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Sent: Friday, May 03, 2019 8:55 PM
To: Neal Waldrop - gmail (nealwaldrop606@gmail.com)
Subject: Global Endeavor / Revelation Revealed / webinar on April 27, plans for May 4
Attachments: 2016-07-17_RR-T08_P088-146_Q059-077.pdf; 2019-05-01_Daniel-Robinson_philosophy-lecture-11-segment-3-plus-glossary-bio.pdf; UB_2081-2082_P195s08.pdf

Dear fellow readers of *The Urantia Book* and friends of the Global Endeavor,

On Saturday, April 27, we conducted our twelfth webinar based on topic 8 of *Revelation Revealed*, a topic that is entitled, “Comparing and contrasting the true teachings of Jesus with the traditional tenets and practices of organized, institutional Christianity.”

Extended controversy pitting Augustine against Pelagius

During the webinar, panelists analyzed and reacted to several pages of *Revelation Revealed* narrating an intense controversy that occurred in the early decades of the fifth century — contention that pitted Pelagius, a relatively obscure British monk who was then preaching in Rome, against Augustine, bishop of Hippo in north Africa, an ecclesiastical superstar whose extant works in Latin have made him the most prolific author who ever wrote in that language and, not incidentally, the most influential theologian who lived and taught in Western Europe during Christianity’s first few centuries.

Nonetheless, the teachings of Pelagius emphasizing the essential goodness of human nature and the freedom of the human will are considerably closer to the revelators’ views than the doctrines that Augustine proclaimed and promoted. For example, Pelagius denied the idea of original sin and the need for infants to be baptized, whereas Augustine asserted that human beings could not attain righteousness by their own efforts and were totally dependent upon the grace of God, while emphasizing the role that he associated with the organized, institutional church.

Further, Augustine’s extended struggle with Pelagius and Pelagianism eventually led him (Augustine) to repulsive teachings that amount to predestination — convictions that clearly influenced John Calvin and, through him, the entire spectrum of Evangelical thought among Protestant Christians.

Before I seek to summarize the discussion, please permit me to comment on this person Augustine. Now in the Christian tradition, he is commonly identified as “Saint Augustine.” I will not do that because to use the title “Saint” involves accepting the authority of the organization that conferred it upon him. But in any case, Augustine of Hippo, the bishop of that city, was a towering figure in the early history of Christianity, probably the paramount theologian in the western half of the Christian tradition; but I would ask you to bear in mind who this person was.

Well, Augustine of Hippo was a noble Roman; he came from a wealthy family background. His family was not of the extremely wealthy category that would have made his father eligible for the Senate as conceived in imperial Rome, but they were definitely in the upper tier of wealthy persons.

He, Augustine, his family background, was associated with the principle of authority, Roman authority, Roman hierarchy, Roman uniformity. Therefore Augustine did not come to this controversy with Pelagius with an open slate. To the contrary, he was *Roman*. He identified with these traits that we discussed in my document “Romanità,” and I hope that you will remain aware of all this when you reflect on the summary that follows below.

The question for active consideration

In the most fundamental sense, the explanation and analysis that appear on pages 104 through 109 of *Revelation Revealed* are aimed at becoming aware of a potentially vicious attack on the teachings of *The Urantia Book* that would amount to name-calling and guilt by association. In other words, we need to understand and be prepared to deal with a possible assertion that the teachings of *The Urantia Book* are “Pelagian” and therefore do not deserve to be considered seriously — on the grounds that Pelagius was condemned in the early decades of the 5th century by various popes of the day and during certain church councils. Therefore the following formal question appears at the top of page 109:

66. How would you respond if a theologian or some other aficionado of Christian doctrine and history were to assert that *The Urantia Book* is “Pelagian,” on the understanding that he or she intended that epithet as a badge of opprobrium, ignominy, and shame, and was wielding it as an all too convenient excuse that dispensed him or her from making the effort to analyze the teachings in substance and discuss them in detail?

Participants agreed that the techniques of sloganeering and name-calling have definitely not disappeared from the circumstances of human life in our era. To the contrary, it is quite plausible to argue that techniques and capabilities associated with social media in the Internet age have made these highly unpleasant phenomena even more prominent than they were in earlier generations. After all, attaching a disparaging meaning to a person’s name (in this case, Pelagius) is an effective tool for crushing an opponent or someone’s contending views, at least in the short run.

From similar perspectives, two participants recounted incidents during which certain other persons expressed hostile attitudes toward *The Urantia Book* and the teachings of the revelators:

— One participant, while being treated in a hospital, was visited by a clergyman who was making his regular rounds for counseling and consolation. The clergyman saw a copy of *The Urantia Book* on a table in the hospital room and asked the participant to explain it. Our panelist devoted about one minute to answering the question, after which the clergyman backed out of the room and out the door, never turning around. Our panelist now interprets this action in terms of the traditional superstition, “Never turn your back on the devil.”

— Another participant stated that while she was sitting in an airport in Brazil, waiting for her plane, a fellow passenger asked to examine her copy of *The Urantia Book*. (He told her he was a missionary who had been seeking to evangelize indigenous people in the interior.) After he had read passages in

The Urantia Book for about ten minutes, he suddenly stood up, threw her copy in the air, and exclaimed: “This is the work of the devil!”

Analyzing the contention involving Pelagius and Augustine

Here are key excerpts from encyclopedia information about Pelagius that appears on pages 105 through 107 of *Revelation Revealed*:

- [Pelagius] “emphasized the primacy of human effort in spiritual salvation.” [page 105]
- [Augustine] “published several denunciatory letters ... particularly [in relation to] Pelagius’ insistence on man’s basically good moral nature and on man’s own responsibility” [page 105]
- [Pelagianism:] “A 5th-century Christian heresy taught by Pelagius (*q.v.*) and his followers that stressed the essential goodness of human nature and the freedom of the human will.” [page 106]
- “Pelagianism was opposed by Augustine, bishop of Hippo, who asserted that human beings could not attain righteousness by their own efforts and were totally dependent upon the grace of God.” [page 106]
- “In the controversies of the Reformation, as well as within Protestantism and Roman Catholicism, those who have defended human cooperation have been called Pelagians by their adversaries.” [page 107]

I would also like to pass along interesting comments that I received by E-mail from a panelist who participated in our preceding webinar (April 20), but who knew that he would not be available on April 27. He wished to send insights about Pelagius that he had acquired by reading the book *Pelagius: Inquiries and Reappraisals* by Robert F. Evans. In part, this colleague wrote to me as follows:

According to Pelagius, grace (of creation) is nothing more or less than the gift of our rational free will — that we are able to make genuinely free will choices, not that we produce grace by our choice. Pelagius states that we can conform to and reinforce God’s grace through our free will choice by refusing to sin in all/any of our actions. The grace of free will choice confers the possibility of the perfectibility of human nature in the light of God’s love. Augustine hated that idea!

During the webinar, I remarked that Pelagius appears to have been arguing about the individual’s responsibility, whereas Augustine maintained that the underlying question involved not only whether God’s grace had been sufficient, but also whether God had chosen to grant it in various circumstances — or, by implication, whether God had declined to provide sufficient grace. If Augustine’s views were accepted, I asked, would this implicitly make God a puppet master pulling the strings, so as to undermine or at least weaken the reality of human free will?

One participant replied that these ideas of Augustine’s certainly seem to abrogate personal responsibility. Another participant commented that the question of arbitrary and capricious grace enabled persons at the top of the social, political, and theological pyramid to invent all sorts of requirements that the individual would have to fulfill if he or she wanted to obtain sufficient grace to lead a good life. Since levels of literacy were quite low and since the organized, institutional church had a monopoly on education at the time (as well as a lock-hold on culture and knowledge), those at the top of the pyramid had full authority over society and could disseminate whatever principles and doctrines they wished.

Another panelist commented that Augustine saw the human race as being corrupted by sin (i.e., the “original sin” of Adam and Eve). This, in her view, is difficult to harmonize with the conviction that human beings were created in the image and likeness of God. She called attention to comforting and inspiring assurances that Jesus provided in an evening gathering during the third preaching tour (Paper 150):

“You cannot buy salvation; you cannot earn righteousness. Salvation is the gift of God, and righteousness is the natural fruit of the spirit-born life of sonship in the kingdom. You are not to be saved because you live a righteous life; rather is it that you live a righteous life because you have already been saved, have recognized sonship as the gift of God and service in the kingdom as the supreme delight of life on earth. When men believe this gospel, which is a revelation of the goodness of God, they will be led to voluntary repentance of all known sin. Realization of sonship is incompatible with the desire to sin. Kingdom believers hunger for righteousness and thirst for divine perfection.” [The Midwayer Commission, 1683:2 / 150:5.5]

Another participant cited the assurance that Jesus provided during one of his morontia appearances after the resurrection, while highlighting his remarks about the fruits of the spirit:

“Salvation is the free gift of God, but those who are born of the spirit will immediately begin to show forth the fruits of the spirit in loving service to their fellow creatures. **And the fruits of the divine spirit which are yielded in the lives of spirit-born and God-knowing mortals are: loving service, unselfish devotion, courageous loyalty, sincere fairness, enlightened honesty, undying hope, confiding trust, merciful ministry, unfailing goodness, forgiving tolerance, and enduring peace.**” [The Midwayer Commission, 2054:3 / 193:2.2 — emphasis added: the sentence in bold type]

In contrast, the same panelist declared that the idea of original sin is unjust, unfair, and dark. It implies that human beings are born, live, and die with a spiritual cloud hanging over us. To which I responded that one of our participants (a person whose professional duties pertain to computers and information technology) does seem to be living with a perpetual cloud over him, although it may just be the Google Cloud, the IBM Cloud, or even the Dream Weaver Cloud. To my knowledge, however, there have not been any adverse effects from a spiritual perspective!

In relation to meeting a possible challenge whereby the word “Pelagian” had been used as a dismissive epithet, one participant counseled a calm approach that would center on asking questions aimed at drawing out the person concerned and creating some basis for reasoned and reasonable discussion. He realized that this will not work in all instances, but commented that it would be highly unwise to launch into a heated and contentious argument with such a person.

To summarize the net conclusions that panelists appeared to have reached during the webinar, I read the following two paragraphs from page 108 of *Revelation Revealed*:

— Pelagius appears to have been an austere figure who may also have been Puritanical, but we agree with him that human nature is fundamentally good, that human beings are free to choose between good and evil, and that sin occurs only by deliberate choice, not as a consequence of another person’s actions at some previous moment.

— In other words, we agree with Celestius and other followers of Pelagius that the doctrine of original sin is a myth, that infants are not born with some imaginary stain, and that initiating a sound and favorable relationship with God does not require baptism or any other ceremony carried out by some representative of institutional religion.

Predestination: Augustine and his influence on John Calvin

The text on page 108 of *Revelation Revealed* proceeds to point out that during Augustine’s extended struggle with Pelagius and Pelagianism, his views on how God bestows grace became increasingly restrictive. He ended up proclaiming that God has made arbitrary decisions that some persons will be saved and that others will not. According to Augustine, God made such decisions before time began, and therefore before any individual was born. These repulsive teachings most assuredly amount to predestination. They clearly influenced John Calvin and, through him, the entire spectrum of Evangelical thought among Protestant Christians.

How, I asked, can we reconcile the conviction that God has chosen some persons to be punished for eternity with the idea the God is a loving father? One panelist appeared to answer for the group by responding that these two disparate ideas cannot be reconciled; they are an obvious contradiction.

Preview of our webinar on May 4

Now that we have reached the middle of page 109 of *Revelation Revealed*, we will begin discussing the rather long section of topic 8 that is entitled, “Christianity: key features and practices. I intend to stimulate substantial discussion about each sub-element. As a practical matter, I believe that discussion during our webinar on May 4 will be limited to the first four sub-elements, all of them appearing on page 109:

- (a) A religion *about* Jesus instead of the religion *of* Jesus.

- (b) The atonement.
- (c) Doctrines and creeds.
- (d) Special status for the clergy.

In connection with sub-elements (c) and (d), I will lead participants on a substantial detour that will enable us to discuss the realities, overtones, and implications that are closely associated with the following two sentences in section 8 of Paper 195:

[The mother of modern secularism was the totalitarian medieval Christian church. Secularism had its inception as a rising protest against the almost complete domination of Western civilization by the institutionalized Christian church. \[The Midwayer Commission, 2081:2 / 195:8.2\]](#)

As the Midwayer Commission implies, the organized, institutional Christian church dominated Western civilization for approximately one thousand years (500 – 1500 CE). During that millennium, Christian clerics held a monopoly on education, learning, and thought. In effect, they insisted that all aspects of human life had to be understood and pursued from the intellectual and theological perspectives of accumulated Christian doctrine.

The second attachment to this message is a two-page segment from a philosophy lecture that portrays this situation in conceptual ways that I consider particularly interesting. During the webinar on May 4, we will read and discuss these two pages just as if they were an integral part of *Revelation Revealed*.

DETAILS

As explained at the bottom of the first page of this attachment, the material consists of segment 3 of lecture 11 (“Hippocrates and the Science of Life”), which is part of a 60-lecture course by Professor Daniel N. Robinson entitled, “The Great Ideas of Philosophy, 2nd Edition” (2004). This course is available on CDs or on DVDs; it is sponsored by a commercial enterprise with two names, “The Great Courses” and “The Teaching Company.” I originally transcribed this material in June 2014, then reviewed and verified my transcription on April 19. To assist you further, on page 3 of the attachment I have provided a glossary of a few unusual words and also biographic information about Professor Robinson.

After we finish discussing this text, we will read and discuss section 8 of Paper 195, which mainly discusses the corresponding issues from the opposite perspective (problems and dilemmas associated with secularism). For your convenience, I am also sending you the corresponding pages from the single-column edition of *The Urantia Book* (i.e., the third attachment).

Along the way, I plan to ask the panelists why the fixation of certain Protestant Christians on a literal interpretation of the Book of Genesis led them to undertake heavily politicized campaigns whereby they advocated prohibiting science teachers from teaching the theory of evolution in U.S. public schools — a prohibition that was actually enacted into law in some states of the United States.

In addition, I will find some convenient opportunity to ask them to reflect on the assignment of responsibilities among the twelve corps of master seraphim (Paper 114, section 6). In other words, I will ask them to comment on the apparent balance of the interests of the seraphic planetary government and, by implication, the relative share of emphasis and attention that topics related to religion receive. To say this even more simply, I will ask the panelists to talk about the relationship between religion and all other aspects of human life on our planet Urantia.

PRACTICAL FACTORS

1. Since the recordings of our previous webinars remain available on YouTube, you could watch any or all of them whenever you wish. Here is the link that would take you to the specific location on the Internet:

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC_6QHPLuABZojhdjE8XJRQg

As a workaround that would help you if you do not have this link immediately to hand, you could log onto the main site for YouTube and then search for “Global Endeavor.” The results would include a reference to our programs, although it may not appear at the top of the list.

2. Here is the standard time line that applies to all our discussions, including the next webinar on Saturday, May 4:

- Pacific Time Zone: from 12:00 to 2:00 pm.
- Mountain Time Zone: from 1:00 to 3:00 pm.
- Central Time Zone: from 2:00 to 4:00 pm.
- Eastern Time Zone: from 3:00 to 5:00 pm.

Please be aware that the starting time is only approximate, for it usually takes us a few minutes to make the adjustments to the rather complicated software that cause all the participants to be viewed and heard correctly. In relation to our preceding webinars associated with topic 8, live streaming in YouTube began at about ten minutes past the hour indicated above.

Regards, Neal Waldrop.
Chairman, the Committee for the Global Endeavor
[May 3, 2019 at 8:55 pm]