

Faith, Doubt, Uncertainty, and Cosmic Citizenship

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Author's note: This essay attempts to explore *The Urantia Book* overview of the faith adventure in the context of some of Paul Tillich's observations on faith in his classic work, "*The Dynamics of Faith*"—in particular Tillich's views on doubt and uncertainty as inevitable components of the faith quest.

Introduction

Each of us has begun the journey of faith. While our creative spiritual imaginations provide us with insight into the nature of the goal of our journey of faith, we sometimes find ourselves puzzled and confused regarding the best way to attain that goal.

The Urantia Book tell us that by embarking on this journey, ". . . you are sure to encounter, and if you have the courage, to traverse, the rugged hills of moral choosing and spiritual progress."

If we know something about the path ahead, which winds through these "rugged hills of moral choosing", perhaps we will be better equipped to deal with the uncertainty and difficulty which *The Urantia Book* guarantees we will encounter.

The Urantia Book refers to this process as the ascent through the psychic circles—the path which can lead from the first moments of self-consciousness in childhood, to a morality based on universe citizenship later in life—a progressive expansion of social and personal identity.

This ascent through the psychic circles relates to personality integration with the Supreme Being. Hence, growing through the psychic circles involves the attainment of ever more meaningful levels of functional personality integration with the social and spiritual milieu in which we find ourselves living. We become more real as we achieve increasing personality integration with the lives and purposes of other personalities in combination with a pursuit of the Father's will.

Cosmic citizenship is not just a concept of identity, a concentric circles pin on the lapel; it involves reaching a stage of maturity in which our decisions, choices, and actions increasingly are based on our best understanding of the true welfare of the cosmic whole. Cosmic citizenship is a living orientation to action, not a mere confession of belief in an exalted ideal.???

The concept of "personality integration" derived from *The Urantia Book* does not mean the attempt to bring order to one's subjective labyrinth of psychological associations but rather refers to the integration of one's personality with the personalities of others in the living, evolving organism of the Supreme.

"The universe is a whole; no thing or being exists or lives in isolation. Self-realization is potentially evil if it is antisocial. It is literally true: "No man lives by himself." Cosmic socialization constitutes the highest form of personality unification. Said Jesus: "He who would be greatest among you, let him become server of all." [15:10.14]

We each have many concerns which consume our attention in daily life.? We are concerned about our needs for shelter, food, clothing, economic security for our families, education and health care for our children—the list is long in our increasingly complex world.? We have concerns about social and political matters.? But we also have some concerns about our spiritual lives, our personal relationships with God and the service of his purposes—concerns that sometimes get pushed down on our list of priorities.

How do we prioritize our concerns? What is most important?? What is the difference between how we would answer these questions in a philosophical discussion vs. how our daily lives reflect what our real priorities are??

Honest consideration of the following questions should help you gain a deeper perspective on the primary architecture of your true values (spiritual life).

- 1. In daily life, to which tasks do you devote your best time, energy and thinking?
- 2. What are the causes, dreams, goals or institutions to which you contribute time, money, or creative effort?
- 3. As you live your life, what power or powers do you rely on and trust?
- 4. To what or to whom are you committed in life—for what or for whom are you willing to subordinate or sacrifice your deepest human longings and interests?
- 5. With whom or with what group do you share your most sacred and private hopes for your life and for the lives of those you love?
- 6. What are your most sacred hopes, your most compelling goals and the primary purposes in your life?

We can combine all these questions into one:.? What is the central value relative to which all of your other life choices and decisions are made???

The devotion and behaviors with which we pursue that which is of greatest importance to us is what constitutes our true religious life. ?Our religious life may be wholly secular while still being pursued with religious devotion.? The task of religious growth as it relates to cosmic

citizenship is to make sure that those central values to which we are most devoted ? our ultimate concerns ? have survival value; that they reflect engagement with universe reality, are truly spiritual in nature and cosmic in scope.?

"Religion is not a specific function of life; rather is it a mode of living. True religion is a wholehearted devotion to some reality which the religionist deems to be of supreme value to himself and for all mankind. And the outstanding characteristics of all religions are: unquestioning loyalty and wholehearted devotion to supreme values. This religious devotion to supreme values is shown in the relation of the supposedly irreligious mother to her child and in the fervent loyalty of nonreligionists to an espoused cause." [100:6.1]

Honestly contemplating the above questions will give you an idea of how your personal religious life appears when evaluated on the basis of the ideals portrayed in *The Urantia Book*.? In *The Urantia Book's* view of personal religious experience, the behaviors in which we engage as we pursue whatever reality we deem to be of supreme value—these constitute our true religious life.

From a psychological perspective, that to which we are supremely devoted *is* the God of our personal religion, regardless of how we might philosophically describe a belief in an abstract Deity.?. Everyone has a personal religion and everyone has a god.?. The challenge is to evolve these inalienables of conscious life into a functional cosmic orientation which informs our choices, decisions, and actions we take.?

Our god may be our career, our financial security, our family, our social image, or a role we play in a human institution or organization.

Important as each of these may be, if they are treated as the highest center in our lives, they become idolatrous because they take a position in our inner lives which should be dominated by our personal relationship with the Father and the desire to do his will.?

I am not suggesting that we sacrifice these important and necessary elements of our personal lives.?. What is required is that we subordinate them to the pursuit of the Father's will.?. That is to say, when we make decisions regarding our family lives, our careers, our economic needs, our social roles, we learn to make them relative to a sincere seeking of the Father's will.?. Our creative participation in Supremacy and our desire to serve the Father's purposes must become our ultimate concerns.?. And thus our spiritual lives can begin to coordinate, integrate, and invigorate all of the other responses to the demands of daily life.

Given this perspective of the religious life, what is faith?? What is its nature and role in this great adventure?

Faith, Doubt, Risk and Courage

Paul Tillich has described faith as "an essential attitude of a finite being who is attempting to orient himself with respect to the infinite."? Faith is certain in so far as it develops out of an experience of the Father's presence.? But faith is uncertain when it seeks a satisfactory explanation for the nature and implications of this experience.? This element of uncertainty in the life of faith cannot be removed, it must be accepted.? And the element in faith which accepts this uncertainty is courage.

Uncertainty with security is the essence of the Paradise adventure?uncertainty in time and in mind, uncertainty as to the events of the unfolding Paradise ascent; security in spirit and in eternity, security in the unqualified trust of the creature son in the divine compassion and infinite love of the Universal Father; uncertainty as an inexperienced citizen of the universe; security as an ascending son in the universe mansions of an all-powerful, all-wise, and all-loving Father. [111:7.1]

In the courageous acceptance of uncertainty, faith shows most visibly its dynamic character.? Where there is daring and courage, there is always the possibility of failure.? And in every act of faith this possibility is present.? But the risk must be taken.

There is risk if what was considered a matter of ultimate concern turns out to be a matter of temporary or transitory reality. This is indeed the greatest risk we can take in life.? For if it proves to be a failure, if that to which we have devoted ourselves turns out to have been a temporal creation of our imagination or something we constructed to meet psychological rather than spiritual needs, the meaning of our life breaks down; we find that we have surrendered ourselves to something which is not worthy of such surrender.?

The most destructive form of doubt is not a doubt about facts or conclusions.? Existential skeptical doubt is an attitude of actually rejecting the possibility that we can be certain about anything.? It is a doubt about whether it is possible to understand anything as being true.? Therefore it cannot be refuted logically.? Such an attitude necessarily leads either to despair or cynicism.? Skeptical doubt may serve an awakening and liberating function, but it also can prevent the development of a centered personality.?

"Faith is to religion what sails are to a ship; it is an addition of power, not an added burden of life. There is but one struggle for those who enter the kingdom, and that is to fight the good fight of faith. The believer has only one battle, and that is against doubt—unbelief."? [159:3.8]

But the doubt which is inherent in faith is not skeptical doubt.? It is the normal, healthy uncertainty which accompanies every risk. It does not question whether a certain proposition is true or false; but it is aware of the element of insecurity in every concept which we attempt to use to represent reality.?

At the same time, the doubt which is a part of faith accepts this insecurity in an act of courage.? Faith includes courage.? Any act in which courage accepts risk is an indicator of the existence of faith.

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In the teachings of Jesus we see much of this difficulty overcome by placing our personal relationship to reality in the context of a child's relationship to a parent.? In a healthy family the child's faith and trust are existential.? There is no doubt about the reality and integrity of the relationship. The child does not base its relationship to the parent on philosophical assumptions or intellectual evaluations.? It is an existential state of personality engagement in relationship.???

In this context we can also understand the most fundamental aspect of Urantia Book cosmology: The foundations of reality are not atoms, molecules, or "energy," but relationships between personalities.? Relationships between personalities are that which survive and continue to develop throughout eternity.? Everything in existence comes to be so as a result of interactions between personalities.? Indeed our very destiny can be described as the endless exploration of the co-creational potentials of personality.? What realities can we actualize when we enter into creative associations with other personalities?? This question is the needle on the compass that points in the direction of eternity.?

Faith and Community

The religious language of sacred stories is created in the community of believers and cannot be fully understood outside this community.? Within the community, the religious language enables the act of faith to realize a richer content because it embodies the combined experience of many truth seekers and the superhuman insights of shared revelation.? Faith needs its conceptual language; without language and stories there could be no consciousness of the meanings and values of faith, no basis for developmental progress, no basis for making faith relevant to daily life in the world.? Thus the value of faith communities.

When we participate in study groups or share insights with other readers we not only deepen our understanding of *The Urantia Book*, but we also become more aware of the experiences and insights of others; we are enriched and we contribute to the strengthening of faith within the community by sharing our own experiences in the adventure.??

"Spiritual growth is mutually stimulated by intimate association with other religionists. Love supplies the soil for religious growth—an objective lure in the place of subjective gratification—yet it yields the supreme subjective satisfaction. And religion ennobles the commonplace drudgery of daily living." [100:0.2]

The problem which arises here is that the community itself, with its own needs and attractions, stands in danger of replacing the life of faith.? Communities of believers must evolve in a way which facilitates the relationship between God and each participant.? The challenge for the community is to learn how to mobilize faith in the hearts of individuals toward integration of the whole without becoming obsessed with ideological uniformity or internal political structure—*without becoming an idolatrous replacement for the spiritual faith and truth seeking which originally led people into the community.*

"The kingdom of heaven in the hearts of men will create religious unity (not necessarily uniformity) because any and all religious groups composed of such religious believers will be free from all notions of ecclesiastical authority—religious sovereignty." [134:4.6]

Another challenge faced by communities of believers deals with faith and doubt within the community of faith itself.? There is danger in allowing shared beliefs or an assent to a creed to become the mechanism by which social coherence is established.? Such a situation will lead to conceptual stagnation if it excludes the element of uncertainty regarding the truth of the shared meanings which define the social boundaries of the community. Social coherence must be sought on spiritual levels of a shared relationship with the Father and a shared quest for an ever greater engagement with truth.??

The concept of the "infallibility" of a text may result in idolatry because loyalty to a symbolic representation of universe reality may replace loyalty *to* universe reality—the living Supreme.? "Infallibility" results in something preliminary and conditional becoming regarded as ultimate and elevated above the risk of uncertainty.? This is idolatrous faith because its object is a reality which is merely representative of reality, but not reality itself.?

The Content of Faith

Faith is never experienced in isolation from some form of conceptual content.? It is experienced in, with and through this content—the ideas, language, stories and rituals that constitute a faith community. The object of faith must be our personal relationship to cosmic reality; the "content of faith" consists of the stories we tell ourselves and each other about the nature of this reality and our relationship to it.

The Urantia Book contains stories about reality which help us understand our experience of faith as it relates to an evolving personal universe—a universe structured around relationships between personalities and personality systems.? For most of us these stories form a significant

part of the content of our faith—the illumination of values which enable us to progress in our moral and spiritual lives.

The goal of our experience of faith is infinite while the stories with which we attempt to understand and socially express this experience of faith are very finite and based on meanings derived from our participation in human culture. Therefore we should be aware from the beginning that our stories, our understandings, our sacred texts, our insight into revelation—are always going to fall short of fully expressing that to which they point. It is a fact that, because of our extreme finitude as human beings, any way in which we attempt to symbolize universe reality is going to be relatively limited.

The Urantia Book refers to the paradigms within which we do our thinking and choosing as "universe frames," and we find a brief overview of the topic in Paper 115

"Partial, incomplete, and evolving intellects would be helpless in the master universe, would be unable to form the first rational thought pattern, were it not for the innate ability of all mind, high or low, to form a universe frame in which to think. If mind cannot fathom conclusions, if it cannot penetrate to true origins, then will such mind unfailingly postulate conclusions and invent origins that it may have a means of logical thought within the frame of these mind-created postulates. And while such universe frames for creature thought are indispensable to rational intellectual operations, they are, without exception, erroneous to a greater or lesser degree.

"Conceptual frames of the universe are only relatively true; they are serviceable scaffolding which must eventually give way before the expansions of enlarging cosmic comprehension. The understandings of truth, beauty, and goodness, morality, ethics, duty, love, divinity, origin, existence, purpose, destiny, time, space, even Deity, are only relatively true. . . . Man must think in a mortal universe frame, but that does not mean that he cannot envision other and higher frames within which thought can take place." [115:1.1]

The ascent through the psychic circles involves moving through a series of universe frames. We live within each one for a season, learning and growing. These are paradigms, frames of reference constructed of meanings and values. But sooner or later there comes a breakdown of our conceptual scaffolding, our universe frame, and we must move on to a more expanded one within which we may experience further growth.

One of the great dangers of religious life is that we can easily mistake a particular "universe frame" for reality itself and become arrested in our development. When we have an experience of the presence of God, this experience may be made possible because of a relationship we have with a book, with a person, with a group, with a place, with an object, with a piece of music—almost anything is capable of mediating the presence of God to us. God is, after all, making every possible effort to get our attention. The problems begin when we mistake the medium through which the presence of God is experienced for the experience itself. This is particularly

true of individuals who find the presence of God mediated through experience with a particular religious community or text.?

Thus we understand why *The Urantia Book* warns us about "the relativity of concept frames" at the beginning of Paper 115. Here we more easily can begin to appreciate why a ruthless quest for truth must ever be our guiding principle. If we are truly growing in our faith experience, we will move through a number of "universe frames" during our mortal lives, each providing a conceptual environment within which we can experience growth, but each of which stands in danger of becoming an idolatrous substitute for the transcendent goal of faith—an idolatrous substitute which can prevent further growth.

"Religious perplexities are inevitable; there can be no growth without psychic conflict and spiritual agitation. The organization of a philosophic standard of living entails considerable commotion in the philosophic realms of the mind. Loyalties are not exercised in behalf of the great, the good, the true, and the noble without a struggle. Effort is attendant upon clarification of spiritual vision and enhancement of cosmic insight. And the human intellect protests against being weaned from subsisting upon the non-spiritual energies of temporal existence. The slothful animal mind rebels at the effort required to wrestle with cosmic problem solving." [100:4.2]

Meaningful growth demands a willingness to experience difficulty and it demands courage. Pride and fanaticism are the unmistakable symptoms of doubt which has been repressed. Doubt is overcome not by repression but by courage. Courage does not deny that there is doubt, but it accepts doubt as an inevitable expression of its inability to fully grasp the infinite. Real courage does not need the safety of an unquestionable conviction or belief. Real courage enables us to live with the risk without which no creative life is possible. Living faith is not a matter of doubtless certainty, but rather a matter of daring courage which accepts the possibility of failure.?

Faith and Belief

One of the most common misunderstandings of faith is to mistake it for knowledge that has a low degree of evidence. This is "belief" rather than "faith." In this case, an act of will by the believer is supposed to compensate for the lack of evidence to support the belief.

The Urantia Book has a whole section devoted to this topic—Paper 101, section 8. There is additional related material in section 3 of the same paper. These selections contain some of the *Urantia Book's* clearest commentary about the nature of faith and belief. Consider this overview of the nature of faith:

"Through religious faith the soul of man reveals itself and demonstrates the potential divinity of its emerging nature by the characteristic manner in which it induces the mortal personality to

react to certain trying intellectual and testing social situations. Genuine spiritual faith (true moral consciousness) is revealed in that it:

- 1. Causes ethics and morals to progress despite inherent and adverse animalistic tendencies.
- 2. Produces a sublime trust in the goodness of God even in the face of bitter disappointment and crushing defeat.
- 3. Generates profound courage and confidence despite natural adversity and physical calamity.
- 4. Exhibits inexplicable poise and sustaining tranquility notwithstanding baffling diseases and even acute physical suffering.
- 5. Maintains a mysterious poise and composure of personality in the face of maltreatment and the rankest injustice.
- 6. Maintains a divine trust in ultimate victory in spite of the cruelties of seemingly blind fate and the apparent utter indifference of natural forces to human welfare.
- 7. Persists in the unswerving belief in God despite all contrary demonstrations of logic and successfully withstands all other intellectual sophistries.
- 8. Continues to exhibit undaunted faith in the soul's survival regardless of the deceptive teachings of false science and the persuasive delusions of unsound philosophy.
- 9. Lives and triumphs irrespective of the crushing overload of the complex and partial civilizations of modern times.
- 10. Contributes to the continued survival of altruism in spite of human selfishness, social antagonisms, industrial greeds, and political maladjustments.
- 11. Steadfastly adheres to a sublime belief in universe unity and divine guidance regardless of the perplexing presence of evil and sin.
- 12. Goes right on worshiping God in spite of anything and everything. Dares to declare, "Even though he slay me, yet will I serve him." [101:3.4] ?

Faith, Love and Action?

The concern of faith is identical with the desire of love; deeper union with that to which one belongs. Faith as a set of? accepted and defended doctrines does not produce acts of love.? But faith as the state of seeking greater integration with universe reality implies love and service ?

the means by which spiritual integration with other personalities is attained.? The presence of love is an indicator of the degree to which faith has conquered its idolatrous possibilities. ?

Faith as a function of our growing relationship with the Supreme reaches out into the world as unifying action.?

"With God the Father, sonship is the great relationship. With God the Supreme, achievement is the prerequisite to status?one must do something as well as be something."? [115:0.2]

"If you love me, Peter, feed my lambs. Do not neglect to minister to the weak, the poor, and the young. Preach the gospel without fear or favor; remember always that God is no respecter of persons. Serve your fellow men even as I have served you; forgive your fellow mortals even as I have forgiven you. Let experience teach you the value of meditation and the power of intelligent reflection." [192:2.2]

"If something has become a religion in your experience, it is self-evident that you already have become an active evangel of that religion since you deem the supreme concept of your religion as being worthy of the worship of all mankind, all universe intelligences. If you are not a positive and missionary evangel of your religion, you are self-deceived in that what you call a religion is only a traditional belief or a mere system of intellectual philosophy." [160:5.3]

Conclusion

In conclusion it is important to appreciate that we are not engaged in the faith adventure alone.? God is seeking to find us and to commune with us by every means possible.

"The Father in heaven will not suffer a single child on earth to perish if that child has a desire to find the Father and truly longs to be like him. Our Father even loves the wicked and is always kind to the ungrateful. If more human beings could only know about the goodness of God, they would certainly be led to repent of their evil ways and forsake all known sin. All good things come down from the Father of light, in whom there is no variableness neither shadow of changing. The spirit of the true God is in man's heart. He intends that all men should be brothers. When men begin to feel after God, that is evidence that God has found them, and that they are in quest of knowledge about him. We live in God and God dwells in us." [131:10.4]

"You are my apostles, and to you religion shall not become a theologic shelter to which you may flee in fear of facing the rugged realities of spiritual progress and idealistic adventure; but rather shall your religion become the fact of real experience which testifies that God has found you, idealized, ennobled, and spiritualized you, and that you have enlisted in the eternal adventure of finding the God who has thus found and sonshipped you." [155:6.18]

May our spiritual benefactors bless each of us with challenges and difficulties which will stimulate genuine spiritual faith and lead us into a fuller actualization of responsible and creative cosmic citizenship.