

The Urantia Book: A Cosmic Jesus Story

by Dr. Meredith J. Sprunger

Of all the possible challenges the Christian story might face, the discovery of intelligent life on another world will shake the foundations like nothing before. With the Christian story based on specific events within a specific culture on our planet at a particular point in time, how do human views of philosophy, theology, spiritual living and eternal life relate to lives lived elsewhere in an inhabited universe?

How does the life of Jesus on our world relate to the cultural evolution of what may well be a countless array of inhabited planets in our universe? With a theology of sacrifice based on the traditions of primitive Hebrew bedouin tribes, how do concepts such as salvation and grace assume significance on a world with a different evolutionary history than our earth?

This essay by Dr. Sprunger points in a constructive direction by linking the most recent thinking about Christian theology with the cosmology and eschatology outlined in *The Urantia Book*. It points toward a rational philosophy and theology while leaving open the possibility that every personality in the universe ultimately is oriented to life through a personal relationship with what we know as "the Christ."

Religion is usually the last of the cultural disciplines to change its frames of reference following the discovery of new knowledge. Although Western Civilization has entered a new age in terms of its scientific astronomical orientation, most Christians are pre-Copernican in their spiritual cosmology. When they think of God and the spiritual world, unconsciously, they assume heaven is up, and hell is down, even though intellectually, they realize this makes no sense in our modern astronomical cosmology. Consequently, they continue to live with an earth-centered Christology.

In the pre-Copernican world view the earth is at the center of the solar system.

This simplistic cosmological view is further augmented by prescientific concepts of eschatology. In spite of substantial evidence that we live in an evolutionary universe, where gradual evolution is the key to all growth and development, most Christians assume that after death, we are somehow instantly changed from material beings into a spiritual existence.

Eschatology: A study of things related to human destiny and the so-called "end times."

Among all of the areas of theology and eschatology, the construction of a universe spiritual cosmology is the least consistent with contemporary knowledge. Various writers have speculated about the need for consistency between the discoveries of material reality and the spiritual reality which engulfs human life. We can start with the known physical universe and extrapolate into the unknown. The new astronomy, therefore, can serve as a conceptual foundation from which we might speculate as to what an integrated parallel spiritual cosmology might look like.

Astronomers tell us we live in an hierarchical universe composed of galaxies and superclusters. The curved nature of space suggests that we live in a limited universe, but it is of such gigantic size, that distances are measured in billions of light years. The universe exhibits evolutionary processes with nebulae creating new suns and systems, and old suns dying out.

With these facts and probabilities of our material astronomical cosmology in mind, let us project a spiritual cosmology which is harmonious with such a universe.

In addition to the traditional theology of a Trinitarian Godhead comprised of relationships between three divine persons, there must be Absolutes serving as the source of all of the potentials of the infinite past, present, and future of the universe—absolutes relative to which all evolutionary activity takes place. This aspect of deity, to use a Whiteheadian term, we might refer to as *the Primordial manifestation of God*.

From distant galaxies to the most minute particles of energy-matter, we observe a creative process at work in the evolving time-space universe. Jung, Tillich, Teilhard de Chardin, Whitehead, and others have called attention to this evolving aspect of reality. Borrowing again from Process Theology, we might label this *the Consequent or Process manifestation of God*. From the perspective of *The Urantia Book* this is a theology of the Supreme Being.

Viewing the countless galaxies with their probable myriads of inhabited planets, we must assume there are countless deity personalities of infinite variety and nature, ministering to this universe of universes. This function of deity we might call *the Distributive manifestation of God*. In addition to enlarging our deity concepts, any realistic theistic metaphysical picture must have a setting in a spiritual cosmology which is at least as extensive as our vast astronomical universe. In such a cosmology, it would be reasonable to assume that the residence of the Trinity and other aspects of Primordial Deity is located at the center of the universe of universes. This, traditionally, has been known as Paradise.

"At the heart of this eternal and central universe is the stationary Isle of Paradise, the geographic center of infinity and the dwelling place of the eternal God." *The Urantia Book*

Paralleling the galaxies and superclusters of the material universe, it would seem reasonable to project spiritual administrative structures corresponding to these material galaxies and

supergalaxies, which we will refer to as local universes and superuniverses. Each local universe and superuniverse would have a contingent of Distributive Deity personalities responsible for fostering life and ministering to all of the planets and personalities in this section of the universe of universes.

The third basic assumption in projecting a relevant spiritual cosmology in the universe of universes, is that the key *modus operandi* in the spiritual universe is evolution. All of the events and personalities of this spiritual cosmology are shaped and conditioned by the evolving dynamics of evolutionary growth. In the present universe age, Process Deity is playing a major role in the galaxies and universes of time and space.

Intelligent beings of mortal status originate on the inhabited planets as the culminating development of biological evolution in the ecosystem. The minds of these material mortals are enlightened by a spiritual ministry which includes aspects of Primordial, Process, and Distributive Deity activities. Through this leading of the spirit ministry, and the mortal truth, beauty, goodness value perception capacity, man makes decisions and identifications with spirit reality. These decisions evolve a quasi-spiritual soul which has survival potential, after the physical body-brain mechanism deteriorates and dies.

Postmortal experience with a new quasi-spiritual body-mind continues in the spiritual universe, virtually where evolutionary experience ended on the material world. Gradually, through rigorous growth experiences, these advancing personalities become more and more spiritual until they achieve true spirit status. Spiritual evolutionary education and growth continues as the individual progresses from universe to universe, inward in the spiritual cosmos, until these pilgrims achieve Paradise, and are taken into the embrace of the Universal Father. This ends the finite phase of experience, and opens new levels of reality for the opportunity of education and service, which continues into the infinite and eternal future.

With these initial assumptions rooted in our contemporary knowledge of universe cosmology and associated scientific phenomenal insights, we shall now attempt to project a universe Christology harmonious with these observations.

Each material-spiritual local universe is assigned a contingent of Distributive Deity personalities by the Universal Father. The hand of these Distributive Deity personalities in our local universe is "the Christ"—a Divine Son incarnated on our world as Jesus of Nazareth. In each local universe, this Son of God is known as "the only begotten Son" because, for all practical purposes, he is God to all in his local universe—"He who has seen me has seen the Father." (John 14:9)

In the cosmology of *The Urantia Book* this Distributive Deity is known as "God the Sevenfold" and consists of 1. The Local Universe Creator Son, 2. The Ancients of Days, 3. The Seven Master Spirits, 4. The Supreme Being, 5. God the Spirit, 6. God the Son, 7. God the Father.

In each local universe the Universal Father delegates responsibility to the Local Universe Creator Son (the local universe manifestation of Christ) for all that takes place in his universe.—"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." (Matt. 28:8) The first task of the Local Universe Son and his associates is physical—to set in motion the creative nebular forces which produce the local physical systems with their suns and planets, as visualized by the prologue of the Gospel of John. In this capacity, we would refer to the Local Universe Son as our Creator.

As planetary evolution progresses, eventually, beings with wisdom and worship potential appear on the scene. The Local Universe Son and his Distributive Deity associates provide various forms of spirit ministry to these intelligent beings, as their civilization and culture evolves. At some point in the cultural-religious development of each planet, which might be called: "The fullness of time", the Local Universe Son decides that the planet is ready for a bestowal mission. Whereupon, he or one of his Distributive Deity associates, incarnate in the likeness of the mortals of the realm.

The Bestowal Son brings a more complete knowledge of the Universal Father, and reveals the "Christ" as the way, by which, all in the local universe proceed to the Father—"I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me." (John 14:6) The Local Universe Son serving in this capacity, we might refer to as our Savior. In "the fullness of time" this Bestowal Son returns to the planet to inaugurate a new era of service and advanced development for the planet.

Once a universe Christology is established on a planet, there is a general recognition that the various religions of the planet all have vital spiritual insights, and that each religion can learn from the others. Mortals on such worlds begin to understand that it makes little difference where we begin our spiritual education in the universe. Following physical death, all mortals who have evolved souls of survival value are resurrected, with a new type of body and mind, and continue their education and growth in the local universe, toward spiritual perfection, under the guidance and loving ministry of our Christ, our Savior, the sovereign of all.

Eventually, we graduate from the experiential schools of the local universe, and with the blessings of Christ, begin our more advanced spiritual training, as we proceed inward in the universe of universes. When our long, long evolutionary universe training and growth culminates in reaching Paradise, and we are embraced by the Universal Father as his faith sons and daughters who have risen from animal origins to divine status. No doubt our real spiritual universe ministry will then begin.

While engaging in these theological speculations it is also important to appreciate the universal appeal of the revelation Jesus brought to our world, the revelation that the Absolute God of universes, Distributive deity, the Primordial, the Consequent, the Process—all are aspects of a loving heavenly Father who maintains loving personal relationships with every created being in the universe. "The Universal Father rules a universe of universes by the compelling power of his

love. Love is the greatest of all spirit realities. Truth is a liberating revelation, but love is the supreme relationship." *The Urantia Book*

The foregoing Universe Christology is sketched in broad, impressionistic strokes. It is presented in the hope of stimulating creative theological thinking relative to a spiritual cosmology, which is harmonious with our contemporary knowledge of universe reality. Anyone interested in a more detailed consideration of religion from a universe point of view, will find *The Urantia Book* to be a highly informative and rewarding resource book.