points out characterizes the period just before the emergence of a new paradigm in the understanding of the universe in which we live. Frank J. Tipler's book, *The Physics of Immortality*, Doubleday, 1994, makes an interesting contribution to this paradigm shift. Dr. Tipler is not only a scholarly physicist, he displays a remarkable knowledge of the history of science, philosophy, and theology. His Omega Point Theory presents an empirical argument for the existence of an omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent God and the future resurrection of every human being who ever lived. Tipler also advances answers to a host of theological-religious questions and declares that theology is a branch of physics.

The Omega Point Theory reduces everything about human beings—life, mind, personality, and soul—to physical descriptions. Dr. Tipler's extensive and astute scientific argument reminds one of the observation that God is "the most inescapable of all presences, the most real of all facts." (U. B. p. 1127) Throughout the intellectual history of Western Civilization a great many of the most balanced and insightful philosophers and scientists have asserted that there are more facts and reasons to postulate an intelligent First Cause at the ground of reality than random chance.

For those contemporary people who accept only empirical evidence for what is real, *The Physics of Immortality* may significantly influence their view of human life and destiny.

The Spiritual Fellowship Journal

The book has received a wide-spread readership in Europe. Although Dr. Tipler contributes considerable wisdom to humankind's search for reality, his basic error, in my judgment, is his assumption that the human mind has access to only one form of reality: physical phenomena. But, surprisingly, he arrives at conclusions which undergird the basic truth affirmations of the major religions of the world. These truths, however, are viewed in a quite different context.

All of these developments add to the growing evidence that we are in the throes of a major shift in the understanding of reality. I believe the capstone of this new paradigm will be the spiritual universe picture presented in *The Urantia Book*.

-MJS

The Lessons of History

The most pervasive and undisputed observation of our times is that we are living in one of the major transition periods of history. Astute philosophers of history like Oswald Spengler, Albert Schweitzer, Pitirim A. Sorokin, and Arnold Toynbee observe that we are witnessing the decline of Western Civilization. They also observe that all culture cycles are empowered by a great spiritual vision and when that spiritual view of reality loses its relevancy and centrality, the culture declines and disintegrates. All agree that only a new vision of spiritual reality can renew and revitalize our civilization.

Loren B. Mead, an Episcopal priest who is founder and president of The Alban Institute, says in *The Once and Future Church*, "We are at the front edge of the greatest transformation of the church that has occurred for 1,600 years. ...it may eventually make the Reformation look like a ripple in the pond." (p. 68). It is commonplace for writers to refer to our times as the postmodern and post-Christian era. The hunger for spiritual truth has increased but the old Christian paradigm has outlived its relevancy and ability to communicate and inspire. Its sectarian theology about Jesus is losing its appeal for thinking people to the universal gospel of Jesus, a theology that highlights the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of humanity and transcends dogmatic theology and sectarian institutionalism.

Our world desperately needs a new vision of spiritual reality that is based on the foundations of contemporary knowledge and a universe view that is meaningful to people today. *The Urantia Book*, which purports to be a new epochal revelation, has the potential, in my judgment, to serve as the spiritual foundation of a new cultural cycle, and the spiritual dynamic for the transformation of the Christian Church from a sectarian institution into a universal fellowship. It obviously takes time to test and acclimate to a new and inspiring spiritual paradigm. The history of scientific and cultural revolutions demonstrate that many people never make the transition. It may take generations. But for those who are hungry for a new and larger conceptualization of spiritual reality, *The Urantia Book* can be a liberating and inspiring experience!

-MJS

Spring, 1995

Interface: Just Another Source?

I recently spoke with a friend who was interested in obtaining a copy of *The Urantia Book*. I had previously shared with her the opinion that many people have difficulty in approaching the book with a critical but open mind. Her reply was that it "was just another source."

I found the comment refreshing. Many people in religious matters appear motivated more from fear than from faith. Many, both lay and clergy, seem unable to trust themselves to critically evaluate sources outside the mainstream. Laity often feel the need for permission from authority figures to do so, while clergy appear afraid of being seduced by such material, or vulnerable to criticism from other clergy or laity.

Such fear, I believe, has helped to maintain the idolatrous attitude that many Christians have with regard to the scriptures. However, there is also a danger of *Urantia Book* readers falling into the same kind of idolatry. As impressed as we may be with its content, as authoritative and compelling as we may find it, there is no claim to perfection and no anathemas or warnings aimed at those who would criticize it. Indeed, it invites critical inquiry and emphasizes that truth is where it is found.

Throughout *The Urantia Book* there are many comments by the authors such as "we are not sure, but we think..." or "We simply don't know..." It certainly *does* claim to have come from high sources, and that the spiritual content of its message will bear the test of time. But it also clearly invites thoughtful interaction and criticism. As Jesus is quoted as saying to antagonists and would be defenders alike, "The truth never suffers from honest examination." (U.B., 1711)

The Urantia Book, indeed, will not suffer from honest criticism. Such criticism will eventually help sort the essence from the accessory, the truth from its conceptual containers. The early church fathers seldom erred with regard to scripture the way latter day Christian fundamentalists have. They believed God condescended and provided a very human container for the Word through the Scriptures. They believed in an underlying unity of purpose guided and revealed by the Spirit, but that unity and perfection of purpose did not rely on the perfection of its outward form.

The Reformers almost reveled in cataloging the inconsistencies and flaws to be found in the Scriptures. They could do so because they discounted the outward form as secondary and even unimportant. Luther likened the Scriptures to a manger, a very common thing having no outward beauty in itself, but holding what was precious, even divine.

We would do well to so regard *The Urantia Book*. Treating it as "just another source," far from demeaning it, is very much in keeping with its own message and a healthy antidote to idolatry and fetishism. We should confidently invite people to evaluate it on its own merits. In the end it will better serve the purpose it claims to serve.

-Merlyn Cox

The Urantia Book and Spiritual Renewal

The Adventure Has Begun

Paul Herrick

When I first considered the column heading "*The Urantia Book and Spiritual Renewal*," I felt like I couldn't respond to that directly because there must be a "newal" before there can be a "renewal." But as I thought more about it, I realized that there was indeed a "newal." When I was very young I actually did have some spiritual leanings. The problem was that my intellectual development overtook them very quickly. My fascination with both science and adventure, combined with a rapid realization of the fallacies of "Christianity," tended to undermine these leanings and relegate them to the bottom of my priority list. When I returned to college in 1960, after three years in the army, I was well on my way through the transition from "believer" ...to agnostic...to atheist.

When I returned to college in 1960, after three years in the army, I was well on my way through the transition from "believer" ...to agnostic...to atheist.

Two identifiable events occurred during the next two years which gradually turned this process around. In October of '60, shortly after arriving at Indiana Tech, I experienced a "full streamer" on a parachute jump. I had had several close calls during my previous two hundred odd jumps, but this was the first time I had feelings of remorse for the lack of meaning and significance in my life. As my main parachute streamed over my head, and as I went through the emergency procedures to get my reserve chute opened, I remember thinking to myself, "Well Herrick, you've been screwing around and screwing around and it finally caught up to you." Of course, those feelings quickly subsided after my reserve chute opened successfully and I lapsed into the familiar adrenaline high which nearly always follows an exciting brush with death.

The second event occurred in January of '62 when, during an elective course in philosophy, my professor (One Doctor Meredith Sprunger) assigned reading from an ominous looking tome called *The Urantia Book* (the WHAT?). Having been a reader all of my life, I instantly recognized that this book was different. I wasn't sure what to make of it, but it clearly was worth investigating further. I would go to Dr. Sprunger's office and pump him for information, but it was like pulling teeth to get anything out of him. He just sat there with that smile on his face, knowing full well that he had "hooked a big one."

I graduated that June and began my career as an aeronautical engineer. I didn't have a *Urantia Book*, but it was lingering in the back of my mind. One day my new boss and I got into a bull session at the coke machine, and I casually mentioned it to him. He became very interested in what little I could tell him about it, and his interest rekindled my interest. We chipped in six bucks apiece and ordered the book. It came to my house on a Friday and I spent the weekend with my nose buried in it. I took it to work with me that Monday and said, "Here it is. You take it home for a few days and look it over. But either I'm going to buy you out or you're going to buy me out because I want one for myself." He brought it back a few days later and said, "I don't care who buys out who, but I want one for myself too." He was a world class spear fisherman and diver, and he died in 1991 while diving at 280 feet breathing helium and oxygen. He had planned to retire that summer and dive the Mediterranean looking for the first Garden of Eden. *The Urantia Book* had "hooked" him too.

I started reading from page one during the summer of 1962, and finished it about three-and-a-half years later. I knew it was hog wash, but it was wonderful science fiction. ...I started reading it again, and when I was about half way through it, I suddenly knew it was all true.

I started reading from page one during the summer of 1962, and finished it about three-and-a-half years later. I knew it was hog wash, but it was wonderful science fiction. When I finished it, it occurred to me that it might not be hog wash. I started reading it again, and when I was about half way through it, I suddenly knew it was all true. I haven't wavered from that opinion for one second since then, and I've read it seven complete times to date, often spending hours on one paragraph.

My life of adventure has continued (I can't stop) and I've had many more near fatal experiences, but I am slowly realizing that my most thrilling adventures, portrayed in the pages of my beloved *Urantia Book*, are just getting underway.

Paul Herrick is an Aeronautical Engineer and a long time student of The Urantia Book.

Do not try to satisfy the curiosity or gratify all the latent adventure surging within the soul in one short life in the flesh. Be patient! ... Harness your energies and bridle your passions; be calm while you await the majestic unfolding of an endless career of progressive adventure and thrilling discovery.

Eastern Orthodoxy and *The Urantia Book*

by Byron Belitsos

Slowly but surely, *The Urantia Book* is becoming more widely disseminated within Christendom. As we watch its reception by liberal Protestants, and a few Catholics, a fascinating question arises concerning its future impact on Eastern Orthodox Christians.

Drawing upon human and superhuman sources, the *Urantia Papers* claim to provide the true story of the life of the historic Jesus. But how do these writings square with the beliefs of the historic church, whose founders actually witnessed Jesus' life? The Eastern Church traces its bishops and its "Holy Tradition" in an unbroken line back to these earliest believers—even to the Apostles themselves who first preached at Jerusalem and Antioch. How then should *Urantia Book* readers regard this ancient institution, whose patriarchs still sit in Jerusalem and Antioch? Conversely, on what basis might Orthodox Christians approach this claim of a new and strange revelation of the life of Jesus? Are there points of contact between Orthodoxy and *The Urantia Book*, or are the two anathema to one another?

Drawing upon human and superhuman sources, the Urantia Papers claim to provide the true story of the life of the historic Jesus. But how do these writings square with the beliefs of the historic church, whose founders actually witnessed Jesus' life?

The Rising Importance of Orthodoxy

Such questions are more important now than ever. One obvious reason is the collapse of communism in the primary sphere of the Eastern Orthodox Church: Russia and Eastern Europe. After decades of repression, these countries have a significant opportunity to reconstruct their faiths.

On a recent visit to Russia, I witnessed churches that had once fallen into neglect now filled to overflowing; I spoke with people from all walks of life who were involved in a passionate reappropriation of Russia's rich Orthodox tradition. One is a professor who lives in Moscow, a former Communist Party member who is now an Orthodox convert. He has recently discovered and embraced *The Urantia Book* as well, finding a strong affinity between the two faiths. Another friend in Moscow, a magazine publisher who has been in dialogue with the *Urantia* community, is now deeply involved in a complicated project to rebuild a historic church in the center of Moscow. Once an atheist with no interest in religion, she is now a practicing Orthodox believer.

In the U.S., Orthodox Christian communities are growing in membership, unlike many other church denominations, now that they are emerging from their old-world ethnicity. There is also a significant movement of converts from Protestantism to Orthodoxy. In 1987 the bulk of the membership of the evangelical Campus Crusade for Christ converted to Orthodoxy. Other evidence of the growing interest of Protestants is a remarkable new book documenting the conversion to Orthodoxy of eighteen former clergy from diverse Protestant backgrounds.¹

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Scholars and journalists are also giving more notice to Orthodoxy. Karen Armstrong's best-seller *A History of God*, (Knopf, 1993) gives especially sympathetic treatment to the tradition. According to an article in the *Ume Reader* on the current revival of Orthodoxy, Armstrong notes that Orthodoxy "is rooted in mystery and paradox, rather than legalistic do's and don'ts....Eastern Orthodoxy has a rich tradition of mystical practice that Armstrong refers to as a 'Christian Yoga'."²

Is *The Urantia Book* Protestant?

When most reader-believers of *The Urantia Book* think of dialoguing with Christians, they often look to liberal or mainline Protestant churches. At first glance this seems quite sensible, for it certainly requires an environment free of dogmatism to be able to hear talk of a "new revelation."

Some might also argue that the Book itself is part of the stream of liberal Protestant thought, or at least most consistent with it. For example, it is generally "fideist," as is the Protestant tradition. It attacks ecclesiasticism and criticizes ceremonialism and sacramentalism, although it does institute a new form of the Eucharist in the "sacrament of the remembrance." (U.B. p. 1942) And it appears to praise the Protestant Reformation by referring to it in several passages as a "rehabilitation" and "rejuvenation" and even a "resurrection" of the church. (See Paper 195, "After Pentecost.")

Still, there are many important elements in the Book's teachings that lend themselves to interface with Orthodoxy. Eastern Orthodox theology today has strengths where liberal Protestant thought has weaknesses. For example, there is a rising tendency in seminaries to question the divinity of Jesus, to deconstruct the transcendence of the divine, to abandon Trinitarian theology. By contrast, the staunch Orthodox adherence to the sacred traditions of historic Christianity may open doors to dialogue, for the *Urantia* revelation strongly

affirms the historic Christian faith in the Incarnation and the Trinity.

Mystical traditions are not lacking in Protestantism and certainly not in Catholicism, but Orthodoxy contains a vast, rich, and unbroken tradition of mystical theology and practice which is of direct lineage from the early church. One evidence is the superb collection of Orthodox mystical writings known as the *Philokalia*, the cream of over a thousand years of experiential mysticism.³

The Eastern church inherited the fullness of the "desert spirituality" tradition of the early church mystics and ascetics, which harkens back so vividly to the prophetic strain of Judaism. Magnificent liturgy, resplendent symbolism, mystical art, and experiential religion have always had a privileged place in Orthodox religiosity.

The Doctrinal Basis for Dialogue

One beginning place for dialogue would be Eastern Orthodox doctrine. It may amaze many Orthodox believers to discover that the doctrines of the Church "Fathers" (or, "Patristics") that required centuries to evolve are affirmed as generally correct by *The Urantia Book*. This strong link at the doctrinal level means to me that both Orthodox believers and adherents of *The Urantia Book* have much to share and much to learn from each other.

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There are perhaps three key elements of Orthodox belief: the theology of the Trinity, the doctrine of the Incarnation, and the worshipful veneration of icons. The first two are strongly echoed and amplified in the teachings of *The Urantia Book*; and I personally find that the devotional use of icons that pervades the Eastern churches provides a "satisfying symbolism" that can "symbolize that which is permanent in the presence of unceasing change." (See "The Nature of Cultism," U.B. p. 965-6)

The core beliefs of Orthodoxy were spelled out in the Seven Ecumenical Councils of the early centuries of Christianity, which met between A.D. 325 and 787.⁴ The great Patristic age of speculative mystical theology is long over, but latent in "Holy Tradition" are images, practices, and doctrines that can easily lend themselves to creative development. For example, a great revival of Russian Orthodoxy in the 19th century that was induced (at least in part) by the translation of *The Philokalia* into Russian quickly reached new heights of innovative theology (such as Soloviev, Bulgakov, and Berdayev) and of religious art (such as Dostoevsky). The

creative theology of this period in Russia even anticipated later developments in the West such as process theology (which has a strong affinity with *The Urantia Book's* concept of the Supreme Being) and the re-integration of feminine images of deity in Soloviev's school of "sophiology" (which echoes important themes in *The Urantia Book*). It is very possible that a world renaissance of Orthodox life and thought might have followed in the 20th century had this revival not been stamped out by Lenin and Stalin.

Christology and Trinity

But let us return to the original period of creative Orthodox theology. It seems a miracle that the theologians of the early church were able to establish philosophically the truth that Jesus was "homousios" (one in essence) with the Father, while also fully human. We are told in *The Urantia Book* that without the valiant efforts of one of these Greek "Fathers" of the Church, this great and saving truth would have been lost:

Christianity owes much, very much, to the Greeks. It was a Greek, from Egypt, who so bravely stood up at Nicaea and so fearlessly challenged this assembly that it dared not so obscure the concept of the nature of Jesus that the real truth of his bestowal might have been in danger of being lost to the world. This Greek's name was Athanasius, and but for the eloquence and the logic of this believer, the persuasions of Arius would have triumphed. (U.B. p. 2070)

The historical record shows that Athanasius led the Council of Nicaea (325) to repudiate Arianism (the belief that God the Son is fundamentally inferior to God the Father) and to adopt the view that Jesus as Son was "light from light, true God of true God," that is, ontologically equal to the Father.

Amazingly, the earliest Christians arrived at a doctrine of the Trinity that also matches in key points that of *The Urantia Book*. Again, this was not achieved by direct revelation but through the same circuitous, evolutionary route as the dogma of the Incarnation. Several centuries of doctrinal debate were necessary because, according to *The Urantia Book*, Jesus' teachings to his Apostles about the true nature of the Trinity were lost.

Jesus taught his apostles the truth regarding the persons of the Paradise Trinity, but they thought he spoke figuratively and symbolically....The first Trinity of Christianity was proclaimed at Antioch and consisted of God, his Word, and his Wisdom...The Christian concept of the Trinity, which began to gain recognition near the close of the first century after Christ, was comprised of the Universal Father, the Creator Son...and the Mother Spirit....(U.B. p. 1144) [Emphasis added]

Of course, all of these concepts were finally codified in the Nicene Creed in 325.

In addition, in Constantinople in 381, the Second Council spoke more clearly of the Holy Spirit as equal to the other two Persons, and is "...worshipped together with the Father and the Son." This essential teaching of the equality of the third person of the Trinity is also affirmed and greatly expanded by *The Urantia Book*.⁵

As a side note, it is regrettable that the Wisdom or "Sophia" concept of the earliest Christian Trinitarians at Antioch (see emphasis, last quote) faded into the lost pages of early church history. This image of Sophia is in certain ways an accurate depiction of the local universe Mother Spirit concept of *The Urantia Book*. By the fourth century, Sophia was largely dropped in favor of the genderless Holy Spirit, or merged into the rising cult of Mary, the Theotokos ("God-bearer" or "Mother of God"). But there is great hope that she will be retrieved. As we noted previously, through the visionary theology of Vladimir Soloviev, a school of Orthodox "sophiology" arose in Russia in the nineteenth century to explore this ancient notion once again, and this revived Sophia concept is, curiously, enjoying a renaissance both in Russia today and in the United States among eco-feminist thinkers and creation theologians. Is it possible that creative Orthodox theologians might someday revive the cultic basis for the veneration of the Mother Spirit and even the Infinite Mother Spirit?

As a side note, it is regrettable that the Wisdom or "Sophia" concept of the earliest Christian Trinitarians at Antioch (see emphasis, last quote) faded into the lost pages of early church history. This image of Sophia is in certain ways an accurate depiction of the local universe Mother Spirit concept of The Urantia Book.

Whatever the case may be, our key point here is that the trinitarianism of the Ecumenical Councils was, according to *The Urantia Book*, "spiritually" correct:

But though the Christian concept of the Trinity erred in fact, it was practically true with respect to spiritual relationships. (U.B. p. 1145)

The Church Fathers' high concept of the Trinity has been preserved intact down to this day in the Eastern Church, especially in its spiritual sense. In no place on earth is this "practically true" concept of the Trinity venerated, worshipped, meditated upon, symbolized, sensed, celebrated, chanted and sung about with as much energy and faith as in Orthodox churches worldwide. "Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit!" is a constant refrain in the Orthodox liturgy of John Chrysostom, the standard liturgy throughout the Orthodox world.

The liturgy of the Eastern Church creates a cosmic theater for the adoration for the Trinity. It is my view that this exuberant tradition of worship and symbolism could continue

unbroken if these churches were ever to embrace *The Urantia Book*; it is at least my hope as one who was raised within this tradition. The Eastern Church has also spent the greater part of 2000 years praising God for the gift of the Incarnation, and this is a legacy that could certainly be preserved. I would suggest that such sublime notions of transcendence and immanence need only be supplemented by the new narrative of the life and teachings of Jesus in order to create a robust new religion for the 21st century.

Two Views of Salvation

Few Christians realize that there is a wide divergence between the ancient church and its successor churches in the West (both Catholic and Protestant) in the understanding of how man is saved. By the same token, few *Urantia Book* readers realize that the soteriology of the Eastern church is closer in spirit to *The Urantia Book* than that of the Western church.

The differences between East and West can be summarized as follows: The Western tradition is essentially the juridical-Augustinian view that since human will is shackled by original sin, we can be saved only by unearned acts of divine grace that are ultimately *predestined*. Calvinism is perhaps its most extreme form, but this Augustinian teaching—along with the closely allied doctrine of blood atonement whose roots are in Paul—has endured in all branches of Western Christianity. Mainline Protestant theologians have only recently abandoned the Augustinian premises of original sin and atonement.

The Eastern position derives from the very different teachings of St. Maximus the Confessor, the seventh century Greek theologian and mystic. Along with St. Gregory of Nyssa, Maximus is one of the systematizers of the essential early church doctrine of *theosis* ("deification"). Maximus' view of salvation is summarized below by the distinguished historian, Jaroslav Pelikan:

An epitome of the contrast is the formula of Maximus: 'Our salvation finally depends on our own will.' The dichotomy represented by the antithesis between Pelagianism [the rejected Latin doctrine of salvation by reliance on human will] and Augustinianism was not part of Maximus' thought. Instead, his doctrine of salvation is based on the idea of participation and of communion that excludes neither grace nor freedom, which were established once and for all in the incarnate Word and his 'two wills'.⁶

What is important for us here is that St. Maximus' position on salvation is remarkably close to that of Jesus in *The Urantia Book*. Jesus teaches that salvation is a free gift of God that is freely received. But our free will is not "fallen" or "crippled" in the Augustinian view; human will, says Jesus, is an essential factor in choosing to receive such grace: "I declare that salvation is first a matter of your personal choosing."

(U.B. p. 1828) Elsewhere he says, "The transformations of grace are wrought in response to the living faith of those who are the beneficiaries." (U.B. p. 1686) Similarly, St. Maximus writes:

The Spirit does not generate a will that is not willing, but he transforms into deification a will that has the desire [for salvation].⁷

According to Pelikan, the continuing legacy of Maximus in the East on the problem of salvation was such that "...the antithesis between divine grace and human freedom, which dogged Western theology for many centuries, did not present a problem in that form for Eastern Christian thought."⁸

Thus it should come as no surprise that the Eastern church rejects as simplistic and wrongheaded the juridical implications of the atonement doctrine adhered to in the West. We know, of course, *The Urantia Book* takes pains to refute the atonement doctrine, calling it "a barbaric idea." (U.B. p. 60) Likewise, the early Fathers with the exception of Augustine did not emphasize the Pauline view that Jesus' death was a "ransom."

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As we will see in the next section, the Eastern church sees salvation, much as *The Urantia Book* does, as a continuing process of "progress—growth in grace." (See U.B. p. 1682.) Certainly both teachings would consider a tragic error the simplistic evangelistic Protestant formula that salvation depends on being "born again" by virtue of the belief that "Jesus died for our sins."

"Theosis" in Orthodoxy and *The Urantia Book*

In the 60's and 70's, the Campus Crusade for Christ led thousands of college students into the "born again" brand of conversion experience typical of today's evangelical Christianity. A former Crusade leader, Frank Schaeffer, an Orthodox convert, contrasts the born-again experience with Orthodox *theosis* in his book *Dancing Alone*. Schaeffer was perhaps most responsible for leading the Campus Crusade for Christ into the Orthodox church.

The American Protestant also looks for a magical instantaneous "silver bullet" solution to sin. He calls this the "born again" experience. But according to Holy Tradition, just saying that one is born again is meaningless. It does not entail the necessary...use of our free will to choose God's way again and again, which the historical Church taught is the only way we can become like God, to strive to become "deified"—in other words, imitate Christ and through imitation to become God-like ourselves.⁹

Schaeffer's book is a sustained polemic against the narrowing of the theological horizon that is represented by modern Protestantism when contrasted with Orthodoxy.

The modern Russian theologian, Georges Florovsky, writes: "The ultimate aim and purpose of human life was defined in the Patristic tradition as *theosis*, divinization."¹⁰ Similarly, the Jesus of *The Urantia Book* also urged believers to dare to be God-like, to love with a *fatherly* love. Much like the central Orthodox doctrine of the progressive "deification," Jesus taught his followers to engage in a "...glorious progression, to become perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect." (U.B. p. 1604)

Like the other Fathers of the Church, Maximus saw the practice of unceasing prayer (which we will soon examine) as essential to deification. Notably, his teaching on *theosis* was also incorporated into the Christology he successfully defended at the Sixth Ecumenical Council in 681.¹¹

Maximus' theological achievement culminates the line of Patristic thought beginning with St. Athanasius and his forbears. Historians now point out that Athanasius' central argument to Council of Nicaea was the basis of the later doctrine of *theosis*; he declared that if Jesus is not both fully God and fully man, then we *cannot* logically share in the divine nature. His famous line about the Incarnation epitomizes the Orthodox concept of *theosis*: "He became man so that man might become God."

Hesychasm and Orthodox Spirituality

The Greek Fathers' teaching of *theosis* is not just a theological abstraction. It is actually the doctrinal expression of a rich tradition within Orthodoxy of specific worshipful practices. Arising from the experiments of the mystics of the early church, these practices are commonly known under the term "hesychasm" or "hesychia." The literal translation of the Greek word *hesychia* is "quiet" in Latin and "stillness" in English. For the early church, *hesychia* provided the method of carrying out the Biblical injunction of "unceasing prayer," which St. Paul urged for all believers.

Bishop Kallistos Ware, Lecturer in Eastern Orthodox Studies at Oxford University, summarizes the practices of hesychasm:

A hesychast is one who pursues hesychia, inner stillness or silence of the heart, in particular through the use of the Jesus Prayer. This is a short invocation, constantly repeated, usually in the form, 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me.' Through inner attentiveness and the repetition of this prayer, sometimes accompanied by a physical technique involving the control of breathing, the hesychasts...believed that they attained a vision of divine light and so union with God.¹²

John Meyendorff explains the real purpose of the prayer to the hesychast:

The Jesus prayer is at the center of all hesychast spirituality. The Name of the Incarnate Word is bound up in the essential functions of being: it is present in the "heart," it is linked to the breath....*The monk is called to become conscious of the actual presence of Jesus in the interior of his own being...without any images.*¹³ [Emphasis added]

It seems to me that the hesychastic practice of the interior consciousness of the presence of God strongly echoes Jesus in his Second Discourse on Religion in *The Urantia Book*:

Many of your brethren have minds which accept the theory of God while they spiritually fail to realize the presence of God....It is not so important that you should know about the fact of God as that you should increasingly grow in the ability to feel the *presence of God*. (U.B. p. 1733)

Hesychasm evolved directly out of the "desert" tradition of the earliest Christian anchorites of the fourth century in Egypt and Syria. The desert spirituality of these innovators is regarded by most historians to be the historic font of Christian experiential mysticism, both in the West and the East. Western mystics from Meister Eckhart to Thomas Merton drew deeply from this source.

By the sixth century, the various strands of early desert hesychasm were drawn together in a theological synthesis of its Neo-Platonic and Biblical elements. The Hellenistic influence, coming through Neo-Platonic thinkers such as Evagrius Ponticus, emphasized "mental prayer" and tended toward a Platonic dualism of body and spirit. The Biblical approach, epitomized by St. Macarius, a contemporary of Athanasius, was heart-centered and holistic.¹⁴

Hesychastic heart-spirituality was systematized in the sixth century by St. John Climacus of Sinai. Climacus essentially used Neo-Platonic categories to evoke a holistic approach to unceasing prayer. Striking a theme that became crucial in later theological developments, Climacus and his contemporaries *did not pose a contrast between the body and mind or spirit as developed later in the West*. They did not privilege any aspect of the human organism as being closer to the divine vision than any other. Instead, they depicted all elements of the human person as equally "fallen" in the face of God's utter transcendence, and thereby all parts—body, mind, imagination, and soul (compositely represented as "the heart")—*as equally benefiting from the gifts of grace conferred upon the believer practicing hesychia*.

Seen from the psychological point of view, hesychasm involves a practice of *stilling the entire being*, both body and mind.¹⁵ The contemporary Greek mystic and psychologist, Hierothos Vlachos, summarizes the teachings of the Fathers in this respect:

St. Gregory the Theologian regarded hesychasm as

essential for attaining communion with God. "It is necessary to be still in order to have clear converse with God and gradually bring the mind back from its wanderings." With stillness a man purifies his sense and his heart. So he knows God, and this knowledge of God is his salvation.¹⁶

Vlachos quotes John Climacus from his classic work *The Ladder of the Divine Ascent* on the technique of stillness:

Stillness of the soul is "Accurate knowledge and management of one's thoughts....Stillness of the soul is a science of thoughts and of an inviolable mind. Brave and determined thinking is a friend of stillness. It keeps constant vigil at the doors of the heart, and kills or repels the thoughts that come."¹⁷

"Hesychia" and *The Urantia Book*

If it is true that such practices lead to a consciousness of the presence of God, how would Jesus as depicted in *The Urantia Book* regard hesychasm?

The Urantia Book reveals that Jesus used various meditation techniques in his practice of the presence of God. The Greek Alexandrian philosopher Rodan depicts Jesus as a man fully devoted to a "habit" or "technique" that he "so consistently practices....the isolation of worshipful meditation." (U.B. p. 1774)

Later in the passage, we see that this possibly involves a physical and mental discipline, and it certainly involves a form of stillness:

I am deeply impressed with the custom of Jesus in going apart by himself to engage in these seasons of solitary survey of the problems of living...and to do all of this with an eye single to the glory of God—to breathe in sincerity your Master's favorite prayer, "Not my will, but yours, be done...." This worshipful practice of your Master brings that relaxation which renews the mind; that illumination which inspires the soul....The relaxation of worship, or spiritual communion as practiced by the Master, relieves tension, removes conflicts, and mightily augments the total resources of the personality.

Not unlike the hesychasts, we can see in this quote an emphasis on stillness ("relaxation which renews the mind"), breathing ("breathe in sincerity"), and inner attentiveness ("an eye single to the glory of God").

Remember also that Rodan portrays relaxation or stillness as an essential feature of worshipful communion:

From the human standpoint it is a question of combined meditation and relaxation. Meditation makes the contact of mind with spirit; relaxation determines the capacity for spiritual receptivity. (U.B. p. 1777)

We read elsewhere in the Book that worship is "effortless attention, true and ideal soul rest, a form of restful spiritual exertion." (U.B. p. 1616)

Thus, there seems to be many elements of teaching in *The Urantia Book* that provide a bridge to hesychastic spirituality. But much more research is needed in this area. There are important theological similarities between Orthodoxy and *The Urantia Book*; it is not surprising that they teach comparable techniques for practicing the presence of God.

Hesychasm is treated in more depth in my column that appears later in this issue of *The Spiritual Fellowship Journal*. As a final point it is important to note that the hesychasts put stress on (1) repentance and (2) observance of the Commandments, as necessary concomitants to the hesychastic practice of stillness.

The Orthodox Synthesis of

Mysticism and Theology

A closer look at Orthodox mystical theology will help underline its dissimilarities with Western theology and what I believe is a corresponding theological affinity with the spirit of *The Urantia Book*.

The Urantia Book frequently emphasizes that theology must be experientially based. It defines theology as "...the study of the actions and reactions of the human spirit....Theology is always the study of your religion; the study of another's religion is psychology." (U.B. p. 1135)

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In this same spirit, Patristic theologians from the beginning saw theology's purpose as initiating the believer into an *experience of God*.¹⁸ Hesychastic mysticism has continued almost unceasingly in the Eastern church, nurturing theological trends in almost every generation. Orthodox theologians from Athanasius to the present have considered as axiomatic the famous dictum of Evagrius Ponticus, who said "If you truly pray, you are a theologian, and if you are a true theologian, you will know how to pray."¹⁹

The first great challenge to this long tradition of the infusion of mysticism and theology arose in the 14th century. It was issued by a renowned scholar in Constantinople named Balaam, who was influenced by the Renaissance humanism then blossoming in Italy.²⁰ The full story of the fascinating disputes that followed is far too intricate to narrate here. What is important for us is that Balaam's provocations aroused the entire monastic community of the Eastern Church, now concentrated at Mt. Athos, in a passionate defense of hesychasm and the mystery of deification.

The Palamite Synthesis

and Modern Secularism

It fell to Gregory Palamas, a brilliant abbot on the "Holy Mount," to articulate a response from the perspective of the Patristic tradition against the "nominalism" and "apophatism" of Balaam—who by this time had many supporters among the humanistic intelligentsia of Byzantium.

The result of his labors was the ultimate doctrinal synthesis of hesychastic mysticism with Patristic theology. Palamas showed how the most sublime notions of the unknowability of God in his essence (i.e., apophatism), were yet consistent with the doctrine of theosis and the Christ-mysticism of the hesychasts. He distinguished the unknowable essence of God from the knowable "energies" of God as manifested in his revelations to us and as experienced by the hesychastic saints; yet he provided for the paradoxical unity of God's essence and energies.

This is an oversimplifying summary of a great thinker. Suffice it to say that Palamas saved Christianity in the East from what became its fate in the West: *the sundering of theology from religious experience*. Corollary to this was the separation of philosophy from theology, and later of science from religion, that is now an earmark of Western thought. The splintering of the Western medieval synthesis began in the Renaissance and was completed in the Enlightenment; in the end it led to the complete secularization of the Western mind in modern times. While we all undoubtedly enjoy the fruits of science and liberal philosophy that resulted from secularism, the world has paid a heavy price indeed from the "death of God" that was its inevitable by-product. Thus, writing some time in the 1930's, the authors of *The Urantia Book* warned: "Twentieth-century secularism tends to affirm that man does not need God. But beware! this godless philosophy of human society will lead only to unrest, animosity, unhappiness, war, and world-wide disaster." (U.B. p. 2081)

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If it were not for the Palamite synthesis, and its subsequent adoption in the Council of 1351, it is very possible that a secularizing humanism might have taken hold in Byzantium among the Hellenistic intelligentsia—just as it had in Europe. This would have eventually marginalized the unique achievements of Patristic tradition. We can speculate that the result over time might have been the substitution of the

Orthodox mystery of deification with a pagan humanism of self-deification. This of course, is what happened in the succeeding centuries in the West:

The victory of Palamas was the victory of Christian humanism over the pagan humanism of the Renaissance. The full measure of the controversy's significance can be grasped only in the light of what followed [in the West]. An ineluctable decision was set before the Orthodox Church in the fourteenth century: a choice between a unitary (integral) concept of man based on the Bible, affirming the immediate efficacy of redemptive grace in every sphere of human activity, or the choice of an intellectualized spiritualism claiming independence for the human intellect, or at least autonomy from all matter, and denying that any real deification was possible here below. There is no doubt the secularism of the modern age is the direct consequence of the second choice.²¹

Church Governance and Christian Unity

I would like to close by shifting gears and noting the contribution that might be made by the Eastern Church to the reunification of Christianity. *The Urantia Book* blasts Occidental Christianity for its disunity:

Christianity is seriously confronted with the doom embodied in one of its own slogans: "A house divided against itself cannot stand." The non-Christian world will hardly capitulate to a sect-divided Christendom...[the] division of Christendom presents a grave weakness....(U.B. p. 2085-6)

Protestantism now presents the world with thousands of competing "churches" to choose from. One could argue that it has sacrificed unity for the sake of avoiding the problems of diversity.

By contrast, the Orthodox church has retained much of its original doctrinal and organizational unity. Bishops make policy and pronounce doctrine by convening synods, just as they did in the early centuries of the church before the rise of the Papacy. The Orthodox church has always been characterized by an atmosphere of deliberation and a search for consensus among the bishops of the *entire church*, along with input from laity and clergy. The Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople is known only as first among equals in a decentralized church order; there is no pope in Eastern Orthodoxy.

This relatively decentralized form of administration provides one model for how to achieve church unity without overmuch uniformity: the Orthodox church's conciliar style of governance is a *middle way* between Papism and the excesses of Protestant sectarianism. Similar models of "middle way" governance are also exemplified in older Protestant denominations, such as the Anglican and Episcopal.

In the West, Catholic tyranny begat the rebellion of Protestantism against an intolerable ecclesiastical uniformity. Tragically, this in turn shattered the unity of Western Christendom for the foreseeable future. The Eastern church has never generated tyranny or rebellion on such a scale.

Perhaps if the Eastern Church could be induced to see Jesus once again as he lived his life on earth among men—if it could behold the living Jesus as depicted in *The Urantia Book*—perhaps then it, the historic church of Jesus, the upholder of the sacred truths of the Incarnation and the Trinity, the preserver of integral Christian theology over two millennia, may be able to assist in leading Christendom toward its eventual reunification as depicted in this crucial passage in *The Urantia Book*:

The living Jesus is the only hope of a possible unification of Christianity. The true church—the Jesus brotherhood—is invisible, spiritual, and is characterized by *unity*, not necessarily by *uniformity*. Uniformity is the earmark of the physical world of mechanistic nature. Spiritual unity is the fruit of faith union with the living Jesus. The visible church should refuse longer to handicap the progress of the invisible and spiritual brotherhood of the kingdom of God. And this brotherhood is destined to become a *living organism* in contrast to an institutionalized social organization. It may well utilize such social organizations, but it must not be supplanted by them. (U.B. p. 2085)

Notes:

1. *Coming Home: Why Protestant Clergy are Becoming Orthodox*, ed., Peter Gillquist, Conciliar Press, Ben Lomand, CA: 1992.
2. "A Western Eastern Way", *Utne Reader* (Nov/Dec 1994), pp. 32-3.
3. *The Philokalia*, originally compiled by St. Nikodemas of the Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth. (Three volumes in translation.) Published by London: Faber & Faber, 1984. See also *Writings From the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart*, from Faber & Faber.
4. Orthodoxy defines the entire stream of events in the life of the early church—life, death and resurrection of Christ, the creation of liturgical practices and church governance, the adoption of the scriptural canon (settled in 387 at the Third Council of Carthage), and the seven great councils of the Church—as one unified "Holy Tradition" guided by the Holy Spirit.
5. The personality and attributes of the third person of the Paradise Trinity, the Infinite Spirit, are presented in papers 8 and 9 of *The Urantia Book*. The Infinite Spirit's local universe focalization is described in paper 34, "The Local Universe Mother Spirit."

It is notable that the Christology proclaimed at Nicaea was revisited in several other Ecumenical Councils in language paralleling that of *The Urantia Book*. The Chalcedon Council (451) affirmed Christ as "perfect in Godhead and perfect in humanity," and "is made known to us in two natures. The difference between the two natures is in no way destroyed because of the union." Further controversy arose regarding the nature of the humanity of Christ in view of this union. The sixth Ecumenical Council (681) ascribed to Christ "two natural wills." This doctrine is comparable to the teachings of *The Urantia Book*. (See pp. 1331 and 1510.)

6. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Spirit of Eastern Christendom*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press) pp. 181-2.

7. Ibid., pp. 11-12.

8. Ibid.

9. Frank Schaeffer, *Dancing Alone: The Quest for Orthodox Faith in an Age of False Religions*, (Boston: Holy Cross Press, 1994) p. 205.

10. Georges Florovsky, *Bible, Church, Tradition: An Eastern Orthodox View*, pp. 114-15.

11. Against the Monothelites, Maximus argued that the two natures of Christ are not abstract ideas, but *existentially real*. Believers can achieve deification only if a human will or "energy" existed in its fullness in Jesus; this permits Christians to conform to the divine will by uniting themselves sacramentally and mystically to the deified human will of Christ.

12. *The Oxford Illustrated History of Christianity*, ed., John McManners, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) p. 156.

13. Meyendorff, p. 58.

14. Macarius regarded sin as a force that breaks up the unity of the person understood as a *single organism*. Drawing from the holistic image of the Christ physically incarnate, Macarius emphasized the participation of the *whole person* in prayer — the body, mind, imagination, soul and feelings, all compositely represented as "the heart."

Christ came to reestablish the unity of the human composite; and by constantly recalling the name of Jesus the hesychast makes the grace of redemption live within him. That this grace may be truly efficacious, he must make "his spirit return into his heart," the center of the psycho-physical organism, and thus reconstitute the original harmony between the parts of the organism. (Meyendorff, p. 88.)

15. See the chapter on hesychia, pp. 311-326, in Archimandrite Hierotheos Vlachos, *Orthodox Psychotherapy: The Science of the Fathers*, (Levadia, Greece: Birth of the Theotokos Monastery, 1994).

16. Ibid. p. 312.

17. Ibid., p. 315.

18. "What is remarkable about early Christian thought is that both the Orthodox Fathers and the "heretics" had basically the same view of theology's purpose: to initiate the believer into a genuine gnosis, an experiential knowledge of God." Fritjof Capra & David Steindl-Rast, *Belonging to the Cosmos: Explorations on the Frontier of Science and Spirituality*, (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991), p. 48.

19. Evagrius Ponticus., *The Praktikos & Chapters on Prayer*, (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1981), p. 65.

20. Balaam was born and educated in Italy, and migrated to Constantinople in 1338, gaining renown at the Imperial Court through his brilliant scholarship in numerous disciplines. Balaam was fleeing the hyper-rationalistic Thomistic environment of medieval Roman Catholicism, and saw himself as embracing instead the profound Hellenism of the East, and thereby returning to the true faith of the Fathers. Against the rationalism of Aquinas, he propounded (at the imperial academy in Constantinople) the "apophatic" (imageless) theology of Pseudo-Dionysius — a crucial strand in the theological synthesis comprising the doctrine of deification. Dionysius taught that God was radically unknowable through any natural human faculties, fully transcendent to all understanding and knowledge.

But Balaam went even further. By now he had gained such renown that he was appointed by the Emperor to represent the Eastern Church in reunion dialogues with Pope Benedict. He therefore sought a theological basis for overcoming the differences of the contending churches.

In Dionysius [Balaam] found a metaphysical basis for the reunion of the churches: since God is unknowable, why go on disputing about the procession of the Holy Spirit? The Greeks hold that the Spirit proceeds from the Father alone; the Latins defend their seventh-century addition to the Creed (the *Filioque*) by claiming that he proceeds also from the Son. [Balaam thought] this was sheer presumption on both sides, but especially on that of the Latins. (Meyendorff, p. 88.)

On one side Balaam attacked the over-confident rationalism of the Thomists; on the other, he assailed the overconfident mysticism of the hesychast theologians, who presumed to base the dogmas of their Trinitarian theology on *experiential mysticism*.

21. Meyendorff, p. 174.

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A Urantia Church?

Dick Bain

The Urantia Book presents one of the most complete pictures of theology and religion available to humankind. Many students of the book refer to its teachings as their religion. Other readers are uncomfortable with any reference to traditional religion. Increasingly the question arises, "Will *The Urantia Book* inspire the organization of new religious institutions?" Should there be a Urantia church?

The terms "church" and "religion" are often used to mean the same thing, so I will define what I mean when I use the terms. I take my cues from Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary. By church, I mean socialized and organized religion with buildings and clergy. By religion, I mean a community in which the individuals share a common set of spiritual beliefs and attitudes relating to God. Early Christianity was a religion but only later became a church.

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The Questionable Influence of the Church

If some *Urantia Book* readers find the idea of a Urantia religion objectionable, then they would no doubt view the idea of a Urantia church as a terrible turn of events! The distaste of many people in the Urantia movement for a church or even for a religion is understandable. Some rather despicable things have been done in the name of religion. The church has often been a roadblock in the way of social, scientific, and even spiritual progress. Wars have been fought and people have been persecuted because of disagreements over theology. On the other hand, socialized religion as embodied in the church, synagogue or mosque has at times been a conservator of values and even of valuable knowledge. It has also provided a community of loving support for many in times of trouble. And because of its conservative nature, the church has at times been a governor on the engines of change to prevent too rapid or too radical changes. Weaknesses in one situation can sometimes be strengths in other settings.

Another objection that people have to socialized religion, especially as seen in the church, is that it isolates groups from one another; it promotes the "us vs. them" syndrome. If people begin to see the Urantia movement as just another

religion or church with its own holy book, will this inhibit them from looking at *The Urantia Book*? Will we thereby limit the growth of *Urantia Book* readership? Do the advantages of a Urantia church outweigh the potential problems?

If some Urantia Book readers find the idea of a Urantia religion objectionable, then they would no doubt view the idea of a Urantia church as a terrible turn of events!

The Power of Institutions

Some people will see the development of a Urantia church as a great sell-out, the beginning of bureaucracy, and the death of real religion. I would ask this question of such folks: How many practicing Gnostics do you know? The Gnostics in early Christianity were opposed to the development of a professional clergy and they were against overmuch organization. But without organization they had no power. Gnosticism wilted away as a result of the power of the organized Christian church. Humans are institution builders because institutions are the machines that carry out the great tasks of civilization. The Urantia movement will have difficulty accomplishing large, long term programs without the power of a well-organized church.

On Page 1076, the authors of *The Urantia Book* offer an additional reason for the development of a socialized religious institution such as a church: "The Jewish religion persisted also because of its institutions. It is difficult for religion to survive as the private practice of isolated individuals." And again on Page 1083: "While it is true that the institutionalization of religion has usually detracted from its spiritual quality, it is also a fact that no religion has thus far succeeded in surviving without the aid of institutional organization of some degree, greater or lesser." If a Urantia religion exists or is developing, then it seems it will eventually need to organize to survive.

Humans are institution builders because institutions are the machines that carry out the great tasks of civilization. The Urantia movement will have difficulty accomplishing large, long term programs without the power of a well-organized church.

We Live in a Pluralistic Society

But even if a Urantia church develops, many students of *The Urantia Book* will not rush to join it. Such a church will only be one aspect of the Urantia movement. I see three different types of *Urantia Book* readers. The first type is the totally independent person. Many readers have anti-institution sentiments and would have nothing to do with a Urantia church. These people will be valuable to the Urantia movement because they will be free to introduce the book to people who are independent like themselves. The second type of *Urantia*

Book reader is one who embraces the teachings of the book, but remains a loyal member of his or her religious organization. This person is an asset to the spread of *Urantia Book* teachings because they are positioned to introduce the book to people of their church or other religious organization. They are missionaries of a sort. The third type of *Urantia Book* student is one who longs for a church that provides the sort of support and organizational functions that the Christian church provides, but a church composed of students of the book and a church that fully embodies the teachings of *The Urantia Book*.

What of those who embrace the teachings of The Urantia Book but choose to remain a part of the traditional Christian church? Can anyone be intensely involved in this enlarged picture of spiritual reality and be a Christian (Moslem, Jew, etc.) as well?

What of those who embrace the teachings of *The Urantia Book* but choose to remain a part of the traditional Christian church? Can anyone be intensely involved in this enlarged picture of spiritual reality and be a Christian (Moslem, Jew, etc.) as well? Maybe. It depends on the brand of religion with which they are involved. The fundamentalist sects of the various religions have very little tolerance for ideas outside their theology. The few people I have spoken to who are both students of the book and members of Christian fundamentalist churches choose to conceal their involvement with the book to avoid problems with their church. On the other hand, based on personal experience, a liberal Christian has little difficulty in this religious coexistence because the theology of the book is basically compatible with that of the liberal Christian church. This coexistence, of course, requires a sharing of time and resources.

The few people I have spoken to who are both students of the book and members of Christian fundamentalist churches choose to conceal their involvement with the book to avoid problems with their church. On the other hand, based on personal experience, a liberal Christian has little difficulty in this religious coexistence because the theology of the book is basically compatible with that of the liberal Christian church.

When a *Urantia Book* student is a part of an established religious organization such as the Christian church, I suspect that in most cases the organization or church gets more of the person's money, time, and loyalty than any *Urantia* organization gets. Of course, there is a good reason the Christian church gets the lion's share of everything. It has the infrastructure which the *Urantia* movement in general does not have. It offers worship services on Saturday or Sunday, and a professional clergy who can counsel people, perform

weddings, and represent the Christian community to the rest of the world. At its best, the church offers a social/spiritual structure within which people feel they have a place and an identity. The *Urantia* movement struggles at a disadvantage because it lacks much of this structure; therefore it cannot command the loyalty and resources the Christian church can. Furthermore, in a culture that is so largely Christian, the Christian church has the approval and sanction of society; the fellowship of *Urantia Book* readers is still largely unknown. When the religion inspired by *The Urantia Book* does develop such an infrastructure, then it will begin to command more of the loyalty and resources of students of the book. For those who long for a church that embodies the teachings of *The Urantia Book*, there is an unmet need. It appears we already have a *Urantia* religion; I believe it is only a matter of time before some sort of *Urantia* church emerges from this religion.

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What will be the relationship of a *Urantia* church to other religious organizations, especially the Christian church? It all depends on perceptions. It's not how this *Urantia* church sees itself that counts; it is how the dominant culture perceives it. Because the *Urantia Book* readership is small and not prone to the sort of sensationalism that attracts the press, there is no general awareness of *The Urantia Book* at this time. This anonymity will not last forever. When groups of *Urantia Book* students organize churches, they will become very visible. If this church movement remains small, it can no doubt maintain cordial relations with all but the most conservative Christian churches, much as Unitarian Universalists do. If it grows into a real powerhouse and begins to pull in large numbers of members from Christian churches, it may be seen as a threat and perhaps some tensions will develop. If, on the other hand, this postulated *Urantia* church is or is perceived as a splinter Christian church, then it may blend into the Christian background so well that it's hardly noticeable.

The Future Development of the Church

In addition to groups of *Urantia Book* students forming churches, how will *The Urantia Book* influence institutional religion? If we look to the example of the Christian church and Judaism, we note that the Christian church was built on the foundations of Judaism, but was far more than just a reformed Judaism. But the differences between Judaism and the emerging Christian religion were much greater than are the differences between the teachings of *The Urantia Book* and Christianity. The theology of the book could almost be seen as Christian theology purged of its negative aspects. Will the *Urantia Book* frame of reference grow within the cocoon of the Christian church and eventually split off to form its own denomination?

I feel that there is a strong possibility of a spin-off sect. Or will the Christian church—or a segment of it—evolve because of its contact with *Urantia Book* teachings and become a reformed and revitalized Christian Church? This is what many of us hope will happen. The authors of *The Urantia Book* indicate that either a new church will emerge from within the Christian church, or that the Christian church itself will be transformed from within. Possibly both of these events will take place. On page 1866 they tell us, "Thus does the so-called Christian church become the cocoon in which the kingdom of Jesus' concept now slumbers. The kingdom of the divine brotherhood is still alive and will eventually and certainly come forth from this long submergence, just as surely as the butterfly eventually emerges as the beautiful unfolding of its less attractive creature of metamorphic development." It may be what will emerge does not resemble the Christian church, but it would be hard to believe that it would not at least bear traces of its ancestry.

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It seems that rites and rituals are a necessary part of most religions, and I am sure a Urantia church will be no exception. The rites and rituals that are a part of the Christian religion have a long history and a strong identity and might be appropriated by an emergent church structured by *Urantia Book* teachings. Unfortunately, some of the rituals, such as communion, have traditional atonement meanings that are not in harmony with *Urantia Book* theology, but they could be redefined so they reflect the more positive teachings of the book. Even if a Urantia church develops totally outside of the Christian church, I suspect that there will be many similarities between the Urantia church and the Christian church. It is much easier, faster, and generally the natural human tendency to adapt existing rites and rituals rather than start from scratch. Symbols may be more of a problem.

On page 966, the authors inform us that "...even the restatement of the religion of Jesus must develop a new and appropriate symbolism." What then becomes of the primary symbol of traditional Christianity, the cross? It certainly has quite a different meaning for those who are students of *The Urantia Book*. Can this venerable Christian symbol be purged of its atonement connection and rehabilitated to symbolize the real meaning of Jesus' life and death? The problem is that the cross is primarily a symbol of Jesus' death, not his life. Perhaps a shepherd's crook would be a more appropriate

symbol. Another symbol that will surely be appropriated by a Urantia church is that of the three concentric blue circles, the banner of Christ Michael and the symbol of the Paradise Trinity. I suspect that a Urantia church will long use well-known symbols before developing a unique symbolism.

The proliferation of churches reflecting the teachings of *The Urantia Book* may be a long way in the future. It will of necessity be preceded by the widespread social awareness of the teachings of *The Urantia Book*. I feel that the Urantia movement already is a religion whether or not *Urantia Book* students recognize themselves as such. The early Christians probably did not perceive themselves as a new religion; they didn't even name themselves, someone else did. When there comes to be a widespread consciousness of the Urantia community, perhaps it will also be named by outsiders.

A case could be made that a Urantia church of sorts already exists. Consider: Church-goers meet periodically for fellowship and worship. Students of *The Urantia Book* gather periodically for fellowship and occasional worship at conferences. They do not have permanent buildings for these functions, or a priesthood, but there are those talented teachers and leaders who organize conferences, lead workshops and worship. And there is an underground church of sorts in the study groups who meet in people's homes. These groups are generally educational and social, but they certainly have spiritual overtones. There was a so-called "house church" movement in the US a few decades ago. The proponents were trying to move the church away from the conventional church buildings and into the home to pray and worship as the early Christians did. Those Urantia study groups which have a more spiritual focus certainly have the flavor of a house church. When a Urantia church emerges, even if it originates from within the Christian church, the real source could be from the seeds of the more spiritual study groups. We may conjecture about where or how a new religious organization will emerge as a result of the Fifth Epochal Revelation, but the authors of *The Urantia Book* make it clear that something will emerge—not if, but when!

"The great hope of Urantia lies in the possibility of a new revelation of Jesus with a new and enlarged presentation of his saving message which would spiritually unite in loving service the numerous families of his present-day professed followers." (p. 2086)

Dick Bain is an electrical engineer and an editor of Innerface International. He is a long time student of the The Urantia Book.

The Science of Serendipity

Carol Hay

Science has always fascinated me. I've been especially intrigued by the stories of how some of the most important discoveries occurred through serendipity, such as someone accidentally knocking over a bottle in the laboratory and finding the solution to a perplexing problem, or how some scientist would be walking the streets in the middle of the night, unable to sleep because of a problem she couldn't solve, and some totally unrelated activity, like sitting on a park bench, would suddenly dispel her confusion and bring her a crystal clear answer to the problem.

The definition of serendipity is the faculty or happenstance of finding valuable things by accident—like the three princes of Serendip in the Persian fairy tale. What a wonderful coincidence! Surely, I thought, there must be some way to develop a process to access serendipity, to be able to experience it more often. So I began to research this phenomena. I came across many books that told stories about people who had experienced it, but no one seemed to know how serendipity happens.

A friend who loves the philosophy of science would give me books and tell me, "Carol, this book will really help you understand more of the process of serendipity than you realize." But it would be a book on quantum physics or something similar, and I couldn't even read it. Meanwhile, another friend presented me with the gift of a book entitled *Leadership and the New Science* by Margaret Wheatley. Since I wasn't reading anything that was helping me get any closer to the phenomenon of serendipity, I decided to sit down and read some of this book. As I read through the book, I realized that I had stumbled onto the answer for which I had been searching. There it was, serendipity explained. But it didn't come to me the way I thought it would. And it didn't look like what I had expected. Even so, it made perfect sense. I had experienced serendipity!

As I followed Margaret Wheatley's journey through the new sciences, I was introduced to the startling fact that many of the principles that are being discovered in the scientific world are *exactly* the same principles that are present in human life and human relationships. I discovered that serendipity is not some mysterious event that occurs when you happen to be shown a momentary glimpse of the secrets of the universe. Rather, I found that by looking at the principles and patterns of science, we open ourselves to the guiding influence that God established for all of his creation. Serendipity can be a way of life.

I found what I was looking for, but not in the way, shape, or form I thought I would. I have always respected and

marveled over the sciences, but I never believed that science could help me access the insights to make my life work more in harmony with reality or to help me better cooperate with the indwelling Spirit of God. Now, it seems incredibly obvious to me. I knew I was on the right track when I read that in the quantum world, *everything is based on relationships*.

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The Importance of Relationships

All of us live in various kinds of communities with multiple relationships. These are living communities that are every bit as much a physical, cohesive system as a thunderstorm moving overhead. They are as vital and interrelated as the human body. Religious communities, in particular, are characterized by warm and loving fellowship. We are all connected in a faith family.

The new science, as it is called, has much to teach us about relationships. Quantum physics, for instance, is actually quite different in method than the linear reductionism model described in the old science which has dominated scientific thinking for the last three hundred years and is still largely the basis of the way people design and manage things today. Computers can now take three-dimensional mathematical equations and feed them back into themselves millions of times and see precise patterns repeat over and over again, where before, brief observations had only revealed chaos. The new science has also detected unseen forces that affect living systems. They are called "fields," and space is filled with them. In the past few decades, science has discovered that the universe is indeed, as *The Urantia Book* tells us, full of guiding principles and patterns.

The recent discoveries of relationships in energy systems have forced scientists to redefine living systems. A living system seems to be anything that reacts and intrarelates organically. It can be anything from an aloe vera plant to a mass of particles, or a group of people like a *Urantia Book* study group, or a church congregation. Science has discovered that a tiny element in a living system can affect the whole—sometimes dramatically so. When you express an opinion in one of these social or religious groups, you are influencing the whole living system in some way. If there are problems between or among individuals in the group, the way they respond to the situation influences the whole system. We can learn about the way living human systems act and react by observing other living systems. That's why I believe that examining some of the new sciences can help answer questions that arise in the Urantia Movement and the church.

Insights from Chaos Theory

One of the common experiences of study groups and churches is a deterioration of interest and purpose. Such a dispirited atmosphere is sometimes increased by controversy, splits, and chaotic conditions. Many people feel we are living on the borderland of spiritual chaos in our world. How does such a system reorganize itself? In 1977, a scientist named Ilya Prigogine won the Nobel Prize for his work demonstrating the capacity of certain chemical systems to regenerate to higher levels of self-organization in response to environmental demands. He coined the term "dissipative structures." Chaos theory and the principles of dissipative structures assure us that an open, participative system can emerge from chaos better and stronger than it was before it lost its equilibrium. But for this process to work, a system must communicate within itself. All too often when there is controversy and division, communication stops. Such disruptions in a living system, however, can take on a whole new light when we look at them through the insights of the new science.

In a dissipative structure, the things that make a system fall apart are the very factors that are important in creating new forms of order. Imagine! Here's how it works. When new information enters a system, it enters as a small fluctuation that varies from what the system has so far been doing. If the system pays attention to the fluctuation, the information grows in strength as it interacts with the system and is fed back on itself. Finally, the information grows to such a level of disturbance that the system can no longer ignore the event. At this point, with so much disturbance, the system in its current form falls apart. Here is the most important part: this disintegration does not necessarily mean the death of the system. In most cases, the system can reconfigure itself at a higher level of organization in a way that makes it better able to deal with the environment.

The Urantia Book description of the Lucifer rebellion is a good example of what happens when a resilient, self-organizing system is disrupted. Lucifer developed his Manifesto of Liberty and began to promote it throughout the local system. Because he was well respected, this manifesto received attention, and the disruptive influence of his ideas began to grow. And then the rebellion occurred, where the system, as it was currently identifiable, began to fall apart. We may wonder how in the world the leaders of our local system who were loyal to the Universal Father could have stood by and allowed what appeared to be a major disruption to continue without reeling in the rebels?

But what was really going on was a living system beginning to react to new, disruptive information, and reorganizing itself. Celestial authorities estimate that thirty times the number of beings would have joined Lucifer if suppression had been attempted. Our system is still reorganizing itself according to its own natural integrity as a system that has Christ as its

nucleus and Paradise as its ultimate pattern. You see, because our universe has a spirit nucleus, it will always respond to disruption by reconfiguring itself, reorganizing, adapting, and growing in ways that are harmonious with the spirit nucleus.

That is why the authors of *The Urantia Book* teach that the universe is structured to allow evil to run its own self-destructive course. They point out that the good resulting from the Lucifer rebellion is a thousand times the evil it caused. Lucifer's great error is now clear. His plan had no spiritual nucleus, no great attractor, no Universal Father. There were no authentic spiritual values to set the pattern and guide the way. Cosmic insanity may simply be freedom without spiritual purpose, direction, or meaning. Consider a violin string lying on a table. It is free, but it has no purpose, no meaning. In a violin it is part of a system that is dedicated to beauty, and as a part of that system it comes to magnificent life.

Restructuring and Growth Assured by the Spirit Nucleus

The history of our world is the story of dissipative structures. The great spiritual lesson of history is that our imperfect mortal structures will disintegrate but we are involved in living systems that will eventually reorganize themselves in a higher spiritual pattern and purpose. Our faith in this process is often weak. We forget the Spirit Nucleus and try to shore up living systems even when they no longer serve current needs. We avoid situations that tax or test them. We impose structures and make them strong and complex because we fear fluctuations that would knock us off balance. The typical structure that is used in business organizations, the pyramid, is made that way. It is designed to withstand any disruption. Why? Because a great number of us believe that living systems, whether they are religious groups or business organizations, need to *protect themselves against fluctuation and change*. We believe that things have to happen in an orderly fashion, an order that is predetermined so that everyone knows in advance what their job is, what behavior is proper and approved. People have very little confidence that living systems, such as groups of people, can deal with fluctuations and change, reacting to information and reorganizing themselves in a manner that is faithful to a higher ideal.

Where did this belief come from that we have to hold the world together, that living systems are so fragile? According to Margaret Wheatley, it comes from seventeenth century science, Newtonian reductionism, in which the world was seen as an incredible machine set in motion by God, a closed system like a gigantic clock. It was dangerous to tamper with the mechanism. Humanity was told by its leaders that this was a universe that could not be trusted with change, rejuvenation, growth. We were warned that we had to control a living system because once it was disrupted, it would fall apart.

But we are slowly learning that we do not live in a mechanistic universe: "The universe is not like the laws, mechanisms, and the uniformities which the scientist discovers, and which he comes to regard as science, but rather like the curious, thinking, choosing, creative, combining, and discriminating *scientist* who thus observes universe phenomena and classifies the mathematical facts inherent in the mechanistic phases of the material side of creation." (U. B. p. 2080) Change and growth are indigenous in the universe. Fluctuation and modification are part of the very process by which order is created. Instead of valuing stability, we should be valuing *resiliency*.

What makes a system capable of being resilient and reorganizing itself? What is the key characteristic of a healthy, self-organizing system? The answer is "self-reference." In response to environmental or internal disturbances that signal the need for change, a system can change in a way that remains consistent with its essential nature. As it changes, it does so by referring to itself, whatever changes it does make will be consistent with its already established identity. Self-reference is what facilitates orderly change. When you cut yourself, for example, how does your body know that it's supposed to grow skin in that spot instead of hair? Because the body refers to itself and finds the answer in your DNA. The body is a self-organizing system that is part of a much more complex system of a holistic human being. Personality and the indwelling Spirit of God are the nuclei that are our unchanging reference points. When we pray or worship we are self-referencing with our ultimate sources of being.

How do we self-reference as members of the Urantia Movement or the church? By way of the values we embrace from the teachings of Jesus, by focusing in on a vision of what and who we are, by accessing our talents and our skills, and by referring to our past. These stabilize us in the midst of a changing environment. "You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free." (Jn. 8:32) And when we live the truth, we do so as personal agents of those values.

If we can't find enough information to self-reference with, then perhaps we need to consciously create a vision of the organizations with which we identify. If we trust the workings of the chaos theory, says Margaret Wheatley, we will see that the dominant shape of our organizations can be maintained if we retain clarity about the purpose, vision, and direction of the organization. If we succeed in maintaining *focus*, rather than hands-on control, we also create the flexibility and responsiveness that every organization craves. What leaders are called upon to do in a chaotic world is to shape their organizations through concepts, not through elaborate rules or structures.

Meaning and purpose work hand in hand with values to serve as faithful points of reference. As long as we keep purpose in focus in a living system, we will be able to live

through times of chaos making decisions and initiating actions of creative resiliency. These are not "far out" ideas. Our own experiences in personal spirituality give credence to these concepts. When we look back over our lives, we can see patterns of meaning and form that emerged. These patterns usually did not come through our careful planning, but often in spite of it. Indeed, what we see in retrospect is that which we *value* becomes that which we *manifest* in all this magnificent unpredictability and seeming chaos.

The Mystery of Self-organizing Systems

Erich Jantch, a noted scientist in the field of dissipative structures, discovered what he considered to be a profound teaching embedded in the living systems he studied. He said, "The natural dynamics of simple dissipative structures teach the optimistic principle of which we tend to despair in the human world: the more freedom in self-organization, the more order." Isn't it remarkable that the two forces we have always placed in opposition to one another, freedom and order, turn out to be partners. Freedom and order have a symbiotic relationship in living organizations. Self-organization succeeds when the system *supports* the independent activity of its members by giving them a strong *vision* of the group's service potential.

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Another characteristic of self-organizing systems is the importance of leadership, not leadership as we normally think of it—heroes on white horses—but leadership in the sense that, within any group, at any given moment, individuals rise for just that moment and make a difference. On page 1959 of *The Urantia Book*, Jesus is speaking to James Zebedee, and says, "In my universe and in my Father's universe of universes, our brethren-sons are dealt with as individuals in all their spiritual relations, but in all group relationships we unfailingly provide for definite leadership. Our kingdom is a realm of order, and where two or more will creatures act in cooperation, there is always provided the authority of leadership." In a self-organizing system, it is usually not the influence of large numbers or favorable majorities that create change, but often it is the action of a lone individual that gets amplified by the system.

In some mysterious way we are learning that thoughts and actions are often connected in the world even though widely separated in space. Something strange has been discovered about space in the quantum world. In agreement with *The Urantia Book*, space is now thought to be everywhere filled with fields, invisible nonmaterial structures that are part of the

basic substance of the universe. Science developed field theory to explain action and reaction *at a distance*.

In 1982 a famous experiment was conducted by a French physicist named Alain Aspect which proved that even elementary particles are affected by connections that exist unseen across time and space. In these experiments, two electrons, apparently linked by non-visible connections, demonstrate that they are, in fact, an indivisible whole that cannot be broken into parts, even by spatial separation. When we attempt to measure them as discrete parts, both react to the attempted measurement. Scientists are stymied by the electrons' unseen fabric of connectedness.

British physicist David Bohm commented on this phenomena by saying, "The notion that all these fragments are separately existent is evidently an illusion, and this illusion cannot do other than lead to endless conflict and confusion." Even more significant are the unseen mental and spiritual fields that link and influence people across space. These invisible fields prepare entire populations for change and growth. This quantum-like process is based on a shift of quality, not an accumulation of quantity. We need to be very serious about the kind of mental and spiritual fields we create.

What can we do to support the quantum process in facilitating spiritual growth? First of all, we can change our perspective. We could make a conscious shift in vision from the small, discrete, visible structures and people in our lives to the vast invisible domain of mental and spiritual fields with connections everywhere. Second, we could create structure in our lives, our study groups, and our churches with the primary purpose of facilitating quality relationships. And finally, before we can truly avail ourselves of these non-material fields in concert with the spiritual forces of the universe, we need to release one secret treasure we are famous for hoarding: Information.

The Importance of Information

Information is the energy that fills the field. It is the life blood of personal and organizational growth. In too many human organizations, information is doled out to members according to how important or strategically placed the member's position in the organization is perceived to be. People typically think that information should be restricted. Those "higher-up" in organizations tend to keep new information to themselves, as if by releasing information, it might trigger chaos in the system. And they are right. *But that's exactly what a system needs to stay alive.*

In order for a system to regenerate itself, it must have information. Then it can change, adopt, and move forward. If the only information it has is the information that merely confirms the status quo, then that system will die. The fuel of enhanced life is *new* information. Like love, it cannot be contained. Information is a living property, not a commodity. In biologic living systems, each molecule "knows" in some

way what the other molecules are doing. If information is not available, the system cannot function correctly.

Wheatly suggests that we develop a whole new relationship with information that requires us to embrace its living properties, not to open ourselves to indiscriminate chaos, but rather to facilitate aliveness and responsiveness. If we are seeking the desirable state of an open system that is resilient, information needs to be our key ally. We are often so engaged in trying to control information that our organizations have been dying, literally, for information they could feed upon, information that was different, discomforting, and filled with enough instability to knock the system into new life.

Mainline Christian churches are a current example of organizations which are suffering for lack of information. They have been steadily declining in numbers and vitality for decades. The clergy in these churches are highly educated, yet, in general, they have neglected to share with parishioners what they have been taught in their seminary training regarding sensitive areas such as the origin of the Bible and the blood atonement theory. Sharing this information would, indeed, shock many of the faithful. But it would also lay the foundations for restructuring the church into a more relevant and vital spiritual fellowship.

These same mainline clergy have, by and large, refused to seriously examine *The Urantia Book*. Although the book's message will someday revitalize the church and transform our world, church leaders are afraid of facing this possibility. We need to understand that a threat to traditional orthodoxy is not necessarily bad, that it can bring with it the opportunity for significant growth. Dissipative structures show us that living systems are constantly moving in and out of stability and fluctuation. We should not be afraid of the inevitable changes that occur in a living system. The church has a clear core of identity in Christ with which to self-reference and establish creative order. The church also has an unprecedented opportunity in our times for the serendipitous discovery of the greatest upstepping of revelation since Jesus walked on our planet.

From the new sciences I have learned that life is infinitely more integrated than I had ever imagined. When we wrestle with events that effect our lives, we often move so far away from the guiding principles and patterns of the universe that, when we bump into them, mostly by accident, we have a serendipitous experience. These serendipitous events are a glimpse into what life could be like if we have faith that our lives are in God's hands. The science and art of serendipity is engaged when we exercise this faith by actively cooperating with God's call to respond to a larger vision of Reality.

Carol Hay, a longtime student of The Urantia Book, speaks extensively to church groups on personal religious growth, and is an editor of The Invisible Fellowship Magazine.

Culture and Values

Aphorisms on Prayer & Worship

Inspired in part by Eastern Orthodox Hesychasm

Byron Belitsos

A child strolling in the park with her father races away for a moment to chase some doves in the grass. Suddenly she bounds back to him and grabs his huge hand. She looks up at him in an awed innocence. "Daddy, can I..." He gazes back, listening affectionately as she recites her simple desires. Finishing, she looks up at him for a moment in silent awe...and races away again to play in the grass.

"Except as you turn about and become more like this child..." (UB: 1761) To enter in God's presence, we become humble and trusting and innocent and playful. Stay true to such childlike purity and we will be blessed with a vision of God: "*Happy are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*" (See UB: 1574 and Mt 5:8.)

The pure of heart are blessed, but the mind is the gateway to the heart. Therefore, purity of heart implies purity of mind. "*The divine nature may be perceived only with the eyes of the mind. But the mind that really discerns God, hears the dwelling Adjuster, is the pure mind.*" (UB: 1105)

But how? How does one achieve this childlike purity of mind and heart? Only by continual practice. That is, by practicing the presence of God always, by becoming familiar with the ways of God, by striving for unbroken prayer and communion. "*The secret of his unparalleled religious life was this consciousness of the presence of God; and he attained it by intelligent prayer and sincere worship — unbroken communion with God.*" (UB: 2089)

"Unbroken communion" means that the mind is pure in its focus on God. "Undistracted prayer is the highest act of the intellect...The state of prayer can be aptly described as a habitual state of imperturbable calm."¹

¹Evagrius Ponticus, *The Praktikos Chapters On Prayer*, c. 34 & 52.

Two practices in particular support the undistracted awareness of the presence of God: meditative relaxation, and consecration of will. "*The spiritual presence of Divinity...is determined by the spiritual capacity for receptivity and by the degree of consecration of the creature's will to the doing of the divine will.*" (UB: 64)

It is especially in the relaxation of worship that ever-deepening channels of spiritual receptivity are created. Says Rodan: "*The secret...is wrapped up in spiritual communion, in worship. From a human standpoint it is a question of combined meditation and relaxation. Meditation makes the contact of mind with spirit; relaxation determines the capacity for spiritual receptivity.*" (UB: 1777)

Consecration of will means a willingness to continually discern the divine will. Meditative relaxation — or hesychia — empties the mind of irrelevant thoughts so that the divine will can be sought *without distraction*. "When through inner attention, the mind or heart attains *hesychia* or rest from passionate thoughts, it [is] able to contemplate God unceasingly."¹

¹George Maloney, S.J., *Prayer of the Heart*, p. 31.

"Words are irrelevant to prayer..." (UB: 1616) "Happy is the spirit that attains to perfect formlessness at the time of prayer."¹

¹Evagrius Ponticus, *The Praktikos Chapters On Prayer*, c. 117.

"They asked Abbot Macarius: How should one pray? The old man answered: There is no need to waste time with words; it is enough to hold our hands and say: 'Lord, according to your desire and to your wisdom, have mercy.'"¹ And this teaching of Macarius, one of the first teachers of "pure" prayer in the desert tradition of Christianity, that is at the origin of the development of the "Jesus Prayer" within the hesychast tradition.

¹Quoted in John Meyendorff, *St. Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality*, p. 24.

Faithful prayer eventually empties the heart of all concerns and even all thoughts, so that it may be filled by communion with the One. Once the child has asked for all she wants, once she turns all her desires over to her father, her mind is prepared to contemplate him in silent awe. In the early hesychast tradition, one simply calls on Jesus' presence to enter silently into one's heart, continually.¹

¹See Meyendorff, pp. 20-40.

But what if our young girl comes of age in a world built on false needs and inflated desires? Then her desires are no longer so simple. What then will she ask of her Father? Will there be an end to her desires and her troubles? How then can she achieve undistracted prayer, even unbroken communion with God?

Jesus taught that slavery to the desires of the flesh — the bondage of self — is an obstacle that must be overcome not by suppression and self-denial, but by a return to simple faith in the indwelling spirit with repentance. "*It is the very goodness*

of God that leads men into true and genuine repentance." (See "Lesson on Mastery", UB: 1609ff)

The Greek root for repentance is *penthos*. According to the hesychast tradition, true *penthos* is accompanied by "the gift of tears" — the heartfelt experience of sorrow over misspent passion which truly cleanses the soul. "Pray first for the gift of tears so that by means of sorrow you may soften your native rudeness... Pray with tears and your request will find a hearing. Nothing so gratifies the Lord as supplication offered in the midst of tears."¹ "The desert tradition claims a great deal for the power of tears."²

¹Evagrius Ponticus, *The Praktikos Chapters On Prayer*, c. 5, 6.

²Alan Jones, *Soul Making — The Desert Way of Spirituality*, p. 82.

"Happy are those who weep, for they shall receive the spirit of rejoicing." (UB: 1570) "The cry of the righteous... opens the door of the Father's storehouse of goodness..." (UB: 1639)

"God is distressed because of the image which has been lost to him. A soul is far dearer to him than the rest of his creation. Through sin it becomes dead, and you, sinner, think nothing of this! You should grieve for the sake of the God who grieves for you. Your soul is dead through vice; shed tears and raise it up again!"¹

¹ St. Ephrem, quoted in Alan Jones, *Soul Making — The Desert Way of Spirituality*, p. 97.

Tears enlist the love of the Father. "Behold, Mercy waits for your eyes to shed tears, to purify and renew the image of the disfigured soul."¹ "The cry of the righteous... opens the door of the Father's storehouse of goodness, truth, and mercy..." (UB: 1639)

¹ St. Ephrem in Jones, p. 97.

What of our child, the burdened one who has now come of age? Her tears, one at a time, will show her the difference between her true and false needs.

"Weeping, then, has a triple function. It softens the hardened and dried-out soul, making it receptive and alive. It clears the mind. It opens the heart. Tears soften, clarify and open. We weep all the more when we see what and who we are in the light of what we are called to be."¹

¹ Alan Jones, *Soul Making — The Desert Way of Spirituality*, p. 96.

Once the heart is softened by repentance, it is made pure. Now one may *consecrate the will*. Prayer and thanksgiving will quickly escort the heart toward worshipful communion, for the mind is no longer distracted. This was the teaching of

the hesychast tradition, in which mind and heart are made pure by *penthos* and by meditative worship (or *hesychia*).¹

¹ See Maloney, S.J., *Prayer of the Heart*, chapters 3-5.

The *Urantia Book* makes a helpful distinction at this point: Prayer is not in itself worship. Unlike prayer, worship makes no request for self; it is the *antidote* to the urge of self. The praying heart is still distracted by the concerns of self, but worship is the true communion of the pure heart with its Maker. "The moment the element of self-interest intrudes upon worship, that instant devotion translates from worship to prayer..." (See UB: 65)

Prayer is a ladder to a higher vista. But the best view comes after the summit is achieved. "Prayer is indeed a part of religious experience, but it has been wrongly emphasized by modern religions, much to the neglect of the more essential communion of worship." (UB: 1123)

Worshipful communion is the ultimate relationship, an effortless, restful, soulful, and delightful sharing of love for its own sake. (See UB: 1616) "Hesychia is continual adoration of the ever-present God."¹

¹ St. John Climacus, quoted in Maloney, p. 32.

Sources:

Alan Jones, *Soul Making — The Desert Way of Spirituality*, (HarperSanFrancisco, 1985).

George Maloney, S.J., *Prayer of the Heart*, (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1981).

John Meyendorff, *St. Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality*, (New York: St. Vladimir's Press, 1974).

Evagrius Ponticus, *The Praktikos Chapters On Prayer*, trans. by John Eudes Bamberger, (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1981).

What agencies led her to abandon her pure heart? To the child of faith, these are all one thing: simply demons. To the adult of knowledge, these agents are social systems built on ignorance, fear, greed, and delusion.

Overcoming the demonic agencies of "this world", then, is the key to a prayer practice that leads to true communion. The inward practice of inner reform has precedence over the outward practice of social reform, for "The kingdom of God is within you".

Now in stillness may the feeling-heart speak. As the mind is stilled, so the emotional self is purified, through the gift of tears, through the catharsis that separates true needs from false. And now may the pure heart shine, for surely will our Father see to our *true* needs.

-Byron Belitsos

Psalms Today

Planetary Progress

Universal Father, among your vast assemblage of celestial agencies and personalities, we acknowledge the Most Highs as the overcontrollers of our planetary progress. We rejoice that they use the limitless resources of the cosmos to curb our misdirections and stimulate our growth.

May your Spirit of Truth guide us past the false security of militarism into the sure influences of social brotherhood establishing peace on earth.

Inspire intellectual and artistic cross-fertilization that we may discover the perennial values of true philosophy.

Stir us to courageous ethical awakening that goodness and righteousness may become the standard of the land.

Enlighten our political wisdom that we may select competent national leaders and public servants who work toward international cooperation and world government.

Give us spiritual insight and cosmic intuition to envision the eternal realities of your kingdom that we may be energized by living faith to bring spiritual pressure from above to shape our human destiny. (82)

"Never should a righteous cause be promoted by force; spiritual victories can be won only by spiritual power. This injunction against the employment of material influences refers to psychic force as well as to physical force. Overpowering arguments and mental superiority are not to be employed to coerce men and women into the kingdom. Man's mind is not to be crushed by the mere weight of logic or overawed by shrewd eloquence. While emotion as a factor in human decisions cannot be wholly eliminated, it should not be directly appealed to in the teachings of those who would advance the cause of the kingdom. Make your appeals directly to the divine spirit that dwells within the minds of men." (1765:4)

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*.