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WRIGHTWOOD SERIES SEMINARS

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**Perspectives
on Race**

in

The Urantia Book

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THE WRIGHTWOOD SERIES SEMINARS

"PERSPECTIVES ON RACE IN *THE URANTIA BOOK*"

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THE WRIGHTWOOD SERIES CONCEPT

The Wrightwood Series Seminars, initiated by the Education Committee of *The Urantia Book Fellowship*, is a service project for readers. This project began in the summer of 1991 as an outgrowth of the commitment to enhance the quality of study of the book and to provide this improved understanding to the readership.

There are three factors underlying this program:

- ◆ The Wrightwood Opportunity
- ◆ The Wrightwood Process
- ◆ The Spirit of Wrightwood

THE WRIGHTWOOD OPPORTUNITY

The separation of The Urantia Brotherhood (now known as *The Urantia Book Fellowship*) from Urantia Foundation produced confusion within the organization as independence became a reality. The Executive Committee chose to rely on the teachings of the book and the spiritual insight of its members to guide the organization during those troubled times. When the stability of The Fellowship was assured, it became clear that carrying the mission of *The Urantia Book* to the peoples of Urantia required clear and confident understanding of its many-faceted teachings, not only within the organizational leadership, but also within the readership. Only the thoughtful, spiritually motivated and guided actions of large numbers of readers and believers can possibly achieve the mission of the book.

The Executive Committee and the General Council are composed of long-time dedicated readers who have been elected to conduct the operations and to determine the policies of The Fellowship. These groups are too large to assemble for long-term, intimate, coordinated technical studies. In addition, the individual Councilors vary too widely in their individual interests to provide a coherent focus on narrow topical issues.

By drawing together a small group of students of similar interest but differing viewpoints, it should be possible to conduct an intense, in-depth examination of the teachings of the book in a specific area. Such an effort should produce valuable and thought-provoking results for the leadership and educate all the readership to the

deeper issues uncovered. The organizational tranquility which emerged after the separation from the Foundation provided an opportunity to experiment with this new approach. The Fellowship office facilities at 529 Wrightwood Avenue, Chicago, afford a close homelike environment where extended meetings can be held.

THE WRIGHTWOOD PROCESS

The essence of the Wrightwood process is in-depth preparation and intimate, thorough discussion. The Education Committee limits participation to a small number of very well-prepared participants, requires each participant to draft a written position paper for presentation and eventual publication, and asks the participants to develop a plan of action for presenting their results to the readership at large. The seminar meets on three days over a weekend to complete these tasks.

This process has since been adapted and applied to the work of committees other than Education. For example, a seminar on constitutional and organizational issues was similarly convened by the Judicial Committee in October 1992.

THE SPIRIT OF WRIGHTWOOD

The topics and issues addressed in the Wrightwood Series are not simple matters on which readers think alike or on which consensus is readily achieved. The experience of these first seminars has shown us that, when we have troubled ourselves to become well-informed on complex issues, and when we sincerely commit ourselves to work through our differences by the power of mutual respect and love, a transcendent, harmonizing vision emerges. Rather than finding others converted to our viewpoint, we learn to appreciate what we hold in common. We grow to understand other points of view as our common values are uniquely expressed through other personalities and experiences.

The benefits of these insights, as they are projected through the readership at large, will become apparent in our enhanced understanding and application of these ideas and ideals in the development, evolution, and growth of planetary society.◆

INTRODUCTION

by Bobbie Dreier

June 1999

When I was a new reader of *The Urantia Book* I gave a copy to a young black colleague. She was troubled, her spiritual antennae were up and she found something I had said intriguing. I invited her to our study group on Sunday. She wasn't there five minutes when she turned to Paper 64, "The Evolutionary Races of Color," read silently for a few minutes and then left abruptly. On Monday, she handed me the book and said, "This is a racist book." My protests that she had read something out of context fell on deaf ears. It was the end of our relationship, and the beginning of my concern with the issue of race in *The Urantia Book*. That was 25 years ago.

I know that many readers share my reluctance to talk to people about *The Urantia Book* because of its statements about the indigo race. There are compelling reasons given for the creation of a variety of races, but little justification for the unequal distribution of the original endowment of intellectual and spiritual capacity. There are no pure races, we are told, but readers who accept their African heritage must perceive themselves as descendants of the indigo race. And there are passages about the indigo race which many people find disturbing, difficult to understand, and personally offensive. One must read the whole book sequentially at least once to place the offending passages in context and to begin to find the answers which may mitigate the impact of these statements. At this time I know of very few African Americans who read *The Urantia Book*, but clearly the success of the fifth epochal revelation depends on the inclusion of *all* peoples.

We are in a period of intense focus on the meaning of race in America, and racial strife is still rampant in the world. But what is race, after all? And what determines a racial group?

Is it the color of one's skin? Is it our mother's race, as defined by the Jews? Is it a fraction of a bloodline as calculated by Nazi geneticists? Is it determined by "one drop of blood" as in the antebellum South? Is it how we view ourselves? How others view us? Is it a genetic question? A biologic question? A social or cultural question? Or is it a political question?

A superficial reading of the passages on the origin and dispersion of the races in *The Urantia Book* offers few answers to people of good will and little comfort to readers of African descent. How could *The Urantia Book*, our beloved, inspired revelation of truth, be so insensitive to any group of people? Or is it?

We are told that as Adjuster-indwelt mortals, although unequal in men's eyes, we are all spiritually equal in God's eyes. We can choose to see ourselves as men see us, or as God sees us. We can decide how much race matters. We can know that our spiritual equality outweighs our biological inequality and that our physical differences are individual, not racial. We can identify primarily with a body, a gender, or a race or we can join with our heavenly Father and co-create the perfect unique person he sees. The choice is ours.

Nevertheless it is true that descendants of the indigo race with the inescapable fact of skin color and its consequences share a history of slavery and racism. It is a fact that *The Urantia Book* says that in its endowment of intellectual and spiritual capacity "the red man stands far above the indigo-black race." But is it true? And if so, what does it mean? The red race is virtually gone while the black race persists, and time has brought many changes. As described in *Our Kind of People: Inside America's Black Upper Class*, by Lawrence Otis Graham, (HarperCollins, 1999) today in the United States there is a black upper



class "aristocracy" whose exclusive sororities and fraternities, social clubs, summer resorts, and yacht clubs are "insular arenas unfamiliar to the black underclass, working class and whites of any class." Clearly, history is not destiny.

However, segregation by class and race characterized early 20th century Chicago when the Urantia Papers appeared. The Forum comprised midwestern Caucasians whose primary association with blacks would have been employing them as servants. In addition, Dr. William S. Sadler, leader of the Forum, and his wife Dr. Lena Sadler, were prominent members of the eugenics movement. This was the setting for the reception of *The Urantia Book*, which gives rise to the following questions: Were the Life Carriers influenced by the prevailing racial attitudes and eugenics language of the times? Did they try to graft new truth onto existing thinking and cultural trends? Did the questions of the Forum members influence the outcome? Were the responses the "highest expression of knowledge at the time"? Is it heresy to think that the racial material, like some of the science in the book, is dated and awaits revision? Or is it all true?

In addition, the dispassionate manner in which the Life Carriers describe Urantia's origins raises other issues. Surely we are more than just a "biologic adventure" to them. Is the story of the original Sangik family a fact? Or is it an allegorical explanation for cultural outcomes? Were there really orange and green people? Are there comprehensible reasons for a "handicap" at the racial starting line? Is the story included because we have "...failed to achieve race harmonization by the Adamic technique [and] must now work out [our] planetary problem of race improvement by other and largely human methods of adaptation and control"? Could it be that *The Urantia Book* is not for this age, but rather for the day when our world has reached a more settled state? The pursuit of answers to questions like these gave rise to this series of papers.

IN THE SUMMER OF 1991 The Fellowship initiated the Wrightwood Series Seminars to explore issues of serious concern in *The Urantia Book*. I suggested "race" as a topic and was given the task of coordinating the effort. I asked Matthew Block, Earlene Green, Charles Olivea and Wesley Smith to participate because they had done previous work on the subject. Charles had delivered a powerful talk called "The Concept of Race in *The Urantia Book*" at Kendall College in 1976. It was published in "The URANTIAN Journal of Urantia Brotherhood" (Winter 80-81). Earlene had written an article entitled "Race in the Urantia Book" which was published as a pamphlet by Urantia Brotherhood in March 1980. Matthew was researching the human sources of *The Urantia Book* and had found some fascinating material on race, and Wesley had done a workshop on "The Evolutionary Races of Man"

for the Oklahoma Society in 1985. In addition, I invited Mary Daly to participate because of her unique perspective on the relationship of marriage and family to the evolution of the races. Linda McNelly answered the call for participation and sent a series of questions relating to the cultural context of the racial issues, and Don Green sent Saskia Raevouri's chart, "The Evolution of Life on Earth." Our task was to explore the biological, intellectual and spiritual implications of *The Urantia Book's* portrayal of race. We were a mixed racial group and I felt fortunate to have the perspectives of two African American readers (Earlene and Wesley) as seminar participants.

Our first meeting was held at the Fellowship's Wrightwood office on the weekend of May 1-3, 1992. It coincided with the race riots that followed the announcement of the Rodney King verdict in Los Angeles. The riots verified how deeply divided our country is by racial identification and perception. Nationwide, it was a weekend of increased sensitivity to black fears and struggles, and we were meeting in part because of the difficulty of sharing a book which uses terminology like "backward" and "least progressive" to describe the indigo race. *The Urantia Book* tells us that the plan for racial amalgamation which would have blended the races was thwarted by the Lucifer rebellion and the Adamic default. Consequently, after one million years of evolutionary growth we find our planet filled with racial problems and far from the realization of human brotherhood.

I was very nervous about the meeting. Like others I had struggled to understand why statements and passages which disparaged a racial group were included in the book. The passages that describe the appearance of six colored races with differing degrees of capacity reinforce negative stereotypes. The conclusion that racial differences *caused* cultural variation, rather than *resulted* from them is debatable. The social and cultural consequences of slavery in this country were certainly responsible to some degree for the discrepancies in achievement between blacks and whites, particularly in the '20s and '30s before the Civil Rights movement addressed issues of equality of opportunity and black pride. But social and cultural causes are not addressed in the book. In addition, although the discussions of biologic uplift—"the need to eliminate debased and deteriorated stock"—refer to a need for uplift in *all* the races, they provide an uncomfortable backdrop to an already emotionally sensitive issue.

I prayed that our meeting would be truth-seeking and spirit-led. Wesley sent an impassioned letter admonishing us "as co-creators with the Father to leave the details of the great amalgam to the universe," and Mary and Linda sent papers for inclusion in our discussion but were unable to attend. The weekend was interactive, stimulating, and