

True Worship: A Commentary on Paper 5, Section 3

by Jeffrey Wattles

Let us listen again to the Divine Counselor of Uversa, whose account of "True Worship" may be found in *The Urantia Book* in section 3 of Paper 5, "God's Relation to the Individual." Our commentary cannot properly be a monologue, but I have not marked, in the present text, the pauses for discussion that punctuated it. This discussion follows one on the prayer process (Paper 91 #9, p. 1002) and anticipates one on service. The commentary here is a step toward holographic study—finding the whole of the book in the part.

Worship is both simple and complex. The simplicity of worship is reflected in the fun of the word for worship among the Quictec Indians of Mexico; it means, etymologically, "to wag one's tail before God." One of the wisest teachings I ever heard on worship was Vern Grimsley's remark, "The secret of worship is to do it." One great message of *The Urantia Book* is that WE CAN worship. We are in the Father's personality circuit. Our minds enjoy the adjutant mind-spirit of worship. We are built to worship. However complex or mysterious worship may seem when discussed, and however elusive it may be at times in our practice, we can and do worship the Universal Father. The section on True Worship articulates the concept of worship. When we read this highly articulated account, we may be led to remark, "Easier said than done." But if we keep in tune with the worship experience itself, then we may say, "Easier done than said." Let us take a moment to do just that before proceeding....

This commentary emphasizes one basic truism: worship is worship of God. In the language of contemporary phenomenology (the philosophical discipline devoted to describing experience), worship is an intentional act (where "intentional" does not denote a deliberate act of will, but an act of consciousness which is directed toward an "object" of some sort; directed beyond itself). Worship is directed to God. Worship is a relating to God. The practical import of recognizing the basic I-Thou character of worship is this: this directedness toward God keeps us from a certain kind of mysticism, and we will pay repeated attention here to the difference between worship and mysticism. (I use the term "mysticism" here in its pejorative sense, recognizing that a qualified approval of mysticism is offered in Paper 91, section 7, p. 1000f.) Hear from page 1001:

When prayer becomes overmuch aesthetic, when it consists almost exclusively in beautiful and blissful contemplation of paradisiacal divinity, it loses much of its socializing influence and tends toward mysticism and the isolation of its devotees.

Our worship may become reoriented to bliss; then we begin to aim for subjective feelings. We can become

more interested in worship than in God. Spiritual bliss is a delightful wave that arises spontaneously; it is not the goal or essence or criterion of true worship, at least at this point in our universe career. Paper 27, #7 (p. 303), describes the Conductors of Worship on Paradise and offers a definition:

Worship is the conscious and joyous act of recognizing the truth and fact of the intimate and personal relationships of the Creators with their creatures. The quality of worship is determined by the depth of creature perception; and as the knowledge of the infinite character of the Gods progresses, the act of worship becomes increasingly all-encompassing until it eventually attains the glory of the highest experiential delight and the most exquisite pleasure known to created beings.

Even in this characterization, the joy of worship remains a function of the relatedness of the worshipers to God. It is not simply self-contained joy (whatever that might mean), but rejoicing in the character of the Gods. Worship, moreover, is implicitly *social*, implicitly group worship, whether or not the worshiper happens to be alone. One worships *our* Father, not just *my* Father. The sense of the social horizon also preserves worship from mysticism. The contrast between worship and mysticism will become more subtle as we go on to consider the role of mindal and spiritual factors in worship. For now, the main point can be restated by drawing on p. 196: "We worship God, first, because he is, next because he is in us, and last, because we are in him." In each of these phases—even in the most interior phase of worship and in the wondrous feeling of being *in* God—worship is directed *to* God. Jesus said, "My yoke is light"; I take it that the light yoke of spiritual experience is to sustain attention on God, rather than relaxing into a self-centered space.

In Paper 143 #7, "Teachings About Prayer and Worship" we read: "Worship is effortless attention, true and ideal soul rest, a form of restful spiritual exertion." (*1616) The difference between worship and narcissism, then, is subtle but not difficult; it is a matter of attention to God. The point is not that we need anxiously to hold on to duality lest we slip into bliss. Again, simply, worship is worship of God. Worship is relational.

Worship is for its own sake; prayer embodies a self- or creature-interest element; that is the great difference between worship and prayer. There is absolutely no self-request or other element of personal interest in true worship; we simply worship God for what we comprehend him to be. Worship asks nothing and expects nothing for the worshiper. We do not worship the Father because of anything we may derive from such veneration....

So we don't enter into worship in order to go load up on a sublime good time. This point, which seems to me to be present as an advanced teaching in the traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, is a familiar basic teaching in much of Hinduism and Buddhism, which are often rigorously clear about keeping worship pure from creature concerns. Writing in the Hindu tradition, O.B.L. Kapoor describes bhakti (worship). He says that yoga (the path of self-mastery) and jnana (the path of philosophic insight) and karman (the path of service-action) are "useful as aids to Bhakti in as much as they are free from all desires for worldly enjoyment. But since they aim at Mukti or a certain blissful state of self, they are not wholly...selfless in their approach." (*The Philosophy and Religion of Sri Caitanya*, p. 180)

Why are we taught that prayer is the ideal prelude to worship? The authors of the Urantia Papers validate human need and encourage the expression of appropriate human desire. The creature is encouraged to express these needs in prayer to the Creator. Indeed, we do in fact walk around most of the time with needs in our hearts, consciously or unconsciously. If we were to try to go directly into worship without prayerfully processing these burdens of the heart, we might deceive ourselves—we might become the prey of old business, the return of the repressed, intruding upon our worship. Can the human mind-self transcend creature concerns without divine assistance? Perhaps that is our ultimate prayer: "God, help me (us) now to transcend the standpoint of request." In any case, no matter what our creature concern is, in prayer we not only present the needs of self and others that we are concerned about, but we also begin to sense the divine response to those needs. Sensing that response, we are lifted by gratitude into worship. I think that's how it goes and how it is supposed to work.

"We simply worship God for what we comprehend him to be." Again, the emphasis is on God. In phenomenological terms, worship is a "founded" act, an act that is based on another act. For example, I may value a political proposal because I believe (and here comes the founding proposition) it will solve a particular important problem. Our worship of God also, in a way, follows the human path from fact to meaning to value. We might say, "I worship God because God is so _____." Usually we don't spell this out to ourselves, but some conception of God underlies our worship. (Recall that the Supreme represents the maximum of truth, beauty, and goodness that we can comprehend, and thus it is particularly in the realm of personality and love that we have access to a supersupreme relationship.) Our comprehension of God, if translated into words, might be put in terms of a noun, a noun phrase, an adjective, an adverb, a verb, a preposition, a dependent clause—let grammatical imagination run free—or even a complete sentence!

We "render such devotion and engage in such worship as a natural and spontaneous reaction to the recognition of the Father's matchless personality and because

of his lovable nature and adorable attributes." Note that the sequence of matchless personality, lovable nature, and adorable attributes exactly follows the first three papers in Part I of the book. In other words, the more we realize of God, through our study and otherwise, the more we will comprehend God and the more likely that our worship is to be spontaneous. If worship is not spontaneous, then it is, perhaps, something we do because we feel we should, or because we are in a group where it is the expected thing, or because we know it's supposed to be a sublime thing—in other words, basically to satisfy our own sense of duty, expectation, or desire—i.e., something which has still to be transformed if it is to reach the level of true worship. Now we are told that on the fifth mansion world, worship is becoming spontaneous (*537.5). Nevertheless we have a tremendous clue to facilitate spontaneity in worship in the line on p. 67: "Sooner or later, God is destined to be comprehended as the reality of values, the substance of meanings, and the life of truth." This idea encourages us to discern God in every realm of daily life—and the more we do so, the more we will be inspired by what we discern, inspired to spontaneous worship. Such connection between the God we worship and the reality, substance, and life of what we experience daily, helps to explain why we are often encouraged to engage in intelligent worship.

When you deal with the practical affairs of your daily life, you are in the hands of the spirit personalities having origin in the Third Source and Center; you are co-operating with the agencies of the Conjoint Actor. And so it is: You worship God; pray to, and commune with, the Son; and work out the details of your earthly sojourn in connection with the intelligences of the Infinite Spirit operating on your world and throughout your universe.

Just as the rules for prevailing petitions (p. 1002) embed teaching on prayer in a general theory of action, we must observe that this section on worship is placed in the context of an entire philosophy of living in the germ. Now we see that trinitarian remarks have practical significance for daily life.

Sincere worship connotes the mobilization of the total powers of the personality under the dominance of the evolving soul and subject to the divine directionization of the associated Thought Adjuster.

What are these powers? Recall the line from p. 1400: "Jesus possessed the ability effectively to mobilize all his powers of mind, soul, and body on the task immediately at hand." The protagonist in this poem from medieval France, "Le Jongleur de Notre Dame" is not a juggler, but the tumbler of Our Lady:

Now above the altar was carved the statue of Madame St. Mary, and this minstrel did come before this image right humble./ Sweet Lady, said he, scorn not the thing I know, for with the help of

God I will essay to serve you in good faith, even as I may. I cannot read your hours nor chant your praise, but at the least I can set before you what art I have./ Then commenced this minstrel his merry play, leaping low and small, tall and high, over and under. Then he knelt upon his knees before the statue, and meekly bowed his head./ Most gracious Queen, said he, of your pity and charity scorn not this my service./ Again he leaped and played, and for holiday and festival, made the somersault of Metz. Afterwards he did the Spanish vault, springing and bounding, then the vaults they love in Brittany, and all of these feats he did as best as he was able. Then he walked on his two hands, with his feet in the air, and his head near the ground./ Thus long did this minstrel leap and play, till at last, nigh fainting with weariness, he could stand no longer on his feet, but fell to his knees./ Lady, said he, I worship you with heart, with body, feet and hands, for this I can neither add to nor take away. Now I am your minstrel./ Then he smote upon his breast, he sighed and wept, since he knew no better prayer than tears, nor no better worship than his art...."

The worship experience consists in the sublime attempt of the betrothed Adjuster to communicate to the divine Father the inexpressible longings and the unutterable aspirations of the human soul.... (*66)

What can those longings and aspirations be? Are they not requests of a higher order? First of all, a longing is not a request, and an aspiration is not a request. If longings and aspirations look forward to fulfillment, they do not express themselves in order to gain fulfillment. The purpose of soul expression is not to gain, but simply to express. Second, the longings and aspirations are unutterable. Think of some very sublime verbalized request, e.g., the close of the believer's prayer: "and make us increasingly perfect like yourself." Now surely the soul aspires to divine perfection, but the word symbols of the human intellect are mere shells; words do not manage to express the soul's longings and aspirations. You remember Lao Tzu's opening line, "The Tao that can be named is not the real Tao"? Well, the longings and aspirations that can be put into words are not the soul's longings and aspirations.

"The mortal mind consents to worship."

This means, first of all, that the mind does not conduct worship. Sometimes we try to prime the pump by praise of God. Or in group prayer, suggestion may be used. We remind ourselves of who we comprehend God to be. This is sublime thinking. It is not worship; but it may stimulate that conception which will serve as the trampoline for worship, for superthinking (*1616). Reading may also be used to prime the pump. Nothing wrong with priming the pump, but the liquid concepts with which we prime are not yet the water of life.

The divine spirit, we recall, aids us in "ceasing to resist." What the mind does in worship is somewhat like ceasing to resist. The mind, then, is attentive, alert, but less active: "effortless attention" (*1616).

A metaphor from the older tradition of Roman Catholic architecture and liturgy may be helpful. In some churches in Spain one can still see the beautifully wrought ironwork gates that separated the altar where the priest performed the Mass. The people looked upon mysteries they did not understand. In worship, the indwelling spirit is like a priest operating behind the gates of consciousness. The mind is more like a sympathetic onlooker at an invisible spectacle wherein are transpiring marvelous and subtle transactions. Only occasionally does the mind stir in some recognition of meaning or value.

Why does the mind need to consent? Because worship is not just a matter of registering some insight. The mind can get the intellectual point and efficiently move on to the next concern rather than waiting for something more profound to transpire. The quick mind likes to move on to the next idea immediately after the first has registered; the immature mind neglects ripening intuition into insight. In worship, however, the entire personality is submitting to the consciousness of contact with God. Worship therefore has a different rhythm.

The point, however, is not merely to slow the mind down, but for the mind to assent to an activity which is not primarily its own. Contrast the poetic, artistic, and musical mysticism which is common today. "The characteristics of the mystical state are diffusion of consciousness with vivid islands of focal attention operating on a comparatively passive intellect." (*1099) To "consent to worship" seems comparatively passive, but the intellect is not the central receiver of the worship experience; the consenting mind is upstaged by the more engaged soul and Thought Adjuster and the personality as a whole. Nor is consciousness diffuse in worship, but as we have said, attentive, alert, "effortless attention." Nor is God perceived or imaged and therefore cannot function as a vivid island of focal attention.

Shall we risk over-teaching and foolish teaching to speak to the question which is sometimes raised: What about distracting thoughts in worship? We must step carefully in response. Our "technological" society is steeped in the quest for quick and easy maxims that the mind can easily understand and which can be easily practiced "in the comfort of your own home." Our desire to control nature, carried to extremes, has yielded a now obvious harvest of pollution. And our desire to control the spiritual life is no more beautiful. We are awash with techniques, methods, handy advice, guidelines, and suggestions. It is all too easy to produce facile and excessively specific instructions. There are various techniques of self-reminding, such as the saying of a spiritual word; but it must be remembered that worship itself is self-forgetting. There is no infallible technique for the human mind to use which guarantees its entry into worship. To use any method of self-reminding is to return to the prayer process, a return to a mountain range, one of whose peaks is to "surrender

every wish of mind and every craving of soul to the transforming embrace of divine growth." (*1002) The openness that is called for here is comparable to that of worship. The intellect that wants to be not merely ship but captain and pilot, too, cannot pray, much less consent to worship. But there is hope. I was praying the other day and I asked God to make me increasingly perfect like himself. And the "response" formed: "I AM." (Smile.)

Let us expand the notion of technique: science (the careful determination and correlation of fact), philosophy (the pursuit of meaning until the very end), and art (the flavored expression of self and spirit) are techniques. Let us consider the coordination of psychology, philosophy, and religion, as a method for finding one's way back to worship through an environment of thoughts. Thoughts need not be regarded as distractions, as though God were somehow to be found only in a different direction from the world.

Again: "Sooner or later, God is destined to be comprehended as the reality of values, the substance of meanings, and the life of truth." One can explore the value latent in one's thought-complex...and then go on to ask what (who) is the reality of this value. And thus one comes once again before the God one had begun to worship. One can explore the meanings of one's thought complex...and then go on to inquire after the substance of those meanings. This path also leads to the presence of God. "Thinking surrenders to wisdom, and wisdom is lost in enlightened and reflective worship." (*1228). And such movement into and "out from" God-consciousness is the life of truth.

The opening of Psalm 92 illustrates a movement from thinking and prayer ("sublime thinking") back to worship. We hear the psalmist turning from the third person discourse of thinking about God to the second person discourse addressing God directly: "It is a good thing to give thanks to Yahweh, to sing praises to your name, O Most High." Prayer and worship have a characteristic second-person or I-Thou focus—or else a sense of the presence of God so genuine as to make anonymous thinking, as though one were alone, obsolete.

When is it worth responding by probing the thought that arises in worship for its value and meaning and truth, and when is it better to abandon the thought? I doubt it would be wise to construct a criterion. The main thing is that the mind aims to be a good mother for the soul—to cooperate with the Thought Adjuster, the father of the soul.

The soul "craves and initiates worship." The craving for worship is one of those unutterable longings we were just discussing. The soul initiates worship...in response to the values it feels. The soul feels values. The more we live from the level of soul consciousness, the more our daily life will conduce to worship. You can walk down the street, perceptually alive to the buzzing, blooming scene about you, with its bodies and boutiques. Or you can walk through the same scene attentive to the qualities of soul that are suggested in the persons

and the evident culture. One of the reasons that prayer is the recommended preparation for worship is that the prayer process facilitates the revelation of values. When we "surrender every wish of mind and every craving of soul to the transforming embrace of divine growth" (*1002), we permit new values to dawn. The rejoicing over these freshly revealed values occasions the spontaneity of the soul's initiation of worship. For someone living in continuous communion with God, the recourse to prayer would not be a necessary preliminary to worship; the supreme truth, beauty, and goodness glimpsed in so many phenomena of daily life would themselves be abundant springboards to worship. I remember Carolyn Kendall mentioning once having asked various people what inspired them most to worship. Some said being out in nature; some said this or that. She said seeing other people, being with people, especially prompts her to worship.

"The divine Adjuster presence conducts such worship in behalf of the mortal mind and the evolving immortal soul." The only point I want to make about this is that there is at this point no human conductor of worship. Human conductors of worship may prepare this phase, but when we open our most profound receptivity, when we surrender to the Adjuster guidance, when we consent to this unutterable transaction, we should not, I suggest, be filled at that time by the socio-suggestions of some preacher, organist, book, or meditation guide. Such other experiences may be beneficial; they may be worshipful, but they are not worship.

What is the difference between a worshipful experience and worship? Worship is an experience of God; an experience of every other reality can be worshipful. Gandhi was asked how long he took for his morning devotions: "Long enough to last all day." Our lives are to be "inwardly illuminated by worship and outwardly devoted to...service..." (*1175) To be illuminated by worship means that the awareness/motivation/response/joy of supreme value is never lost; at least it is in the margin of consciousness. The experiences of striving for value are upheld by the more basic experience of celebrating value.

How can we distinguish mysticism from this phase of worship in which, once initiated by the soul, there is a shift into overdrive, into the duration conducted by the Thought Adjuster? The mind is oriented to God, but not as an island of focal attention operating on the sensory or quasi-sensory level of mind. If the mind gets engaged in trying to detect the faint stirrings of the superconscious, then it is possible to get lost in faint stirrings and to lose the fundamental intention of worship—the act of the entire personality, to which we now turn.

The final level in our exposition is the level of personality. We read, "True worship, in the last analysis, becomes an experience realized on four cosmic levels: the intellectual, the morontial, the spiritual, and the personal—the consciousness of mind, soul, and spirit, and their unification in personality."

The body is not included in this enumeration of the levels of the realization of worship mentioned at the close of our section on True Worship. This means not that the body must be still or gesturally neutral in worship, but merely that the body itself is not a level on which worship is realized. The import of the author's omission of the body here, I propose, is that movement and rest, gesture and posture, our kinesthetic and perceptual sensations—these are dimensions of experience that register in the mind; and it is as part of the mind's experience that they belong to worship. The center of gravity of the worship experience, however, is not in bodily perceptions or movement.

The mention of personality is important because, as each of us can say, I am not just a loose association of mind plus soul plus Thought Adjuster. Even the values of supremacy felt by the soul are not identical with the personality of God intended in worship. I am more than even my soul. I am me, I am a person. On page 67 we read:

The Greek religion had a watchword "Know yourself"; the Hebrews centered their teaching on "Know your God"; the Christians preach a gospel aimed at a "knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ"; Jesus proclaimed the good news of "knowing God, and yourself as a son of God." These differing concepts of the purpose of religion determine the individual's attitude in various life situations and foreshadow the depth of worship....

In other words, I am part of this worship circuit. I am not just an empty openness toward God. Nor in action am I a mere channel. Indeed, one of the essentials of the family of God is to have "faith in the supreme human desire to do the will of God—to be like God." (*1586)

I have two footnotes in closing. One of the "presuppositions"—I cannot find the right concept—of sincere worship is that we are partly saying, as it were, to God: "I want to become more like you." If this is sincere, we cannot hold any ambition higher. A couple of quotes will amplify this theme. "Proper conduct is essential to progress by way of knowledge, through philosophy, to the spiritual heights of spontaneous worship." (*301) It is the divine mercy that we are accepted into the kingdom simply as children of faith. Nonetheless we are called to perfection. The meaning of that invitation is the long universe ascent (*22). But there is one value of perfection that can be realized in a preliminary way (*290) right now. When, after the Ordination Sermon, Jesus emphasized, "Be you perfect," he insisted that being righteous, by faith, must precede *doing* righteousness in daily life. (*1584) I take it that being righteous by faith is the way in which we can, in this life, satisfy the Master's call to be perfect. Being righteous by faith does not guarantee that any given decision will be right, but it does guarantee that we will be teachable. And being righteous is God's gift, not a self-conscious attitude of religio-moral superiority. The Adjuster has been referred to as "the betrothed Adjuster" (*66); this might suggest that the account of worship given here is more meaningful for one who has made the supreme decision for the will of God.

And, finally, a look ahead. "Worship is intended to anticipate the better life ahead and then to reflect these new spiritual significances back onto the life which now is." (*1616) Worship is a foretaste of eternity, in which we as a perfected brotherhood will voyage in the never-ending discovery of the infinity of the Universal Father. (*1174)

The final level of our exposition is the level of personality. The word "personality" is used in the text to mean the individual, the mortal, the physical, and the spiritual—the consciousness in which the soul and the Thought Adjuster are united in the act of worship.

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