The Meredith J. Sprunger Archive

Dr. Sprunger is an ordained minister with an educational background in philosophy and theology, a social scientist with a doctorate in psychology, and has had a distinguished career as a college professor and administrator. Dr. Sprunger was personally acquainted with three of the six individuals who made up the Contact Commission which interfaced with the revelators in the compiling of The Urantia Book. Over the years Dr. Sprunger has done extensive writing on topics related to the spread of The Urantia Book into the Christian church.

A Synopsis of The Urantia Book

My Introduction to The Urantia Book by Meredith Sprunger

The Dynamics of Inner Spiritual Guidance -- by Rev. Meredith Sprunger

1. Biographical Introduction to this Collection of Writings - 5/96
2. Interface with Mainline Christianity - 2/99
3. Our Task - 7/74
4. Leavening Our Religious Heritage - 11/77
5. The Origin of *The Urantia Book* - 4/79
6. *The Urantia Book* and Our Christian Heritage - 4/80
7. Spiritual Perspectives for a New Age - 2/83
8. *The Urantia Book* and Religious Studies - 7/85
9. The Imperative of Outreach Ministry - 1/83
10. The World Mission of *The Urantia Book* - 1/83
11. Pioneers in the New Age - 6/86
12. The Gift of Revelation - 2/87
13. The Historicity of *The Urantia Book* - 1/86 Revised 1/98
14. Hope for an Alienated Society - Circa 1970
15. What is Reality? - Circa 1970
16. The Church: Problem or Potential? - 1/84
17. *The Urantia Book* and Christian Fundamentalism - 5/82
18. Principles of Ministry - 6/82
19. Clergy Evaluate *The Urantia Book* - I; 1/86
    Clergy Evaluate *The Urantia Book* - II; 10/91
20. Preparing for Scholarly Evaluation of *The Urantia Book* - 7/84
21. Outreach Reflections - 6/86
22. Our Major Responsibility: Disseminating the Fifth Epochal Revelation - 4/97
23. God's Presence in Action - 7/86
24. Major Growth Steps in the Urantia Movement - 3/92
25. The Dynamics of Empowerment - 4/92
26. The Cultural Impact of *The Urantia Book* in the Next Fifty Years - 5/92
27. Beyond Fundamentalism - 12/91 Revised 11/94
28. The Purpose of Revelation - 11/95
29. Prayerful Problem Solving - 5/97
30. The Commission to Minister - 5/81 Revised 10/97
31. The Future of the Fifth Epochal Revelation - 2/93 Revised 1/98
32. Understanding Evil in Human Experience - 3/94
33. The Challenge of the 21st Century - 8/95 Revised 4/99
34. Jesus of Nazareth: A Study of the Fourth Epochal Revelation 7/71

Introduction to the Theology of The Urantia Book

Discussion questions for Part I

Discussion questions for Part II

Discussion questions for Part III

Discussion questions for Part IV

A Spiritual Pilgrimage:
Adventuring with the Fifth Epochal Revelation

A Biographical Introduction to the Meredith J. Sprunger Archive
5/96

This collection of papers had its origin in an urgent appeal that I seriously consider assembling the various papers I have written over the years and make them available. These papaers written in the pioneering years of the Fifth Epochal Revelation may have some value for individuals who discover the Urantia Papers in the future and wonder about the thinking of those of us who were privileged to fellowship with the founders of the Urantia movement.

On Giving a Testimony

Among my earliest memories I recall as a four or five year old boy sitting in the Missionary Church in Woodburn, Indiana listening to people give their testimonies of how God had blessed and helped them that week. Sometimes I was impressed by their sincerity and genuineness; but more often, even as a small boy, I was critical of their claims and wondered about their motivation. An aversion to exhibitionism has been a strong aspect of my personality.

I am a person of very ordinary abilities and gifts, yet my life has been blessed and rewarded in so many ways. Over the years, I have come to the conviction that I have a very able Thought Adjuster. Many times I have had the urge to bear testimony to God's guidance and acknowledge that whatever accomplishments I have achieved are largely the result of my Adjuster's shepherding and undergirding and not my human abilities. But my aversion to exhibition and the suspicion that disguised egocentric motives may be involved in this testimonial urge have always thwarted its actualization.

As an octogenarian, I have struggled in ascertaining the most effective avenues of service to which I am called. My direction has always been in the areas of nature, philosophy, theology, spiritual insight, and writing. At times I have envied those whose calling was in more tangible areas such as helping people with specific material or physical problems. Intellectually, I know that philosophers and writers contribute a valuable service, but emotionally I sometimes wish for more immediate and tangible results of service.
From an egocentric point of view, I would prefer to abandon this testimony project, but after much soul searching I feel constrained to witness to the guidance, support, and partnership of a wonderful Thought Adjuster and loving friend, along with the Spirit of Truth and Holy Spirit. Those who have experienced this divine partnership know the truth of a Mighty Messenger statement, "when man gives God all that he *has*, then does God make that man more than he *is.*" (U.B. p. 12185)

Odyssey of Peak Experiences

Our lives are shaped by our peak experiences. These episodes of transcendence are sometimes difficult to explain, but most people have a sense of the ministry of a Reality above and beyond themselves that bring meaning to their lives: ..."at every crossroad in the forward struggle, the Spirit of Truth will always speak , saying, 'This is the way.'" (U. B. p. 383)

My search for knowledge and truth started at an early age. I have a vivid memory at the age of four of a compelling urge and deep hunger to know more about life. I was standing outside on the south side of our house in the bright sunshine. I recall saying to myself, "There is something about life that I do not understand, but I'm going to find out."

These prayers of the heart take years to integrate our minds and fashion our lives. Along the way critical peak experiences stand out in our memory. Around the age of eight my father was treasure of our church. He had piles of coins on the dining room table. One glass was full of fifty cent pieces. I took several of these coins and hid them. When my father recounted the money, it did not agree with his original count. He was quite disturbed and sought me out, saying, "Meredith, did you take some of this money?" I felt terrible and admitted taking the money and showed him where I had hid it. This humiliating experience made me determine never to do anything like that again.

When I was nine years old my mother developed breast cancer and suffered terribly in the later stages of the disease before she passed away. A year and a half later my father's vermiform appendix burst and, before the days of antibiotics, inflammation set in that took his life. I shall always remember my father facing death, gathered us four children around him and telling us that he hoped that we would always live lives that were good and truthful, following the guidance of our heavenly Father. The death of my parents were rugged reality probing confrontations. I recall sitting in our front room during the home funeral service of my father looking out of our picture window at a herd of cows grazing in the sunshine, and saying to myself, "Now I'm like those cows with no one to care for me but God."

An aunt and uncle took me to live with them at their home in the country near Monroe, Indiana. When I was around thirteen, we went to the Mennonite Church in Berne, Indiana to hear the community chorus sing Handel's Messiah. I was so carried away by the spiritual grandeur of the lyrics and music that I became acutely aware of my own finitude and insignificance. When we got home, I went up to my room and prayed fervently, "Lord, make me a part of something more important and significant than myself!" Little did I realize that one day I would have the privilege of being one of the pioneers associated with the Fifth Epochal Revelation.

My central interests have always been in nature, philosophy, and religion. As I struggled with the decision of what course of study I would pursue in college, I was drawn to a career as a naturalist. Since I was without parental guidance, I tried to think objectively. Reasoning that my attraction to nature was a passing adolescent fancy, I attempted to make a more mature, conventional choice. Since I was always interest in the "why and wherefore" of things, I thought chemistry fit this description. Knowing, however, that I did not want to spend my life in a laboratory, I settled on Chemical Engineering.

Although I received an excellent grade in chemistry in my first semester at Purdue, I knew that I did not want to be an engineer. So I turned to my first love and transferred to the School of Forestry. Here I felt comfortable but more and more the idea of philosophy and religion seemed to be calling to me. Comments my uncle made about ministers led me to think he regarded them as "parasites" on society. The idea occurred to me that I could earn my living as forester and engage in ministry as an avocation. So I wrote Mission House Seminary (now United Theological Seminary) asking if I could enroll in the seminary after graduating from the School of Forestry. Their reply was, "No, you should have a liberal arts major to enter the seminary." This was a devastating blow to my life plan. What should I do? What was God's will? I walked late nights under the full moon in pasture fields near the agriculture campus trying to discern spiritual guidance. It was an agonizing decision, but finally I felt confident that God was calling me to take the more difficult course, transfer to Lakeland College, major in philosophy, and enter the seminary.

My educational pilgrimage proceeded normally through Mission House Seminary, B.D., Princeton Theological Seminary, M. Th., a pastorate at Trinity United Church of Christ in Mulberry, Indiana, and earning a Ph. D in psychology at Purdue University. In 1950 I took a position teaching psychology at Elmhurst College and a pastorate at Highland Avenue United Methodist Church in Chicago. The pressure of these two new positions plus the 25 mile drive through Chicago traffic began to take their toll. Being a hearty person with considerable ego-reinforcing courage, I plunged on until my physiological and psychological energy reserves were exhausted. Suddenly my ego invulnerability was shattered. I was thrown into the physical exhaustion and psychological depression of battle fatigue.

Only those who have experienced the engulfing depth, anguish, and hopelessness of such depression can know what it is like. It is a psychological-spiritual event that tests the depth of the soul. It will either leave you a wounded and broken individual or a transformed and stronger person more in tune with spiritual reality.

While it was the dark night of the soul, it was also the transforming peak experience in my life. Stripped of all my ego-defenses and rationalizations, I was faced with either giving in to despair or surrendering my ego-defenses and giving myself completely to God regardless of consequences. I saw this as the only option with which I could identify. My life had been dedicated to God before but now I had faced the ultimate test. The restructuring of my inner life was slow but sure. I had a better understanding of what it means to be spiritually born again. I had passed through the tempering fire of testing and knew the spiritual invincibility of being a son of God. Much later my experience resonated with a passage I read in *The Urantia Book.*

But long before reaching Havona, these ascendant children of time have learned to feast on uncertainty, to fatten upon disappointment, to enthuse over apparent defeat, to invigorate in the presence of difficulties, to exhibit indomitable courage in the face of immensity, and to exercise unconquerable faith when confronted with the challenge of the inexplicable. Long since, the battle cry of these pilgrims became: 'In liaison with God, nothing—absolutely nothing—is impossible.' U. B. p. 291)

In 1952 we took a pastorate at Grace United Church of Christ in Culver, Indiana. I found that my spiritual insights and growth took on a new dimension. After several years of working out sermons and papers formulating my own spiritual experience and emphasizing the religion of Jesus rather than the religion about Jesus, I realized that a new spiritual approach was needed in mainline Christian theology. I tentatively outlined a couple of books that needed to be written, but I was not ready for the discipline required to write these books. After some time of trying to avoid commitment to this project, I realized that in loyalty to this inner leading a decision had to be made.

To seek the will of God in making this decision I spent hours under the stars in our back yard. It seemed clear to me that a new theological-spiritual orientation was needed in understanding our Christian faith, and that God was leading me to move in this direction. I finally expressed my willingness to make the commitment to undertake this project. Not long after I made this decision, *The Urantia Book* was placed in my hands. I promised the friend who gave it to me, Judge Louis Hammerschmidt, that I would evaluate it.

Its table of contents turned me off; I thought it would be a waste of time to read it. After many months of procrastination, I started reading the section on the Life and Teachings of Jesus. I did not find what I expected to find. It confirmed and greatly enhanced the New Testament story. Often I read with tears streaming down my cheeks. When I finished reading this seminal presentation of the Life and Teachings of Jesus, I knew its authors had a profound grasp of spiritual reality. Thus motivated, I read the entire book. When I finished reading the Urantia Papers I realized that this was the most authentic picture of total reality in print. The integration of science, philosophy, and religion along with its spiritual cosmology gives a picture of the universe of universes that is without parallel in spiritual insight and philosophic coherence in world literature. I recognized that the basic ideas I had decided to write about were here presented much better than I could possibly formulate them. I had the pervasive sense that my whole life had been prepared for this new vision of spiritual reality. The rest of my life has been a postscript and postlude to this climaxing peak experience.

In order to learn more about the origins of *The Urantia Book* I soon established a relationship with Dr. William S. Sadler, a Chicago psychiatrist, who was the leader of the group receiving the Urantia Papers. This association developed into a warm friendship with Dr. Sadler, his son, Bill, and Emma L. Christensen (Christy). They were all members of the Contact Commission receiving the Papers. Irene and I spent many week-ends with Dr. Sadler and Christy and developed friendships with members of the Forum. It was my privilege later to officiate at the Memorial Services of Dr. Sadler, Bill, Christy, and other members of the General Council.

I was elected to the General Council of Urantia Brotherhood, and Bill Sadler and I were appointed the first Field Representatives of the Brotherhood. Later I served as chairman of the Education Committee and Fraternal Relations Committees, and President of the Urantia Brotherhood. After Dr. Sadler had graduated to the Mansion Worlds, Christy became the "director" of the Foundation-Brotherhood offices. When she was getting up in years, Christy invited me to come to Chicago and take her place. I told her that this invitation was a high honor, but that I had a sense of calling to a less prestigious and more difficult ministry of interfacing with the leaders of mainline Christianity.

In closing this autobiographical odyssey of peak experiences, I should testify to several psychological-spiritual experiences that are rationally and scientifically inexplicable. They occurred in periods of both psychological and physical crises. Although such experiences are important to one's inner life, they must remain personal. The seemingly miraculous I'm confident would be explicable if the range of our knowledge were greater. I recall that my gratitude was so great in one of these experiences that I said to the indwelling presence of the Father that I would remember it, in the far distant future, when I stood in his presence on Paradise.

The Meredith J. Sprunger Archive

Interface with Mainline Christianity

Although I examined the Table of Contents of *The Urantia Book* in December of 1955, it was late in 1956 when I finished reading it and realized that it had epochal potential for transforming religion and religious institutions on our planet. During 1957 I shared it with a small group of Church and Christ clergy and we started a ministerial study group. I also started a local study group of people in Grace church. Once during the year I mentioned the book in a sermon as an inspirational source worth examining. For twenty-five years I bootlegged concepts from the Urantia Papers in preaching and teaching.

Early Confrontational Events

One of the elders of the church whose family was miffed because the Parsonage Building Committee did not chose their plan, sent a letter to the president of the denomination, Dr. James E. Wagner, complaining about my involvement with *The Urantia Book*. Dr. Wagner asked two professors of Mission House Theological Seminary to evaluate the book. Some excerpts from their review show that it was quite negative:

" Much of the material strikes one as Gnostic. The Church rejected Gnosticism because it substituted speculation for faith and pretended to know more about Jesus Christ than the commonly accepted tradition of the Church....I personally have a hard time penetrating the depths of the Bible and appropriating its rich vocabulary. If I should spend further time contemplating myself in the 'gobbledygook' of the Urantia Book, I would be ready to have my head examined!... We must remind readers of the book that the Church acknowledges God's first revelation in Jesus Christ. To claim that the Urantia Book is a new revelation is to excommunicate oneself from the fellowship of the Church. This book adds absolutely nothing to our faith in God as Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier. It is superfluous."

Dr. Wagner then contacted Dwin Rev. Henry Koehler, president of the Michigan-Indiana Synod of the Evangelical and Reformed Church, who in turn came to Culver and talked to me about the complaint. My response was that I was not going to use *The Urantia Book* in church work and was ready to be examined on my theological positions at any time, but that no one was going to tell me what I could or could not read. Henry agreed with my point of view and later wrote a letter to our consistory informing them of the letter written by an elder of Grace Church. The President of the Consistory of Grace Church, Donald B. Hand, wrote Henry Koehler the following letter, dated 2/25/58:

Dear President Koehler and members of the Synodical Council:

Two weeks ago you brought to our attention a letter which had been written by one of our Elders to the President of our Denomination complaining of our study with Dr. Sprunger of the Urantia Book, and intimating that some measure of censure by the higher echelon of our church should be applied to us.

At a special meeting of the Consistory on February 19th the matter was presented and discussed fully. The identity of the Elder was not disclosed so that there would be as little cause for personal emotion as possible. From the discussion which followed, may I summarize the feelings of our Consistory: The action of the Elder, although sincere, was ill advised and certainly in direct contradiction of the Constitution of the Evangelical and Reformed Church; furthermore, it was an undemocratic request calling for an authoritarian action not only unwarranted but also inimical to the principles of our democratic processes, both state and church.

As a result of the discussion, the following actions were taken:

1. Motion made and seconded: "It is understood that every member of Grace Church shall recognize the lawful authority and procedures of the Evangelical and Reformed Church. Any complaint shall be brought first to our local Consistory. If the decision of the local Consistory does not satisfy the person or persons carrying the complaint they may appeal to the Synodical Council. The decision of the Synodical Council is not subject to an appeal." To be made to the President of the Denomination.

"If any member desires to bring a charge against the minister, this charge shall be made in writing to the Synodical Council of the Michigan-Indiana Synod. Any member not following this lawful procedure shall be liable to the judicatory action of the Spiritual Council of Grace Church." Supported 13 to 1 (Ballot vote.)

2. Resolution offered and supported: "It is understood that Dr. Sprunger will refrain from mentioning or teaching from the Urantia Book in any of his pastoral duties. As a private citizen of this community, however, we have no objection to his conducting a study group on the Urantia Book in his home, the parsonage, at 215 N. State Street, Culver, Indiana." Supported 11 to 1 with two abstaining (Ballot vote.)

Dr. Sprunger announced that since he considered this a controversial matter and not necessary to the welfare of the church, he would not conduct a study group in the parsonage even though there was only one vote against it.

Following these motions, the Consistory members expressed their individual confidence in the efforts which Dr. Sprunger has made to bring us a larger and more meaningful vision of the truths our Bible and a way in which to apply these truths to our daily lives. We reject any suggestion or pressure which would limit a minister or layman in respect to what he may or may not read or study in an honest search for truth, feeling that though a strong progressive approach to Christian thinking may step on some toes, such an approach is more desirable than that of preserving the "status quo" in which one progresses rapidly backwards.

Assuring you that we are not headed in that direction under our present leadership, and hoping that this satisfactorily explains our disposition of the problem, I am,

Sincerely yours,

Donald B. Hand

President Henry Kroehler's reply, dated 2/26/58 is as follows:

Dear Mr. Hand:

First of all, let me express my appreciation for the contents of your letter of February 25th. I also want to add that I thoroughly agree with the procedure which you have outlined in regard to the Urantia Book controversy. At one or two points I would think perhaps a different wording would be more desirable. Yet I think the general spirit of the procedure which you outlined is wholesome.

It seems to me that you are perhaps somewhat unnecessarily severe in the censure against the elder involved in this particular instance when you speak of his action as "an undemocratic request calling for an authoritarian action." I agree that the correct was made through the wrong channel but I am not aware of any request for any authoritarian action. Rather I am quite certain it was primarily an expression of concern.

I also want to share with you and the members of the consistory in the expression of confidence in the work which Dr. Sprunger is doing in your midst. Dr. Sprunger knows that the concern which was expressed in this regard in no way reflects any hesitancy in expressing our appreciation for the excellency of the work he has been doing. I gather, however, from your letter that there might be some thought to hinder "a strong progressive approach to Christian thinking." I feel that I need to assure you that in the Evangelical and Reformed Church there has always been an encouragement for such thorough Christian thinking and that I am sure we shall continue with that particular emphasis. Nevertheless, this will in no way imply that legitimate objections will not be raised against the development of any unchristian thinking in our congregations.

With these comments I want to assure you again that I have every confidence that the congregational life in Grace Church will continue to develop in every Christian sense as it has in the past.

Sincerely,

Henry G. Koehler

On 2/27/58 Dr. Edward W. Brunelle, pastor of Zion Church in South Bend, and chairman of the denominational Commission of Church and Ministry, wrote the Rev. Herbert Messinger, who was a member of our ministerial study group, that in his opinion any minister who "accepts the claim and teachings of Urantia as authentic would sooner or later have to leave the ministry of the Evangelical and Reformed Church." The concern about our ministerial group studying *The Urantia Book* was also referred to a special committee of the Synod Presidents by Dr. James Wagner. It is important to recognize that all of this contact by church officials was done kindly and with a real concern for those of us studying *The Urantia Book* and for the church.

Arrangements were made for our group of ministers to meet with Dr. Robert V. Moss, Jr. on October 6, 1958. Dr. Moss was President of Lancaster Theological Seminary and Professor of Philosophy and Theology. He had recently written one of the Biblical material in *The Urantia Book* and admitted that much of it was in harmony with the best scholarly views. Dr. Moss also acknowledged that the date of the crucifixion in *The Urantia Book* was one of the two dates which the research of the Biblical scholar, Harold Rubinkiewicz, had narrowed down to. Later Dr. Moss wrote a pamphlet on the book. "It is uncritical in its use of Biblical materials and the admixture of gospel materials with very late apocryphal materials (possibly as late as the 20th century?) is regrettable. My own feeling is that some of the sharper edges of the gospel materials have been cut and that this is acceptable in a time like these." I received a letter from him dated October 13, 1958 saying, "It occurs to me that we did not deal with one basic question. As you know, Christianity is an historical religion and because of that the bases of revelation can be tested by scholarship. It seems to me extremely important that the source of the Urantia "revelation" be set forth in any serious study of its claims." I assured Dr. Moss that our group was already seriously engaged in researching the persons and events associated with the origin of *The Urantia Book*.

Introducing College Students to *The Urantia Book*

At this point in time I saw that it was fruitless to introduce church leaders to *The Urantia Book*. I reasoned that young people studying the sciences would be more open to the book. With this in mind, I joined the faculty of Indiana Institute of Technology where I had the opportunity to introduce hundreds of students to the book. In 1962 we started a Urantia study group composed of faculty members, students, and community people. This became a Urantia Society in 1969.

In 1964 I accepted a second position as pastor of Plum Tree United Church of Christ, some thirty miles south of Fort Wayne. This congregation was a former Christian Church whose theology reflected a fundamentalistic position. During the next 15 years I discovered that using appropriate language and frames of reference, the truths of *The Urantia Book* were welcomed with joy and enthusiasm. I was able to introduce the book to about 20% of the congregation.

Preparation for my mid interface with mainline Christian leaders, I retired from Indiana Institute of Technology in June of 1977 and from our pastorate at Plum Tree United Church of Christ in May of 1979. On April 17, 1979 we organized The Christian Fellowship of Students of *The Urantia Book* as a nonprofit corporation in the State of Indiana.

Interfacing with Mainline Christian Leaders

Following Jesus' approach in going to Annas who was at the top of the Sanhedrin power structure in starting his public ministry, we started our interface with mainline Christianity by writing personal letters to 88 theological professors in seminaries affiliated with the American Association of Theological Schools along with a pamphlet and an offer of a loan book. We received only a couple responses which showed no interest in examining the book. Later I tried to interest Dr. Walter Brueggemann, a highly respected and widely read theologian in the United Church of Christ, in taking a critical look at *The Urantia Book*. His response was, "I don't even understand the reality why should I spend time on a book like this?" Dr. Martin E. Marty of the Chicago University School of Divinity and a senior editor of *The Christian Century*, writes in a letter dated 2/15/80, "Through the years different folk have sent me the Urantia Book. I've taken a few running jumps at it, found my understanding thin and my curiosity quickly waning. Thanks for the offer." A couple years ago when Dr. Marty was at Plymouth Church here in Fort Wayne, I talked to him about *The Urantia Book*. He remarked that he didn't know much about the book but was impressed with the quality of the people who were studying it.

Partial List of Outreach Activities from 1979 to 1999

• Wrote "Interface with the Church." This paper outlines my preparation for interface ministry with the Christian Church and the objectives of the Christian Fellowship of Students of *The Urantia Book* . (5/17/79)

• Wrote "On Introducing *The Urantia Book* to the Christian Church." This paper presents a rationale for an interface ministry to the church.(6/79)

• Wrote "A Synoptic Introduction to*The Urantia Book* ." This paper was prepared for discussions with ministers covering the following areas: An Overview, Revelation, The Doctrine of God, Cosmology, Jesus and the Plan of Salvation, The Church and the Kingdom of Heaven, and Prayer and Worship. (3/10/80)

• Wrote "Universe Christology: A Transplanetary View." This paper uses contemporary theological writing to support the Christology of *The Urantia Book*. (4/10/80)

• Gave a review of *The Urantia Book* to a Sunday school class at the First Christian Church in Fort Wayne (12/14/80) and a little later to the men's group at the Unitarian Church.

• We sent 83 letters to the mainline ministers of Muncie, Indiana on 1/6/81 inviting them to a review of*The Urantia Book* at Ball State University. The few who attended wanted loan books. Called on one minister who showed interest.

• In January of 1981 we started a student discussion group at Indiana University-Purdue University at Fort Wayne and ran an ad in the student newspaper. Spoke to students in Dr. Mark Sheldon's philosophy class and Dr.George Washington's philosophy class.

• Sent 350 letters to the mainline ministers of Indianapolis on 1/26/81 inviting them to a review of*The Urantia Book* at the Indiana Interchurch Center (2/81). The hall drawn minimum attendance of 50 people. Called on several university professors; some asked for loan books.

• Wrote "The Church: Problem or Potential?" on 5/5/81. This paper which uses *Urantia Book* concepts has been presented at workshops in several churches.

• On 9/17/81 I wrote a letter to the *Spiritual Counselors Project* magazine correction on this fundamental. Wrote of*The Urantia Book* . The editor offered to dialogue but failed to do so.

• A donor offered to finance *Urantia Book* Research Grants for college students in late 1981. We decided against it, not liking the idea of paying people to read the book.

• We sent 83 letters with pamphlets and return cards for loan books on 1/15/82 to the Campus Ministers of the State of Indiana. The response was poor.

• On 5/28/82 I wrote "*The Urantia Book* and Christian Fundamentalism." This paper attempts to speak to The fundamentalist's reservations about reading*The Urantia Book* .

• "Outreach Ministry" was written 5/31/82. It presents levels of ministry in sharing *The Urantia Book* with our Christian culture.

• "Principles of Ministry" was written 6/82. It presents spiritual principles of ministry to the church and society.

• "The Future Development of the Christian Faith" was written 8/1/82 and has been presented in several church workshops.

• On 17/83 I published a 29 page "Brief Summary of the Religions of the World." We need familiarity with and appreciation of all religious groups.

• Between 1983 and 1985 we sent 8,000 personal letters with pamphlet and return card to the ministers in the United Church of Christ. Four percent (over 300) asked for loan books; around 90 purchased or were given books. A report of this project entitled "Mainline Clergy Response to *The Urantia Book* " was published in 1/1/986 and in Journal article (Fall, 1991) "Clergy Evaluate *The Urantia Book*" The general response was poor.

• During this time we sent personal letters with pamphlet to all of the United Methodist ministers in the State of Indiana.

• Sent personal letters with pamphlet to 1500 Fort Wayne Public School teachers with offer of a loan book. (1/84)

• Spoke to the Indiana-Purdue University Religious Forum on the topic "What is *The Urantia Book*?" (11/7/84)

• Presented a paper at the national meeting of the American Academy of Religion in Anaheim, California entitled, "*The Urantia Book* and Religious Studies," November 11, 1985.

• We sent 5,000 letters and a copy of "The URANTIA Book and Religious Studies" on 4/30/86 to members of the American Philosophical Association asking if they would be interested in participating in research on*The Urantia Book* ? Around ten responses were received in such research.

• Formed a Clergy Network of readers of *The Urantia Book* and published a Newsletter. (11/86)

• Sent letter and poster to the Religion or Philosophy Departments at 2200 colleges and universities promoting "The Christian Fellowship Prize in Religious Research." The research topic was: "Compare and Evaluate Jesus' Concept of the Kingdom of God in the Bible and *The Urantia Book*." The first prize: $1000, second prize: $500, third prize: $300, fourth through ninth prizes: $100. The project was dropped because of a lack of interest. Only four papers were received. (9/87)

• On 9/10/87 I sent a letter and appropriate materials to the chairman of the Church and Ministry Committee of the Northeast Association of the Indiana-Kentucky Conference of the United Church of Christ supporting the application of a minister for membership in the Association who was being questioned about his interest in*The Urantia Book*. The committee was favorably disposed to this membership in the association.

• On December 2, 1988 I was asked to give a review of *The Urantia Book* at the combined Sunday School at the Leo United Methodist Church. The response was positive and around twelve books were sold.

• "The Gift of Revelation" was published in 1/9/90. This 22 page booklet was designed to help busy ministers and academics to get a reasonably accurate picture of the cosmological, philosophical, and religious teachings of *The Urantia Book* in a reasonably short time.

• The first issue of *The Spiritual Fellowship Journal* was published April 9, 1991. The Journal seeks to interface with mainline Christian clergy.

• Over the next several years copies of the Journal were sent to all ministers in the United Church of Christ, United Methodist ministers in the State of Indiana, the Association of Unity Churches and ministers in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). A modest number have subscribed to the Journal.

• In December of 1992 *Spiritual Psychology, A Primer* was published by Jemenoo, Inc., P. O. Box 725, Wilmette, IL 60091. *Spiritual Psychology* presents the basic truths of The Urantia Book in a form that even those who have never read it can understand.

• In 1993, at the suggestion of the pastor of Grace St. John's United Church of Christ, Dr. James N. Westphall, which we attend, I have been teaching the Explorers Sunday School class on *The Urantia Book*. The class is composed of nine people who are leaders in the church and we have had great interest and excellent discussions. A *Urantia Book* class was taught for a while by Judy Smith, a member of our Urantia Society Study Group, at the Aldersgate United Methodist Church in Fort Wayne.

• The Program Committee of the United Church of Christ Northeast Association Pastor's Circle asked me to present a program on *The Urantia Book* at our February 22, 1995 meeting. After giving an orientation on the origin, nature, and secondary works associated with *The Urantia Book*, I gave a talk on "*Urantia Book* Deviations from Traditional Christian Theology." The response was interesting and mildly positive with a couple of pastors expressing an interest in reading the Life and Teachings of Jesus.

• After 40 years of interfacing with mainline Christian clergy, including sending *The Spiritual Fellowship Journal* to thousands of ministers from 1991 to 1997, it is obvious that most of the leaders of the Christian Church have too much at stake to seriously examine and evaluate a new spiritual paradigm. It will probably be generations before the Christian Church will recognize it.

Feb.27,1995

The Rev. Dr. Richard L. Hamm
P. O. Box 1986
Indianapolis, IN 46206

Dear Dick:

Normally Irene and I would not have attended the 50th Anniversary of the Associated Churches of Fort Wayne-we have a study group which meets on Sunday evening-but our pastor, Jim Westphall, and his wife, Lois, purchased tickets for us and asked us to attend the meeting with them. We are delighted that circumstances worked out to bring us to this meeting. I thought your historical analysis of the development and second coming of the Pentecostal movement in mainline Christianity was brilliant and your spiritual vision for the future was inspired and inspiring. Hopefully, copies of your talk will be available. I also sense that you are a key person God is using to restore the spiritual vitality of mainline Christianity.

I would personally much prefer not to write this letter but feel led to do so. For many years I have been concerned about mainline Christianity and the relevancy of our spiritual message. As you know, I have tried to interface mainline clergy to *The Urantia Book*. After almost 40 years of critical and prayerful evaluation, I believe its claim to be the Fifth Epochal Revelation is an authentic categorization of its content, I believe this not because the book makes such claim—I am turned off by any person or book making something claims—but because of the high, self-authenticating quality of its spiritual insights. It is my conviction that it is the key to the renaissance of mainline Christianity and that our planet is being prepared for its reception.

It is pivotally important that *The Urantia Book* receive critical theological evaluation. Many years ago our group of young United Church of Christ ministers tried to get Dr. Robert Moss (President of New Testament at Lancaster Theological Seminary and then President of the United Church of Christ) interested in evaluating the book. Dr. Moss did take the time to look at some of the Biblical references in the book and meeting with us said they were essentially in agreement with contemporary scholarship, but he questioned the books historicity and did not wish to take the time to read 2000 pages.

Later I tried to get Walter Brueggemann who at that time was at Eden Theological Seminary to examine the book. His response was "I don't even understand the Bible, why should I spend the time to read a book like this?" A couple of years later after Martin Marty spoke at Lakeland College, I wrote him suggesting that he might like to look at *The Urantia Book*. He sent me a brief but courteous letter saying others had recommended the book to him. "I've taken a few running leaps at it," he remarked. "I don't understand the reality. What I am searching for your consideration is that it would be entirely proper for you to be concerned about the effect of *The Urantia Book* on the church and with your rapport with theologians you might approach a courageous and balanced theologian with this concern and he, eventually, could involve colleagues in such an evaluation. I leave this suggestion with you confident that you are sensitive to the guidance of the Spirit, and realizing that you may come to a decision different than the one I might make in a similar situation. Finally, I would invite you to read the 700 page Life and Teachings of Jesus in *The Urantia Book* simply as a novel. It will, in all probability, enhance your appreciation of the singular importance of the life and teachings of Jesus.

Cordially and sincerely,

Meredith J. Sprunger

***The Urantia Book* as an acceptable resource.**

We are now (10/97) directing the Journal to a new mission to: "Promote Theological, Philosophical, and Psychic Discussions Germane to an Appropriate Symbiosis and Socierelgious Expression of the Fifth Epochal Revelation."

New Religious Institutions

Although our outreach ministry to mainline Christian leaders has been positive, we are well aware that it takes generations to change a spiritual paradigm in religious institutions and culture. Nearly 40 years of experience has taught me that anything purporting to be new revelation is not within the boundaries of current theological-institutional respectability. Most ministers are afraid to seriously examine *The Urantia Book*. This is understandable as their whole lives are centered in the traditional theological paradigm.

We will continue to interface with mainline Christian leaders, however, I think it is now time to give priority to other audiences and alternatives in outreach ministry. Historically, creative new religious institutions have been central to the culture, not by the leaders of traditional religion, but by laypersons. The most fruitful field for outreach ministry is among laypersons, many of whom are hungering for a larger and more satisfying vision of spiritual Reality.

Many of us who have our roots in the traditional Christian Church would love to see a renaissance and revitalization of the church by the Fifth Epochal Revelation. But a realistic appraisal of institutional dynamics suggests that new religious institutions have the best chance for spreading the Fifth Epochal Revelation through which the message of *The Urantia Book* is carried throughout the world. Richard Bain, one of my former students, has recently written an excellent article entitled, "A Urantia Church?" in which he observes that such an institution is not only desirable but that we are already on our way toward such religious institutions. "We may conjecture," he says, "about where or how a new religious organization will emerge as a result of the Fifth Epochal Revelation, but the authors of *The Urantia Book* make it clear that something will emerge—not if, but when!"

We are entering into a new era of outreach ministry. The solid core of the Urantia movement has come through tribulations with renewed dedication and balance. We have enough of age, experience, and maturity to successfully carry out the mission of the Fifth Epochal Revelation. We are ready to interface with the leaders of the Fifth Epochal Revelation will make its way and overcome any barriers placed in its way. We are standing at the threshold of "one of the most amazing and enthralling epochs of social readjustment, moral quickening, and spiritual enlightenment" on our planet. The preliminary, crowning growth and development of the Urantia movement are still in process; however, the potential of an exciting outreach mission of the Fifth Epochal Revelation is challenging us. The Most Highs have prepared us and our planet for the most thrilling vision of spiritual reality since Jesus of Nazareth walked on our world. This outreach mission will be many-faceted, pluralistic, and victorious!

The Meredith J. Sprunger Archive

Our Task

7/74 Revised 12/97

Ours is one of the most fascinating and yet one of the most difficult tasks on our planet. For we are the custodians of the greatest message ever given to humankind, yet we must acquire the forbearance and wisdom to refrain from using indiscriminate and short-sighted methods of presenting this message to our present day society. Some individuals and groups are more prepared than others to seriously examine the Fifth Epochal Revelation.

Our task as spiritual fellowships and study groups is to become living communities of the higher way of truth, beauty, and goodness that the searchers of humanity may discover. We should endeavor to become the leaven that will eventually transform the people and religious institutions of the world. Our mission is to become the channel through which individuals and religious groups can discover the Fifth Epochal Revelation under the most favorable conditions. If we do our job well, the teachings of The Urantia Book will eventually permeate our entire world.

This patient but persistent role is exceedingly difficult. We have been conditioned to crash methods and programs in science and industry, and to movements in religion designed “to save the world in this generation.” We need to remember that many of the major mistakes on our planet have been caused by impatience and the use of short-cut methods, by ignoring the fundamental law of readiness which is the key to all solid growth in the evolutionary universes. Any attempt to hasten or retard this evolutionary process is doomed to defeat. We cannot “force the hand of God;” we can only realize individual, planetary, or universe growth by co-operating with the methodology ordained by God.

Correlated with the law of readiness is the law of self-determination. We enter the Kingdom of God and grow therein only when and as we hunger and strive for truth, beauty, and goodness—God. Discovery, growth, wisdom—these achievements in the spiritual realm are not arbitrarily conferred on individuals—they are the result of intense desire, diligent searching, and rigorous effort. All of these facts warn against the danger of using either the pressure of present-day promotion techniques or the subtle motivational coercion of modern advertising. The only “hidden persuader” we dare rely on is the indwelling Adjuster who never violates the self-determining freedom of the human will.

Our purpose of sharing the great truths of *The Urantia Book* is best achieved by attraction rather than coercive promotion. If each of us will faithfully strive to practice, in all of our human affairs, the teachings of Jesus, then such living demonstrations will attract people to recognize the Fatherhood of God and the brother/sisterhood of humankind and the discovery of the Fifth Epochal Revelation.

The quality of students of *The Urantia Book* is more important than the quantity of readers. We need to build solid foundations to withstand any and all contingencies that might arise in the future. We should be aware of at least four potential inappropriate roles which may lure those who are inspired by the Fifth Epochal Revelation.

1. **The Enthusiast.** When the first impact of the tremendous message of *The Urantia Book* grips a person, they are on fire to share this message with others. This healthy impulse sometimes causes people to lose their normal sense of discretion, propriety, and wisdom. Over-enthusiasm triggers them to act out the ancient observation: “Fools rush in where angels fear to tread.” These well-meaning people need the understanding counsel and stability of more experienced members of the Fellowship to help them over this period of impetuousness. Most of them after a little experience will settle down and acquire more appropriate and effective ways of witnessing to their faith.

2. **The Jilted Suitor.** Many people using the best judgment available to them will introduce *The Urantia Book* prematurely to a religious group or institution. As a result they will experience various degrees of rejection by this group. All too often such an individual will react in kind. He or she rejects the group and ceases to attend their meetings. This only causes greater animosity and erects more impregnable barriers to the recognition of the truth and potential of the Fifth Epochal Revelation. If you should misjudge the readiness of a group for introduction to *The Urantia Book*, do not be surprised or visibly disturbed by this rejection. In humility and love try to understand such people and continue your fellowship with them on the level of their religious comprehension. If you do find it wise to server relations with such a group, do it gradually and unobtrusively, and continue to love these people as individuals.

3. **The Messianic Aspirant.** Occasionally we are going to attract people with a messianic complex. They genuinely feel that God has laid upon them the burden of “saving humankind.” Such delusions of grandeur cause such people to become some of the most difficult and potentially disruptive personalities in any religious movement. To the degree that such individuals are in touch with reality, every effort should be made to impress them with the fact that the salvation of humankind is a many-fold and evolutionary divine ministry extending over centuries. There are no indispensable human ministers and any one who has too great a sense of importance loses their usefulness to do important things in the Kingdom of God. Indeed, the excessive prominence of individuals in any religious group is usually unhealthy and a potential source of evil. Genuine humility and spontaneous self-forgetfulness coupled with a deep desire to serve our fellows are central qualities required of all who would be used most fully and constructively in spiritual ministry.

4. **The Frustrated Server.** How many of us periodically or continually stand here! We have a deep longing to serve and share the great truths and reality orientation of the Fifth Epochal Revelation. But the mundane channels through which we serve leave us longing to be used more effectively and completely. We see the tremendous possibilities of the teachings of *The Urantia Book* to transform society and we are faced with the reality of the incremental nature of the evolutionary process. in addition to realizing the unchangeable nature of evolutionary methodology, the greatest deterrent to unwise action is found in establishing a channel of service where we can pour out our energy in creative activity. This service should be satisfying and fulfilling in itself as well as laying foundations for spiritual growth.

Our basic problem is to condition our emotions so that we identify ourselves with the evolutionary process. This reality centeredness will help us avoid activity that violates or ignores the fundamental laws of readiness and self-determination. As we maintain our sense of historical perspective, we see that the Fifth Epochal Revelation is making its way in the world more rapidly than previous epochal revelations. There is a great spiritual hunger and expectancy throughout the world. It is generally recognized that the old religious forms and concepts are inadequate for our age. Creative thinking has almost died out in the theological world; forms, techniques, and institutional developments are stressed in an attempt to fill the aching void.

The Most Highs are preparing our planet in a remarkable way for the advent of the Fifth Epochal Revelation. As we evolve study groups and small religious groups, the teachings of *The Urantia Book* are slowly making their way in our culture. The fields are indeed “growing white for the harvest.” Our world is gradually preparing itself for the time when the storms of dogmatism and the fog of sectarianism are swept away by the fresh winds of searching minds and hungry souls enabling the sun of an enlarged revelation of spiritual reality to bring new light, warmth, and hope to humankind.

The Meredith J. Sprunger Archive

Leavening Our Religious Heritage

11/77 Revised 12/97

One of the greatest needs of contemporary society is to be inspired by a fresh and enlarged spiritual vision that will stimulate humankind to new spiritual growth. Such advances in spiritual enlightenment in the past have been initiated by pioneering personalities or were inspired by the vision of prophetic books.

It is my considered opinion, confirmed by more than forty years of critical thought and experience, that we have in *The Urantia Book* such an epoch-making book. Like a mountain peak rising above the slumbering potentials of our contemporary scene, the book catches and reflects the light that signals the dawn of a new spiritual era. It is destined to introduce unprecedented creative thought and action in the field of religion that will transform our entire society.

The Urantia Book purports to be the Fifth Epochal Revelation, the first major divine revelation since the coming of Christ Jesus to our planet. Such a claim surely will put a knowledgeable and responsible person on guard. Almost every generation produces a number of people who pose as the bearers of a "new revelation." What is surprising about *The Urantia Book* is that it has almost nothing in common with radical and fanatical movements. It does not advocate a new religion. Its viewpoint builds upon the religious heritage of the past and present; yet, it is fresh, expansive, and profound.

The superior quality of the philosophical-religious insights of *The Urantia Book* is clear to anyone of discriminating mind who reads it. After a judicious and reflective reading of the book, one is impressed by the power of its own authenticity. It is as book, however, which cannot be adequately evaluated until one grasps its comprehensive universe cosmology—its total religious picture. Just as students of the life of Jesus recognize the superlative quality of his character even though they may reject his divinity, so humankind will eventually recognize the unparalleled quality of the insights of *The Urantia Book*—even though they may not accept as a new revelation.

Revelatory authenticity, however, is a secondary consideration. The basic challenge posed by this stimulating book is pragmatic. Does it have something creative and constructive to contribute to our modern religious-philosophic outlook? There is little question but that it can and will make a significant contribution to our religious thinking. Evaluated on the basis of spiritual insight, philosophic coherence, and reality-centeredness, it presents the finest world view of religion and spiritual reality available to our contemporary society. It will profoundly impress those who are interested in progressive philosophical and religious thinking that has the potential of molding world destiny.

A Holistic Philosophical Orientation

The exceptional philosophical-religious qualities of *The Urantia Book* include an integrated and masterful concept of reality. The gap between monistic and pluralistic metaphysical concepts is bridged. Mechanistic and vitalistic interpretations of natural phenomena are integrated. Science and religion are seen as aspects of a larger unity. Concepts of deity ranging from that of a personal Universal Father to an impersonal absolute are so well unified that the holistic picture is harmonious. Both unitarian and trinitarian views are enhanced. These and other philosophical-religious diversities are integrated in such a way as to augment the essential truths in each of these positions.

A marvelously organized astronomical universe is projected which includes millions of inhabited planets in all stages of physical, mental, and spiritual evolution. The book contains what is probably the most realistic and inclusive material-mindal-spiritual cosmology in the entire field of philosophy and religion.

Moreover, *The Urantia Book* presents an eminently reasonable picture of the conditions and nature of immortality. Survival is seen as dependent on the spiritual reality status of the individual—the result of the free choice motivation and decisions of the person toward truth, beauty, and goodness (God) as he or she sincerely understands these values. Nevertheless, evil, sin, and judgment are stern and sober realities in the universe. The interrelationships of body, mind, soul, and spirit are treated with much insight and originality. The central challenge to each person is to make a balanced effort to achieve God-consciousness. Growth toward spiritual perfection is presented as the fundamental motivation of life. This growth is evolutionary, culminating, and virtually endless.

The Urantia Book also presents a superior understanding of planetary history, dynamics, and destiny. Evolution is seen as the key modus operandi of our planet. It integrates the mechanisms of the physical universe with the purposes of mind and spirit "over-control." An excellent summary of the development of religion and the growth of civilization is given with admirable conciseness and insight. The book's penetrating analysis or religion, culture, and the family is of exceptional quality. Its basic philosophy of the various forms of energy is that matter is ultimately subject to mind, and that mind is eventually controlled by spirit.

The last section of *The Urantia Book* contains an extended version of the life and teachings of Jesus which is unsurpassed in theistic philosophical reasonableness, spiritual insight, and personality appeal. This superb presentation of the life and teaching of Jesus brings life to the sketchy New Testament story and with it a new authenticity. It is basically acceptable to all religions, emphasizing the religion *of* Jesus which is unifying as opposed to the religion *about* Jesus which tends to be divisive.

A Resource Not an Imperative

Although the message of *The Urantia Book* is solidly rooted in the perennial philosophy and experience of the past, it does present an enlarged view of the universe and God. Religious institutions usually find expanded knowledge and insight difficult to assimilate. Light can blind as well as guide. Truth which is presented prematurely brings frustration and rejection. *The Urantia Book*, therefore, may be disturbing to some people even though it is supportive and positive toward all people and all human efforts in the search for truth and spiritual understanding.

People are receptive to progressive spiritual values long before they are prepared to understand the origin and implications of these truths. Religious leaders, therefore, might best stimulate spiritual growth by translating the insights they discover in *The Urantia Book* into the idiom and reference frame of the people they serve. Many of us have already learned how to do this in transcribing religious and spiritual insights acquired in seminary and further graduate study to the person in the pew.

Even though *The Urantia Book* is among the most significant sources of spiritual guidance available to contemporary society, it is not an end in itself; nor is it a necessary means of spiritual enlightenment. Its potentials for individual and social growth, however, are so great it should be highly recommended to all who are interested in the creative possibilities of a spiritual renaissance in our society. Its message is balanced and profound. Its approach is open and benign. There are no threats or coercions to "believe." It seeks to work in and through the evolutionary process and within the social institutions of our world.

During the years since its publication by the Urantia Foundation, 533 Diversey Parkway, Chicago, IL 60614 in 1955 this 2097 page book is being discovered by steadily increasing numbers of people. The overwhelming consensus among those who have read *The Urantia Book* is that it is destined for universal recognition on our planet.

The kingdom or family of God that was the focus of the teachings of Jesus is an invisible and spiritual fellowship that is destined to become a living organism transcending social institutions. Contemporary religious institutions serve as useful sources of religious ministration in our society. No doubt other religious groups will originate from the inspiration of the Fifth Epochal Revelation. The teachings of *The Urantia Book* are destined to support, enlighten, and strengthen all religious institutions toward the fulfillment of their unique potentials in ministering to the spiritual needs of humankind. In the ages to come it will serve as an ecumenical leavening influence to the great and many-faceted religious heritage of our world.

The Meredith J. Sprunger Archive

The Origin of *The Urantia Book*

4/79 Revised 12/97

Years of experience reveal that the first thing people wish to know about *The Urantia Book* is who wrote it. What are the circumstances of its origin? It does little good to tell them the book should be judged by its content, not by claims of authorship. Because of the conditioning of our culture, we are naturally inclined to depend on sources and authority when evaluating publications. Religious literature, in particular, is appraised in this way.

The authenticity of individuals, religious groups, or literature which claim revelatory authority is always open to question. Authority is never a philosophical criterion of truth. There are only two ways this question can be approached with credibility. First, a personal judgment can be made based on the quality of the material being evaluated. The other way revelatory authenticity is established is by the judgment of society over years of historical experience. Social tradition is an especially powerful influence. Even when biblical scholars like Rudolf Bultmann declare that our reliable historical knowledge is so meager that "We can know almost nothing concerning the life and personality of Jesus," few people are troubled by such statements. Our historical experience has socially validated the quality of the New Testament story of the life and teachings of Jesus.

There are, presently, no social traditions associated with *The Urantia Book.* It must be analyzed and evaluated on the quality of its content. Although they have little relevance in determining the quality of *The Urantia Book*, there are two sources of information regarding its origin.

The Author's Account

The first account of the origin of *The Urantia Book* lies within its own pages. We are told the papers were authorized by high deity authorities and written by numerous supermortal personalities. These papers are designated as the Fifth Epochal Revelation to our planet, Urantia. Dated from 1934 A. D., the five epochal revelations are: (1) Dalamatia—500,000 years ago; (2) Adam and Eve—37,848 years ago; (3) Melchizedek—1980 B. C.; (4) Jesus—7 B. C.; and *The Urantia Book*—1934-35 A. D.

The authors (revelators) acknowledge the difficulty of portraying the realities of eternity in the language of time. We are told sever limitations were placed on the knowledge they were permitted to share with us. They explain that all time-space revelation is partial and incomplete, needing to be periodically upstepped in the process of planetary development.

In general terms the authors discuss the problems they encountered communicating between their spiritual level of universe reality and our material level of mortal existence. They reveal that they made contact through the Thought Adjuster (indwelling spirit of God) of a particular human being on our world. We are assured, however, that this Thought Adjuster's communication technique is not related to "spiritualism," "mediumship," or "channeling." Specific details are not discussed. Further information can be found in *The Urantia Book* on the following pages: 1:1-4; 16: 7; 17: 1-2; 32: 1; 33: 3; 215: 2-9; 865: 1, 5, 6; 1007: 1-7; 1008: 2; 1109: 2-8; 1110: 1-13; 1111: 1-4; 1208: 6; 1209: 0; 1258: 1; and 1343: 1-3.

The Human Story

The second source of information relating to the origin of *The Urantia Book* is the human side of the story. Following my discovery of the book in December of 1955 and after introducing it to some of my clerical friends, we spent years researching the human side of the origin of the book. The following information summarizes our findings.

We quickly discovered the papers were received by a small group of people in Chicago. Their leader as Dr. William S. Sadler. Dr. Sadler was a highly respected psychiatrist who taught at the Post-graduate School of Medicine at Chicago University. For almost thirty years he was also a lecturer in Pastoral Counseling at McCormick Theological Seminary.

Dr. Sadler told me that in the mid 1920's a group of people from all walks of life met at the Sadler residence to discuss psychological and medical topics. This group was known as the Forum. Through a series of events in this discussion group, communications were established through the Contact Commission between the revelators and members of the Forum. Much later, Forum members established Urantia Foundation and published *The Urantia Book.*

Dr. Sadler candidly discussed any question we asked him, but he would not talk about two things: the name of the individual whose Thought Adjuster was used in the materialization of the Urantia papers and the unique way in which the papers appeared. Dr. Sadler said they were asked to take vows of secrecy regarding these two subjects. When I asked why these restrictions were imposed upon them, he gave me the following reasons:

1. *"The main reason for not revealing the identity of the contact personality is that the revelators do not want any human being—any human name—ever to be associated with The Urantia Book. They want this revelation to stand on its own declarations and teachings. They are determined that future generations shall have the book wholly free of all mortal connections—they do not want a St. Peter, St. Paul, Luther, Calvin, or Wesley. The book does not even bear the name or any mark of the printer who brought the book into being."*

2. *"There is much about the appearance of the Urantia papers which no human being fully understands. No one really knows just how this phenomenon was executed. There are numerous missing links in the story of how this revelation came to appear in written English. If anyone should tell all he really knows about this technique and the methods employed in getting this revelation, such a narration would satisfy no one, there are too many missing links."*

Our group of ministers discovered a possible reference to the individual somehow involved in the materialization of *The Urantia Book* . It is found in the appendix of Sadler's book, *The Mind at Mischief,* published in 1929. He says, *"Eighteen years of study and careful investigation have failed to reveal the psychic origin of these messages. I find myself at the present time just where I was when I started. Psychoanalysis, hypnotism, and intensive comparison fail to show that the written or spoken messages of this individual have origin in his own mind. Much of the material secured through this subject is quite contrary to his habit of thought, to the way in which he has been taught, and to his entire philosophy. In fact, of much that we have secured, we have failed to find anything of its nature in existence. Its philosophic content is quite new, and we are unable to find where very much of it has ever found human expression."* (p. 383)

During Dr. Sadler's investigation of this phenomenon, he consulted men like Howard Thurston, the renowned slight-of-hand artist who devoted considerable time to exposing fraudulent mediums and psychics. He also conferred with Sir Hubert Wilkens, the noted scientist and explorer involved in investigating psychic phenomena. They all agreed that the phenomena connected with this individual could not be classified with other types of psychic phenomena such as automatic writing, telepathy, clairvoyance, trances, spirit mediumship, channeling, or split personality.

On May 7, 1958 our group of ministers met with Dr. Sadler to discuss the origin of *The Urantia Book.* He gave us a paper listing every imaginable form of subconscious mind or psychic activity. At the bottom of the outline a note said: *"The technique of the reception of* <u>*The Urantia Book*</u> *in English in no way parallels or impinges upon any of the above phenomena of the marginal consciousness."* He went on to tell us that so nearly as he could determine, the appearance of Urantia papers was associated with some form of superconscious mind activity. On numerous occasions Dr. Sadler told me that he did not know how the materialization was accomplished. He said that almost everything known about the origin of *The Urantia Book* is found in various places in the book.

In 1939 the revelators requested that the leaders of the Forum ask for volunteers who would meet each Wednesday evening to seriously and systematically study the Urantia papers. Seventy persons volunteered and they became known as "The Seventy." The Seventy were trained by directives from the revelators and their own leaders up to the time of the publication of *The Urantia Book.* Special emphasis was placed on the evolutionary process involved in the acceptance of new truth. The danger of using broadcast, indiscriminate, or revolutionary methods in presenting the message of *The Urantia Book* was stressed.

In preparation for the publication of *The Urantia Book,* Dr. Sadler and Bill Sadler wrote an introduction. At a contact session they were told that although they meant well, this was not acceptable—*"a candle can hardly illuminate the sun."* At the proper time, they were assured, an introduction would be given. When they received the Foreword, Dr. Sadler observed that they fully realized the inadequacy of their own introduction.

They were, however, given permission to compose a "Table of Contents" for the book. Bill Sadler compiled the titles, the section headings, and in various parts of the book outlined some of the material, thus making up the "Table of contents." Dr. Sadler and other members of the Contact Commission assured me that no human being wrote any of the book. One individual, not a member of the Contact Commission, who made suggestions to "improve" one of the papers was vigorously informed that no human additions to the book would be allowed. Every precaution was made to publish the message of the text just as the revelators had given it.

After many years of study, they were given permission to publish the book. They were told that although many people would welcome this enlarged presentation of spiritual truth, the population as a whole was not ready for it. The Fifth Epochal Revelation was given as an evolutionary phenomenon which would slowly take root in our society. An early publication of the book was given, they explained, so that leaders and teachers could be trained and people of means could be found to fund translations into other languages. The cost of the first printing was $75,000. This money was raised by voluntary contributions from members of the Forum.

The Urantia Foundation was established as a nonprofit organization in 1950. *The Urantia Book* was published under international copyright October 12, 1955. The Urantia Brotherhood was organized in 1955 as an ecumenical fellowship for studying and disseminating the teachings of *The Urantia Book.* The name "Urantia Brotherhood" was officially changed to "The Fellowship" (for readers of *The Urantia Book*) in 1991. The Fellowship office is located at 529 Writewood Ave., Chicago, IL 60614.

Judge by Content

The events associated with the origin of *The Urantia Book* have nothing to do with its verification of truth or spiritual quality. This you must judge by its contents and the spiritual fruit it produces. The message of *The Urantia Book* has amazing self-authentication and historical-philosophical consistency. But, in the final analysis, the indwelling spirit of God is the ultimate reality which must evaluate its message.

The Meredith J. Sprunger Archive

The Urantia Book and Our Christian Heritage

4/16/80

Rarely does one find a book on theology or religion which has the potential of changing the conceptual patterns of our culture. Over twenty years ago a small group of United Church of Christ ministers discovered a stimulating volume entitled *The Urantia Book.* Urantia Foundation published this book in 1955.

Since that time other clergymen and tens of thousands of laypersons have become interested in this unusual book. The overwhelming consensus is that it will receive universal recognition. This challenging book is a fascinating document for personal spiritual growth and intellectual development. It may become the most important source of information revitalizing the church and restructuring theology since the Reformation.

The growing number of ministers and religious leaders discovering the book are surprised that a publication of this spiritual quality and potential has remained virtually unknown for over twenty-five years. A partial answer is because the publishers have not promoted it. They believe that the low key evolutionary process of person to person introductions is the wisest method of acquainting people with the book. In addition, there are three major factors which have discouraged clergymen and other Christian leaders from a serious evaluation of its message:

1. It comes from a source that is not known and trusted by religious and theological groups.
2. It is a large book (2,097 pages) and some sections can be difficult to read.
3. It claims to be new revelation and understandably causes suspicion, if not fear or hostility.

Hopefully, we have left those days of cultural naivete when claim or authority are regarded as a criterion of truth. Revelatory authenticity is a secondary consideration. The primary challenge posed by *The Urantia Book* is pragmatic. Does it have something creative and constructive to contribute to our modern philosophic-religious outlook? Evaluated on the basis of spiritual insight, philosophical coherence, and reality-centeredness, it presents, in the judgment of thousands of people who have critically examined it, the finest world view of religion available to contemporary society.

The Urantia Book, like any other book on religion, should be read critically but with an open, spirit-guided mind. It is not, and should not be seen as, a challenge to the Canonical literature of the church. Canonical literature, including the Bible, is the result of divine initiative and guidance that has been tested by centuries of experience and wisdom in the church. *The Urantia Book* , like all other contemporary literature, can only serve as an adjunct to the scriptural sources of faith in the church. You will find that it supports an enlightened Biblical approach to religion. Most people have a greater appreciation of the Bible as a result of reading *The Urantia Book.* Although individuals may determine the personal value of the book in a relatively short time, its worth and place in the church can only be determined by generations, if not centuries, of experience.

An Integrated Universe

The Urantia Book presents an integrated, holistic view of the universe. It combines the best traditional concepts of God with the most meaningful present day concepts (Tillich, Teilhard de Chardin, Whitehead) into a uniquely coherent system.

A hierarchical, structured astronomical universe, teaming with millions of inhabited planets, is paralleled by a similar spiritual cosmology. The book presents a superior understanding of our planetary history, dynamics, and destiny. Evolution functions as the key physical and spiritual modus operandi of the universe. The mechanisms of the physical universe are integrated with the purposes of mind and spirit overcontrol. An excellent summary of the development of religion and the growth of civilization is given with conciseness and insight. The authors' penetrating analysis of religion, culture, and the family is of exceptional quality.

The last section of *The Urantia Book* contains an extended version of the life and teachings of Jesus. This inspiring presentation of the bestowal mission of Jesus to our world brings life and authenticity to the sketchy New Testament story. Its teachings are basically acceptable to all religions. They emphasize the religion *of* Jesus which is unifying rather than the religion *about* Jesus which tends to be divisive. The central challenge of contemporary human beings is to make a balanced effort to achieve God-consciousness. Growth toward perfection (God) is seen as the fundamental motivation of life. This growth is evolutionary, culminating, and virtually endless.

A Resource not an Imperative

Although the message of *The Urantia Book* is solidly rooted in the perennial philosophy and religious experience of the past, it does present an enlarged view of the universe and God. Religious institutions usually find expanded knowledge and insight difficult to assimilate. Light can blind as well as guide. Truth that is presented prematurely brings frustration and rejection. *The Urantia Book*, therefore, may be disturbing to some people even though it is supportive and positive toward all people and all human efforts in the search for truth and spiritual understanding.
The Urantia Book is among the most significant sources of spiritual guidance available to present day society, but it is not an end in itself, nor is it a necessary means to spiritual enlightenment. Its potentials for individual and social growth, however, are so great it should be highly recommended to all who are interested in the creative possibilities of a spiritual renaissance in our society. Its message is balanced and profound. Its approach is open and benign. There are no threats or coercions to "believe." It seeks to work in and through the evolutionary process and within the social institutions of our world.

The Urantia Book strives to stimulate the spiritual regeneration and evolutionary advancement of all humankind. It points out that the kingdom of God is an invisible spiritual fellowship that is destined to become a living organism transcending social institutions. The authors of the book seek to encourage and strengthen all religious institutions toward the fulfillment of their unique potentials in ministering to the spiritual needs of humanity.

How Can *The Urantia Book* Contribute to Our Christian Heritage?

There are three basic reasons for ministers and Christian leaders to take the time to read *The Urantia Book* .

1. The book is being discovered by thousands of people at an increasing rate. You may find it helpful to having a working knowledge of the quality and scope of its message.
2. In the judgment of many ministers and Christian leaders, the book contains the greatest stimulus to spiritual growth in contemporary literature.You may wish to examine the basis for this opinion.
3. You may be a searcher for philosophical and religious truth. If so, you are aware of the limitations of our historic philosophic-religious resources. You will find *The Urantia Book* one of the most enlightening sources of spiritual truth you have ever read.

Hopefully, these reasons will motivate you to read this book. Through its pages you will discover new aspects of reality and deeper insights into living spiritual truth that will enhance your work and daily living. *The Urantia Book* has a wealth of resource information and insight to help solve problems in our complex society. It presents the highest principles of judicious thinking and healthful living. Its message emphasizes balance and maturity while teaching respect for established traditions, laws, and usages. The spiritual universe is so realistically and authentically portrayed, it can be instrumental in lifting one's life to a new level of spiritual effectiveness.

The Meredith J. Sprunger Archive

Spiritual Perspectives for a New Age

2/83 Revised 1/98

We are living in one of the great pivotal periods of history. Society has undergone more change in the last one hundred years than the world has experienced in the previous two thousand. Information is exploding. Some fields of knowledge are doubling every every five to ten years. Ninety percent of the scientists who have ever lived are living in our times. We are unlocking the secrets of the microcosm and beginning to travel in outer space. During this century we have evolved a new physics, a new astronomy, a new psychology, and the beginnings of a new philosophical age.

Our planetary life is changing so fast contemporary society is experiencing future shock.There is a sense of alienation from our traditional cultural values. Our relation to life has become ambiguous.There is a pervasive intuitive feeling of meaninglessness in the civilization of the twentieth century. We have lost our spiritual orientation. The great religious systems of the past no longer command the total commitment of humanity or fulfill their ultimate needs. We are passing through a collective psychological and spiritual reorientation equivalent in magnitude to the emergence of Christianity from the ruins of the Greco-Roman civilization.

Humanity is Searching

A form of searching underlies the erosion of institutional religion in our day. The deterioration of the credibility of traditional social, economic, political, and moral values among our most perceptive youth is building a hunger for a new spiritual vision. The growing lack of relevance elicited by ancient spiritual frames of reference which have their roots in prescientific thought and culture has triggered an explosion of cults, new religions, and psychomystical movements.

Just as in past philosophical-cultural transitions,there is a proliferation of phenomena and movements. In this so called “Age of Aquarius” we have thousands of gurus, astrologers, Tarot Card readers, numerologists, and prophets of every sort. Millions of people are pursuing ESP, psychic Phenomena, Zen,Yoga, I Ching, Theosophy, Spiritualism, Scientology, Transcendental Meditation, UFO’s, and mind altering drugs. Among the dozens of new sects which have sprung up are The Unification Church, The Divine Light Mission, The International Society of Krishna Consciousness, The Children of God, The Way International, and many others.

A New Vision of Reality

There is a search for spiritual reality today that is unprecedented in modern times. What is the meaning of all this yearning for spiritual verities? If we can learn from history, it means that God is at work in our world preparing us for a new spiritual age. Many influences are at work training us for creative approaches to the future. We should like to invite your attention to a book that will play a key role in initiating this new spiritual age. It is *The Urantia Book* published in 1955 by the Urantia Foundation in Chicago, Illinois. *The Urantia Book* is one of the most promising sources of creative thought in philosophy, religion, and culture in our contemporary world. This inspiring book has sold over 300,000 copies. The overwhelming consensus among those who have read the book is that it will receive universal recognition.

In its 2,097 pages *The Urantia Book* presents an integrated picture of the universe which has extremely broad ramifications. The book’s observations and insights regarding the arts and sciences have problem solving implications. Its overarching grasp of the dynamics of civilization and culture shed wisdom in almost every area of human endeavor.

Pioneering Contemporary Scholars

Modern day scientists, philosophers, and theologians have tried to accommodate our growing understanding of reality with traditional ways of looking at the universe. The factual world of scientific knowledge can no longer be explained or understood by the scientific theories that seemed adequate only a few years ago. London University physicist, David Bohm, sees reality in a relational wholeness. Our world of experience, he believes, has its roots in a deeper level of reality which he views as a holographic universe. In similar manner, Carl Sagan in his book, *Cosmos*, attempts to update our knowledge of physical phenomena and expand our conceptualization of the universe in which we live.

Paul Tillich, one of the most widely read theologians of the mid-twentieth century, tries to restructure the way we perceive spiritual reality. His description of God as the inescapable “ground of being” adds a new dimension to the religious aspect of life. The British mathematician and philosopher, Alfred North Whitehead, enlarges our traditional Deity concepts in his view of the primordial and the consequent natures of God that have been amplified by Process Theology into one of the major theological developments of the twentieth century. Buckminster Fuller, one of the most creative minds of our generation, sees God functioning in the evolutionary process of the world.

Harvard psychologist, Henry A. Murray, observes the distress, confusion, and alienation experienced by so many members of our contemporary society. He, along with the Swiss psychiatrist, Carl Jung, believes the root cause of this dispirited condition of modern people is an inadequate religious orientation to life. Dr. Murray conjectures that we need a new universe mythology, a vision of ultimates, that will “claim the head and heart” of twentieth century society. British authors, C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkein, recognize this same need and in their writings have attempted to prepare our minds for such an enlarged and inspiring vision of spiritual reality.

A Bold New Spiritual Paradigm

The Urantia Book integrates and structures all of these contemporary prophetic views in a unique holistic cosmos. It is a present-day universe perspective integrating science, philosophy, and religion. The book is divided into four parts. The first section describes the nature of Ultimate Reality and the astronomical or cosmological nature and organization of the universe. This picture is essentially in harmony with our present astronomical knowledge and parallels the Swedish astronomer Charlier’s concept of a hierarchical universe.

The second section of *The Urantia Book* relates to our local galaxy or local universe and its interrelationships where the loving and effective ministry of Christ Michael is the central universe reality through which everything else finds meaning and purpose.

The third section of *The Urantia Book* narrates the story of the origin and development of our world whose universe name, we are told, is “Urantia.” The interesting material in this account coincides with the best of our scientific and historical knowledge.

The fourth section of *The Urantia Book* contains a 774 page version of the life and teachings of Jesus which is solidly rooted in the historical New Testament story. This superb presentation of the life of Jesus brings vibrant coherence to the sketchy New Testament picture and with it a new authenticity. It is basically acceptable to all religions, emphasizing the unifying religion *of* Jesus rather than the divisive theologies *about* Jesus.

A Holistic Universe Perspective

A more detailed description of the different sections of *The Urantia Book* may be helpful. Part I, The Central and Superuniverses, and Part II, The Local Universe, would be philosophically classified as metaphysical in nature. That is, these sections portray the ultimate nature of things. *The Urantia Book* presents an integrated and masterful view of Ultimate Reality. Concepts of Deity, ranging from a personal Universal Father to impersonal Absolutes, are so well unified the holistic picture is maintained. The nature and attributes of God are discussed as they relate to the universe and to the individual. The Trinity is conceptualized with greater intellectual and spiritual clarity than any other description in theological literature. The material and gravitational center of the universe,the Isle of Paradise, is referred to as the nuclear source of all energy, matter, life, and personality. A marvelously organized hierarchical universe is described that includes trillions of inhabited planets in all stages of physical, mental, and spiritual evolution. Mechanistic and vitalistic interpretations of natural phenomena are integrated. Science, philosophy, and religion are seen as partial aspects of a larger integrated universe.

The Urantia Book presents one of the most realistic and inclusive material-mindal-spiritual cosmologies in entire field of philosophy and religion. It portrays an eminently reasonable picture of the conditions and nature of immortality. Survival depends on the spiritual reality status of the individual. This, in turn, is determined by the free will decisions of the individual toward God, by our loyalty to truth, beauty, and goodness as these values are sincerely understood. Nevertheless, evil, sin, and judgment are stern and sober realities in the universe. Its intriguing picture of life after death, an area that theologians refer to as eschatology, is not only appealing to rational intelligence but has the ring of authentic spiritual reality. The interrelationships of body, mind, soul, and spirit are treated with insight and originality. The central challenge to human beings involves making a balanced and sane effort to achieve God-consciousness. Growth toward perfection is seen as the fundamental motivation of human life. This growth is evolutionary, culminating, and virtually endless.

A Relevant View of Our World

Eric Fromm observes that our technological civilization is experiencing a revolution of hope. The editorial board of *World Perspectives* declares that we are in the process of developing a new consciousness. There is an ecumenical power of mind and heart enabling people to recreate their life and become aware of this divine destiny. The American psychologist, Abraham Maslow, has directed our attention to the importance of “meta-needs” or “Being Values” which constitute the spiritual foundations of human nature. The Italian psychiatrist, Roberto Assagioli, speaks of the basic significance of transpersonal qualities and the Spirit Center of human consciousness. The Jewish philosopher, Martin Buber, calls contemporary humanity to rediscover the all important “I-Thou” relationship of life. Humanistic Psychology and Holistic Medicine see human nature as an integration of body, mind, and spirit that is distinctively shaped by the higher human values. The writings of the French priest,Teilhard deChardin, discover and illuminate the hand of God in the entire evolutionary process. Teilhard believes we have entered the greatest period of change the world has ever known. Humanity, he says, is moving toward the “Omega Point” of mental-spiritual awareness.

British churchmen, Leslie D. Weatherhead and John A. T. Robinson, have eloquently described the decadent theological formulations of current day Christianity that have their roots in the prescientific thinking of the Middle Ages. It is time, they tell us, for a new spiritual renaissance. The American Academy of Political and Social Science, in one volume of their *Annals* have documented the radical changes that have taken place in American religion since the 1960’s. Public opinion research scientist, Daniel Yankelovich, says there is a form of searching underlying all of American life today. And George Gallop reports in a talk at Princeton Theological Seminary that “Americans today appear to be on a spiritual quest of major proportions...the final two decades of this century could, in fact, represent a unique chapter in the history of religion in the United States.”

Part III of *The Urantia Book*, The History of Urantia, confirms, summarizes, and builds upon these and many other contemporary concerns and developments. It describes the origin and evolution of events on our planet. In addition to human biological evolution, it traces the development of civilization, culture, government, religion, the family, and other social institutions. *The Urantia Book* exhibits a superior understanding of planetary history, dynamics, and destiny.

The section discussing marriage and the family has a rich and realistic historical appreciation of the relationships of men and women. It has a balanced assessment of the contributions of both nature and nurture in shaping human life. Papers dealing with the nature and function of religion, the purpose and practice of prayer and worship, and the place of personal and institutional religion in life and society are among the best discussions of these subjects in print. Chapters that describe the loving nurture of the indwelling Spirit of God are of exceptional quality. They parallel the world’s finest insights derived from a first hand experience of God found in devotional literature.

The Life and Teachings of Jesus

Part IV of *The Urantia Book*, The Life and Teachings of Jesus, while faithfully confirming the gospel story in the Bible, enlarges and enhances our knowledge about the mission of Jesus to our world. This expanded version of the life and teachings of Jesus has a universal appeal. Even when it is viewed only as a historical novel, it is unsurpassed in theistic philosophical reasonableness, spiritual insight, and personality appeal.

This life of Jesus not only fills in the “hidden years” from twelve to thirty, but also describes his pre-bestowal and post-bestowal experience. *The Urantia Book* integrates, enhances, and completes the Biblical story. It confirms the symbolic closing statement of the Gospel of John, “There are also many other things which Jesus did; were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.”

In its biography of Jesus, *The Urantia Book* gives a thorough account of Jesus’ life. The authors narrate his engaging childhood experiences and the events in his heroic struggle as a teen-age youth to overcome family adversity. They tell of his travels and adventures whereby he gained a thorough knowledge and complete understanding of human existence. The revelators depict fascinating vignettes of his personal ministry and thrilling episodes of his public ministry.

You will enjoy reading this captivating story in its entirety. For those who have Christian backgrounds, this may be the best place to start reading *The Urantia Book.* You will find that *The Urantia Book* will give you a greater understanding and appreciation of the Bible.

The Question of Origin

Probably the most difficult question to answer about *The Urantia Book* is “Who wrote it?” It claims to be written by supermortal beings as a special revelation to our world. It purports to be the first major divine revelation since the coming of Christ to our planet. Such a claim certainly raises doubts in the minds of rational and responsible people. Almost every generation produces individuals who pose as the bearers of new revelation.

What is surprising about *The Urantia Book* is that it has almost nothing in common with radical or fanatical movements. It does not advocate a new religion but supports the best in all religions. Its viewpoint builds upon the religious heritage of the past and present; yet it is fresh, expansive, and profound. After a judicious and reflective reading of the book, one is impressed by the power of its own authenticity.

Nevertheless, *The Urantia Book* should be read critically like any other book. It should be judged by its content, not by any claims of authorship. Only after a thorough reading of the book and careful evaluation of its message is one in a position to speculate about authorship.

Even though *The Urantia Book* is among the most significant sources of spiritual guidance available to contemporary society, it is not an end in itself; nor is it a necessary means to spiritual enlightenment. Its potentials for individual and social growth, however, are so great it should be highly recommended to anyone interested in the creative possibilities of a spiritual renaissance in our world. Its message is balanced and profound. Its approach is open and benign. There are no threats or coercions to “believe.” It seeks to work in and through the evolutionary process and within the social institutions of our world.

The authors of *The Urantia Book* are primarily interested in the spiritual stimulation and growth of people of all faiths and religions. The book has much to contribute to all of the religions of the world. Kenneth Boulding in *The Meaning of the Twentieth Century,* Alvin Tofler in *The Third Wave,* John Naisbitt in *Megatrends,* Fritjof Capra in *The Turning Point,* and many other prophetic voices point out that we are entering a major transition period in human history. We desperately need enlarged and solid spiritual foundations with the visionary potential to give stability and guidance to the new era which is struggling to be born. I believe *The Urantia Book* has the greatest potential for serving in this capacity of any philosophical-religious resource now available to humankind. It is a seminal source of enlightening spiritual truth. All in all, *The Urantia Book* is the most exciting book of the century! I invite you to discover this resource for yourself.

The Meredith J. Sprunger Archive

The Urantia Book and Religious Studies

(Paper presented at the American Academy of Religion meeting at Anaheim 22/25/85)

Rarely does one find a book on theology or religion which one feels has the potential of changing the conceptual patterns of our culture. Some twenty-nine years ago I was a member of a small group of United Church of Christ ministers who discovered *The Urantia Book* published by Urantia Foundation, 533 Diversey Parkway, Chicago, IL 60614 in 1955. We found it a remarkably effective book in stimulating creative thinking in philosophy, religion, and culture. The general consensus among the thousands of people who have read the book is that it will receive universal recognition. It has extremely broad ramifications, shedding wisdom in almost every area of human endeavor.

This challenging book is not only a fascinating source document for personal spiritual growth and development, it may well become one of the most important sources of information leading to the revitalization of the Christian Church and the restructuring of theology since the Reformation. The growing number of ministers and other religious leaders now discovering the book are surprised that a publication of this spiritual quality and far-reaching potential could have remained virtually hidden for over thirty years. A partial answer to this anomaly is found in the fact that those responsible for the publication of the book have initiated no promotional programs. They believe the low key evolutionary process of person to person communication is the wise method of acquainting people with the book. In addition, there are three major factors which have discouraged clergy and other religious leaders from a serious reading of the book:

1. It comes from a source which is not known and trusted by religious and theological groups.

2. It is a large book (2097 pages) and some sections are not easy to comprehend.

3. It claims to be new revelation and, therefore, understandably causes suspicion, if not fear or hostility.

Hopefully, we have left those days of cultural naivete when claim or authority have any meaning as a criterion of truth. Revelatory authenticity, therefore, is a secondary consideration.The primary challenge posed by *The Urantia Book* is pragmatic. Does it have something creative and constructive to contribute to our modern philosophical-religious outlook? Evaluated on the basis of spiritual insight, philosophical coherence, and reality-centeredness, it presents, in the judgment of thousands of people who have critically examined it, one of the finest world views of religion available to contemporary society.

After a quarter of a century of experience in introducing thousands of philosophy students and ministers to *The Urantia Book* I have found the two major obstacles to getting people to read the book are its size and initial erroneous impressions of "esoteric" or "gnostic" connotations. For those who get past these psychological barriers and read the book, almost all are impressed with its comprehensive grasp of planetary phenomena and most believe it has a substantive contribution to make to religious studies.

A New Vision of Reality

In its two-thousand pages *The Urantia Book* presents an integrated picture of the universe that relates science, philosophy, and religion in a synergistic holism. It presents an integrated and masterful view of Ultimate Reality. Concepts of Deity ranging from that of a personal Universal Father to impersonal Absolutes are so well unified the holistic picture is maintained. The nature and attributes of God are discussed as they relate to the universe and to the individual. The Trinity is conceptualized with greater intellectual and spiritual clarity than any other description in theological literature. The material and gravitational center of the universe, the Isle of Paradise, is referred to as the place of origin of all forms of reality—spiritual, mindal, and material energy, life, and personality. A marvelously organized hierarchical universe is described that includes millions of inhabited planets in all stages of physical, mental, and spiritual evolution. Mechanistic and vitalistic interpretations of natural phenomena are integrated. Science, philosophy, and religion are seen as partial aspects of a larger unified universe picture.

The Urantia Book presents one of the most realistic and inclusive material-mindal-spiritual cosmologies in the entire fields of philosophy and religion. It portrays an eminently reasonable picture of the conditions and nature of immortality. Survival is seen as dependent on the spiritual reality status of the individual. This, in turn, is determined by the free will decisions of the individual toward God, by our loyalty to truth, beauty, and goodness as these values are sincerely understood. Nevertheless, evil, sin, and judgment are stern and sober realities in the universe. Its intriguing picture of life after death, its eschatology, is not only appealing to rational intelligence but has a ring of authentic spiritual reality. The interrelationships of body, mind, soul, and spirit are treated with much insight and originality. The central challenge to human beings is to make a well-balanced and sane effort to achieve God-consciousness. Growth toward perfection of purpose and the spiritual nature of being is presented as the basic motivation of life. This growth is evolutionary, culminating, and virtually endless.

The book describes the origin and evolution of events on our planet. In addition to physical development of the planet including plant, animal, and human biological evolution, it traces the development of civilization, culture, government, religion, the family, and other social institutions. The authors exhibit a superior understanding of planetary history, dynamics, and destiny. The section discussing marriage and the family has a rich and realistic historical appreciation of the relationships of men and women and a balanced assessment of the contributions of both nature and nurture in shaping human life. Papers dealing with the nature and function of religion, the purpose and practice of prayer and worship, and the place of personal and institutional religion in life and society are among the best discussions of these subjects in print. Chapters that describe the loving nurture of the indwelling Spirit of God in the human mind are of exceptional quality and parallel the world's finest insights from a first hand experience of God found in devotional literature.

The fourth section of *The Urantia Book* contains a seven hundred page version of the life and teachings of Jesus which is solidly rooted in the historical New Testament story. This superb presentation of the life of Jesus brings life to the sketchy New Testament picture and with it a new authenticity. It has a universal appeal even when it is viewed only as a historical novel for it is unsurpassed in theistic philosophical reasonableness, spiritual insight, and personality appeal. This life of Jesus not only fills in the "hidden years" from twelve to thirty but *The Urantia Book* gives a picture of his pre-incarnation and post-incarnation experience. It is basically acceptable to all religions, emphasizing the religion *of* Jesus which is unifying rather than the religion *about* Jesus that tends to be divisive.

The Question of Origin

Probably the most difficult question to answer about *The Urantia Book* is "Who wrote it?" It claims to be written by numerous supermortal beings as a special revelation to humankind living on this world, "Urantia." It purports to be the first major or epochal revelation since the coming of Christ to our planet. Such a claim certainly raises doubts in the minds of rational and responsible people. Almost every generation produces a number of people who pose as the bearers of new revelation. What is unique about *The Urantia Book* is that it has almost nothing in common with radical or fanatical movements. It does not advocate a new religion but seeks to undergird the best in all religions. Its viewpoint builds upon the best of the religious heritage of the past and present; yet it is fresh, expansive, and profound. The superior quality of the philosophical-religious insights of *The Urantia Book* is clear to anyone of discriminating mind who reads it.

Obviously, one should read *The Urantia Book* critically and judge it by its content, not by any claim of authorship. Only after a thorough reading of the book and careful evaluation of its message is one in a position to speculate about authorship. One is impressed with the authenticity of its teachings. Its message is balanced and profound. Its approach is open and benign. There are no threats or coercions to "believe." It seeks to work in and through the evolutionary process and within the social institutions of our world.

The Urantia Foundation who publishes the book and the Fellowship of readers of *The Urantia Book* which is the fraternal organization engaged in disseminating the teachings of *The Urantia Book* are not interested in starting a new religion, organizing a church, or promoting any kind of religious organization. They are primarily interested in the spiritual stimulation and growth of people of all faiths and religions.

Relation to Contemporary Theology

The Urantia Book builds upon and enhances the concerns of contemporary theology. It affirms the insights of existential-secularization theologies in presenting a holistic picture of Reality, free from the "two-story" dualism of classical Christianity. God is in the midst of life and the "ground of being" as well as a transcendent Reality. Experience-based thinking is substituted for authoritarianism and dogmatism.

The book reinforces and amplifies the evolutionary foundations of the process theologies. In its concepts of the Absolutes and the Supreme it parallels the Whiteheadian views of the "primordial nature of God" and the "consequent nature of God." Although *The Urantia Book* accepts the factual realities of the diversity of gender, race, and economic systems, it stresses the importance of equality of opportunity, dignity, freedom, and justice emphasized by the liberation theologies.

Even while solidly rooted in the ontological and evolutionary realities of the past, *The Urantia Book* is methodologically oriented toward the future as are the contemporary theologies of hope. It contains the most elaborate and intriguing picture of eschatology in religious literature that is both horizontal and vertical in nature. The illusions of secularism, reductionism, and naive utopianism are challenged with a breath-taking view of the future based on the hard realities of spirit conditioned evolutionary development.

The authors of *The Urantia Book* emphasize the importance of reversion activities, play, humor, relaxation, and creative artistic expression which are frames of reference held in common with the contemporary theologies of play and story. The narrative quality of the life and teachings of Jesus and the interesting accounts of the heroes of the past found in *The Urantia Book* are among the most inspiring stories in religious literature.

Some contemporary theologies, however, will be disturbed by *The Urantia Book* because it goes beyond the horizontal dimensions of reality and the linguistic analysis of meaning. Even though it affirms their concern for the horizontal aspects of life, it reemphasizes and tremendously expands and enhances the classical metaphysical conception of Reality. It integrates a hierarchical and transcendent conception of Deity and Reality with an indigenous and creative immanence in a new and inclusive holistic picture. The dynamics of this cosmic drama come close to Teilhard de Chardin's visualization of Cosmogenesis and Christogenesis meeting in God where the two trajectories of time and eternity blend into one all encompassing Unity-Reality.

The new pluralism of belief-systems and life-styles is a permanent condition of our world. The attempt by religious and political fundamentalists to draw within their own comfortable belief beds and pull the covers over their heads pretending the rest of the world does not exist, or exists only as an aberration is no longer tenable. The new polysymbolic religiosity of our day is, I believe, the evolutionary foundation upon which a new and higher vision of reality will be built.

The Urantia Book, in my judgment, has the potential of cleansing the windows of perception that we may catch a vision of the wonder of ourselves and the universe in a new and expanded visualization of reality. Its message will bring what Joseph Campbell calls a "remythologization of consciousness" freed from the reductionism, dichotomies, and static symbols of the past. This fresh, epochal mythology, this new organizing metaphor of reality, will retain the wisdom of the past, make meaningful the challenge of the present, and give humankind a vision of the future that will inspire and energize their minds and souls. Once again we will have generations, prophetically visualized by Roger Shinn, who have metaphysical confidence, comprehensive vision, and living faith.

Potential for Stimulating Creative Studies in Religion

The basic question which *The Urantia Book* poses for those interested in promoting scholarship in religious studies is, what is its potential for stimulating creative thinking in theology and religion? I have been contemplating this question for more than twenty-five years and I consistently come to the conclusion that *The Urantia Book* has the greatest potential for stimulating new vitality in religious studies of any religious book or event in recent times. I am confident that scholars in religion will gradually discover what a rich mine of religious research it contains. It has already been the source of one doctoral thesis. Dr. Jacques Rheaume at the University of Ottawa entitled his study "An Analysis of a Revealed Text: *The Urantia Book* " (Analyse d'un Texte revele: *The Urantia Book*) which was completed in August of 1983. This is the first of what I predict will be a long line of masters and doctoral dissertations based on *The Urantia Book.* Some of the possible topics probed by these studies are suggested below:

"A Hypothesis Concerning the Authorship of *The Urantia Book* Based on an Empirical Examination of Its Content"

"Biblical, Scientific, Historical, and Logical Errors or Discrepancies in The *Urantia Book* Based on Contemporary Scholarship"

"Deity Concepts in World Religions Found in *The Urantia Book"*

"Similarities and Differences of *Urantia Book* and Traditional Christian Trinity Concepts"

"*The Urantia Book* Description of the Supreme Being Compared with Whitehead's Concept of the Consequent Nature of God"

"*Urantia Book* Spiritual Cosmology Contrasted with Christian Eschatology"

"The Nature of Religion Described in *The Urantia Book* Compared with Contemporary Theological Views"
"The Concept of the Thought Adjuster Contrasted with Contemporary Views of the Superconscious and Transpersonal Psychology"

"The Religion of Jesus Contrasted with the Religion about Jesus"

"*The Urantia Book* View of Jesus' Concept of Man Contrasted with the Pauline Understanding of Human Nature"

"The Doctrine of Salvation: *Urantia Book* and Mainline Christian Theology Compared"

"*The Urantia Book* View of Christianity and the Gospel Compared with that of Adolf von Harnack"

These are only a few of dozens of topics which are inspired by the stimulating and innovative material found in *The Urantia Book.* When scholars of religion finally discover the rich mine of religious material in *The Urantia Book* the creative parameters of research will be greatly expanded. Kenneth Boulding in *The Meaning of the Twentieth Century*, Alvin Toffler in *The Third Wave*, John Naisbitt in *Megatrends*, Fritjof Capara in *The Turning Point*, and many other prophetic voices have pointed out that we are entering a major transitional change in he history of humankind. We desperately need spiritual foundations that are large enough, solid enough, and have the visionary potential to give stability and guidance to the new age that is struggling to be born. I believe *The Urantia Book* has the greatest potential for serving in this capacity of any philosophical-religious resource now available to our society.

The Meredith J. Sprunger Archive

The Imperative of Outreach Ministry

1/23/83 Revised 10/6/86

The foremost priority of the Urantia movement at this point in time, I believe, is outreach ministry. We have the message the world most needs to hear, and those who are called to be missionaries of the fifth epochal revelation must now seriously ask, "How do we go about this task?"

When the revelators were asked for guidance in answering this question they refused to give specific instructions but advised that we study Jesus' plan of outreach ministry and be guided by his example. Jesus spent approximately a year training his apostles and then began a public ministry. For two years this ministry was largely confined to Palestine and then Jesus instructed his apostles and disciples to proclaim the gospel throughout the entire world. This initiated the greatest missionary movement in the history of our planet.

To date we have not followed the advice of the revelators of *The Urantia Book* nor the example of Jesus very closely. We have spent more than thirty years studying *The Urantia Book* with some people preparing themselves for the possibility of public ministry in the indefinite future. There is wide-spread confusion about what ministry is appropriate and when, or even if, public ministry should be initiated. During these years the basic attitude of the majority of people within the power structure of Urantia Brotherhood toward initiating public ministry has been "do nothing now." Over the past couple of years there has been a growing realization that we ought to be engaged in outreach ministry.

Levels of Ministry

In order to clarify the ambiguities prevalent in our discussion about outreach ministry, I have suggested five basic levels in which we communicate the gospel messages.

> *First Level*—Living the Gospel—doing good as we pass by in life. **The Living Level.**
> *Second Level*—Social Service—amplifying the gospel through systematic social action. **The Social Level.**
> *Third Level*—Traditional Concepts—communicating the gospel through traditional Christian frames of reference or other traditional religious teachings. **The Traditional Level.**
> *Fourth Level*—Contemporary Concepts—communicating the gospel using all of our contemporary resources, including bootlegging *Urantia Book* concepts. **The Contemporary Level.**
> *Fifth Level—The Urantia Book* Concepts—communicating the gospel through concepts of the fifth epochal revelation. ***The Urantia Book* Level.**

We should engage in outreach ministry on all five communication levels. Which level we use at any particular time should be determined by the evolutionary readiness status of those with whom we are interacting and the objectives of our specific ministry. It is my judgment that almost all of the people of the United States are evolutionally prepared to receive the gospel message on the first three levels of communication but that a minority are not psychologically or socially ready to receive it.

Many are Ready

I would estimate that social and cultural evolution has conditioned from twenty-five to thirty-five percent of our population to be receptive to the gospel message on the Fourth Level of intellectual-spiritual comprehension. Philosophical materialism and skepticism, however, causes a substantial minority of this group to be psychologically or socially unprepared to accept it.

A large number of those who live at the **Contemporary Level** of cultural literacy are prepared for the concepts and cosmology of *The Urantia Book*. I believe that from ten to twenty-five percent of the population of the United States is ready, from an evolutionary point of view, to receive the gospel message on the Fifth Level of conceptual understanding; however, very few of this group are psychologically or socially ready to realistically consider the possibility of "new revelation." Some degree of public exposure or confrontation is necessary before the majority of this segment of society becomes aware of *The Urantia Book* and is challenged to consider the possibility of revelatory authenticity.

Beginning Public Ministry

I believe it is time to initiate the beginning phase of public ministry which will bring *The Urantia Book* to the attention of our society. Those who are called to this outreach ministry would be wise to work through organizations not officially connected with Urantia Brotherhood.Such organizations can be more flexible and innovative than official groups and also will serve as buffers to the more conservative posture of Urantia Brotherhood. During the first few years these outreach activities should be concentrated in local communities. The methodologies we use in our ministry should be devised by the highest wisdom we possess and be altered by the feed-back of experience. We should also feel comfortable with the channels of communication we use and strive for excellence in their execution.

New Era Dawning

Our public ministry should be geared to the nature of our contemporary culture. We are shifting from an industrial society to an information society. Living in the world's leading provider of information, we have many tools at our disposal. High technology is emancipating us from dependency on neighbors and work groups; therefore, people are hungry for the human touch. Small in-groups become increasingly important to our identities and well-being.

The transition from national economies to a world economy is building the foundations for world wide social and religious fellowship. The failure of short term planning in our economic, social, and moral adjustments points to the necessity of long range planning. We have many dinosaurs not only in our traditional institutions but in the Urantia movement as well. The decentralization trend in Western Civilization is lessening the importance of hierarchies and power structures and increasing the significance of local communities and networks. Society will be rebuilt from the bottom up. We must rely less on central institutional help and guidance and develop more local direction and individual initiative. The small units of society which will rebuild our culture are close-knit, dedicated, participatory groups governed by a central purpose. The old either-or society (religious-secular, educated-uneducated, proper-improper) is passing and cultural diversity is taking its place. In work, food, life style, cable TV, and religion there are multiple choice options being utilized in our society.

We are living between the times. In this social and cultural ambiguity we need the innovative ability to venture boldly into the future. We are living in one of the few periods of history where social and religious values are in flux. Ours is a day in which those with vision, courage, initiative, and high spiritual goals will have extraordinary leverage and influence in shaping the future. In the context of such a changing world, we need to plan and execute our public ministry as heralds of the fifth epochal revelation.

Spiritual Approach Basic

How we conduct our outreach ministry is much more important than when or where we introduce people to *The Urantia Book.* The inevitable indifference and social opposition must be taken in stride with love, intellectual candor, and good humor. Since we are not trying to organize a church, start a new religion, raise money, or coerce people to do anything, our public ministry is relatively benign. Jesus assures us, "my yoke is easy and my burden is light." This mission bears the simplicity of Philip's invitation, "Come and see." We are merely introducing people to a book and encouraging them to read it. Their response is in the hands of the Spirit. If the message of *The Urantia Book* does not sell itself, we should cheerfully allow the reader to his or her own interpretations and evaluation. If this new vision of spiritual reality does not inspire people, our arguments are not likely to do so.

Although the essence of our outreach ministry is simplicity itself, it is important and much of the hope of the world rests upon it. Therefore, I would urge you to adopt the following seven principles of ministry in your outreach work.

Use Wisdom

Use wisdom and balance in all of your service. Avoid extremes, exhibitionism, oversell, and the spectacular. Learn to distinguish between artistic good taste and the theatrical. Remember that personal contact is more effective than impersonal mass communication. Understand the wisdom and effectiveness of small groups. These groups from coalitions and netwroks more open and dynamic than hierarchical and self-serving cults. Such a network is many times greater than the sum of its parts. It has multiple leadership, pluralistic, and its center is everywhere. Start where people are, not where you are. Communicate in their frames of reference and anticipate their natural reactions. Combine the most expert knowledge with the highest values in all of your ministry. Master your mind through the power of the spirit. Be strong in the spirit; know that in liaison with God nothing can defeat the spiritual purposes of your life. Be fearless but act with discretion.

Let Love Create

Let love create the atmosphere of all of your interpersonal relationships. Remember that you cannot communicate effectively with others unless you positively and unconditionally accept them with all of their imperfections. Strive to prevent your biases and limitations from interfering or distorting your service to them. Support, stimulate, and help people; do not seek to coerce them. See all of your fellows as persons of worth and strive to build their self-confidence and self-respect. Be natural and genuine and enjoy their company.

Serve out of love, a thankful heart, and the joy of the act itself. Ministry is an intrinsic activity of the creative mind and the loving soul. Extrinsic motivation in service compromises its spiritual value. Serving God even for good extrinsic purposes such as building your study group, society, or church, or even to bring about a spiritual renaissance limits its spiritual value and personal satisfaction. Minister out of the intrinsic motivation of love, thankfulness, and joy; the extrinsic repercussions or results will largely take care of themselves. Serve with the openness of creative love; but do not try to manipulate people.

Cultivate Openness

Temper your personal convictions with philosophic objectivity. Always be honest and open. Cultivate freedom of opinion and respect the right of others to disagree with your most deeply held convictions. Honor each person's God-given right to self-determination. Try to establish common ground but do not contend with people. Let your enthusiasm for truth animate your discussions but never knowingly put people down or offend.

Cooperate with Evolution

Recognize that evolution is the underlying principle of life. Do not expect immediate results. All growth is unconscious and has mustard seed beginnings. The roots of a new tree of life take decades to penetrate the rocks of tradition on which it is planted. Be patient but do not become the victim of a fearful "do-nothing" psychology and bury your talents and treasure in stagnation or cult obscurities. Be concerned about ministering effectively but relatively unconcerned about results. Realize that your ministry must be planned and conducted in the context of the law of readiness. Always minister at the point of evolutionary readiness but do not confuse this basic preparation for the surface conditions of psychological and social readiness. All who have prophetic vision know that evolution, the plow of history, eventually breaks the crust of individual resistance and moves the clods of social stagnation. Be loyal and persistent in your service without needing to see results or to be honored by success. It is our privilege and responsibility to minister; the results are in the hands of God the Supreme. In all things cultivate in yourself the mind and attitude of the Supreme. The vicissitudes of time do not change the goals of eternity.

Live with the Commonplace

Be actively involved in routine, commonplace experiences. Grow, bloom, and bear fruit in the soil where you are planted. If possible, keep your old social and religious ties strong and healthy. Share at the level of spiritual acceptance.When you are a tadpole don't pretend to be a trout or an eagle. Only dedicated and creative tadpoling will bring you inner satisfaction and a sense of fulfillment. These mundane activities and identifications will bring a sense of proportion, genuineness, and integrity to your ministry. Forget the failures of the past and do not allow yourself to be preoccupied anticipating the future. Live in the present in constant fellowship with the Father and absorbed in the existential moment of experience.

Develop a Sense of Humor

Cultivate an active sense of humor. Humor helps us maintain a proper sense of perspective. You can carry useful man-sized or woman-sized loads when you get the world off your shoulders. Do not take yourself too seriously even though you are participating in important work. Be unconcerned about prestige and status. Strive to avoid self-contemplation and cultivate self-forgetfulness. Finite personalities can become tragic figures when they lose their sense of perspective and fail to appreciate the comedy of life. We need to learn to laugh at ourselves and the frustrating, ridiculous, and absurd situations we encounter. A light hearted spirit can be a great asset in carrying the sometimes heavy burdens of ministry.

Serve with Joy

Above all, live with joy in your heart and find joy in your ministry. You belong to the Father's kingdom which has an eternal future of unimaginable adventure and reward. Nothing can long prevent the fulfillment of your most ardent spiritual hopes and fondest dreams. All who experience this faith in an eternal destiny live with irrepressible joy even in the midst of material hardship, social conflict, and seeming personal defeat. As you free yourself from the slavery of the lure of things, the adoration or criticism of people, and the importance of preoccupation with self, you will experience the liberating joys of service. You will also discover that in doing so you are free from the egocentric social pressure of being successful and establishing or maintaining a reputation.

When our will is in harmony with the Universal Father, the joy of service also brings a deep sense of peace. When you no longer experience this peace of mind and joy in your ministry, find another channel of service which does fill your heart with joy because you feel that you are where you belong, where your heavenly Father wishes you to serve.

Personal Spiritual Growth

I should like to close with what I consider the most important thing I have to share with you. While outreach ministry is the most important imperative of the Urantia movement, if you are not called to this ministry, or fail to respond to the Spirit's leading, others will hear this call and carry the good news of the Fifth Epochal Revelation to the farthest corners of the earth. But there is another call which no one can respond to except yourself. This is the Father's loving appeal that you dedicate yourself to your own spiritual growth.

Nothing in this world is more important in your life than your active cooperation in achieving the Spirit's mastery of your mind and body, your attitudes and appetites, your emotions and actions. This is not accomplished by simply willing it; it demands active participation. The initial stages of growth usually require enduring suffering, transcending egocentric pride, or even experiencing social humiliation. The rewards and joys of a Spirit controlled mind and a Spirit mastered body, however, far outweigh the birth pangs endured in evolving the soul. The enlarged freedom and deeper inner peace of your liberated and growing soul bring the greatest joy and sense of fulfillment that sons and daughters of God can experience in this life. Not only have you actualized your authentic self, but you have a quality of being which is more real and can accomplish greater service for your fellows and the Father's kingdom. It is my prayer that each of us may grow in this life of the Spirit. For the life of the Spirit is the well-spring and creative source of outreach ministry.

Living Faith Acts

We are living in one of the major transitional periods of human history. Our society desperately needs an enlarged vision which will give guidance and stability to the new age which is struggling to be born. *The Urantia Book* has been given to us providing the spiritual fulcrum to lift our world into a new era of human achievement. Our Sovereign Master speaks to us as to Peter, "If you love me, feed my sheep."

The World Mission of *The Urantia Book*

1/20/83 Revised 5/12/99

The spiritual ministry to our world is preparing us for a new spiritual age. The key to this new paradigm of Reality is presented in the message of *The Urantia Book.* Just as our world was prepared for the advent of Christ (the Fourth Epochal Revelation), today we are experiencing another "fullness of time" in which our society is being prepared for the Fifth Epochal Revelation (the message of *The Urantia Book*). This new vision of truth confirms and integrates the best of all former revelations and enhances the spiritual truths of all the traditional religions of the world.

Interfacing with World Religions

We who are pioneers of the Fifth Epochal Revelation must learn to relate positively with the peoples of all of the world's religions. Philosophers of religion have long observed that the religions of the world have much more in common than they have in exclusive uniqueness. *The Urantia Book* is the most inclusive revelatory picture of religion yet to appear on earth. It is appreciative and constructive in its attitude toward all religion and religionists.
As we prepare ourselves to relate to the peoples of the world and their religious backgrounds we should become thoroughly familiar with the tenets of their various faiths. It is also important to remember that within and among all religious groups there are common polarities: the educated intellectuals versus the unlearned masses, the prophets versus the priests, and the rigid conservatives versus the flexible liberals. In each religious group the educated, prophetic, and open people are the first to recognize and accept new truth. When we look at the religions of the world as total entities, it would appear that Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, and Hinduism are evolutionally the best prepared to receive the teachings of *The Urantia Book.* Islam is probably the most defensive and reactionary world religion; yet, it accepts the prophets of other religions in its sacred scriptures and its sufis are quite open to truth from outside sources.

Our Christian Heritage

Although we should bring the good news of *The Urantia Book* to all of the religions of the world, Christianity is particularly prepared to receive its message. The Christian Church is the major evolutionary religion rooted in the teachings of Jesus. In many ways the authors of *The Urantia Book* express a special interest in upstepping the Christian Church. They refer to Christianity as the best of the religions of the twentieth century (p. 2083), the best exponent of Jesus' lifework on earth (p. 2085), one of the world's greatest powers for good (p. 2085), the cocoon in which the kingdom now sleeps (p. 1866), and, if enhanced by the Fifth Epochal Revelation, the greatest hope of the world (p. 20086).

Establish Common Ground

There are basic approaches which we should keep in mind when relating to any religious group. We should always start by establishing common ground. All of the religions of the world have much in common with *The Urantia Book.* We need to emphasize the positive aspects of each religious faith. Add to those spiritual realities which people most need and desire.Be cautious and tactful in correcting errors when such negative communication cannot or should not be avoided. Highlight service and living faith rather than theology. Engage in fellowship and dialogue with openness while avoiding unnecessary structure and rigidity. Stress spiritual truths and avoid economic, political, and moral involvement. Spiritual truths and principles are universal. The moral and social application of these principles is determined by many environmental and developmental factors.

Importance of Indigenous People

Outreach work is best conducted by indigenous people. Those who are social and religious members of the group where interface is sought are the missionaries most likely to be effective. Work within the religious institutions of society when possible. Jesus taught within the synagogues of Judaism until he was barred from doing so. Paul was able to communicate meaningfully with the Jews of his day because he was a scholar of Judaism. Work at the point of psychological readiness and do not expect too much change in people. Allow the evolutionary process to determine their rate of growth.

Significance of Social Confrontation

Anyone familiar with the history of religious movements will appreciate the significance of social confrontation. A religious faith and philosophy does not become a force in a society until it enters a period of social challenge. No matter how irenic, loving, and wise a new and advanced religious view of life may be, it does not achieve effective communication and viability in any community or nation until it experiences a time of social confrontation.
The Urantia Book is just beginning to enter this period. The evangelicals and fundamentalists are starting to write brochures and books in which *The Urantia Book* is singled out as one of the modern heresies. Dr. Sadler used to say, "When the Catholic Church places *The Urantia Book* on its banned list, get ready to sell a lot of books." The Catholic Church finally recognized this reaction and discontinued its banned list. Nevertheless, the evolutionary role of confrontation is basic to the testing and growth of all religious movements.
Rather than fearing this time of evaluation and testing, we should anticipate and welcome it. *The Urantia Book* can stand the most rigorous examination. And there will be some serious challenges. It will not begin to serve the nation and the world, however, until in each local community it enters this period of confrontation. This marks the beginning of its public service.

Laypersons Catalysts of Growth

Historically religious professionals have been among the last to constructively recognize and respond to new revelation or major reform movements. For many reasons centering around personal security, institutional preservation, and professional training, ministers and priests will not read the entire *The Urantia Book* or seriously examine it until enough laypersons in their churches or religious institutions are reading it. Although it is important for ethical reasons to introduce religious leaders to *The Urantia Book* early in our outreach ministry in a community, we should realize that, with few exceptions, laypersons will be the first to recognize its quality. Laypersons have been the founders of virtually all of the major world religions. The majority of the great religious advances in spiritual growth on our planet have been spearheaded by those outside the power structure of religious institutions. Laypersons will also be the key facilitators and the dynamic force actualizing the spread of the good news of *The Urantia Book.*

Outreach Imperative

Outreach ministry is the most important need and the greatest latent potential in the Urantia movement today. "A new and fuller revelation of the religion of Jesus is destined to conquer an empire of materialistic secularism and to overthrow a world sway of mechanistic naturalism. Urantia is now quivering on the very brink of one of its most amazing and enthralling epochs of social readjustment, moral quickening, and spiritual enlightenment." (p. 2082) "The gospel of the kingdom must be proclaimed to all the world." (p. 1804)
This great mission depends on dedicated missionaries! We can be disciple-type followers who quietly live the enlarged gospel in our personal lives. This is good but not the level of dedication needed to bring this new epochal revelation to our society and the world. Only apostle-type workers filled with enthusiasm, wisdom, courage, and dedication will be able to bring this transforming spiritual message to humanity. Such apostles of new truth are inevitably called to serve in the atmosphere of social confrontation. This is why Jesus warned his apostles that as bearers of new truth they would experience rejection in their own families and hostility in society. Growth is always a traumatic experience for individuals and society.
The difficult and sometimes controversial task of introducing *The Urantia Book* to society is best carried out by organizations designed for this purpose. Many organizations of this nature will come into being. This pluralism of service groups will evolve a loose network assuring creative diversity and dynamic variety in outreach ministry.

Grass Roots Viability Basic

The history of the growth of religious movements also teaches us the importance of establishing stable groups at the grass roots of society. Growth does not take place in a grandiose manner. It proceeds through channels of social communication to develop a viable constituency in specific, local communities. In time, centers of influence evolve and gradually the entire society and culture is permeated by the new stimulus to spiritual growth.
Today we stand at the beginning of the public phase of outreach ministry in the Urantia movement. The first stage of public ministry is characterized by curiosity and indifference which is eventually followed by opposition and social confrontation. The real quality of the spiritual message is then tested by this challenging individual and social experience. Movements become a social reality when the truths they proclaim become indigenous in the lives of people in local communities.

Challenge of the Next Century

Such pioneering ministry is never easy; it demands vision, courage, wisdom, and perseverance. Each of us has an unusual opportunity to shape the future of our world by helping to introduce a new and inspiring revelation to our community and culture. Such a fortuitous opportunity comes to a generation only once in thousands of years. What a happy and challenging historical moment! We are standing on the threshold of one of the most promising and exciting eras of human history. I hope that each of us will respond to this challenge of spiritual destiny and, thereby, find fulfillment and joy in sharing with our fellows the best Good News of the century!

The Meredith J. Sprunger Archive

Pioneers in the New Age

6/7/86 Revised 1/25/87

I should like to call your attention to a statement made by the Old Testament prophet Habakkuk (1:5), “Look, there is work being done in your days which will astonish you and which you will not believe when it is told to you.” We are again living in a time when amazing things are being accomplished by the spirit of God in our world.

We are living in an age which is experiencing the exhaustion of the spiritual creativity of the renaissance and the reformation. Scientifically and conceptually we have left behind the horse and buggy technology and the geocentric universe view or our forefathers. It is generally recognized by the prophetic voices of our day that we are at the beginning of a new age. We are standing at the edge of tremendous potentials for human growth and human destruction.

The most creatuve minds of our generation are meeting with perplexity and frustration in attempting to solve the growing complexity and seriousness of our contemporary problems ranging from environmental pollution to human misery and destruction. The significance of the crisis of our age is seen in the fact that the spiritual supervisors of our planet have recognized the need for a new epochal revelation to restructure our planetary and universe views of reality and inspire us to new levels of material and spiritual growth. As a result we have the Fifth Epochal Revelation in the form of *The Urantia Book.*

Importance of Outreach

One of the most important responsibilities and opportunities of our world today is bringing this new vision of reality to the peoples of the world. Each person who discovers *The Urantia Book* and recognizes its significance must decide what his or her role should be in this many faceted outreach mission. The Fifth Epochal Revelation can only exercise its transforming power in our world if we have able, wholehearted dedication in this outreach ministry.

Paul in his letter to the Colossians says (3:23), “Whatsoever you do, put your whole heart into it as a service to the Lord, not just to humankind.” On page 1780 of *The Urantia Book* we read, “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.” We are told on page 279-80, “In the universal regime you are not reckoned as having possessed yourself of knowledge and truth until you have demonstrated your ability and willingness to impart this knowledge and truth to others.” On page 556 we are admonished, “The weak indulge in resolutions, but the strong act. Life is but a day’s work—do it well. The act us ours; the consequences God’s.”

Living Spiritual Truth

I should like to challenge you to act on the spiritual leading which you have for service. I would invite you to ascend the seven-step ladder of outreach ministry. *Step one* is the level of living the teachings of *The Urantia Book.* This is basic and elemental. None of the other steps of outreach service will be effective until we have reasonably mastered the principles of inspired spiritual living. Without honesty, integrity, sincerity, trustworthiness, loving attitudes and action directed by experiential spiritual wisdom, no outreach service will be effective. With these qualities of behavior, our lives are an eloquent message, and we have the opportunity to share the great truths of the Fifth Epochal Revelation that have inspired us.

Sharing Spiritual Truth

Most of us then take step *two* and begin sharing these enhanced spiritual realities with our fellows. We usually begin by relating these insights without revealing the source because, for one reason or another, we do not wish to publicly announce that we are readers of a strange new book that we believe is the Fifth Epochal Revelation. This bootleg ministry is constructive and good but lacks forthrightness and power. I would encourage you, when you are ready, to take the critically important *third* step in outreach ministry: summon that level of openness and courage where you become a discriminating herald or salesperson of *The Urantia Book.*

Now you are not only able to present insights which may be appropriate to specific situations but you are sharing a veritable library to truth and wisdom where people can find an entire philosophy of life and a new view of universe reality. As you wholeheartedly pursue the task of introducing people to *The Urantia Book,* you have become a missionary in the traditional sense of the word. When you inspire others to engage in such outreach work, the effect is geometric in nature.

Social Groups and Cultural Influences

All this is good but very soon we become aware of the necessity for the *fourth* step in outreach activity: the cultivation, organization, and direction of study groups. There are now several hundred Urantia study groups in existence. Hopefully, in the not too distant future, we will have thousands of study groups throughout the world. Study groups are basic to the socialization of religion but they are partial and incomplete. These groups spring up, have an up and down history, are limited in the number of people they attract, and sometimes die out. At best the study group is a temporary and limited social-historical phenomenon.

Every serious and dedicated person engaged in outreach ministry in the Urantia movement faces the limitations of individual and study group evangelism and longs for the permanence and broad cultural depth of institutional wholeness and stability. To satisfy this hunger for a deeper relationship with society and realizing the greater potentials of cultural involvement, we take the *fifth* step in outreach ministry: participation in quasi or limited institutional activities such as forming Urantia Societies, placing books in libraries, introducing the study of *The Urantia Book* in educational institutions and professional societies, or getting involved in growing edge movements like environmental improvement, holistic studies, peace demonstrations, and futurist activities.

Authentic Religious Institutions

This progression of outreach experience, along with planetary religious history, leads to the realization that these five basic steps in missionary activity are but preliminary and partial phases leading to the only abiding form of the socialization of religion: the formation or reformation of religious institutions. It is the paradox of religious history that the institutionalization of religion increases the potential for evil and hampers growth but is a necessary requisite for religious enculturation and survival. (p. 1083)

The solution to this paradox, as the authors of *The Urantia Book* point out (p. 1076), is not the eradication of religious institutions but in creating more perfect, spiritually attuned religious organizations. All outreach activity which has survival value, therefore, must culminate in some for of institutionalization. Religion must have an appealing symbolism incorporated in ritual which encourages and enhances individual and group worship, undergirds the values of the family, and furnishes fellowship and spiritual care for all of life from birth to death. The initial five steps of outreach ministry are good and necessary steps to the only social vehicle and methodology which can carry the Fifth Epochal Revelation to the peoples of the world. It must be incorporated in religious institutions. All wholehearted and thorough outreach ministry based on revelatory and historical wisdom must come to grips with this elemental fact.

Leavening Traditional Religions

There are two basic ways in which this can be done. The first takes us to step *six*: the study and incorporation of the teachings of *The Urantia Book* in the religions of the world. Here in Western Civilization this means creating an interface with Christianity. Christianity has tremendous latent potentials. The authors of *The Urantia Book* regard it as “the best of the religions of the twentieth century” (p. 2083) but it “is only the larval stage of the thwarted spiritual kingdom.” (p. 1866)

The Christian Church has great reserves of evolutionary historical wisdom and has organizational roots throughout the entire world. No one knows to what spiritual heights it may rise when reformed and transformed by the Fifth Epochal Revelation. It is imperative that we exercise the courage and wisdom to build an interface with Christianity as well as with all other religions of the world.

A New Religious Movement

The authors of *The Urantia Book* visualize one more step for the outreach mission of the Fifth Epochal Revelation. They point out that every new revelation of truth has given rise to a new religious movement (p. 966) and that the enlarged “restatement of the religion of Jesus must develop a new and appropriate symbolism.” This prophetic insight and proclamation brings us to step *seven* in outreach ministry: the formation of a new social expression of religion.

Many suggestions are given for the development of this new religious fellowship predicated on the Fatherhood of God and the brother/sisterhood of humanity. Such a religious institution needs an appealing symbolism and ritual which promotes individual and group worship, embodies a masterful mystery, builds on the values of the home, encourages diversity and growth, and provides fellowship and spiritual care for humankind. It is the basic structure that stimulates and supports personal spiritual experience—true religion.

Missionary work at this seventh level, I believe, has the greatest promise for the future. It has the advantage of learning from the experiential wisdom of all of the religions of the world as well as the spiritual insights and universe view of the Fifth Epochal Revelation. Religious organizations working on this seventh level of outreach ministry will eventually establish spiritual fellowships throughout the world. They will head up a religious movement which will become known as the newest of the world’s religions and will be a mighty force in ecumenical relationships, facilitating fellowship and unity of purpose among all the planetary religions.

Call to Courageous Service

I should like to challenge and encourage those of you who feel called to dedicate yourself to the outreach ministry of the Fifth Epochal Revelation. This, I believe, is the most important spiritual objective of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and it may be, in perspective, the most crucially significant project now in process on our planet.

This is a many-faceted and diverse ministry that needs to be carried out on all seven levels of outreach service. Strive to determine where your abilities and calling direct you to work and then serve wholeheartedly and dynamically in the spiritual kingdom of Christ Michael and the Universal Father. This ministry is not and will not be easy. “The religion of the spirit means effort, struggle, conflict, faith, determination, love, loyalty, and progress.” (p. 1729) Even as Jesus spoke to his apostles of the first century, he is speaking to his contemporary disciples, “Are you fearful, soft, and ease-seeking? Are you afraid to trust your future in the hands of the God of truth whose sons you are?....Will you go back to the easy path of the certainty and intellectual settledness of the religion of traditional authority, or will you gird yourselves to go forward with me into that uncertain and troublous future of proclaiming the new truths of the religion of the spirit, the kingdom of heaven in the hearts of man?” (p. 1730)
Each of us must find the answer to this question in the quietness of our own soul. And then we must act on this guidance.

Sri Aurobindo | Synopsis | Index

The Life Divine

Book Two: The Knowledge and the Ignorance

The search for an ultimate principle of human life is not a matter of the Vedanta alone but it is the common quest of the human race and it has taken on a variety of forms and an infinite variety of attempts. The Vedanta, however, is an exceptional manifestation of the high spiritual quality of the Indian mind and it has given to the quest a quality and a result which are not to be easily or lightly rejected by the human race in its continuous quest for the Truth of its being and its life.

Introduction

The one Being is one of the ground-principles of human life. Nevertheless, the ambiguous name Omega is the one hundred-and-twenty-first in the series of the Greek letters, and it is the last letter of the Greek alphabet. The Greek letters are used in the Greek language as numerals, and the letter Omega is the last letter of the Greek alphabet, and it is the last letter of the Greek alphabet because it is the last letter of the Greek alphabet. The Greek letters are used in the Greek language as numerals, and the letter Omega

of sexually violence throughout all Asian society. The First Asian Gaming Forum in Las Vegas in. This is the overlapping Asian of Indian Gaming and Asian Gaming. Asian Gaming Forum is a conference and exhibition for the Asian Gaming Industry

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THE HISTORICITY OF *THE URANTIA BOOK*

1/21/86 Revised 1/21/98

The fact that *The Urantia Book* has won the appreciation of thousands of people with capable minds and balanced personalities within the Christian and Judaic traditions, and has sold over 300,000 copies with little organized promotional effort, attests to the attractiveness of its religious message. Years of experience, however, have demonstrated that the first thing people wish to know about *The Urantia Book* is its authorship and origin. This is a difficult question to answer because the book does not fit into conventional categories. It claims to be new revelation and to have been written by supermortal personalities!

In the middle and late 1950's a group of United Church of Christ ministers made a serious attempt to evaluate the book and answer the question of origin. Among the various resources consulted, we asked Dr. Robert V. Moss Jr., who was at that time Professor of New Testament Studies at Lancaster Theological Seminary and President of the United Church of Christ, to evaluate the book. We met with him in South Bend, Indiana, October 6, 1958, and engaged in a spirited and fruitful discussion. Dr. Moss, although he did not read the entire book, remarked that the treatment of biblical material in *The Urantia Book* was essentially in harmony with the best scholarship of the day and observed that the book had many inspiring passages. On October 13, 1958, he wrote saying:

"It occurs to me that we did not deal with one basic question. As you know, Christianity is an historical religion and because of that the bases of revelation can be tested by scholarship. It seems to me extremely important that the source of the Urantia "revelations" be set forth in any serious discussion of its claim. To say there is no historical basis for the "revelations" is to say that it differs radically from the biblical understanding of the way in which God acts."

Our group was already investigating this question, and we continued to thoroughly research the historicity of *The Urantia Book*. We had quickly discovered the papers were received by a small group of people in Chicago under the leadership of Dr. William S. Sadler. Dr. Sadler was a highly respected psychiatrist who is sometimes referred to as the father of American psychiatry. For many years he taught at the Post-graduate School of Medicine of Chicago University and for almost thirty years was a lecturer in Pastoral Counseling at McCormick Theological Seminary.

The Mind at Mischief

In researching books written by Dr. Sadler, we discovered relevant material in *The Mind at Mischief*, Funk & Wagnalls, 1929. The subtitle of the book is "Tricks and Deceptions of the Subconscious and How to Cope with Them." In the book Dr. Sadler presents his view of mediumistic phenomena. On the basis of considerable research, he maintains that all of the mediums that he studied were either fraudulent or self-deceived victims of subconscious mind activity in which their alter ego appeared to them as a source of knowledge from the spirit world. One case did not fit this classification. There is little doubt that this individual was the man whose superconscious mind *The Urantia Book* claims was used in some way in the materialization of the Urantia Papers. In the appendix of *The Mind at Mischief* Dr. Sadler describes this atypical case:

In the discussion of fraudulent mediums or self-deceived psychics, the reader of this book has several times encountered the statement that there were certain exceptions to the general indictments there made, and referred to this appendix. It now becomes my duty to explain what I had in mind when those footnotes were inserted....

> "The...exception has to do with a rather peculiar case of psychic phenomena, one which I find myself unable to classify, and which I would like very much to narrate more fully; I cannot do so here, however, because of a promise which I feel under obligation to keep sacredly. In other words, I have promised not to publish this case during the lifetime of the individual. I hope sometime to secure a modification of that promise and to be able to report this case more fully because of its interesting features. I was brought in contact with it, in the summer of 1911, and I have had it under my observation more or less ever since, having been present at probably 250 of the night sessions, many of which have been attended by a stenographer who made voluminous notes.
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> "A thorough study of this case has convinced me that it is not one of ordinary trance. While the sleep seems to be quite of a natural order, it is very profound, and so far we have never been able to awaken the subject when in this state; but the body is never rigid, and the heart action is never modified, though respiration is sometimes markedly interfered with. This man is utterly unconscious, wholly oblivious to what takes place, and, unless told about it subsequently, never knows that he has been used as a sort of clearing house for the coming and going of alleged extra-planetary personalities. In fact, he is more or less indifferent to the whole proceedings, and shows a surprising lack of interest in these affairs as they occur from time to time.
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> "In no way are these night visitations like the seances associated with spiritualism. At no time during the period of eighteen years' observation has there been a communication from any source that claimed to be the spirit of a deceased human being. The communications which have been written, or which we have had the opportunity to hear spoken, are made by a vast order of alleged beings who claim to come from other planets to visit this world, to stop here as student visitors for study and observation when they are in route from one universe to another or from one planet to another. These communications further arise in alleged spiritual beings who purport to have been assigned to this planet for duties of various sorts.
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> "Eighteen years of study and careful investigation have failed to reveal the psychic origin of these messages. I find myself at the present time just where I was when I started. Psychoanalysis, hypnotism, intensive comparison, fail to show that the written or spoken messages of this individual have origin in his own mind. Much of the material secured through this subject is quite contrary to his habits of thought, to the way in which he has been taught, and to his entire philosophy. In fact, of much that we have secured, we have failed to find anything of its nature in existence. Its philosophic content is quite new, and we are unable to find where very much of it has ever found human expression.
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> "Much as I would like to report details of this case, I am not in a position to do so at present. I can only say that I have found in these years of observation that all the information imparted through this source has proved to be consistent within itself. While there is considerable difference in the quality of the communications, this seems to be reasonably explained by a difference in the state of development and order of the personalities making the communications. Its philosophy is consistent. It is essentially Christian and is, on the whole, entirely harmonious with the scientific facts and truths of this age. In fact, the case is so unusual and extraordinary that it establishes itself immediately, as far as my experience goes, in a class by itself, one which has thus far resisted all my efforts to prove it to be of auto-psychic origin. Our investigations are being continued and, as I have intimated, I hope some time in the near future to secure permission for the more complete reporting of the phenomena connected with this interesting case." (Sadler, William S., *The Mind at Mischief*, New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1929. pp. 382-384)

Sadler Interview

On May 7, 1958, our group of ministers had an appointment with Dr. Sadler to discuss phenomena associated with the origin of *The Urantia Book*. When we arrived he had prepared a paper for us listing every imaginable form of subconscious mind or psychic activity. At the bottom of the outline he had a note saying, "The technique of the reception of *The Urantia Book* in English in no way parallels or impinges upon any of the above phenomena of the marginal consciousness." He went on to tell us that as nearly as he could determine, the appearance of the Urantia Papers was associated with some form of superconscious mind activity.
Dr. Sadler candidly discussed any questions we asked him, but he would not talk about two things: the name of the individual whose superconscious mind was used in some way in the materialization of the Urantia Papers, and the details associated with this materialization. He said they were asked to take vows of secrecy regarding these two things. When we asked him why these restrictions were imposed on them, he gave the following reasons:

1. The main reason for not revealing the identity of the contact personality is that the revelators do not want any human being—any human name—ever to be associated with *The Urantia Book*. They want this revelation to stand on its own declarations and teachings. They are determined that future generations shall have the book wholly free from all mortal connections—they do not want a St. Peter, St. Paul, Luther, Calvin, or Wesley. The book does not even bear the imprint of the printer who brought the book into being.
2. There is much connected with the appearance of the Urantia Papers which no human being fully understands. No one really knows just how this phenomenon was executed. There are numerous missing links in the story of how this revelation came to appear in written English. If anyone should tell all he really knows about this technique and methods employed throughout the years of getting this revelation, such a narration would satisfy no one—there are too many missing links.

Various members of the Chicago group speculated that the revelators wished nothing "miraculous" associated with the book and intended that it be accepted or rejected entirely on the worth of its teachings. On numerous occasions Dr. Sadler told me that he really did not know how the materialization was accomplished, and that just about everything known about the origin of *The Urantia Book* is found in various places in the book.
We found that during Dr. Sadler's investigation of this phenomenon he consulted with men like Howard Thurston, the renowned sleight of hand artist who devoted considerable time to exposing fraudulent mediums and psychics, and Sir Hubert Wilkens, the noted scientist and explorer who was interested in investigating psychic phenomena. All of them agreed that the phenomena connected with this individual could not be classified with other types of psychic phenomena such as automatic writing, telepathy, clairvoyance, trances, spirit mediumship, channeling, or split personality.
Since it was obvious that Dr. Sadler started as a professional researcher and skeptic and turned into a believer, I asked him why he changed his mind. He replied that as they read the early Urantia Papers he observed that many of the group known as the Forum—which Drs. William and Lena Sadler had started to discuss medical topics but was now engrossed in examining the Urantia Papers—were becoming highly impressed by their content. He was particularly concerned about his wife. So one Sunday he made a speech about the importance of objectivity and a critical approach to the material. The response he got was kind of a testimony meeting. The essence of their reaction was, "We don't care who wrote the papers, they simply make more sense than anything we have read along this line."
But Dr. Sadler thought his professional reputation was at stake. He had publicly declared there were no genuine mediumistic phenomena, and he wasn't going to allow one baffling case to change his mind. As time went on, however, he was increasingly impressed with the consistency and high quality of the material. He was satisfied in his own mind that the subject involved in the materializations could not have produced the material as he did not have the qualifications or abilities to do so. By this time he also was convinced that he was dealing with genuine phenomena and not some clever trickery. Finally, he told me, when the paper evaluating the personalities of the twelve apostles came through, he threw in his intellectual towel. He said, "I'm a psychiatrist, and I think I know my business, but this paper was a real blow to my pride. If I had a half-dozen of the world's best psychiatrists to help me and years to prepare it, I was convinced that I could not fabricate a paper with this ring of genuineness and insight. So I said to myself, 'I don't know what it is, but I do know that it is the highest quality of philosophical-religious material that I have ever read.'" From that time on, Dr. Sadler became not only the professional director of the group but also its dedicated leader.
Events surrounding the origin of *The Urantia Book* have little relevance in assessing the truth and spiritual quality of the book—these must be determined by evaluating its content. It is, however, an important area for research. The findings of such research lends a significant contribution to the critical evaluation of the text itself. The following story is the product of years of investigation and many hours of discussion with those associated with the origin of the Urantia Papers. It includes a personal knowledge and friendship with key people in the Urantia movement over the past forty years.
During this period I served pastorates in the United Church of Christ and joined the faculty of Indiana Institute of Technology, acting as head of the Department of Psychology, chair of the Division of Liberal Arts, and President. I have been especially careful to maintain academic objectivity and exercise critical evaluation of both *The Urantia Book* and the Urantia movement. The essential elements of the following narration have been cross-validated many times by numerous people who had first-hand experience in the events associated with the origin of *The Urantia Book*.

The Chicago Story

Dr. William S. Sadler (1875-1969), physician, surgeon, psychiatrist, professor, and author of forty-two books, was a man of unusual abilities. He was a popular lecturer on Chautauqua platforms and promoted modern medicine and mental health issues through talks, magazine articles, and books. As a result of this effective advocacy, he and his wife, Dr. Lena Sadler, were frequently asked by friends and acquaintances to host an informal group where medical and social issues could be discussed. Accordingly, the Sadlers started a Sunday afternoon tea in the mid 1920's, which became known as "The Forum," where such topics were examined and sometimes debated. In time the Forum came to be composed of professional people: doctors, lawyers, dentists, ministers, and teachers, along with individuals from all walks of life—housewives, secretaries, farmers, and common laborers.
One Sunday a Forum member asked Dr. Sadler what he thought about a psychic medium who was drawing large crowds in one of the local theaters. Dr. Sadler replied that he had investigated many such psychics and found they were either dishonest frauds or sincere but self-deceived people whose subconscious mind activity led them to believe they were getting knowledge from the spirit world. "Then," he added, "there is one that I haven't figured out yet." They, of course, wanted to know about this person, later called "the contact personality," and Dr. Sadler shared some of the information gathered since 1911.
For a number of years he and a small group of associates, called "the contact commission," had the opportunity of testing and verifying the content of unusual forms of distant communication. They were trained and familiarized with the technique of communication and information imparted by the alleged extra-planetary personalities, later known as "the revelators." Through such a sharing of information, the agenda of the Forum was virtually taken over by the revelators.
Around this time, a personality who claimed to be a student visitor to the planet challenged the contact commission saying, "If you people realized what a high spiritual source you were associated with, you would stop making these puerile investigations to detect fraud and ask some significant questions about the nature of reality and the universe." Dr. Sadler took this message to the Forum and suggested that they take up the challenge by writing questions which could be taken to the revelators. They agreed to do so, and the many questions submitted were organized by Dr. Sadler. The first question presented was, "Is there a God; and, if so, what is he like?" In response they received five papers which the revelators requested be read to the Forum and kept in Dr. Sadler's office safe.
Soon after the first Urantia Papers were presented, the revelators requested that they form a closed group. Each member of the Forum was asked to sign a pledge which read: "We acknowledge our pledge of secrecy, renewing our promise not to discuss the Urantia revelations or their subject matter with anyone save active Forum members, and to take no notes of such matter as it is read or discussed at the Forum meetings, or make copies or notes of what we have personally read." Membership tickets were issued and the charter membership numbered thirty. From time to time new members were received into the Forum after being interviewed by its officers and signing the pledge of secrecy. During the Forum's existence its membership rose to a total of 486.
Members of the Forum were permitted to come to 533 Diversey Parkway and read the papers, but they were never taken from the building.
The original papers were handwritten. Handwriting experts agreed that it was not the writing of the human individual whose superconscious mind was used in some way in the materialization of the papers. Dr. Sadler and his son, Bill, hypothesized that the papers were written by midwayers (who can operate in both the material and the spiritual realms) and placed in the reception area. They were requested to have these original papers typed and carefully checked by the members of the contact commission. Whenever the original papers were typed and checked, the originals in the locked safe disappeared.
Occasionally, after papers were read and placed in the office safe, they disappeared. When the contact commission inquired about this disappearance, very little explanation was given beyond the fact that it was their decision to withdraw the paper. Other papers were altered after being read to the Forum. For instance, one of the papers stated that the apostle Nathaniel had "a good sense of humor for a Jew." The members of the Forum chuckled at this comment. The next time they obtained this paper from the safe, they discovered the phrase "for a Jew" was deleted. The assumption was that they were required to read these papers to the Forum so that these higher beings could observe human reaction to the material presented. In this manner the papers composing *The Urantia Book* were received in the mid 1930's.
All of the Urantia Papers were materialized by the revelators as completed papers. Dr. Sadler told me that he did not know how the materialization was accomplished; but he was close enough to the phenomena to know that it was not associated with channeling or mediumistic activity. The papers narrating the Life and Teachings of Jesus were the last papers received. The midwayers who were given the responsibility of composing the papers were afraid this direction, like the Lucifer rebellion, might be contrary to higher universe policy. They did not proceed with the project until they received confirmation from the high court of the Superuniverse. They were not only given permission to present an authentic Life and Teachings of Jesus, but were assigned a special priority for their work in our local universe.
In 1939 members of the Forum were asked for volunteers who would be willing to meet on Wednesday evenings to seriously and systematically study the Urantia Papers. Seventy persons expressed their desire to join this class, and they became known as "The Seventy." The seventy were trained through papers and by directives from the revelators and by Forum leaders up to the time of the publication of *The Urantia Book*. Special emphasis was placed on the evolutionary nature of the acceptance of new truth and the danger of using mass media and revolutionary methods in presenting the message of the Urantia Papers to our contemporary culture.
When permission to publish the Urantia Papers was given, the revelators stated that they regarded *The Urantia Book* as a feature of the progressive evolution of human society. The book belongs, they said, to the era immediately following the ideological struggle in which they saw our planet involved. Early publication was granted so that leaders and teachers might be trained and translations of the book could be published in other languages. Various instructions were given for the publication of the book including the procurement of an international copyright.
In preparation for the publication of *The Urantia Book*, the Urantia Foundation was established by a Declaration of Trust under the laws of the State of Illinois on January 11, 1950. The Foundation is managed by a five member Board of Trustees who are appointed for life terms. The trustees' duties and responsibilities are defined in the Declaration of Trust. Among the most important of these are the publication of *The Urantia Book* and preserving its text inviolate in perpetuity.
When the Foundation made an appeal to the Forum members for funds to cover the first printing of 10,000 copies, the response was immediate. The cost of the first edition was around $75,000. The book is printed at the Crawfordsville, Indiana plant of R. R. Donnelly and Sons Company, and was published by the Urantia Foundation on October 12, 1955.
A French translation of *The Urantia Book* was published in 1961. Finnish and Spanish translations were published in 1993 and the Russian and Dutch translations were published in 1997. Korean, German, Swedish, Hungarian, and Italian translations are on the horizon.

Study Groups and Societies

Members of the Forum recognized that some sort of fraternal organization was sure to grow out of the teachings of *The Urantia Book*. Accordingly they organized the Urantia Brotherhood on January 2, 1955, and the Urantia Brotherhood Corporation, which acts as the legal and fiscal agent of the Brotherhood, on October 21, 1955, under the laws of the State of Illinois. In December, 1959, the Internal Revenue Service of the United States ruled that the Urantia Foundation, the Urantia Brotherhood, and the Urantia Brotherhood Corporation were tax-exempt, not-for-profit organizations.
The organizational building blocks of the Urantia Brotherhood are local Societies which emerge from mature study groups, and they function with great autonomy. In 1989, as the result of a dispute over democratic control of the Brotherhood, the Brotherhood severed organic connection with the Urantia Foundation and changed its name to the Fifth Epochal Fellowship, now better known as **The Fellowship** for students and readers of *The Urantia Book*, with offices at 529 Wrightwood, Chicago, IL 60614. The Urantia Foundation,with offices at 533 Diversey Parkway, Chicago, IL 60614, is sponsoring a new fraternal organization entitled The International Urantia Association. These fraternal organizations are primarily interested in the spiritual stimulation and growth of people of all faiths and religions.

Future Development

Both the Urantia Foundation and The Fellowship have refrained from using mass media, believing that person to person contact and slow evolutionary growth is the most effective long term policy for introducing people to *The Urantia Book*. It is rather amazing that in a time when reporters are examining all kinds of cults and new religious movements, *The Urantia Book* has received little general publicity. The academic world is just beginning to discover its existence. In 1983, Dr. Jacques Rheaume at the University of Ottawa wrote a doctoral thesis on the topic "An Analysis of a Revealed Text: *The Urantia Book*" (Analyse d'un Texte Revele: *The Urantia Book*). In 1985, there was an American Academy of Religion Consultation on the theme "*The Urantia Book* in Religious Studies."
The Urantia Book is one of the most promising sources of creative thought in philosophy, religion, and culture in our contemporary world. It has extremely broad ramifications. The authors' overarching grasp of the dynamics of civilization and culture shed wisdom in almost every area of human endeavor. Although we are confident the church will one day view *The Urantia Book* as an authentic and enlarged source of spiritual truth, it will only gain such recognition through critical evaluation by laypersons, ministers, and theologians.

The Meredith J. Sprunger Archive

HOPE FOR AN ALIENATED SOCIETY

Circa 1970

Our whole civilization is in a ferment and is groping toward a new spiritual awakening. We are experiencing one of the great innovative periods of history. Like the fourth century which witnessed the triumph of Christianity and the seventeenth century which marks the dawn of modern science, we are entering a new epoch of human existence.

It is generally recognized by contemporary philosophers that we have come to the end of a philosophic age. Numerous obituaries have been written for the death of philosophy as well as the death of God. At professional meetings philosophers spend much time telling each other that nothing significant is being said. Not having anything dynamic to present, they spend endless time telling what they are going to discuss and then bore their colleagues with elaborate minutia.

At one time philosophers like Socrates and Giordano Bruno were put to death because their ideas were so vital and disturbing people were afraid they would turn the world upside down. Philosophers are again beginning to sense that only when they abandon their citadel of epistemological escapism and venture boldly into real life to face the new problems of living and the enlarged problems of the ultimates in human existence will they have something to say. It is comforting to realize that, historically, the Owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of dusk. The shadows are now deep and the time of awakening is at hand.

The Dawning of a New Age

This awakening, however, will not advance from its initial stirring and stretching until mankind is stimulated and challenged by the perception of enhanced realities which once again have the potential of turning the world upside down. This is essentially the result of an enlarged spiritual awakening, the burden of the prophet, the mission of a relevant religion.

The decade of the 1960's has been marked by revolutionary changes in religion. Historians of the future will probably mark this decade as the beginning of a new spiritual era. Perceptive minds have labeled our times variously as the post-Christian, post-Puritan, post-modern, and post-industrial age. These expressions of profound dissatisfaction with traditional modes of religious expression are rooted in a world wide cultural revolution which is forcing contemporary society to search for new and more adequate spiritual foundations.

The appearance of radical theology marks the bankruptcy of a decadent theological-religious tradition. Theological empiricism completed its self-fulfilling prophesy. Social anthropology traced cultural and religious forms to biological needs, social-economic problems, and historical events. Modern textual criticism applied the methods of archaeology, anthropology, and historical analysis to the Bible. The social, economic, political, and religious biases of biblical material were demonstrated. Additions, deletions, and editing of biblical material became obvious. The process of "demythologizing" scripture culminated in the work of Rudolf Bultmann. The end result of decades of empirical study of the Bible is summarized in the cryptic statement: "Even though scripture may not be revelatory in the sense of God speaking in some miraculous way and although the scriptures are lacking in historical validity—they, nonetheless, contain myths which do speak some of the finest wisdom of man." Unchallengable authoritarian revelation was discredited. For the educated man biblical authoritarianism has become an untenable position. The death of authoritarianism and magic in religion has left many with a spiritual void or, at best, only a humanistic ideology.

Paul Tillich carried this negation of face-value symbolism one step farther in asserting that biblical and religious symbols are illusions unless we get to the philosophical-religious meaning behind these symbols. God, for instance, must be understood not as an old man with a beard or some vague spiritual entity but as "the ground of being." While Tillich rendered a significant service to the intellectual community by infusing relevant meaning into threadbare religious symbols, theology was becoming so esoteric many fundamentalists regarded Tillich as a disguised atheist. Just as Bultmann and Tillich pronounced the death of literal, authoritarian revelation, Dietrich Bonhoeffer declared the world has now "come of age" and announced the death of the church and Christianity as "separate" institutions of significance.

There was only one more logical step in this progression: the announcement of the death of God. Among contemporary theologians, this was accomplished first by Gabriel Vahanian, in 1961, with his book *The Death of God*: *The Culture of Our Post-Christian Era*. The "death of God" theologians brought some basic spiritual insights into sharp focus. We have come to the end of a philosophic-religious era. Radical theology has dared to make public the realization that the primitive idea of God as "an old man with a beard," the "deus ex machina" is dead in our culture. They have reinforced the elemental philosophic insight that the empirical method alone cannot find Ultimate Reality.

The rise of radical theology, ipso facto, demonstrates the old religious orthodoxies of Western civilization have been shorn of most of their cultural relevance and power. There is a sense of frustration, alienation, and despair along with, here and there, a new humanistic optimism about religion. The challenge of the radical theologians has brought to light a great spiritual hunger in our secular society. Young people, although largely abandoning the church, are preoccupied with moral-spiritual issues. As the spiritual vacuum in our society increases forms of religious extremism and the occult flourish among common people similar to the extremism of the mystery religions in the Greek and Roman world just before the advent of Christianity.

Prophetic attempts to reconstruct and revitalize Christianity are numerous and significant. Peter Berger's *The Noise of Solemn Assemblies* (1961) challenges morphological fundamentalism. John A. T. Robinson's *Honest to God* (1963) and Harvey Cox's *The Secular City* (1965) are stirring popular attempts to rethink and vitalize religion. Recognizing the decadent state of the old religious institutions and traditions, Martin Marty wrote *The Second Chance for American Protestants* (1963) and E. E. Y. Hales speaks of the drastic Roman Catholic theological and institutional reformation in *Pope John and His Revolution* (1966).

In spite of these heroic attempts to bring spiritual relevance and power to traditional religious institutions, there is a sense of futility in the life of the church. There is a general recognition among thoughtful people that the time-honored structures of Christianity are irrelevant to the actual conditions and needs of the world. Youth have lost faith in the old religious institutions but search earnestly for spiritual reality. The urge toward nihilism is powerful; and the tendency to irrational thought and action or social isolationism is very strong.

The Search for Meaning

In this spiritual wasteland we are already witnessing an occult explosion. As people experience alienation from themselves, their fellows, and Reality they grasp for straws of hope. Occult book sales have doubled in the last three years. Nearly seventy percent of our daily newspapers carry columns on astrology. Over two million Ouija boards were sold last year. There are 10,000 professional astrologers and 400 witch covens practicing in America. We have become a land in which palmists, phrenologists, numerologists, tarot card readers, satanists, and alchemists exist in large enough numbers to form associations and hold meetings. Gurus and mystics are fashionable and experimentation with mind-altering hallucinogens has become epidemic.

The shadows of the downfall of Western civilization threaten us. Philosophers of history such as Arnold J. Toynbee and P. A. Sorokin have pointed out that only a new spiritual dynamism can redeem our crumbling culture. Both historical analysis and prophetic insight suggest they are correct. Is there such a spiritual rejuvenation gestating in the womb of history? A realistic prognosis of the spiritual condition of our society does give some ground for hope. We have already observed the radical and irreversible constructive change in American religion during the 1960's. In addition to these prophetic voices, there are many constructive movements at work. Informally we see activities such as "the underground church" and there are various formal organizations like *World Perspectives* which are making great contributions toward a transformation of values in our society.

In spite of these encouraging signs of hope, one must acknowledge their limited potential at a time when earth-shaking measures are needed. Our space age needs a spiritual stimulus and cosmology commensurate with the vast universe we are beginning to explore. Where shall we look for this kind of spiritual ministration? Religious philosophers would tend to give a cynical answer to such a question. Nevertheless, there is a spiritual movement already started which I believe has the potential of shaping human destiny. In advancing this prediction, I am aware of the danger of making premature judgments. At the inception of dynamic movements there is, it seems, a very fine line between the occult, the esoteric, and that which later is recognized as a reality oriented spiritual break-through.

The Urantia Book

I have been observing this movement for fifteen years and it seems to have all of the qualities basic to a significant religious renaissance. Its dynamic is rooted in a challenging book entitled *The Urantia Book* published by the Urantia Foundation, 533 Diversey Parkway, Chicago, Illinois 60614, in 1955 and contains 2097 pages. Examining its contents you discover it claims to be written by numerous celestial beings as a special revelation to man living on this world, Urantia. It asserts that it contains the first major divine revelation since the coming of Christ to our planet.

This is certainly claim enough to make anyone suspicious of its contents. People who pose as the bearers of new revelation are quite common. Almost every generation produces a number of such individuals and movements. What is surprising about *The Urantia Book* is that it has almost nothing in common with these radical movements. It does not advocate a new religion. Elements of fanaticism will find no support in its teachings. The book contains nothing contrary to the highest insights or basic convictions of the major religions of the world. From ancient Gnosticism to modern Secularism, it cannot be accused of falling into any of the traditional heresies of theistic faith. Yet its viewpoint is fresh, expansive, and profound.

The superior quality of the philosophic-religious insights of *The Urantia Book* is clear to anyone of discriminating mind who will read it. It is a book, however, that cannot be properly evaluated until one grasps its comprehensive universe cosmology - its total religious picture. Just as students of the life of Jesus recognize the superlative quality of his character even though they reject his divinity, so one is impressed with the quality of the insights of *The Urantia Book* even though one may not accept it as a new revelation.

At this time I believe the question of revelatory authenticity is a secondary consideration. Should this book continue to grow in influence and become a shaping force in our religious world, it will take generations of time for the church or society to make up its mind about its revelatory status. Individuals, of course, will probably make up their minds much sooner. The real question which this stimulating book poses is: does it have something creative and constructive to contribute to our modern philosophic-religious outlook distinctively superior to the prophetic voices which we have already considered? After years of pondering this question, I must give an unqualified "yes." There is little question but that it can and will make a significant contribution to our religious thinking. It presents the finest world view of religion which I have ever read, yet it is not actually syncretistic. Evaluated on the basis of spiritual insight, philosophic coherence, and reality-centeredness it is far superior to any book with which I am acquainted.

We should remind ourselves that every advance in knowledge is a disturbing and painful experience to man. This is true of both quantitative knowledge (science) and qualitative knowledge (religion). The prophets are stoned and the pioneers of science are ridiculed. Man's historic resistance to truth is greatly aided by his tendency to accept second-hand sources of information - usually authoritarianism and tradition. If you are interested in progressive philosophical and religious thinking which has the potential of molding world destiny, The Urantia Book is a first hand source of information which you cannot afford to miss.

I would not urge anyone to accept *The Urantia Book* as "revelation" but highly recommend a critical reading of the book. Colleagues, including around a dozen ministers whom I have enticed into reading this huge volume, have been profoundly impressed and enthusiastic about its content. For ten years I have made periodic assignments in *The Urantia Book* in my philosophy classes. These students, engineering and science majors, many of whom have fundamentalistic religious backgrounds are quick to detect fraud and esoteric nonsense. Yet these students generally are impressed and many become so interested they can hardly put the book down.

Superior Qualities

The Urantia Book has many superior qualities. First, it presents an inclusive, integrated, and masterful concept of Reality. It bridges the gap between a monistic and pluralistic concept of Reality without doing violence to either. Mechanism and vitalism are integrated in such a way as to bring unity rather than diversity. The Urantian deity concept ranges from the finest theism (Universal Father) to an impersonal absolute (Unqualified Absolute) which is so well unified the concepts are not antagonistic. The devotees of Unitarianism, Trinitarianism, and Christology will find each view enhanced and stimulated with each view included in the essence of the metaphysical picture. The book pictures a gigantic, marvelously organized astronomical universe which includes millions of inhabited planets in all stages of physical, mental, and spiritual evolution. It contains what is probably the most realistic and inclusive material-mindal-spiritual cosmology in the entire field of philosophy and religion.

The Urantia Book, secondly, structures what appears to me as the most reasonable concept of immortality in the field of religion. Survival is pictured as dependent only on the spiritual reality status of the individual which in turn is the result of the free choice motivation and decision of the individual toward truth, beauty, and goodness as he sincerely understands these values. Nevertheless, evil, sin, and judgment are seen as stern and sober realities in the universe. The interrelationships of body, mind, soul, and spiritual realities are insightfully presented and more comprehensively treated than in any parallel description in the field of religious psychology or theology. Growth toward perfection is seen as the most fundamental motivation of human life. This growth is evolutionary, culminating, and virtually eternal.

The third basic reason for the superior quality of *The Urantia Book* is its insightful understanding of planetary history, dynamics, and destiny. It recognizes evolution as the key modus operandi of our planet. It integrates the mechanisms of the physical universe with the intelligence of "overcontrol." The book gives an excellent summary of planetary history, civilization, and institutions of religion with admirable conciseness and insight. There is a penetrating analysis of religion, culture, and the family which is of exceptional quality. Its basic philosophy of the various forms of energy is that matter is ultimately subject to mind and that mind is eventually controlled by spirit.

Finally, a life of Jesus is presented which is unsurpassed in theistic philosophical reasonableness, spiritual insight, and personality appeal. The life of Jesus is basically acceptable to all religions as well as Christianity. It emphasizes believing with Jesus rather than a narrow, dogmatic belief in Jesus. There is a sharp distinction between the religion of Jesus which is unifying as opposed to the religion about Jesus which is divisive. This superb presentation of the life of Jesus will inspire almost everyone reading it. The greatest challenge to humanity is seen as a well-balanced effort to achieve better communication with the indwelling presence of God—to attain God-consciousness.

The history of philosophy and religion tells us that a book of this stature will almost certainly become controversial and be condemned by fundamentalists and those who emphasize forms of religious orthodoxy. Nonetheless, it is my guess that *The Urantia Book* will become a major influence in shaping man's philosophic-religious thinking in the years to come.

To prepare for the publication of *The Urantia Book* the Urantia Foundation was organized on January 11, 1950 by a Declaration of Trust under the laws of the State of Illinois. The Urantia Brotherhood was organized on January 2, 1955. The constitution of the Urantia Brotherhood designates it as a voluntary, locally autonomous, fraternal organization. Provision is made for chartering local societies and fostering study groups. In December of 1959 the Internal Revenue Bureau ruled that the Urantia Foundation and the Urantia Brotherhood were exempt from paying income taxes and that contributions made to these organizations are deductible from the income taxes of such donors. A French edition of *The Urantia Book* was published in 1961.

It is interesting to note that there has been no attempt to advertise or promote the sale of *The Urantia Book* or to establish study groups other than the spontaneous activity of interested people. In spite of this low key approach, over 20,000 books have been sold (at $20.00 per volume) and numerous study groups have sprung up—usually without the knowledge of the Urantia Brotherhood.

After a reasonably thorough study of *The Urantia Book* and the Urantia Brotherhood for more than a decade, my considered evaluation is that among all of the hopeful sources of spiritual rejuvenation in our society the stimulus of the message of *The Urantia Book* is the most likely to succeed. It may turn out to be the major means by which our alienated society is reunited with its "ground of being" and at the same time enabled to rediscover the Universal Father.

We are, I believe, only in the initial stages of one of the greatest advances in social and religious development our planet has ever experienced. The process of change is now centered in what Abraham Maslow called the growing tip of humanity—the one percent of the population who are the innovators and the pioneers. This is where the action is—our world is quivering on the edge of one of its most amazing epochs of social readjustment, moral quickening, and spiritual enlightenment. There is a great need for our culture to be inspired by an enlightening and ennobling spiritual vision which will energize the minds and hearts of humankind where it will incubate and spring forth in creative activity which will enable us:

> To build more inclusive concepts of truth, beauty, and goodness which bind together naturalism and idealism, the humanities and technology, science and religion.
>
> To develop a new concept of human nature enabling us to appreciate our potentials and encouraging us to participate in our own creative evolution inspired by a vision of our great destiny.
>
> To construct a mature view of the goals of social evolution and stimulate us to initiate wise programs of social change.
>
> To present an enlarged concept of the gospel of love and thereby teach humankind the baseness of violence and war and inspire us to develop personal, governmental, and universe potentials of love and brotherhood.
>
> To envision a comprehensive plan of our planetary evolutionary destiny which in turn will unify culture, governments, and religion.
>
> To enlarge and enhance our conception and understanding of our eternal destiny and thereby fill our life with vital meaning and dynamic purpose.

What is Reality?

Circa 1970

The problem of reality is the central concern of philosophy and the culminating quest for meaning in human experience. Human beings react in harmony with their perceptual and conceptual field of reference. What we believe to be causative and irreducible, our concept of reality, determines the basic character of our thoughts, feelings, and actions. Our philosophy is a synthesis of our cultural heritage, personal experience, scientific knowledge, and rational-creative thinking.

The synthesis of human knowledge and experience is always a contemporary task that is never finished or complete. The understanding of life is cumulative. Periodically a new and enlarged synthesis takes place. Historically, there have been many major enlargements of Western philosophy. The Greek synthesis attempted to integrate the discipline of logical reasoning with the values of antiquity. Thomas Aquinas combined the insights of Aristotelian philosophy with the basic values of Christianity. Rene Descartes postulated a matter-mind dualism which opened the door for the development of the physical sciences. Immanuel Kant worked out a philosophic synthesis which harmonized the rational approach of traditional philosophy, the empiricism of the emerging physical sciences, and Christian values. Pragmatism endeavored to accommodate the rich contributions of the biological sciences. Existentialism evolved largely as an attempt to actualize the human potentials opened up by the developing social sciences.

A new major synthesis is needed. Traditional terms and boundaries are inadequate. References to the “natural” and the “supernatural” are prescientific frames of reference that have little meaning in our contemporary understanding of the nature of things. We are beginning to recognize that idealism and naturalism are authentic aspects of a larger concept of reality. A new unity is emerging amid diversity and complexity.
Our experience is pluralistic. Psychologically we perceive three basic forms of reality: matter (energy), mind (consciousness), and spirit (value). These are our basic sources of knowledge. From our human perceptual point of view, matter is the basic substance of the universe. There are many forms of matter—light, heat, electricity, magnetism, chemism, and energy are essentially the same thing. The electromagnetic scale represents various levels of energy phenomena. The immediate control of matter is largely governed by empirical cause and effect mechanisms. From a short range view matter appears to demonstrate random and mechanistic behavior; a longer range view shows lawful, intelligent, and purposeful behavior.

Mind is the controlling function of reality in the material universe. The most elemental form of control systems are found in atomic structure, chemical reactions, and biological codes. The largest empirical forms demonstrating mind over-control of matter are found in planetary and universe evolutionary dynamics. Mind appears to operate on differential levels from simple organic matter through lower organisms to highly complex organisms like human beings. Mind (control functions) as it operates on the material level is usually classified as a form of physical energy, but these control aspects of matter are the result of indigenous mind qualities associated with matter. Mind is a form of energy that is not only capable of association with different configurations of matter but also with different aspects of spiritual reality.

Spirit is the highest and most determinative form of reality. Spirit eventually governs mind, which, in turn, dominates matter. From a human point of view, the foundations of the universe are material which are controlled by mind that is ultimately directed by personality the essence of which is spirit. Human awareness of spiritual reality is largely limited to our truth, beauty, and goodness perception that eventually evolves a God-consciousness. In addition to our mindal capacity for value perception, there is a reality aspect of the human mind known variously as the Superconscious, the Inner Light, the Indwelling Spirit, or the Thought Adjuster which is a spiritual source of guidance slowly transforming human beings in the direction of the “Image of God.” Spirit is the highest form of universe energy—the basic nature of Ultimate Reality.

Basic Characteristics of Reality Experience

Matter, mind, and spirit are inter-associated in differential levels of complexity. The electromagnetic scale (electrical waves, radio waves, heat waves,white light, ultra violet rays, gamma rays, and cosmic rays) illustrates the various forms of physical energy which inter-associate with each other and with mind and spirit phenomena in innumerable combinations. We know very little about mind phenomena but recognize differential activities of the subconscious, the conscious, and the superconscious aspects of mind.

Psychiatrists such as Dr. Richard Bucke see evidence of an evolving quality of mind which he called “cosmic consciousness.” Laboratory experiments in extra sensory perception suggest that we may some day discover what might be called “mind circuits.” These and undiscovered aspects of mind inter-associating and combining with forms of physical and spiritual energy result in exceedingly complex manifestations of experiential reality.

All of these experiential aspects of reality are integrated in our experience through the unique capacity of personality. Through personality experience mind intervenes between matter and spirit bringing about an organization, understanding, and unity to our experience. Without this mindal integrating capacity between matter and spirit, we would be confronted with a schizophrenic reality experience.

There is a basic integrative unity of reality in the universe. Our contemporary understanding of matter, mind, and spirit is approaching a common semantic description: energy. For the first time in our planetary history the physicist, the psychologist, and the theologian are speaking of the same broad descriptive reality. We are beginning to realize that the traditional areas of investigation and study are artificially separated. In nature and life we have holistic situations in which many influences are operative. Even formal study programs reflect this kind of thinking in courses like biochemistry, astrophysics, physiological psychology, cultural anthropology, etc.

Diversity is a surface phenomenon. When we look underneath and within, we see a universal unity. The main structure of the DNA is the same in a mollusk, as rose, or a human being. The millions of species of plant and animal life share the same chemical elements of matter. To penetrate the surface diversity of experience and understand the basic lawfulness and unity of all things is the essential goal of science, the arts, philosophy, and religion. Intellectually, this unitary reality has been given various names: The Absolute, The Great I Am, Ultimate Reality, etc. The religious designation for this unitary reality has also been given many names: God, Allah, Jehovah, Ahura Mazda, etc. The universe is a vast integrated creation which is controlled by a unified, infinite mind.

Evolution is the Fundamental Dynamic of the Universe

Human knowledge is relative, partial, and progressive. This is demonstrated in our maturation and socialization experience, in our general scientific knowledge, and our historical knowledge. Our relative knowledge, however, is generally dependable. Knowledge must always be evaluated from the level of our experience. To a small child fire and poisonous drugs must be a real danger; for a knowledgeable adult these same objects may be a safe means of sustaining life. A person driving a car must regard a brick wall as a solid obstruction; as a physicist this person may regard it largely as empty space.

Our knowledge and experience must always be correlated with our evolutionary development. Premature knowledge (not prepared by experience) can be disastrous. Attempting to live by regressive knowledge leads to stagnation and destruction. As we make decisions and take action on the basis of our highest experiential evolutionary knowledge we are eventually led to wisdom. The wisdom and experience of each level of development prepares us to the knowledge and experience of the next stage of development. This process appears to be endless.

There is, therefore, a constant need in each generation for the reinterpretation and relevant application of the basic truths of experience. Although the basic principles of evolving a healthy individual and sound society are relatively constant, the form and emphasis which they take are constantly changing. Whenever this process of growth does not take place in a civilization such a society will decay. The eternal command is “Be you perfect, even as I am perfect,” but what that means must be discovered by the individual and society at each stage of development.

There are various developmental purposes involved in the evolutionary process:

1. There is movement from the physical through the mental-cultural to the spiritual. Primitive people emphasize physical regulations and pleasures. Civilized people stress the discipline and development of the mind. The sages and saints of society cultivate the spiritual achievements of finding truth, establishing brotherhood, and knowing God.

2. There is development from randomness, lawlessness, and arbitrariness to lawfulness, justice, order, and design. Early human beings saw life as determined by whim and caprice and made rules to fit their personal advantage. Civilized society sees the universe as governed by law and recognizes justice even when it is against their personal welfare.

3. There is progression from egocentricity and selfishness to love and ecumenical relationships, from self-expression to self-mastery, from negative fear reaction to positive self-actualization motivation. Maslow points out that the evolution of human needs takes the following order of priority: physiological needs, safety needs, love needs, self-esteem needs, and self-actualization needs.

4. There is a transfer from external control to internal control, from group rights to individual rights, from force and coercion to freedom and creativity. Primitive peoples need strict rules and control; an advanced society promotes good and wise behavior through individual volition. Augustine was referring to the spiritually mature person when he said, “Love God and do as you like.”

5. There is an over-all direction in the evolutionary process toward spiritual perfection. But even the meaning of perfection is mediated to each person through his or her progressive experiences. Knowledge is always a function of being. And we are evolving beings.

We Need a New Spiritual Cosmology

Contemporary discoveries in astronomy have replaced the old “three story” universe with a concentric universe. Vast spiral galaxies populate the universe. The Swedish astronomer C. V. L. Charlier also believes we may live in a hierarchical universe. We live in an enormous, expanding universe which is virtually limitless. Our traditional circumscribed universe with the earth at its center has turned out to be a myopic illusion. The astronomical universe appears to function like a vast organism with innumerable families of suns passing through tremendous but predictable cycles from birth to death. Most astronomers hypothesize that the universe is populated with myriads of inhabited planets in all stages of evolution. Man’s egocentric position in the universe we must now recognize is an untenable view.

Our traditional spiritual cosmology based on the three-story universe is hopelessly outdated. Any relevant spiritual cosmology must be built on current astronomical frames of reference. If a spiritual universe is to be taken seriously, it must also be projected on a vast, concentric, hierarchical scale with the traditional “Paradise” at the center of this enormous physical-mindal-spiritual creation.

Thomas Dick, a progressive religious philosopher of a century ago, saw the implications of our growing knowledge of the universe when he said, “It is now considered by astronomers, as highly probable, if not certain—from late observations, from the nature of gravitation, and other circumstances—that all the systems of the universe revolve around one common center and that this center may bear as great a proportion, in point of magnitude, to the universal assemblage of systems as the sun does to his surrounding planets. And since our sun is five hundred times larger than the earth and all the other planets and satellites taken together—on the same scale, such a central body would be five hundred times larger than all the systems and worlds in the universe. Here, then, may be a vast universe itself, an example of material creation, exceeding all the rest in magnitude and splendor and in which are blended the glories of every other system.” (*If A Man Die* - Harry C. Mark, p. 84)

The Church: Problem or Potential?

What is the Role of Religious Institutions in Society?
1/27/84 Revised 1/27/98

There is wide-spread concern about the future of the Christian Church. Some mainline theologians are predicting that the church of tomorrow will bear little resemblance to the church of today. The prognosis of future events and trends has never never achieved a high degree of validity. But such exercises of speculation are interesting and provide a basis for discussion. Each individual would visualize a different script; but, hopefully, the following projection will stimulate thought and discussion regarding the church in the 21st century.

The church of the future will continue to enlarge and deepen its conception of God. Our understanding of Deity-Reality will grow in complexity following the thinking of Alfred Whitehead and Carl Jung. There will be a growing realization of the centrality of Christ and a diminishing appreciation of Paul and Old Testament theology, along with a continued demythologizing of the Bible. This ascendancy of a Jesusonian understanding of God and the spiritual nature of salvation will result in the demise of the Pauline blood atonement theory. Our culture will undergo an astronomical-spiritual conceptual shift that abandons the simplistic "heaven" of ancient times and visualizes a vast spiritual cosmology harmonious with the contemporary scientific view of the cosmos.

The Nature of Religion

Religion is fundamentally an individual experience of values. In its highest form, it is the experience of supreme value—Ultimate Reality—God. Inevitably, individual religious experience results in social expressions of religion, the formation of religious institutions in society. Religion cannot survive in civilization without institutionalized forms of belief, worship, practice, and tradition. Religious cults are more creative and unifying when they are organized around goals and purposes rather than theological dogmas and authoritarian creeds. Dogmas tend to become stereotyped and limit imagination and growth. Institutionalized religion provides an appealing symbolism for preserving values through fostering sentiment and gratifying emotion. Its power lies in the vividness of its human appeal.

Religious organizations are more effective and constructive when they are kept separate from other social groups and secular activities. Their task is to present and enhance spiritual realities and principles. The application of those principles to the many facets of life is the task of the individual and other social organizations. Whenever religious organizations attempt to become advocates of social, economic, or political activities instead of spiritual principles, they lose their prophetic capacity and become identified with aspects of the secular society. By compromising their unique spiritual role, they are unable to furnish the spiritual renewal needed by the secular institutions of civilization.

Religious institutions can keep free of secular alliances by: (1) A critical corrective philosophy. (2) Freedom from institutional social, economic, and political associations. (3) Creative pastoral care and love-expanding fellowships. (4) Prophetic spiritual insight and appreciation of cosmic values. (5) Avoiding fanaticism through the corrective influences of scientific and objective academic attitudes.

The Christian Church

The church is a human social institution dedicated to a religious-spiritual purpose. The life and teachings of Jesus is the most dynamic influence ever to activate humankind on our planet, but Jesus did not found the church. The reference to the church by Jesus in Matt. 16:18-19 was actually added to the text by the early church according to Rudolf Bultmann and other theologians. The church in Jesus' day did not exist.

Jesus spoke of the kingdom of God which is a spiritual relationship—vertically in the recognition of God as our heavenly Father, and horizontally in the acknowledgement of our fellows as our brothers and sisters. The religion of Jesus is best summarized as "The Fatherhood of God and the brothersisterhood of humankind."

The basic principles of the kingdom are (U. B. p. 1863):

1. The pre-eminence of the individual. People are not means to be manipulated but ends in themselves. They have intrinsic value in the eyes of God.

2. The will as the determining factor in human experience. In our spiritual destiny we are not the victims of fate but determine the ultimate nature of our existence. Not where we are now but the direction in which we are facing is the important thing.

3. Spiritual fellowship with God the Father. This inner relationship is the key to shaping our attitudes, our faith, and our destiny.

4. The supreme satisfaction of the loving service of man. Loving service is more important than the intellectual theology we have and the basis for fulfillment and happiness in life.

5. The transcendency of the spiritual over the material in human personality. Spiritual realities through the mediation of our minds and our faith eventually dominate and shape our personalities in spite of material limitations or handicaps.

Early Christianity was the most effective, appealing, and enduring cult ever devised in world history. It was largely founded on the religious experience and theological orientation of Paul. Even today the church is only meagerly Jesusonian. The enthusiasm engendered by the resurrection inadvertently led Paul and the early church into a new gospel *about* Jesus in place of the original gospel message of the Fatherhood of God and the brother/sisterhood of humankind.

The institutionalized church became a virtual substitute for Jesus' concept of the kingdom of God. The simple spiritual appeal which Jesus made to the souls of humankind was extrapolated by Christianity into a new order of human society. The church has often presumed to lay claim to those mysterious powers and privileges which can be exercised and experienced only between Jesus and his spiritual believers. The church is not synonymous with the kingdom of heaven; the one is largely a human social organization, the other is a spiritual relationship.

Today the church has been traditionalized, dogmatized, and institutionalized. Its creativity and growth are threatened by formalism, over organization, intellectualism, and other nonspiritual preoccupations. As a result the Christian Churches of today, unconsciously and unintentionally, stand as great obstacles to spiritual growth and the actualization of the centrality of the teachings of Jesus.

Dangers of Religious Institutions

The institutionalization of religion is socially necessary and good but in doing so religious power for good is curtailed and its possibilities for evil are increased. Some of the dangers of formalized religion are (U. B. p. 1092):

1. The fixation of beliefs and the crystallization of worship. Religion becomes a routine and truth is standardized and eventually fossilized. The zealots of the church become intolerant judges of orthodoxy.

2. The diversion of religion from the service of God and our fellows to the service of the church. There is an inclination of leaders to become administrators or theologians instead of pastors and ministers. In time an oppressive ecclesiastical authority evolves.

3. There is an accumulation of vested interests and possessions that results in an entanglement with secular institutions and the secularization of the church.

4. Competitive divisions and numerous sects form which encourage discrimination, elitism, and "chosen people" attitudes.

5. There is a tendency to venerate the past while ignoring present needs and opportunities. Such traditionalism fosters false and exaggerated ideas of sacredness and fails to make up to date interpretations of spiritual values and religious practices.

Such a traditionalized, dogmatized, and institutionalized church fails to hold the interest of adventurous youth and gradually loses its relevancy and its enthusiasm in proclaiming the saving message of the gospel of eternal salvation. Creativity and growth are forced outside of the institutional organization.

Strength of Religious Institutions

There are many significant contributions which the socialization of religion has to offer any civilization. Ideally, religious institutions should serve both as the foundation of a society and its guiding star. Some of the positive services which the church can contribute to individuals and society are (U.B. p. 1092):

1. Witness to faith in the Fatherhood of God and the brother/sisterhood of humankind as it is exemplified in the religion of Jesus. Dramatize and magnify the lures of truth, beauty, and goodness and foster spiritual growth. Present prophetic spiritual insight into the wisdom and meaning of contemporary living and provide supreme ideals and goals for living.

2. Enhance the beauty, attractiveness, and meaningfulness of group worship. Provide the naturalness, simplicity, and beauty of spiritual symbolism and avoid artificiality and complexity of rituals and rules.

3. Magnify the value of unselfish service, loving fellowship, and neighborhood welfare. Augment moral values and inspire living by high ethical principles. Bring unity amidst diversity and provide permanence in a world of constant change. Promote ecumenical participation with all religious groups.

4. Glorify the potentials of the family and provide incentives and opportunities for family participation at home and in the church.
5. Promote realistic and vital religious education with rites of passage associated with spiritual ritual observances.

6. Provide wise counsel and spiritual guidance. Give individual attention so that all feel the love of the extended church family.

7. Facilitate the spread of the gospel message of the Fatherhood of God and the brother/sisterhood of humankind to all people. Function as a missionary of spiritual truth and loving service, not in the promotion of doctrinaire positions or ecclesiastical boundaries.

The Future of the Church

Jesus concept of the kingdom of God will prevail. In spite of its limitations, the church is one of the greatest powers for good on earth. The contemporary church is but the larval stage of the thwarted spiritual kingdom that Jesus came to establish. The kingdom of God inaugurated by Jesus is still alive and will one day emerge as the dominant spiritual force on our planet.

The kingdom of God is an invisible and spiritual brother/sisterhood which is destined to become a living organism transcending social institutions. We are called to spiritual unity, not uniformity. There will always be a diversity of intellectual comprehension and interpretation. Spiritual unity is based on common ideals, purposes, and goals, not on the same theological beliefs and creeds. In this fellowship of the kingdom there is no place for sectarian rivalry, group antagonism, moral superiority, or spiritual infallibility.

We are living in one of the great pivotal periods of history. Kenneth Boulding in *The Meaning of the Twentieth Century*, Alvin Toffler in *The Third Wave*, John Naisbitt in *Megatrends*, Fritjof Capra in *The Turning Point*, and many other prophetic voices have pointed out that we are entering a major transitional change in the history of humankind. We desperately need spiritual foundations which are large enough, solid enough, and have the visionary potential to give stability and guidance to the new age that is struggling to be born.

"This process of cultural transformation...is what we are now observing in our society....While the transformation is taking place, the declining culture refuses to change, clinging ever more rigidly to its outdated ideas; nor will the dominant social institutions hand over their leading roles to the new cultural forces. But they will inevitably go on to decline and disintegrate while the rising culture will continue to rise, and eventually will assume its leading role. As the turning point approaches, the realization that evolutionary changes of this magnitude cannot be prevented by short-term political activities provides our strongest hope for the future."[1]

Daniel Yankelovich in his exhaustive sociological study, *New Rules*, says that we are marching to a new beat; we cannot turn back the clock; we are entering a new age of society. He found that people are fed up with the selfish, individualistic preoccupations of the 1970's and hunger for commitment to truth and service. Marilyn Ferguson in *The Aquarian Conspiracy* documents the many facets of this personal and social transformation of consciousness in the 1980's.

Dr. George Gallup in a talk at Princeton Theological Seminary a couple of years ago said, "Americans today appear to be on a spiritual quest of major proportions...the final two decades of this century could, in fact, represent a unique chapter in the history of religion in the United States." I believe that he may be correct in his observations.

The hour may be striking for a rediscovery of the true and original foundations of the present day institutionalized church when the pressures of contemporary problems will scrape off the barnacles of nineteen hundred years of its history and allow the life and teachings of Jesus to shape its faith and practice. "Religion does need new leaders, spiritual men and women who will dare to depend solely on Jesus and his incomparable teachings...who will be exclusively devoted to the spiritual regeneration of men. And then will these spirit-born souls quickly supply the leadership and inspiration requisite for the social, moral, economic, and political reorganization of the world."[2]

[1] Capra, Fritjof. 1983. *The Turning Point.* Bantam Books., p. 418-9.

[2] Urantia Foundation. 1955. *The Urantia Book.* Chicago., p. 2082.

The Meredith J. Sprunger Archive

The Urantia Book and Christian Fundamentalism

5/28/82

Many devout Christians of conservative or fundamentalistic background have read sections of *The Urantia Book* and recognized the superb quality of its spiritual insights, but they have been troubled by the revelatory claim of the book or positions taken which differ from some of the doctrines of fundamentalism. These people over the years have written to ask questions, express perplexity, seek help, or challenge statements.

This paper seeks to speak with constructive understanding to these questions and spiritual anxieties. In many ways it has been the Christian fundamentalists who have maintained the vibrant spiritual emphasis of religion in America. Our intent is not to contend with fundamentalistic beliefs, but rather, to set these spiritual truths in a larger frame of reference which, hopefully, will enable those who hold to a conservative theology to recognize that we subscribe to the same spiritual realities and are brothers/sisters in Christ.

Most people who accept the Bible as revelation do not do so because some one demanded obedience to this belief. They accept the Bible as the word of God because they recognize its spiritual truths. Your approach to *The Urantia Book* should be made the same way. Before you read *The Urantia Book* you should not regard it as revelation. Only after you have read it are you in a position to begin to consider whether or not it may have been inspired by God. Faith and conviction must come from honest and sincere inner leading and not from some authoritarian claim or demand.

How We Got Our Bible

In thinking about the entire question of revelation it may be helpful to know how we got our Bible. Theological schools devote entire courses to this question and dozens of books are available on the subject. But you can get a short summary of the Bible's origin by going to the Public Library reference shelf and consulting a copy of Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible.* Look up the term "canon," which means "officially accepted standards or books," and read about how we got our Bible.

You will find the Old Testament evolved in three main stages over thousands of years of history. It was edited periodically by many scholars. The entire canon of the Old Testament was not decided until around 90 A. D. at the famous Council of Jamnia where Hebrew scholars finally determined which books should be included in the "official" scriptures of Judaism. The process and the decisions agreed upon were much more complex and extensive than this brief description might lead you to believe.

The New Testament began in the early Christian Church as a series of papers and letters written by numerous people. These papers were circulated among believers, edited, combined, and added to by many early scholars and church leaders. The names of apostles were often attached to the better papers so that they would have more authority for church members. From around 144 A. D. to 367 A. D. various scholars and bishops drew up their own lists of books which they thought should be canonical or officially recognized books. Finally, Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, wrote an Easter letter to the churches of his diocese in the year 367 in which he discusses the books which he considered canonical. This is the first list which includes all of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament as we now have it. His list, however, was in a different sequence than our current New Testament. At various church councils in the years that followed Athanasius' list was widely adopted, and in this way we got our New Testament.
In Athanasius' pastoral letter he wrote with all of the authority of a bishop, "let no one add to them (his list) or take away aught of them." Such authoritarian exhortations were considered necessary to protect the purity of revelatory teachings; and statements like the admonition in Rev. 22:18-19: "I warn every one who hears the words of the prophecy of this book..." were common. In the same way the Urantia Foundation published *The Urantia Book* under international copyright protection so that the purity of these teachings can be safeguarded. These precautions are not meant to imply that God ceases to enlarge the revelation of himself and spiritual truth to succeeding generations. The history of the Bible shows that God does progressively reveal larger truths to a developing world. Early religious leaders used authoritarian warnings and admonitions frequently to protect the latest prophetic messages.

Once you understand how the content of the Bible was accumulated, edited, adopted, and officially approved, you realize that revelation is validated by centuries of experience. Many people recognize revelation immediately because the indwelling spirit of God confirms what they hear or read, but it takes many people over a long period of time to establish a social tradition of revelation such as the Bible. This tradition, along with the authority and prestige of the institutional church, results in a cultural conditioning which largely determines how the average person thinks and acts.

Recognizing New Revelation

The Urantia Book, being very new, must be evaluated by the indwelling spirit of God working in the mind and heart of each individual. You should accept nothing in *The Urantia Book* or any other book unless it passes this inner test of truth. I am confident that a thousand years hence, we will have a solid social tradition witnessing to the revelatory quality of *The Urantia Book.*

Revelation is always the product of the action of God in the life of humanity. God has an infinite number of ways to do this. In Jesus of Nazareth he used both physical and spiritual means to bring revelation to us in the form of a person. In the writings of Paul he used spiritual inspiration in the mind of Paul to bring us revelation in the form of brief letters to churches. In John's book of revelation he used a vision to the mind of John to bring us revelation. In *The Urantia Book* he used high spirit personalities to bring revelation in the form of a book. God could use an infinite number of channels and manifestations to bring revelation to his mortal children. It is God's wisdom that determines the time, place, method, and form of revelation. We might speculate on why God uses certain channels and forms, but this would only be an educated guess. The spirit of God is always active in the world, and in this sense revelation is continuous—usually through inner guidance to individuals who share these prophetic insights with their society. Periodically epochal revelations such as the coming of Jesus occur. These epochal revelations naturally have a much greater effect on our world than the continuous forms of evolutionary revelation. A study of epochal revelations shows that each succeeding one enlarges and enhances the earlier spiritual understanding.

Revelation must always be given in the language, the forms of knowledge, and the philosophical concepts that are meaningful to the people who are given this revelation at the time in which it is given. As human knowledge expands, revelation uses these more advanced concepts to convey its spiritual message. This is a never ending process.

The New Fulfills and Enhances the Old

Just as the New Testament fulfills and upsteps the Old Testament, *The Urantia Book* confirms and enlarges the truths of the Bible. Most people have a much greater appreciation of the Bible after reading *The Urantia Book.* The Bible and *The Urantia Book* are companion volumes. Not to recognize this close supportive relationship is to repeat an ancient error. Early in the Christian Church a wealthy ship owner by the name of Marcion headed a movement to eliminate the Old Testament from Christian literature. The church wisely rejected his views. Any reader of *The Urantia Book* who took this same attitude toward the Bible, in my judgment, would be making a similar mistake. There are many people, in fact, who have not been interested in the Bible until after they have read *The Urantia Book.*

Because of the natural suspicion conservative religionists have toward any claim of new revelation, a rather common reaction that some fundamentalists have toward *The Urantia Book* is that it could be a work of Satan. It is also interesting to recall that this was the same possibility raised in connection with the message of Jesus. Jesus' response to this accusation, I think, is as good as can be made. He said he should be judged by the fruits of his life—"How can Satan cast out Satan!" *The Urantia Book* should be judged in the same way. You will find it supports the mission and message of Jesus and refutes the intentions and message of Satan! Epochal revelation will probably always meet the same reception given the message of Jesus. The leaders of traditional religious institutions are likely to oppose it; but, in time, the common people will receive it gladly.

The Human and the Divine

A careful study of the life and teachings of Jesus reveals there is no contradiction between the spiritual teachings regarding Jesus found in *The Urantia Book* and the Bible. Certain physical and cosmological facts or assumptions are corrected, and Jesus' entire life and teachings are enlarged by *The Urantia Book;* but the essential spiritual truths are unchanged.

For instance, Christian theologians generally affirm that Jesus was both a human and a divine personality, but the majority of scholars in mainline churches have long recognized that the story of the immaculate conception and the virgin birth were added by the early church to make his divine nature more believable for the church members of those times. An interesting observation is that today this story is frequently a stumbling block to belief in the authenticity of the Biblical record of the divinity of Jesus. If the virgin birth is a historical fact, the reverse argument is a much sounder philosophical position: that is, since God could have used any method he desired to incarnate his son, the fact of the divinity of Jesus makes the virgin birth a possible option of the divine plan.

The reason most mainline church theologians do not accept the virgin birth story is that only two of the four gospels record it and no where else in the New Testament is it referred to. The earliest gospel, Mark, and the latest gospel, John, do not mention it. One would expect all of the gospel writers to highlight such an important event. Secondly, there are many instances of supernatural conception and virgin birth recorded in the annals of religious history. It was the characteristic method by which ancient peoples designated the divine origin of their prophets and leaders. Paradoxically, the Biblical account traces the lineage of Jesus back to David through the ancestry of Joseph, not Mary. Finally, modern Christian scholars reject the virgin birth story because it is observed that God usually uses the natural laws of his creation to work his purposes in the world.

The spiritual truth regarding the nature of Jesus is that he was both human and divine.This *The Urantia Book* strongly affirms. The book does not even mention the immaculate conception and virgin birth doctrines. It is assumed that the Father could incarnate his son as a mortal on our world through the natural process of conception and birth. The ancient legend is quietly ignored while the spiritual truths regarding the nature of Jesus are substantiated and enhanced.

An Enlarged Spiritual Universe

The writers of the various books of the Bible had a comparatively simplistic universe cosmology. They visualized a flat earth in the center of creation encompassed by the vault or "firmament" of heaven. this limited astronomical knowledge naturally conditioned their interpretation of spiritual realities and personalities. Basic spiritual truth, therefore, had to be revealed to the Biblical authors in prescientific frames of reference.

The revelators of *The Urantia Book* present a view of the universe which, while in essential agreement with our present astronomical knowledge, goes far beyond our contemporary science. They also clarify our knowledge of the Paradise Trinity, the pre-bestowal personality and universe status of Jesus, and the functional relationships of spiritual beings in general. Although the Bible does not speak of the Trinity per se, Christian thinkers have developed the doctrine of the Trinity and naturally assumed, without specific Biblical confirmation, that the pre-incarnate Christ was the second person of the Trinity. The fact that the prologue of John speaks of him as the actual creator of our universe was more or less regarded as a poetic "Logos" doctrine since theologians regarded God the Father as the creator. The authors of *The Urantia Book,* however, tell us this Biblical description (also stated in Col. 1:16 and Heb. 1:2) of the preexistent Christ is literally true. He is both the creator and savior of our universe.

Each Creator Son of a local universe is a unique creation of the Universal Father and the Eternal Son and is known as "the only begotten son" in his universe, and all who go to the Father in this universe go through the ministry and means established by this Creator-Savior Son. Even though Jesus is not the second person of the Paradise Trinity, his presence and power are exactly the same as that of the Eternal Son, the second person of the Trinity, if he were acting in the place of Christ in our universe. After Jesus' bestowal on our confused planet, the Father, as recorded in Matthew, placed "all authority in heaven and earth" in his hands; and he has promised one day to return to this world of his incarnation experience. Here, again, we see *The Urantia Book,* while correcting assumptions made due to our very limited universe knowledge, confirms and reinforces the basic spiritual truths of the Bible.

Savior of Humankind

All Christians look to Jesus as the mediator between human beings and God and regard him as the savior of humankind. It is in the explanation of this salvation that they differ. Theologians of mainline Christian Churches see salvation as the gift of God through faith in Jesus emphasizing God's love for humanity and the full acceptance of them as his mortal sons and daughters. The theologians of Christian fundamentalism regard salvation as a gift of God through faith in Jesus because he gave himself as a blood sacrifice demanded by God the Father as the price for forgiving the sins of humankind. This is known as the blood atonement doctrine in which Jesus is seen as the redeemer of humanity from the condemnation of a just and holy God.

The only Christian belief which the authors of *The Urantia Book* vigorously criticize is the blood atonement theory. They do so because this doctrine distorts the great love which the Universal Father has for his mortal sons and daughters. It is incompatible with Jesus' teachings about the nature of God the Father. God's love is not subordinate to his righteousness or holiness. Love is the Universal Father's primary attitude toward all persons. Jesus is, indeed, the savior of humankind but not a redeemer or ransomer.

The blood atonement theory has its origin in the conceptual language of Paul. Coming out of the Jewish tradition and writing with Jewish people in mind, Paul used the symbolic idea of Jesus as the "final sacrifice" in their sacrificial system as a missionary approach which made sense to those with a Jewish background. New Testament scholars today recognize that Paul did not hold a God concept which would be compatible with a literal blood atonement doctrine. He used this sacrificial language because it was the only frame of reference that would be acceptable to the Jews of his day. It was a missionary attempt to relate to the thought patterns of the Jews.

Most ministers in mainline Christian Churches have long since abandoned this retributive concept of God. The Bible commentary most widely used in America today is *The Interpreter's Bible* published by Abingdon Press. In volume VIII, p. 510-11, the writer in commenting on John 3:16 says:

Some of the past explanations of the gospel are not overhelpful to us now. Most of us are not at home in the Jewish sacrificial system; and metaphors drawn from it can be confusing rather than illuminating. And some of the interpretations, popular in the Middle Ages, are to us incredible, and even monstrous....So do many, with the Gospels in their hands, appear to see in them a lesser God giving himself to save us from the implacable fury and resentment of the great God, slow and hard to be appeased, and demanding his pound of flesh from someone. That is hideous heresy; and the blasphemy of blasphemies. It was in the eternal plan of God the Father that Jesus Christ lived out in fact: 'God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself' (II Cor. 5:19), not standing sullenly aside, and needing himself to be reconciled.

We should recognize that most of those who still accept a literal blood atonement theory in our day probably do so out of misunderstanding and with no intent to deny the loving nature of God. To believe that God the Father cannot or will not love human beings until his innocent son is brutally executed is a cruel distortion of the loving nature of the Heavenly Father Jesus revealed to this world. But *The Urantia Book* does affirm the positive spiritual values associated with the crucifixion and our salvation which are important to fundamentalists as well as to other Christians.

It was the Father's will that Jesus allow the Jewish leaders to dispose of him as they desired. God does not arbitrarily interfere with the premeditated intentions of human beings. Jesus' death on the cross demonstrates the profound love he and the Father have for humankind even when they were torturing and executing him. He refused to use divine power to save himself or punish these misguided evil doers. This great love is the most powerful saving act the Father and the Son could bestow on self-willed men in this situation to eventually deliver them from their ignorance, evil, and sin and cause humankind to recognize God's transcendent love. Salvation is something that God in Christ makes possible for every human being. Finite mortals cannot save themselves, but through faith they may accept this gift of eternal life. Christ is the way by which all mortals in our universe go to the Father.

On Approaching New Truth

New truth is always challenging and often threatening to traditionalists. This is both natural and good. The tried and true values of historical experience cannot and should not be easily replaced by the new and untested. These historic truths, however, are periodically upstepped by revelation in the form of prophetic vision. Such growth is usually a traumatic experience for individuals, the church, and society.

Every prophet in the history of the Old and New Testaments has met with unbelief and opposition. The priests of society have regularly stoned its prophets. Then their sons and daughters of another century build monuments to honor the prophets persecuted by their forefathers. It is good to be cautious and critical; it is helpful to doubt and carefully evaluate that which is new. We need, however, to be open and objective enough to allow the spirit to lead us to larger truth. Jesus told his apostles that he would send the Spirit of Truth through which he would lead them to greater truths in the future. We must be sensitive to this Spirit of Truth. We need to learn to recognize truth in its many forms and varying appearances.

The Urantia Book is such a new appearance of truth. You will find that *The Urantia Book* will stand the test of critical examination. It is rooted solidly in the traditional spiritual truths of the Christian faith that have endured for centuries. Reading and studying *The Urantia Book* will give you a deeper and larger vision of this saving faith and help you become a part of a spiritual renaissance which is dawning on our world.

The Meredith J. Sprunger Archive

PRINCIPLES OF MINISTRY

6/1/82

Anyone who has experienced a dynamic personal relationship with God and has dedicated himself to the demands of this relationship must do something about it. Genuine religion always motivates action and changes lives. Jesus emphasizes that service is the true indicator of our sonship with the Universal Father. Religionists have often side-stepped the demanding discipline of spiritual ministry by engaging in religious substitutes such as theologizing, cult cultivation, organizational administration, and mystical contemplation. Cults and sectarian groups tend to be centripetal; inward; their focus and primary relationships are with insiders. A more mature religion or religionist is open and outgoing and seeks to bring ministry to all mankind.

Service to our fellowman can take many forms, and each of us must discover which function or channel we find creative. We can serve God in every vocation of society and through all of the arts and sciences. Jesus directs us to seek the Father's guidance and direction for our lives. All of us are not called to the same ministry. Courageously keep step with the music you hear; and so will the Fathers symphony of service benefit all people.

There are three basic forms of service in which each of us is challenged to participate. First, we should strive to live the inspiring truths given to us. This is elemental. Second, we ought to engage in various types of material service. We should aid the needy, work for social, economic, and legal justice, and foster the actualization of human well-being. Finally, and most importantly, we are called to participate in a spiritual ministry to the minds and souls of our fellows. This sharing and proclamation of the good news has, historically, effected the greatest transformation of human life of all of the forms of service. And today there is a great need for the restructuring of the spiritual foundations of society along with a growing hunger in the world for a larger understanding of the universe and God.

New Potentials of Ministry

The latest and greatest truth the Master has committed into our hands is the fifth epochal revelation. This momentous event has opened vast new potentials of ministry. Each of us should ask ourselves, how are we actualizing these dynamic possibilities? What fruits of the spirit show that we are doing something creative with this enlarged vision of truth in our lives and in our service? Where have we sown this new seed of truth? Are we cultivating soil and planting seed with care; or are we merely letting nature take its course and busying ourselves with other things while the winds of time broadcast the seed at random?

Although there have been many evolutionary periods of spiritual revival spearheaded by great religious leaders, the most significant eras of spiritual awakening on our world have been initiated by the advent of epochal revelation. We have many charismatic religious leaders today who recognize the need for the spiritual renewal of our society, and who are exerting their best efforts to bring about such a spiritual transformation of our culture. The spiritual rejuvenation of our planet, however, requires something more than religious genius and human heroics.

The depth of our world dilemma and the decadence of our spiritual resources is seen in the relative impotence of the religious leaders and the religious institutions of our day. Because of this depletion of our evolutionary spiritual reserves, we have been given the fifth epochal revelation. It has come in the fullness of time; for only an enlarged and integrated vision of Reality along with the faith-power of new revelation can bring about a spiritual renaissance on our world. The crisis of our age challenges every serious student of *The Urantia Book* to dedicate himself or herself to some form of active and systematic outreach ministry.

Fields of Ministry

The most significant fields for spiritual ministry which will have a lasting effect on our culture and civilization are the religious institutions of our society. No spiritual influence has ever made an enduring contribution to our world unless it has become institutionalized. Although religious organizations increase the potential for evil and doctrinal misdirection, no spiritual dynamic has been able to make its way as a viable aspect of history without utilizing institutional channels. This means that the teachings of *The Urantia Book* must either leaven the religious traditions of the world or new religious institutions will have to be created to serve this purpose.

In view of these experiential realities, it becomes clear that one of the most important avenues of service in which students of *The Urantia Book* can function is within the religious institutions of society. Spiritual leavening always comes from within. This is, obviously, a slow and difficult process; but there is no other way to spiritual growth. Those who are too "turned-off," disenchanted, or frustrated to serve actively in the religious institutions of society largely eliminate themselves from one of the most important evolutionary instrumentalities in bringing about a spiritual renaissance on our world.

This does not mean that one must be a member of a religious institution to contribute to spiritual progress. Individuals and noninstitutional religious groups can make great contributions to religious growth. These "freelance" contributions, however, must eventually be incorporated in religious institutions if they are to survive. If the fifth epochal revelation is to make its way into our culture it must first influence the lives of individuals; but in order for these teachings to survive and become a social force in civilization, these individuals must either leaven the traditional religions of our world or create new entities which become the channels through which these truths enlighten mankind.

Hopefully, the Urantia movement will move in both of these directions. Although Urantia Brotherhood is a new religious organization, it seeks to serve a unique role as a human institution. It does not aspire to initiate a new religion or become a religious body which furnishes pastoral, sacerdotal, or worship services as do churches and synagogues. The Brotherhood functions primarily as an educational-social institution with a religious purpose. As such, it may be able to contribute an important ecumenical ministry to all of the religions of the world. The Brotherhood's objective is the spiritual transformation of mankind through the leavening influence of the fifth epochal revelation (and God's continuing, unified spirit ministry) in all of the institutions of our world.

In time there will be new religious groups arising that recognize *The Urantia Book* as the center of their faith and practice which will furnish all of the pastoral, social, educational, and sacerdotal services of contemporary churches and synagogues. In the overall picture, however, these new groups will most likely serve a significant but minor role in the evolution of religion on our planet. The major events of future religious development, probably, will take place with-in the religious traditions which have served the spiritual needs of humanity for centuries. It is, therefore, vitally important that ever increasing numbers of Urantia Book students assume active leadership roles in the religious institutions of the world. If we wisely prepare the ground, eventually thousands of study groups will spring up within these historic communions.

Principles of Ministry

Whatever form of outreach ministry you should choose to engage in, the quality and effectiveness of that service depends, largely, on how it is done. Divine revelation and human experience have taught us the importance of the following seven principles of ministry.

Use Wisdom

Use wisdom and balance in all of your service. Avoid extremes, exhibitionism, oversell, and the spectacular. Learn to distinguish between artistic good taste and the theatrical. Remember that personal contact is more effective than impersonal mass communication. Understand the wisdom and effectiveness of small groups. These groups form coalitions and networks more open and dynamic than hierarchical bureaucracies and self-serving cults. Such a network is many times greater than the sum of its parts. It has multiple leadership, pluralistic policies, and its center is everywhere. Start where people are, not where you are. Communicate in their frames of reference and anticipate their natural reactions. Combine the most expert knowledge with the highest values in all of your ministry. Master your mind through the power of the spirit. Be strong in the spirit; know that in liaison with God nothing can defeat the spiritual purposes of your life. Be fearless but act with discretion.

Let Love Create

Let love create the atmosphere of all of your interpersonal relationships. Remember that you cannot communicate effectively with others unless you positively and unconditionally accept them with all of their imperfections. Strive to prevent your own biases and limitations from interfering or distorting your service to them. Support, stimulate, and help people; do not seek to coerce them. See all of your fellows as persons of worth and strive to build their self-confidence and self-respect. Be natural and genuine and enjoy their company. Serve out of love, a thankful heart, and the joy of the act itself. Ministry is an intrinsic activity of the creative mind and the loving soul. Extrinsic motivation in service compromises its spiritual value. Serving God even for good extrinsic purposes such as building your study group, society, or church, or even to bring about a spiritual renaissance limits its spiritual value and personal satisfaction. Minister out of the intrinsic motivation of love, thankfulness, and joy; and the extrinsic repercussions or results will largely take care of themselves. Serve in the openness of creative love; but do not try to manipulate people.

Cultivate Openness

Temper your personal convictions with philosophical objectivity. Always be honest and open. Cultivate freedom of opinion and respect the right of others to disagree with your most deeply held convictions. Honor each person's God-given right to self-determination. Try to establish common ground but do not contend with people. Let your enthusiasm for truth animate your discussions but never knowingly put people down or offend.

Co-operate with Evolution

Recognize that evolution is the underlying principle of life. Do not expect immediate results. All growth is unconscious and has mustard seed beginnings. The roots of a new tree of life take decades to penetrate the rocks of tradition on which it is planted. Be patient but do not become the victim of a fearful "do-nothing" psychology and bury your talents and treasure in the bogs of stagnation or the quagmires of cult obscurities. Be concerned about ministering effectively but relatively unconcerned about results. Realize that your ministry must be planned and conducted in the context of the law of readiness. Always minister at the point of evolutionary readiness but do not confuse this basic preparation for the surface conditions of psychological and social readiness. All who have prophetic vision know that evolution, the plow of history, eventually breaks the crust of individual resistance and moves the clods of social stagnation. Be loyal and persistent in your service without needing to see results or to be honored by success. It is our privilege and responsibility to minister; the results are in the hands of God the Supreme. In all things cultivate in yourself the mind and attitude of the Supreme. The vicissitudes of time do not change the goals of eternity.

Live with the Commonplace

Be actively involved in routine, commonplace experiences. Grow, bloom, and bear fruit in the soil where you are planted. If possible, keep your old social and religious ties strong and healthy. Share at the level of spiritual acceptance. When you are a tadpole do not live under the illusion that you are a trout or an eagle. Only dedicated and creative tadpoling will bring you inner satisfaction and a sense of fulfillment. These mundane activities and identifications will bring a sense of proportion, genuineness, and integrity to your ministry. Forget the failures of the past and do not allow yourself to be preoccupied anticipating the future. Live in the present in constant fellowship with the Father and absorbed in the existential moment of experience.

Develop a Sense of Humor

Cultivate an active sense of humor. Humor helps us maintain a proper sense of perspective. You can carry man-sized or woman-sized loads when you get the world off your shoulders. Do not take yourself too seriously even though you are participating in important work. Be unconcerned about prestige and status. Strive to avoid self-contemplation and cultivate self-forgetfulness. Finite personalities can become tragic figures when they lose their sense of perspective and fail to appreciate-the comedy of life. We need to laugh at ourselves and the frustrating, ridiculous, and absurd situations we encounter. A light-hearted spirit can be a great asset in carrying the sometimes heavy burdens of ministry.

Serve with Joy

Above all, live with joy in your heart and find joy in your ministry. You belong to the Father's kingdom which has an eternal future of unimaginable adventure and reward. Nothing can long prevent the fulfillment of your most ardent spiritual hopes and fondest dreams. All who experience this faith in an eternal destiny live with irrepressible joy even in the midst of material hardship, social conflict, and seeming personal defeat. As you free yourself from the slavery of the lure of things, the adoration or criticism of people, and the importance or preoccupation with self, you will experience the liberating joys of service. You will also discover that in doing so you are free from the egocentric social pressure to be successful or to maintain a reputation. When your will is in harmony with the will of God, the life of service also brings a deep inner peace. This meaningfulness and joy of worship and service transcends the rewards of all other human activities.

Living Faith Acts

We are living in one of the major transitional periods of human history. Our society desperately needs an enlarged spiritual vision which will give guidance and stability to the new age which is struggling to be born. *The Urantia Book* has been given to us providing the spiritual fulcrum to lift our world into a new era of human achievement. Our Sovereign Master speaks to us as to Peter,, "If you love me, feed my sheep."

The Meredith J. Sprunger Archive

Clergy Evaluate The Urantia Book - I

1/1/86

For many years I have felt a sense of responsibility for informing the growing edge of Christianity about *The Urantia Book*. Since I regard the United Church of Christ as the most progressive denomination among the Christen Churches, I selected this group in my outreach plans.

During the last couple of years I have written around 8000 personal letters to ministers in the United Church of Christ along with some United Methodist pastors. We enclosed a pamphlet telling about the book and a card which they could return to receive a loan copy of the book for three months. Three hundred and twenty-nine ministers, or around four percent, asked for loan books. A little over twenty-four percent of those requesting loan books now have their own personal copies.

You may be interested in the type of responses we received. It is interesting to note that those who were most denunciatory kept the book only a short time and just skimmed the material. Here are some of the comments, beginning with the negative and ending with the positive:

"The Urantia Book is an unfortunate charade. In disseminating it, you not only do no service, you do harm to the reputation of serious gnostic study, as exemplified in the work of Elain Pagels...I will not only not recommend your book, but will publicly deplore it. With a prayer against thinly veiled deception ...."

"While the book is reviewed as modern cosmology like process philosophy, it uses neo-Kabbalistic jargon wholly inappropriate to the 20-21 centuries. It uses magical and gnostic language, viz the 'first Adam and Eve' in literal language. Its perception of the power of N.T. kergyma is still couched in the language of Neoplatonism. It is a bad book and brings no credit to the dynamic kergyma of the Gospels."

"Thanks anyway but this does not speak to me. When you said a synthesis of Whitehead and others, I expected something quite different. Your book seems to perpetuate a new dogma out of completely fanciful materials. Do we really need more mystical fictions, themselves in need of laborious and specialized interpretations?? I couldn't get excited about *The Habbit*--nor this."

"Having examined in considerable detail *The Urantia Book*, I am now returning it to your under separate cover. The process of evaluating the book was challenging and interesting and there is much therein to commend this mysterious work.
However, I have come to the tentative conclusion that this is a product of human reasoning and imagination, not divine, extraterrestrial revelation. Given that the book came into being in the mid-1930's I see a number of concepts that reflect the paradigms of that period, not necessarily what we know today, especially In cems of scientific concepts...
Finally, the organization of the universe follows hierarchical patterns reminiscent of the centralized 1930's. Using Occam's Razor, this explanation seems to me to be overly-complex and bureaucratic. Based on these criteria, I find it difficult to accept the authenticity of *The Urantia Book*. Thank you so much for sharing it with me."

"I have read portions of the book and find that it very neatly weaves the gospels into its narrative, taking care to add other knowledge that we now have of Jesus' time and life. However, it presumes to speculate a bit too much about events such that I might find it Interesting. However, as an authoritative work I find little to commend it. Sorry."

"I am returning your book and the cost of mailing it. I am sorry I bothered you with sending it. It really is not 'my thing.' I am sure it is very meaningful to many people but I am just not interested in it. Thank you."

"I am herewith returning the loan copy of *The Urantia Book*. Somehow I was not able to delve into its mysteries and moods, though I tried on several occasions."

"Many thanks for the loan of *The Urantia Book*. I found the book to be interesting and helpful in some areas but I am not at that point in my own spiritual journey. God's grace and blessing on you and your work."

"I read and sampled various portions of the book. The experience was enlightening, comforting, confusing, shocking, disconcerting, intriguing, reassuring and hopeful. Do most people react this way on first reading from this complex book? ...
I am definitely interested In learning more about this disturbing-yet-fascinating book."

"Its a fascinating book. I've read large parts of it and the other materials you sent me but I must admit I don't know what to make of it. I am a liberal thinker, well read in biblical criticism, ancient mythology, Jungian Psychology, World religions, the history and theology of the Christian faith and the history of art, ritual and culture. I have an open mind. But I find it very difficult to relate the Urantia material to my world view of reality and my faith perspective. It seems to be a literal projection of the inner 'spiritual' realm of the Psyche on to the outer historical world. This is very dangerous ... If you have other material which might help me understand the origin and intent of the book (right now I am very suspicious of its esoteric nature and doubtful of its authorship and 'revelation') I would still be interested (even purchasing) in further reading."

"Thanks for sharing this copy of *The Urantia Book*. I find it beyond my comprehension and am unable to generate further interest in it"

"Thank you for the loan of *The Urantia Book*. I have perused the book and find that, from where I now am on my spiritual journey, the book does not speak to me in a powerful way.
I do however have some observations to share with you. I share them fully aware that I have delved into *The Urantia Book* only superficially.
The origins of the book are indeed important and not, as your pamphlet indicates, of little or no consequence to the content. In fact, content is most frequently determined by origin ... Finally, if the complex hierarchical view of the universe is set aside and the unusual terminology dispensed with, I fail to find much, if anything, new in this revelation.
Now again, let me confess that these are my observations resulting, not from an in-depth study, but from a casual gleaning. However, I appreciate the loan of the book and therefore wanted to give you my honest reaction. At another time in another situation *The Urantia Book*.may be most meaningful to me. At least now I am aware of its existence.
The Unitarian Universalist Ass'n. has a Psi Symposium for the study of psychic phenomena and the like. Since there are UCC people studying *The Urantia Book*, and since the president of the Spiritual Frontiers Fellowship (a few years ago anyway) was a UCC clergy person, I'm wandering why the UCC has no officially recognized organization for the study of things on the fringe of spiritual awareness. If you have any thoughts on this, pass them along."

"Thank you for sharing *The Urantia Book* with me. In the midst of a busy pastorate I found my time strained to deal with it adequately. Much of the content deals with a cosmic philosophical (imaginative) world through which I am neither compelled nor intrigued to fly. When I explored areas of active questioning—i.e. life and teachings of Jesus—I found the blanks filled with the same kinds of inspiration-imagination that I have seen In historical fiction and dramatizations."

"Thank you very much, for sending me *The Urantia Book*...I was glad to got a look at it, as it is an extraordinary book indeed, though I had never heard of it before your brochure came in the mail. Whoever wrote it had an incredible imagination and also a complex and beautifully structured mind, since as your brochures indicate, even a brief reading of parts of it give the impression of a highly unusual consistency amidst all the exuberant imagination.
It reminds me a little of Emanuel Swedenborg, yet without Swedenborg's concern for virtue and the ethical life. It strikes me that the author could have made a tremendous career in modern science fiction.
I don't say that disparagingly. We need people and literature which widen our horizons spiritually, and let us know that there are more things in heaven and on earth than dreamt of in our philosophy.
Where I find the book unsatisfying is first, the lack of relationship to the concrete realities of our world, the obstacles and difficulties which we actually face in living. It is like 'Dungeons and Dragons,' seductively capable of drawing someone off into the higher spheres and losing all touch with the earth.
Second, the fact that the author or authors chose to conceal themselves is very unsatisfying. That again bespeaks the minimizing of history and of historical connections which the book presupposes. It's a kind of mammoth 'Gnostic' document for our time, attractive, I'm sure, to those who need to feel that they have some kind of superior esoteric knowledge not available to most poor mortals.
Finally, for all its claim to represent entirely new, indeed infinite levels of knowledge, there are already aspects of its language which sound quaint, passe, as in the references to the 'Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man.' At least in the U.C.C., such one-sided sexist language is no longer acceptable."

"I have owned a copy for years. Have read much of it. Some of it is far out and bizarre, some of it is absolutely excellent!"

"Thank you for letting me experience *The Urantia Book*. I feel its not for me, but I wish you well and appreciate your means of disseminating the information."

"I thank you for bringing to my attention *The Urantia Book*. I haven't had time to read much but the material, nonetheless, appears enlightening."

The Urantia Book is brand new to me. I have never had the pleasure of seeing or scanning a copy. In fact, it is a bit difficult to know where to lay one's hands on a copy. I am impressed that a person with your background has found *The Urantia Book* such a lively compendium of philosophical, religious and psychological materials.
I will keep my eyes and ears open for a copy and will remain grateful to you for commending this fine resource."

"I am finding the book interesting and though-provoking, and thank you for making it available to me."

"I am absolutely intrigued with *The Urantia Book*. My only regret is that I have less time to read and think than I would like."

" Didn't get finished with the book. Super piece of work."

"Thank you for loaning me a copy of *The Urantia Book*. It was fascinating reading!"

"Thank you. I find the book fascinatingly "

"Its a great book. Thank you for sharing it with me."

"This book was very enjoyable. Thanks."

"The Book has made a tremendous impact on the thought life of a number of faculty at the
University when I recently introduced it to them. I'm completing my doctoral studies
this year ...
Since the Book is making the 'rounds' at present could you possibly send another copy as well, since my wife and I are making a 4th reading of it."

"Even as a neophyte student of *The Urantia Book* it is clear to me that this book can at the very least be classified as first class wisdom literature.
One major theme appears to be that of understanding all change as some form of evolutionary process. While this is a thesis I have long held *The Urantia Book* surely carries it out in a grand and convincing scale. Thanks for introducing us."

"Thank you for the opportunity to peruse *The Urantia Book*. Impressive in its breadth and depth." "I found *The Urantia Book* fascinating. It clears up in good measure some long-standing questions at the back of my mind. Thanks for introducing me to *The Urantia Book*!"

"I appreciate the opportunity you afforded me to gain some familiarity with the book. The reading was fascinatingly!"

"I am finding it fascinating and have a lot more reading to do in it. As I received the book during Lent, I started with 'The Final Discourse' and read through to the and of the book. Since then I have gone back to the beginning of the section on the life of Jesus...
I think my daughter and son-in-law would find *The Urantia Book* interesting. Would it be possible for you to send them an offer of the loan of a copy?"

"I was pleased to receive your letter regarding *The Urantia Book*. Just a few weeks ago, I picked up a copy of the book in a bookstore. It was the first time I had seen it and I browsed through it briefly and my curiosity was piqued. For some reason, there was no price on it, so I asked the clerk and she looked it up. When I found out, I was forced to admit that I couldn't afford to indulge my curiosity to that extent. Hence, I am happy to accept your offer of a loan copy ...
The big problem for clergy in dealing with any of these, in my view anyway, is that one soon finds oneself at odds with generally accepted Christian Theology. My view is that the generally accepted view is really Pauline theology and is not born out in the life and teachings of Jesus. It seems to me that Paul mixed in a lot of other contemporary religious beliefs with his Christology and thereby stultified any real Christian growth ever since. Perhaps it is time to propound a new Christian Theology, or perhaps a Christine Theology, to distinguish it from the Pauline version."

"I already have a copy of *The Urantia Book*. But I am so excited to find a group of kindred souls within the church who want to take it seriously. Please send me more information about becoming a part of your Fellowship, and about any interpretive literature you may have. Praise God and thanks."

"Thank you for your letter regarding *The Urantia Book*; it helped give additional credibility to my *frequent* use of the guidance and revelation the book has provided me since I acquired it over three years ago.
I showed it to another retired U.C.C. minister a couple of years ago and his response was something like 'although parts of it seem far-fetched, the well written book seems to offer some truthful insight.' Thank you for the work you are doing."

"Last Sunday a clergy friend told me of *The Urantia Book*. He seems to convince me that it is an amazing source of spiritual wealth for modern man ..
I would much appreciate it if you could donate a copy of your book for our Center."

"I have appreciated reading in *The Urantia Book*. Although I did not read extensively because I've been involved in a million plus building program, I have read enough to think that I would like to purchase the book. I will write the Urantia Foundation. Many thanks for sharing this with me."

"I am still reading the book—a little at a time. I enjoy it, but find it challenging enough to take slowly.
Are there others in my area with an interest in *The Urantia Book*? Are there any U.C.C. folk among them? Thank you for introducing me to the book.!'

"I have appreciated the loan of *The Urantia Book* ... I am most interested in its message.
Every time I have started to package the book for return, I have put it off until another day. I realize that this is not in keeping with the spirit of our agreement. So, I have decided that I want to keep the book for more leisurely study. From some Christmas money I am enclosing a check ...
Thank you for your patience with me and I look forward to further study. God bless you in your work and ministry."

"I am most enthusiastic about the literature and, as one of my friends shares that enthusiasm, I hope that you might send me another copy which the enclosed check would also cover ... I appreciate your patience and the opportunity given me to examine *The Urantia Book*."

"The book arrived at a particularly frantic time in my life, and I haven't had the opportunity to more than scan it. As you well know, scanning doesn't do the book justice, and I want to keep the copy until I have the time to delve into it more thoroughly ...
The little reading I was able to do served as a reminder of how pragmatic and earth-bound my intellectual pursuits have become, and how little time I seem to have for things of the spirit. Perhaps *The Urantia Book* will become the vehicle for changing that."

"Thank you for sending me a loan copy of *The Urantia Book*. I am finding it a fascinating study and hope to be able to purchase the book in the future ...
There are many points at which the book corresponds with my own experience and convictions; others at which I disagree."

"I have enjoyed *The Urantia Book* and look forward to many pleasurable and instructive hours with it. Thank you for making this service available."

"Thank you so much for the quick delivery of *The Urantia Book*. I've been so impressed by its contents that I've decided to buy the copy you sent me."

"Thank you for introducing me to *The Urantia Book*. I noticed it in a bookstore years ago, but passed it by ... I already feel the need to find a forum for some discussion about this book. Even within the political restrictions of the professional ministry, there are some persons I can speak to regarding this work ... reading it has invigorated my preaching and restored much of my faith in Jesus as the Son of God rather then just a wise speaker and just man. While I am at liberty to refer to *The Urantia Book* with my secretary and friends here (at church), I still feel stifled as the urge moves me o *use* the book as a source document!" _

These excerpts illustrate the varied reactions to *The Urantia Book* among progressive ministers in our society. It will be decades before most of them feel comfortable in reading *The Urantia Book*.

Now that I have completed introducing the existence of *The Urantia Book* to the ministers of one of the most progressive denominations of Christianity, I am content to let the Spirit of Truth and the evolutionary process determine the acceptance and influence of the Fifth Epochal Revelation in our Christian Churches and culture.

As most of you know, the American Academy of Religion hold a Consultation evaluating *The Urantia Book* for religious studies at their national meeting at Anaheim, November 23-26. It is clear from this first brief scholarly evaluation, as it always has been to many of us, that *Urantia Book* fundamentalism is just as untenable as Biblical fundamentalism. In the same way that higher criticism established sound foundations for Biblical studies, so must critical scholarship prepare the way for creative study of *The Urantia Book*. Just as the theologians of mainline Christianity have transcended the doctrine of the literal inspiration of scripture, so must contemporary scholarship deliver us from any illusions of literal infallibility regarding *The Urantia Book*. We will then be free from defensive, fundamentalistic attitudes and open to evaluate its spiritual insights, cosmology, theology, and its view of human origins, development, and destiny.

Clergy Evaluate The Urantia Book - II

Fall 1991

Many of us as we read the Gospels marvel that the Pharisees and Sadducees did not perceive the high spiritual quality and wisdom of the teachings of Jesus. We tend to forget the great influence of tradition and the power of authority in institutional religion. Prophetic messages are usually opposed by institutional power structures for decades before the truth of their insights is generally recognized. This is the nature of religious growth. All individual and social development has a basic evolutionary component.

Some thirty-five years ago while serving as vice-president of what was then the Indiana-Michigan Conference of the United Church of Christ, Judge Louis Hammerschmidt, the lay member of our conference board, gave me a copy of *The Urantia Book.* My life has not been the same since. After several years of critical study and thought, I became convinced that it had an authentic revelatory message. It seemed that my entire existence and experience had been prepared for its transcendent spiritual vision.

I knew that my life must be dedicated to building an interface between this amazing book, which claims to the the Fifth Epochal Revelation in the history of our planet, and mainline Christianity. I spent years thinking about how this could be done wisely and effectively. After decades of bootlegging *Urantia Book* concepts in my preaching and teaching, it became clear to me that no amount of evolutionary eloquence or insight is an adequate substitute for the revelation itself. Through experience I became convinced that only the Fifth Epochal Revelation has the integrated spiritual dynamics to bring a spiritual renaissance in our society. Therefore, in 1979 we organized and incorporated the Christian Fellowship of Students of *The Urantia Book* to serve as an aegis for such a ministry.

Starting in 1983, we sent letters along with a pamphlet and an offer of a loan book to all of the United Church of Christ ministers in the United States and the United Methodist ministers in the Northern Indiana Conference. From the 8,000 personal letters sent,there were 330 ministers who asked for loan books. This 4% request for loan books was greater than the 1% which we hypothesized would ask for books. Around 25% of those who examined the book have purchased their own personal copy. As anticipated, we received both positive and negative comments on the book. The following is a representative sample of each.

“Thank you for introducing me to *The Urantia Book.* I noticed it in a bookstore years ago, but passed it by....I already feel the need to find a forum for some discussion from this book. Even within the political restrictions of the professional ministry, there are some persons I can speak to regarding this work.... Reading it has invigorated my preaching and restored much of my faith in Jesus as the Son of God rather than just a wise speaker and just man. While I am at liberty to refer to *The Urantia Book* with my secretary and friends here (at church), I still feel stifled as the urge moves me to *use* the book as a source document!”

“Having examined in considerable detail *The Urantia Book,* I am now returning it to you under separate cover. The process of evaluating the book was challenging and interesting and there is much therein to commend this mysterious work. However, I have come to the tentative conclusion that this is a product of human reasoning and imagination, not divine, extraterrestrial revelation. Given that the book came into being in the mid-1930’s I see a number of concepts that reflect the paradigms of that period, not necessarily what we know today, especially in terms of scientific concepts....Finally, the organization of the universe follows hierarchical patterns reminiscent of the centralized 1930’s. Using Occam’s Razor, this explanation seems to me to be overly-complex and bureaucratic. Based on these criteria, I find it difficult to accept the authenticity of *The Urantia Book.* Thank you so much for sharing it with me.”

“Even as a neophyte student of *The Urantia Book* it is clear to me that this book can at the very least be classified as first class wisdom literature. One major theme appears to be that of understanding all change as some form of evolutionary process. While this is a thesis I have long held *The Urantia Book* carries it out in a grand and convincing scale. Thanks for introducing us.”

“Its a fascinating book. I’ve read large parts of it and the other materials you sent me but I must admit I don’t know what to make of it. I am a liberal thinker, well read in biblical criticism, ancient mythology, Jungian psychology, world religions, the history and theology of the Christian faith, and the history of art, ritual and culture. I have an open mind. But I find it very difficult to relate the Urantia material to my world view of reality and my faith perspective. It seems to be a literal projection of the inner ‘spiritual’ realm of the Psyche on the outer historical world. This is very dangerous....If you have other material which might help me understand the origin and intent of the book (right now I am very suspicious of its esoteric nature and doubtful of its authorship and ‘revelation’) I would still be interested (even purchasing) in further reading.”

“The book has made a tremendous impact on the thought life of a number of faculty at the University of when I recently introduced it to them. I’m completing my doctoral studies this year....Since the book is making the ‘rounds’ at present could you possibly send another copy as well, since my wife and I are making a 4th reading of it.”

“I already have a copy of *The Urantia Book.* But I am so excited to find a group of kindred souls within the church who want to take it seriously. Please send me more information about becoming a part of your Fellowship, and about any interpretive literature you may have. Praise God and thanks.”

“Thank you for your letter regarding *The Urantia Book;* it helped give additional credibility to my *frequent* use of the guidance and revelation the book has provided me since I acquired it over three years ago. I showed it to another retired U.C.C. minister a couple of years ago and his response was something like ‘although parts of it seem far-fetched, the well written book seems to offer some truthful insights.’ Thank you for the work you are doing.”

“Thank you very much for sending me *The Urantia Book* ...I was glad to get a look at it, as it is an extraordinary book indeed, though I had never heard of it before your brochure came in the mail. Whoever wrote it had an incredible imagination and also a complex and beautifully structured mind, since as your brochures indicate, even a brief reading of parts of it give the impression of a highly unusual consistency amidst all the exuberant imagination.

“It reminds me a little of Emmanuel Swedenborg, yet without Swedenborg’s concern for virtue and the ethical life. It strikes me that the author could have made a tremendous career in modern science fiction. I don’t say that disparagingly. We need people and literature which widen our horizons spiritually, and let us know that there are more things in heaven and on earth than dreamt of in our philosophy.

“Where I find the book unsatisfying is first, the lack of relationship to the concrete realities of our world, the obstacles and difficulties which we actually face in living. It is like ‘Dungeons and Dragons,’ seductively capable of drawing someone off into the higher spheres and losing all touch with earth. Second, the fact that the author or authors chose to conceal themselves in very unsatisfying. That again bespeaks the minimizing of history and of historical connections which the book presupposes. It’s a kind of mammoth ‘Gnostic’ document for our time, attractive I’m sure, to those who need to feel that they have some kind of superior esoteric knowledge not available to most poor mortals. Finally, for all its claim to represent entirely new, indeed infinite levels of knowledge, there are already aspects of its language which sound quaint, passe, as in the references to the ‘Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man.’ At least in the U.C.C., such one-sided sexist language is no longer acceptable.”

“I am finding the book interesting and though-provoking, and thank you for making it available to me.” “I am absolutely intrigued with *The Urantia Book.* My only regret is that I have less time to read and think than I would like.” “Didn’t get finished with the book. Super piece of work.” “Thank you for loaning me a copy of *The Urantia Book.* It was fascinating reading!” “Its a great book. Thank you for sharing it with me.” “This book was very enjoyable. Thanks.”

We received many more comments but all pretty much reflecting these same positive and negative observations. Most of these ministers had the book for only three months and obviously did not have the time for an in depth, critical evaluation. The Christian Fellowship of Students of *The Urantia Book* is interested in stimulating knowledgeable people in all fields of learning, especially those with backgrounds in theology, philosophy, and science to undertake critical evaluations of the book. This is the way revelation is validated or invalidated in our society and culture. We believe *The Urantia Book* will hold up under such examination. In any case this is the acid test of truth which determines whether spiritual teachings live and nourish humankind or are passing phenomena on the human scene.

I should like to close this brief paper by quoting from a letter we received from a Professor of Philosophy who teaches in one of the well known universities of the country. He first heard of *The Urantia Book* in the early 70’s and was unimpressed. Some time ago a former student suggested that he read the book. Since he respected the student’s judgment, he got a copy of *The Urantia Book* and started reading it. Although the professor has not finished reading the book and therefore does not want his name attached to any recommendation, he is amazed at its substantive content.

He comments, “It is, in my judgment, an amazingly sophisticated, spiritually moving, and metaphysically insightful document, this Urantia *Book!* I have been reading philosophical and theological tracts (my major work has been in Heidegger and German philosophy) for many years, and I have never come across a work that is both so philosophically satisfying in its depiction of the Divine, as well as so uplifting, reassuring, and spiritually profound. Clearly, the appearance of this book is an important event in world history. Its description of and justification of the existence of a truly personal, although infinite, Divinity is simply beautiful. I’m not sure what else I need to say to you, except that I am interested in becoming somehow involved in a network of people who have encountered this text and who have been moved by it in a way similar to the way in which it is effecting me....

“What *is* it about this book that makes it, for me and for so many other people, such a compelling, persuasive, and moving work? I’ve read a great many spiritual tracts from a great many religious traditions, but none of them has had the penetrating power of this book. I really am at a loss of what to make of it, except to conclude that it really is what it purports to be. Of course, the very idea that—in effect—angelic entities communicated this work through a human being is absurd to the contemporary secular mind, but such a mind is very limited. We humans are barely evolved beyond the level of animals, so it is not surprising that we have difficulty imagining and taking seriously levels of reality that transcend our own.”

This professor voices the reaction which most of us “religious professionals” have when we first look at *The Urantia Book* —”gnostic,” “esoteric,” “absurd.” Then those of us who take the time to actually read the book find something quite different than we anticipated. It has substance, balance, spiritual insight, and an amazingly coherent universe picture of Reality. Because of its great potential to contribute to the spiritual enhancement and well being of humanity, we think it is important for ministers, theologians, philosophers, and others to engage in a scholarly study, criticism, and evaluation of the book.

(Published in *The Spiritual Fellowship Journal,* Fall, 1991)

The Meredith J. Sprunger Archive

Preparing for Scholarly Evaluation of *The Urantia Book*

7/20/84

With *The Urantia Book* distribution now well over the hundred thousand mark, it already enjoys a readership achieved by only a relatively small percentage of the books published. As more and more people in mainline Christianity become readers of the book it hastens the day when *The Urantia Book* will be subjected to critical scholarly analysis and criticism. My guess is that many students of *The Urantia Book* are ill prepared for such an evaluation.

Rheaume Doctoral Thesis

Last month I received a 715 page copy of Dr. Jacques Rheaume's doctoral thesis written for degree requirements at the University of Ottawa entitled "An Analysis of a revealed Text: *The Urantia Book.*" The manuscript is written in French: "Analyse d'un Texte Revele: *The Urantia Book* ." Dr. Rheaume's critical analysis is but the first of a long line of empirical studies evaluating *The Urantia Book.*

This long dissertation approaches *The Urantia Book* from the linguistic analysis point of view, a discipline which has become quite popular among the social sciences in recent years. The thesis is composed largely of descriptive material relating obvious details of the book familiar to anyone acquainted with the contents of*The Urantia Book.* The most valuable sections of the analysis are those which examine the parables and miracles contrasting them with biblical data and which identify various categories of knowledge found in the book such as biblical, scientific, philosophical, theological, historical, etc. Dr. Rheaume finds twenty-two such categories.

Although the manuscript professes to be an objective, scientific study, even the descriptive sections are filled with subjective, degrading remarks. A few quotes illustrate Rheaume's obvious bias: "The author feels the need to say all he knows about science." (p. 89) "A Biblical quote justifies everything." (p. 93) "It is the Urantia game to make us believe in a lot of science by the simple listing of a multitude of proper names." (p. 152) "The author then begins to classify as he does so often when he feels incapable of arguing or of using his sources." (p. 158) "The author doesn't want any miracles but since there are some in the gospels, he has to use his cosmology in order to explain them." (p. 205) "The author wants to impress by the details and his scholarship." (p. 293) "He limits himself to a few names and a few cliches." (p. 293)

Rheaume's Evaluation

Even in the evaluative sections of the thesis Rheaume frequently lacks philosophical objectivity and intellectual discrimination as the following statements reveal: "If (the origin) is revealed *The Urantia Book* disappears into the multitude of ordinary books whose impact is no long notable." (p. 587) "We must conclude that in the long run the innovative material of the narration does not convey any new truths to the reader who evaluates the text." (p. 608) Added to these undiscriminating subjective remarks, there are errors of fact in a few places in the paper which further contribute to the derogatory connotations of the study. Although there is some truth in the observation that *The Urantia Book* is likely to appeal to American Protestants, statements like the following have questionable validity: "The author lets us see by his statements that he is proud of being an American. America, therefore, becomes the place where *The Urantia Book* can best be appreciated." (p. 365)

Fortunately, Dr. Rheaume does not completely fail to achieve scientific and philosophic objectivity. In general, his knowledge of *The Urantia Book* is accurate. The following statements illustrate the best quality of his philosophic objectivity: "If a work that attempts to unify all of the sciences and all of the historical details is a revelation, we must admit that *The Urantia Book* answers this criteria." (p. 521) "*The Urantia Book* coherence is assuredly remarkable." (p. 522) "The paradox is that *The Urantia Book* becomes more acceptable if we consider it as being not revealed." (p. 612) "The Urantia cosmology could be subjectively accepted as correct and hypothetically true as long as it leads its readers to the discovery of 'religious truth'" (p. 615)

Dr. Rheaume gives his final personal reaction to the book in saying, "It seems that as a human project *The Urantia Book* would have been acceptable but as a celestial 'revelation' a very special faith is needed and the analyst does not possess it." (p. 627) In summary, Dr. Rheaume arrives at three basic conclusions regarding *The Urantia Book:*

1. Verifiable material in the book is generally accurate and reliable. A competent human being could have written such material.

2. Non-verifiable material in the book cannot be proven true or false. It could have been produced by human imagination.

3. Dr. William S. Sadler is the author of the book. Study shows that he had the competence to write the verifiable material and the imagination to write the non-verifiable material.

Limitations of Rheaum's Analysis

In order to understand Dr. Rheaume's point of view one must realize that his graduate committee at the University of Ottawa would demand an objective, scientific approach to the book. Dr. Rheaume's religious background is in conservative European Catholicism which is a long way from the growing edge of Christianity in Protestant churches in the United States.

Not only must one realize that academic research demands objectivity but that any religionist who is intellectually honest and knowledgeable cannot be a fundamentalist. It may be helpful to review the pilgrimage of mainline Christian theology regarding revelation. The early church and the church of the Middle Ages regarded the Bible as revelation because they believed the books it contained were inspired by the Spirit of God. Logically, they deducted, if it is inspired by God it is true—all of it. So we had the doctrine of literal inspiration and the infallibility of the Bible.

Modern scholars and "free-thinkers" have documented errors and discrepancies in the Bible. After years of debate and critical thinking the theologians of mainline Christianity have transcended this "inerrancy" doctrine and discovered not only that the Bible was just as meaningful without it but that this intellectual maturity opened the doors of new spiritual growth. They said the Bible "contains" the word of God, not "is" the word of God. Scholarship, spiritual insight, and wisdom must determine what is and what is not spiritual truth in its contents. It is a reliable guide to faith and practice for Christians.

Mature and intelligent students of *The Urantia Book* ought also to give up any "inerrancy" doctrine—hopefully most never held such a view! *The Urantia Book* has errors or discrepancies in biblical references, in scientific statements, and in historical references as judged by current day research. I have never been interested in these discrepancies of *The Urantia Book* because they are peripheral to the real purpose of the book— spiritual enlightenment. It is not primarily a book of history or science; it is a book of spiritual insight and guidance. I regard *The Urantia Book* revelatory for the same reason I so regard the Bible. It contains the highest quality of insight into spiritual truth and Reality of any book with which I am acquainted. It presents the most meaningful spiritual cosmology available on this planet. The best in Christian eschatology pales by comparison. It contains the most dynamic and spiritually uplifting picture of the life and teachings of Jesus in print. It integrates science, philosophy, and religion more effectively than any other philosophical, theological, or religious source. It is validated more completely by experience than any religious view with which I am acquainted. This is the important thing about *The Urantia Book.*

Just as the Bible has been subject to objective scientific study, so *The Urantia Book* must be critically analyzed if it is to become a reliable source of spiritual guidance for humanity. Errors or discrepancies of fact or logic should be pointed out and examined. Philosophical and spiritual truths should be studied and evaluated. We must understand, however, that such objective study cannot prove or disprove spiritual realities. It cannot determine what is or is not revelatory. Such critical study may be an important tool in helping the individual and society make evaluations and judgments regarding such truths. It is generally assumed by religious scholars that spiritual reality does not contradict scientific fact or the authentic aspects of human experience.

From a scientific, empirical point of view Dr. Rheaume's manuscript has numerous weaknesses. Among these weaknesses I would list the following:

1. He does not adequately document errors or discrepancies in *The Urantia Book* .

2. Although he recognizes the remarkable coherence and integration of science, philosophy, and religion in the book, he does not adequately perceive its unique standing in such integrative attempts in contemporary literature.

3. He does not have a very realistic empirical knowledge of the limits of human creativity regarding authorship nor an adequate comparison with parallel philosophical-religious literature.

Almost every critical student of religion after reading *The Urantia Book* first tests the hypothesis that Dr. Sadler or a group of scholars wrote the book. Some twenty-five years ago we had a group of around a dozen theologically trained people who thoroughly examined this hypothesis. We came to the conclusion on empirical grounds that no one human being could have written it. The background knowledge required is simply too comprehensive for one person to have mastered. The spiritual insights were at too high a level over too extensive a span of knowledge to believe that one person could have written it—there are no historical parallels that are this extensive. The coherence of this entire and complex book are amazing and surpass that of the best authors of the past and present. Against such odds, if we still assume Dr. Sadler wrote the book, we would have to recognize him as one of the greatest geniuses who ever lived—which Dr. Rheaume not only does not recognize, but he intimates that the author needed only quite ordinary scholarly abilities to produce the book.

Dr. Rheaume's analysis can be classified among the many reductionistic, "nothing but," studies of spiritual truth in the past. Classic examples are David F. Strauss, *Leben Jesus,* 1835 and Ernest Renan, *La Vie De Jesus,* 1863. They attempt to show that Jesus and his teachings were purely human and that the supernatural aspect is a myth created by the early church. Albert Schweitzer has pointed out in *The Quest for the Historical Jesus* (1910) that all attempts to interpret Jesus from a purely human point of view have failed to account for the facts of his life and the effect of his teachings and personality in history. I am confident that Rheaume's analysis and those like it in the future will meet with the same historical judgment.

4. Probably the most serious objective weakness of Dr. Rheaume's analysis is his failure to realize that authorship technically has nothing to do with the quality of a literary or religious production. Truth is not determined by the fact of authorship. Whether or not a religious work is designated as revelation is not determined by who may have written it. The authorship of much of the Bible and material in other sacred books is not known. Literature which is classified as revelation is the result of the judgment of many people over many years of experience. I am confident *The Urantia Book* will be universally recognized as revelatory in the centuries to come.

An individual can make the judgment that *The Urantia Book* is revelatory now. But this evaluation is a personal decision and an act of faith—hopefully after thorough intellectual and experiential analysis has been made. For all practical purposes, it makes little difference whether a person classifies *The Urantia Book* as revelation or not—"a rose by any other name smells the save." I usually advise people when starting to read the book not to view it as revelation. Read it critically like any other book. Truth either speaks to us personally or it does not. Much later we can decide whether or not we think the spirit of God speaks through the book.

Scholarly Evaluation in the Future

Finally, in spite of its limitations, we should thank Dr. Jacques Rheaume for his research in writing "An Analysis of a Revealed Text: *The Urantia Book.*" Critical research is an important step in the academic and social acceptance of *The Urantia Book* as a source worthy of study. Once a work achieves research respectability, it is a good sign that it will eventually attract wider attention in the traditional institutional channels of society. If this exposure produces positive responses in the recognition of spiritual truth, its place in the future of society is assured. I am confident that in time *The Urantia Book* will become the "spiritual touch-stone" of the planet.

It is important that we prepare ourselves psychologically and intellectually for scholarly evaluation of *The Urantia Book.* Rather than having the theological and literary scholars of our culture pointing out errors and discrepancies in *The Urantia Book,* we should be documenting them ourselves. We should contemplate hypotheses as to how or why these errors and discrepancies occur. We should make available to scholars the list of small changes in the text that the Foundation has made from time to time. And we should research and document the human sources used by the authors of *The Urantia Book.*

Above all, we should be clear in our minds that the value of *The Urantia Book* is not dependent on some literalistic inerrancy doctrine. Its true worth is in its expanded and enhanced insights into spiritual Reality. No analysis of biblical, scientific, historical, and logical errors or discrepancies has much relevance to the central purpose and message of the book: humanity's spiritual enhancement and salvation. Fortunately, this difficult lesson has already been experientially learned by mainline Christianity and, hopefully, it will not have to be relearned by students of the Fifth Epochal Revelation. On the finite level there are always ambiguities in all revelation which require judgment and faith. This is the special challenge and glory of the inhabitants of Urantia!

The Meredith J. Sprunger Archive

OUTREACH REFLECTIONS

Lake Forest Conference of the Urantia Brotherhood
6/19/86

We are living in an, age which is experiencing the exhaustion of the spiritual creativity of the renaissance and the reformation. Scientifically and conceptually we have left behind the horse and buggy technology and the geocentric universe view of our forefathers. It is generally recognized by the prophetic voices of our day that we are at the beginning of a new age. We are standing at the edge of tremendous potentials for human growth or human destruction.

The most creative minds of our generation are meeting with perplexity and frustration in attempting to solve the growing complexity and seriousness of our contemporary problems ranging from environmental pollution to human misery and destruction. The significance of the crisis of our age is seen in the fact that the spiritual supervisors of our planet have recognized the need for a new epochal revelation to restructure our planetary and universe views of reality and inspire us to new levels of material and spiritual growth. As a result we have the fifth epochal revelation in the form of *The Urantia Book.*

One of the most important responsibilities and opportunities of our planet today is bringing this new vision of reality to the peoples of the world. Each person who discovers *The Urantia Book* and recognizes its significance must decide what his or her role should be in this many faceted outreach mission. New revelation must always build on and, ideally, dovetail with the growing edge of evolutionary religion. When Judge Hammerschmidt gave me *The Urantia Book* some thirty years ago I had the sense that my entire life to that point had been prepared for this transcendent message. I knew that my life must be dedicated to building an interface between the fifth epochal revelation and mainline Christianity and the academic community of higher education. I spent years thinking about how this could be done wisely and effectively, experimenting with different methods, and developing literature for this ministry.

After years of bootlegging *Urantia Book* concepts it became clear to me not only that thousands of.mainline ministers and academic people were doing the same thing (any one who is spiritually relevant today is presenting a view which is harmonious with.*The Urantia Book*) but that no amount of evolutionary eloquence is an adequate substitute for the revelation itself. I became convinced through experience that only the fifth epochal revelation itself had the integrated spiritual dynamics to bring a spiritual renaissance in our society. In 1979 we, therefore, organized and incorporated the Christian Fellowship of Students of *The Urantia Book* to serve as an aegis for such a ministry.

For the better part of thirty years I had hoped that it would be possible to introduce mainline ministers and professors of philosophy and religion to the book before it received national negative publicity from religious fundamentalists. To maximize this possibility I searched for an outreach methodology which would be personal, direct and quiet in introducing these people to *The Urantia Book.* The advent of the word processor made such a strategy possible. It appeared, all things considered, that the United Church of Christ and the United Methodist Church were generally the most progressive and open religionists to new spiritual insight. During the last several years we have sent personal letters with a pamphlet and an offer of a loan book to all the United Church of Christ ministers in the United States and the United Methodist ministers in the Northern Indiana Conference. From the 8,000 personal letters sent, we have had 330 ministers who wanted loan books. This 4% request for loan books was greater than the 1% which we anticipated. Around 25% of those asking for loan books purchased their own personal copy. There were 7 people who asked for gift copies of the book and 19 who failed to return the loan book after five follow up letters asking them to do so. This must have something to say about the ethical standards of clergy persons. We are most grateful to Undershepherds of Anchorage, Alaska who furnished the gift books and replaced all books lost by the Christian Fellowship.

Those of you who received our more detailed report on the responses we received from ministers recall there were both negative and positive comments. By far the largest number were constructive, appreciative and enthusiastic. For some of these pastors *The Urantia Book* has become a major resource in their preaching and teaching. We believe we have contacted a large enough sample of ministers to bring the existence of the book to the attention of most progressive mainline Protestant ministers in the years to come.

In addition to this clergy contact, a number of years ago we sent a similar mailing to around 100 theological professors in 25 to 30 theological schools. We do not know if these projects had any relationship to the American Academy of Religion's Consultation on *The Urantia Book* in November of 1985. The Consultation was initiated by Dr. John C. Meagher, Professor of Religion at St. Michael's College, University of Toronto and a former president of the American Academy of Religion. Certainly the Consultation gave the book visibility among all teachers of theology and religion in colleges, universities and seminaries. This event occurred earlier and was more positive than I had anticipated.

The fact that our second Consultation application was turned down indicates that there is some resistance to further exposure of.The URANTIA Book in the American Academy of Religion. We asked Dr. James B. Wiggins, Executive Director of the American Academy of Religion, for further clarification. In a letter written on June 3rd he gave us the following information.

The AAR Program Committee wrestled hard with the issue of continuing the consultation on the Urantia Book. The decision was not easy nor unanimous, but it was clearly negative. Not the only reason, but a decisive one is the lack of public access to the text except through the Urantia committee. I have no doubt that other reasons were at work also, such that I cannot be encouraging you to apply for "Group" status in the future. *If*, however, you choose to do so, I can assure you that a thorough review will be made of the application.

Dr. Martin Marty, the newly elected Vice President of the AAR, did give me the names of the professors who were more prominent in the discussion of the Planning Committee in turning down the second Consultation. My own opinion is that we should actively pursue placing books in college and university libraries and stimulate a scholarly evaluation of the book which will promote an examination and study of the book in the academic community. When there is sufficient scholarly interest in the study of *The Urantia Book*, the American Academy of .Religion will seek to include it in their program.

Following our clergy project and the AAR Consultation we sent letters to the 5000 members of the American Philosophical Association enclosing a copy of my paper, "*The Urantia Book* and Religious Studies," and invited those interested to participate in a network of persons interested in a scholarly evaluation of *The Urantia Book*. We have received letters from around a dozen people, some nationally known authors, who have expressed such an interest.

Early in the year Peter Laurence called my attention to Dr. Paul Knitter's recent book *No Other Name?*. I discovered that it is a "milestone" book on the doctrine of salvation and ecumenical relationships, marking the growing edge of Christian thinking. I wrote Dr. Knitter, who is Professor of Theology at Xavier University, congratulating him on his seminal contribution to Christian theological development and suggested that he might like to examine *The Urantia Book* which presented views very similar to his thinking and enclosed my AAR paper. In March he wrote saying:

I take your recommendations very seriously, but unfortunately at the moment I cannot really act on them. Given the list of projects lined up before me and the present direction of my research (I'm trying to focus on Buddhist-Christian dialogue), I really cannot undertake any kind of a serious study of *The Urantia Book*. My acquaintance with it is only superficial--but positive, all the more so after your letter and AAR paper.
I would like to be informed of your work. Perhaps we might meet at the AAR convention in Atlanta.

In summary, I believe we have established reasonably wise and effective foundations for outreach ministry with Christian Churches and the academic community. We have accomplished our goal of introducing *The Urantia Boo*k to mainline Christian leaders and scholars before fundamentalists have given the book major negative publicity.

I believe it is important to encourage scholarly evaluation of *The Urantia Book*. Most Urantian literalists and fundamentalists will not be happy with the results but such critical research is basic to the exposure and acceptance of the fifth epochal revelation by progressive members of the major religions of the world. Just as higher criticism laid the foundations for the modern creative study of the Bible, so must scholarly evaluation of *The Urantia Book* open the way to the ecumenical study of the fifth epochal revelation by the growing edge of contemporary religion. From there it will filter down to the peoples of the world.

Decades, if not centuries, are required for this process but we should never cease working on the evolutionary, growing edge. I believe the next major steps required are twofold. First, we must continue interface activities from inside the religious traditions. Most present day professors and Christian leaders will not take the time to seriously read *The Urantia Book* until enough of their students or parishioners keep asking about or making comments concerning its teachings. Even then, the effect will be minimal.

The beginning of the real phase of bringing *The Urantia Book* into our religious culture starts when students of.*The Urantia Book* become theological professors and discreetly share the book with students; and when students of *The Urantia Book* become ministers and share the book with colleagues and appropriately prepared parishioners. There are numerous people with such life plans now. Among those who are planning to get advanced degrees and teach in theological schools is Philip Rolnick who just received his Master of Arts degree in religion from the Pacific School of Religion. His thesis, "The Relational Gospel: Its Implications for Human Family Life," already shows excellence in theological thinking. Among those planning to take seminary training and enter the ministry is Rebecca Marshall whose ability and maturity promise distinctive service in this high calling. The number of people in these categories will grow steadily in the decades to come.

Secondly, we must activate missionary endeavors from outside the religious traditions. Individuals and organizations functioning in this more historically characteristic type of missionary activity have been slow in getting started. This hesitancy is probably the result, first, of the cautious and conservative philosophy of Urantia Brotherhood regarding outreach activity, and second, because such missionary work requires greater courage, planning and resources. Few people have the personal or material qualifications to burn their cultural-religious bridges behind them and venture out in true missionary work unless they have a "home base" giving them personal and material support.

This kind of missionary activity, nevertheless, has the greatest promise for the future. The major organization today with this potential is the Jesusonian Foundation. Eventually such organizations will come into being and exercise the entire gamut of traditional missionary activities: they will develop literature to carry out their tasks; they will employ the various techniques and forms of communication, including specialized and mass media channels as such avenues become appropriate; they will send workers into colleges and universities to win and train leaders for the future; they will eventually establish churches or comparable religious institutions; and finally, if history is an accurate predictor, they will head up a religious movement which will become know as the newest of the world's religions.

As individuals and groups activate this twofold outreach mission we will experience many exciting and challenging events in the Urantia movement of the future. At present as we pause to reflect in this 31st year of the publication of *The Urantia Book*, all in all, from a historical point of view I think we are doing reasonably well in executing our responsibilities and opportunities. There are those who claim we have been far too conservative and inactive; and there are those among us who are worried because we have dared to engage in outreach ministry before we are adequately prepared.

Fortunately the future of the fifth epochal revelation does not depend on any indispensable individuals nor on any single organization. We are launched as a diverse and pluralistic movement and the future will be determined by the guidance of the spirit in many lives working both as individuals and in numerous organizations. This many faceted ministry will experience success as it actualizes attitudes and activities harmonious with the established way and will of Christ Michael and the Universal Father. We serve in a great movement with a difficult but glorious future!

Our Major Responsibility: Disseminating the Fifth Epochal Revelation
4/28/97

Our major responsibility in the Urantia movement, in my judgment, is disseminating the Fifth Epochal Revelation throughout our world. The authors of The Urantia Book project two venues in which this will take place:

1. *By establishing a new cult (religion).* "Regardless of the drawbacks and handicaps, every new revelation of truth has given rise to a -new cult, and even the restatement of the religion of Jesus must develop a new and appropriate symbolism ... The new cult must, like the old, foster sentiment, satisfy emotion, and promote loyalty; but it must do more: It must facilitate spiritual progress, enhance cosmic meanings, augment moral values, encourage social development, and stimulate a high type of personal religious living." (p. 966)

2. *By leavening traditional religions, special attention is directed toward Christianity*. "All Urantia is waiting for the proclamation of the ennobling message of Michael, unencumbered by the accumulated doctrines and dogmas of nineteen centuries of contact with the religions of evolutionary origin. The hour is striking for presenting to Buddhism, to Christianity, to Hinduism, even to the peoples of all faiths, not the gospel about Jesus, but the living, spiritual reality of the gospel of Jesus." (p. 1041)
"But paganized and socialized Christianity stands in need of new contact with the uncompromising teachings of Jesus; it languishes for lack of a new vision of the Master's life on earth. A new and fuller revelation of the religion of Jesus is destined to conquer an empire of materialistic secularism and to overthrow a world sway of mechanistic naturalism. Urantia is now quivering on the very brink of one of its most amazing and enthralling epochs of social readjustment, moral quickening, and spiritual enlightenment." (p. 2082)

The Historic Resistance to New Revelation

The first thing that converts of a new revelation do is to try to share it with traditional religions, especially with the religion out of which these converts came to the new spiritual paradigm. The history of religion shows that this new spiritual vision is never able to "win over" or reform the older religion. Spiritual reformation,when it comes, is the product of later evolutionary development.

My own experience confirms this historic observation. When I first read *The Urantia Book* over forty years ago, I immediately recognized that its superior teachings were very close to the theological positions of the leading thinkers on the growing edge of Christianity. I saw the Fifth Epochal Revelation as the great hope of a revitalization of the Christian faith. Leading theologians, I assumed, would give the book a careful and critical examination—and, if they did, they would recognize its high quality. They would be the leaven that would start a renaissance in the Christian Church.

I intentionally followed the pattern of Jesus' ministry. Early in his public ministry he went to the most prominent leader of Judaism, Annas, in the hope of interfacing with the leaders of Judaism. Even though he met with coldness, Jesus continued his ministry, when possible, in the synagogues of Judaism. The unreceptiveness of the power structure of Judaism made it necessary to conduct an independent ministry to disseminate the Fourth Epochal Revelation.

For more than forty years I have conducted an interface ministry with the leaders of mainline Christianity. This ministry is detailed in a paper entitled "A Personal History of Interface Ministry" that includes contacting theological professors in 85 seminaries belonging to the American Association of Theological Schools, sending 8,000 personal letters to ministers in the United Church of Christ offering a loan book, contacting 5,000 members of the American Philosophical Association inviting critical research on *The Urantia Book*, presenting the paper "The Urantia Book and Religious Studies" at the national meeting of the American Academy of Religion in 1985, publishing *The Spiritual Fellowship Journal* for six years that interfaced between *The Urantia Book* and mainstream Christian clergy and was circulated to all of the ministers in the United Church of Christ, the Disciples of Christ, Unity ministers, and the United Methodist clergy in Indiana.

Although results of this ministry have been positive, it is very modest. Even the most progressive leaders of the Christian Church have too much at stake to seriously consider becoming involved with the Fifth Epochal Revelation. It will be generations before *The Urantia Book* will be recognized as an acceptable resource for preaching and teaching in the Christian Church. After forty years of testing the relevance of the experience of new spiritual paradigms in the history of religion and finding its confirmation regarding the Fifth Epochal Revelation, I believe it is time to change our direction and mission. We may be slow learners, but our love and concern for the Christian Church seemed to require this patient but essentially futile attempt to stimulate a renaissance in the Christian Church.

The Necessity of New Religious Groups

The viability of the Fifth Epochal Revelation must be established through indigenous religious social institutions. The authors of *The Urantia Book* recognize that although religious institutions increase the possibilities for evil, they are germane to the survival of religion in society. The Brilliant Evening Star who authored the paper "The Ghost Cults" and the Melchizedek who authored the paper "Social Problems of Religion" speak of the necessity of a new cult being formed around the Fifth Epochal Revelation and give us guidelines for its creation. This new spiritual paradigm must evolve social religious groups to carry its message to the world.

The first step in evolving indigenous religious structures at the grass roots of society is the formation of study groups. This we have done for over forty years. But study groups at best are transitory groups. Only bona fide religious groups minister to individuals and families from birth to death and establish value orientations from generation to generation. In my discussions with Dr. Sadler I saw that he recognized this, and that is why he structured the Brotherhood/Fellowship Constitution denominating the leaders of the Urantia movement as ordained teachers and started a school to train and ordain such teachers. This is also why I have advocated and encouraged the formation of such religious groups during the past forty years.

The next step that a significant segment of the Urantia movement needs to take, in my judgment, is to intentionally recognize the basic importance of religious institutions in the dissemination of the Fifth Epochal Revelation throughout the world and structure resources to encourage and promote *An Appropriate Symbolism and Socioreligious Expression of the Fifth Epochal Revelation.*

Those who have a sense of calling to this venue through which the Fifth Epochal Revelation will make its way throughout the world need to intentionally shift the vision and policy that has characterized the dominant view of the Brotherhood/Fellowship identity during the past forty years:

1. First, we need to recognize that the overriding negative attitude toward institutional religion that characterized most of the early students of *The Urantia Book* and the deletion of the term ordained teacher" from the Brotherhood/Fellowship Constitution is counter productive to the highest purposes of Jesusonian (*Urantia Book*) evangelism.

2. We need to structure a philosophy and policy within the Urantia movement that encourages and promotes the establishment of religious groups within the movement. Such an outreach mission will eventually encompass the following activities:
a.Drawing up constitution resources.
b.Composing suggestive rituals.
c.Revising and composing hymns.
d.Training for ministry.
e.Composing a manual for ministry.
f.Outlining legal procedures for incorporation and nonprofit status.
g.Developing procedures for initiating and organizing new congregations.

3. We need to publish a theological-religious journal that will serve as a platform for theological, philosophical, and polity discussions and the encouragement of the development of Jesusonian groups throughout the world,

The Spiritual Fellowship Journal of which I am currently the editor, with the approval of our Board of Trustees, plans to restructure its format and redirect its mission from an interface with mainline Christian ministers to the promotion and discussion of theological, philosophical, and polity ideas within the Urantia movement. We believe this new Journal has great potential for the augmentation of religious developments in the Urantia movement.

An Evolutionary View of the Fifth Epochal Revelation

The form of the Fifth Epochal Revelation is different than all previous epochal revelations-it is a book. Its format, I think, is particularly designed to cope with the series of misfortunes that our world has experienced. Its design is more stable and permanent than that of previous revelations and it is ideally suited to the long term educational process of presenting an integrated picture of planetary and universe history and cosmology appropriate to our era of evolutionary development. It has an appreciation of all of the religions of the world and will be a powerful inspiration toward world wide ecumenical fellowship and worship.

Just as it took around 1800 years of evolutionary development to precipitate Reformed Judaism that is very close to the reforms that Jesus tried to contribute to the spiritual understanding of the Judaism of his day, so there will come a time within Christianity that the Fifth Epochal Revelation will contribute the same type of up-stepping contribution within Christianity. Hopefully, it will not take 1800 years. At that time scholars will look back and marvel that the Christian leaders of today did not recognize the significance of the Fifth Epochal Revelation just as we today look back and wonder that the leaders of Judaism did not recognize the quality of Jesus' teachings. The Fifth Epochal Revelation will eventually contribute the same up-stepping influence to all of the religions of the world. On an evolutionary world it takes a great deal of time for a new spiritual paradigm to make its way into the culture. But, happily, new religious institutions need not be handicapped by this lack of spiritual insight.

The Meredith J. Sprunger Archive

God’s Presence in Action

Midwest Conference Talk
7/11/86

You recall Jesus' parable of the two sons, the first son when asked to work in the vineyard refused but later thought the better of it and went to work. The older son when asked to work replied, "Yes, father, I'll go," but after his father left did not fulfill his promise. (p. 1993) On another occasion Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,'shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven." (Matt.7:21) The acid test of life is in our actions. The real nature of our faith is seen in our behavior. "True religion must act...Always and ever religion does something; it is dynamic." (p. 1121) "There is no real religion apart from a highly active personality." (p. 1120) "The Weak engage in resolutions, but the strong act." (p. 556)

Action is creative and effective when we are in touch with reality, when God is a partner in our life and work. Jesus orients his universe sons and daughters saying, "Remember: I am the real vine, and you are the living branches. He who lives in me, and I in him, will bear much fruit of the spirit and experience the supreme joy of yielding this spiritual harvest ... Herein is the Father glorified: that the vine has many living branches, and that every branch bears much fruit." (p. 1945) How does this come about; how do we become living branches which bear much nourishing and enriching fruit?

A creative relationship with that which is substantial and real begins when we come to the realization that egocentricity is psychological poison which leads to an unfulfilled and unhappy life and we insightfully and wholeheartedly dedicate ourselves to God and his purposes for our lives. This unique and personal divine plan is then discovered by meditating on the creative urges deep within us—sorting, organizing, and integrating these sincere longings and singular personality gifts. Under the guidance of the spirit they materialize into vital projects and eventually take the form of a life plan. This plan, this sense of calling, gives meaning and purpose to our lives and with it a new source of energy and strength.

The real substance and character of our lives begins when we actualize these creative urges in specific projects of living. We grow and contribute to ourselves and others only when we act. Our early ancestors, Andon and Fonta, longed to transcend the limited potentials of their primate associates but the future of the human race was not assured until they summoned the courage to act, to flee from their animal cousins and face the rigors of a hostile world. With this act of courage came the serendipitous discovery of fire and the actualization of potentials far beyond their imagination. So always is spirit inspired action the ancestor of unexpected discoveries and unforeseen accomplishments. "The act is ours, the consequences God's." (p. 1286)

Such action, however, is never easy. Spirit indited tasks push us to our limits. "The religion of the spirit means effort, struggle, conflict, faith, determination, love, loyalty, and progress." (p. 1729) With experience, discipline, and productivity we ascend the psychic circles of personality growth and with this accrued wisdom our lives become more effective and we grow more real as persons. This service-action life and its resultant growth prepare us for greater projects in the future. But even now there are many avenues of kingdom work challenging us.

We have in the fuller restatement of the life and teachings of Jesus the greatest spiritual message of our planet. Our world needs to hear this inspiring good news, Once again we need evangelists like King Asoka who trained and sent out thousands of missionaries whose devoted labor in twenty-five years won half of the world to a higher expression of spiritual truth. Our world languishes for great music compositions which will transform our spirits and noble literature that will inspire us to better ways of living. The fifth epochal revelation requires new religious fellowships which will spread throughout the world with a fresh, inspiring spiritual symbolism and an advanced ethic of love which will promote understanding, brotherhood and unity among the diverse institutions and peoples of the world. The Urantia movement awaits visionary entrepreneurs and architects who will set aside tracts of land and construct retreat areas, educational facilities, and worship centers. These and thousands of other tasks and projects are vibrant opportunities for actualization by those who are willing to respond to the spiritual renaissance now being ushered in on the wings of the future.

In whatever direction our life plan may take us, it is the fruits of the spirit that undergird our work and make it effective for time and eternity. These fruits of the spirit are "loving service, unselfish devotion, courageous loyalty, sincere fairness, enlightened honesty, undying hope, confident trust, merciful ministry, unfailing goodness, forgiving tolerance, and enduring peace." (p. 2054) These are the marks of God's presence in action whether our work is in the material, mental or spiritual realms of human activity.

As pioneers of the new age our work is of crucial importance. The messengers of the fourth epochal revelation were very ordinary human beings and yet their witness to new spiritual truth turned the world up side down. Jesus told his apostles that as they serve in the Father's kingdom they would also do the work that he was doing and even greater works would they do because he was returning to the Father (John 14:12) and his universe sovereignty and the new gift of the spirit of truth would magnify their effectiveness. Add to this spiritual power base the dynamic of the fifth epochal revelation and the potentials of this spiritual partnership between man and God stagger the imagination. Pioneers in a new age, however, need to have the personality stamina to serve without seeing results. Indeed, the immediate effect of innovative work is usually disapproval and opposition. Nevertheless, as we pursue our work in partnership with God we know that we are making effective contributions to civilization and culture, that we are adding functional realities to our planet and the realm of the Supreme.

Not only is work on the frontiers of progress often frustrating and rigorous, it is unpredictable. Serving in partnership with God requires flexibility. Often our human and personal hopes and purposes which we have planned and cherished for years are shattered on the rocks of evolutionary reality and transmuted into the larger and wiser objectives of spirit determination. Sometimes we are constrained to do things which we would most wish to avoid. Like Moses who lacked public speaking abilities was, nonetheless, required to become a speaker and teacher, so we often find it necessary to engage in activities where our talents are marginal. The important thing is that we are sensitive to the leading of the spirit and have the courage to act in conformity with that guidance. Ours is the responsibility to act; the results are in larger hands. And history demonstrates that God can use very mediocre talent to accomplish great things. "Service—more service, increased service, difficult service, adventurous service, and at last divine and perfect service--is the goal of time and the destination of space." (p. 316) It is through such service that we human beings fulfill our deepest needs and longings, discover happiness, and come closest to greatness.

The presence of God is most effectively experienced in action—service. Our lives find meaning and purpose through action. Seldom have the people of this planet had greater opportunities for significant service which will effect future generations than now. Let us unite in spreading the message of the fifth epochal revelation which promises to precipitate one of our world's "most amazing and enthralling epochs of social readjustment, moral quickening, and spiritual enlightenment." (p. 2082) And I would now ask you, even as I ask myself: What are you doing to contribute to this new age?

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Major Growth Steps in the Urantia Movement

3/14/92 Revised 1/28/98

I. Freedom from Oligarchy and Authoritarianism and the Triumph of Democracy and Openness

During the first forty years of its existence the Urantia movement has evolved from a handful of readers of *The Urantia Book* in Chicago to hundreds of study groups and thousands of readers throughout the world. Without mass media publicity or promotion over 300,000 copies of the book have been purchased and grass root foundations of the movement have been established. But perhaps the most important development during the early years has been the triumph of spiritual freedom and participatory democracy.

When I first started attending General Council meetings in the early sixties, everything was preplanned, predetermined, cut and dried. No one was expected to interject anything new or different. After being in the group for a while, I recall I had the audacity to suggest that we initiate a Newsletter. One of the "old timers" got his feet and facing me with pointed finger told me in no uncertain terms what a ridiculous ideas that was. Fortunately, not long after that, the Executive Committee did start publishing a Newsletter. But I had learned my lesson. If you wanted to propose something, go to a member of the controlling oligarchy to get it approved.

Another key factor in the development of the Urantia movement was the early loss of its most creative and effective leaders, such as Bill Sadler and Warren and Alvin Kulieke. As a result of this loss of creative leadership and Dr. Sadler's death, the temperament of the second-order Chicago leadership became increasingly conservative, defensive, and fearful. Policies and activities were geared to protect the status quo and decisions, in my judgment, were made more out of fear than guided by wisdom or spiritual direction.

When I became president of the Brotherhood, one of my central objectives was to establish the principles of participatory democracy, openness, and freedom in Brotherhood activities. We fairly well succeeded in starting the process but it took many years for it to be fully accepted and flower in the Fellowship. This was a foundational growth step in the Urantia movement.

II. Freedom from Charismatic Control and the Ascendancy of Evolutionary- rational Direction

Most people in the Urantia movement are acquainted with the Vern Grimsley-Clayton incident. Vern was a gifted person with exceptional oratorical abilities. He founded the Family of God Foundation and established an extensive radio ministry. For years his inspirational talks were the highlight of conferences. His charismatic eloquence captivated many people. Since I had introduced Vern to *The Urantia Book,* I followed his career with great interest. Early on, I became concerned about his clever manipulative control in the Urantia movement. I observed Vern increasingly building a power base of influence in the Brotherhood, but always gave him the benefit of my doubts and concern.

In late 1983, a year after Emma Christensen (the last Contact Commissioner) died, Vern announced that he was receiving special messages telling of the imminent beginning of World War III and urged the Executive Committee of Urantia Brotherhood to move their headquarters to his place in Clayton, California which, he assured them, would be safe. I immediately warned the Executive Committee and General Council against this deception. There ensued considerable confusion, fear, and agitation among the readers of *The Urantia Book* and it took years for the scene to clarify. The Family of God disintegrated and Vern was deserted by all but a few people.

This was a sobering but healthful and strengthening experience for the new movement. As a result, it is highly unlikely that any charismatic person or channeling phenomena will ever be able to capture the Urantia movement. Evolutionary-rational thought and solid experiential judgment has triumphed over charismatic emotionalism and psychic delusions.

III. Freedom from Legalistic Power Control and the Growing Dominance of Cooperative Team Work

In the l960's Martin Myers was invited to move in with Dr. Sadler and Christy to help with chores and activities of the Foundation and Brotherhood offices. Following Dr. Sadler's death, Martin increasingly took over leadership influence at the Chicago office. In some ways Christy became a captive of this situation and at times discussed it with me. She felt there was little she could do about it; however, she did prevent Martin from quitting his bank job to take over formal direction of the headquarters offices as he wished to do.

As Martin Myers' influence increased, he was soon elected as a trustee of the Foundation. As a result, legalistic thinking and legal counsel began to direct Foundation activities. Legal minds devised a method through the registered marks to control the entire movement. Under Martin's direction the Foundation became increasingly autocratic. On Several occasions he implied or directly threatened to take away the service marks from the Brotherhood if they did not follow his advice. Over a period of years he became the center of controversy. Finally, in l989 three Foundation trustees resigned and two professional office administrators handed in their resignations because they could not work with him and maintain their spiritual integrity.

During this same period the Executive Committee of Urantia Brotherhood informed Martin that they would no longer tolerate his autocracy. After a series of exchanges in which the Brotherhood refused to follow his directives, Martin took away their license to use the service marks and terminated their office lease at 533 Diversey Parkway.

This action brought about the advent of the Fellowship of Readers of *The Urantia Book* and finally freed the Urantia movement from legalistic and authoritarian control. It is highly unlikely that the Urantia movement will ever again be shackled by legalism and autocratic domination.

IV. Freedom from Centralized Organizational Control and the Awakening of the Power of Individual Effort and Pluralistic Outreach

We have made great strides in opening the Urantia movement to the freedom of spiritual guidance and to the dynamics of participatory democracy. We have matured and gained strength through traumatic experiences that have educated us to the dangers of charismatic manipulation, legalistic power control, and channeling fantasies. As great and important as these growth steps are, there still lingers in the minds of many the illusion that the march of the Fifth Epochal Revelation into the world is dependent on the plans and directives coming out of "official" organizations in Chicago.

Recent events demonstrate that the Urantia movement has come of age. The Fifth Epochal Revelation has left the protective confines of centralized control in Chicago and has gone out into the world. Local societies and study groups are no longer waiting for official directives to determine their outreach ministry. Independent organizations like the Asoka Foundation, the Jesusonian Foundation, The Christian Fellowship of Students of *The Urantia Book* and others are breaking ground for the spread of a diversified, pluralistic outreach ministry.
We should contemplate hypotheses as to how or why these errors and discrepancies occur.

V. The Growing Significance of a Socioreligious Expression of The Fifth Epochal Revelation

Over the year many of us assumed that wide-spread interest in *The Urantia Book* would bring a spiritual renaissance in our society. After forty years of interfacing with mainline religious leaders in the hope of getting them to undertake a critical examination of *The Urantia Book,* it is obvious that the spiritual paradigm shift of the Fifth Epochal Revelation is too great for them to undertake at this time. It will probably be generations before *The Urantia Book* will be recognized as an acceptable resource for study in the Christian Church.

At the same time there has been a growing hunger among readers of *The Urantia Book* for identity in a bona fide religious organization along with its spiritual ministrations from birth to death. We are beginning to realize that the viability of the Fifth Epochal Revelation must be established through indigenous religious institutions. I am confident that sooner or later such new religious organizations will evolve. It will be interesting to see the many forms and types that these groups will take. The Urantia movement is now launched on the high seas of evolutionary spiritual adventure.

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The Dynamics of Empowerment

Midwest Conference Talk
Revision of 4/19/92

After our survival and safety needs are taken care of, the most important concern of human beings is empowerment for living. We need physiological nourishment to furnish energy for all of our activities. To transcend the mere animal level of human living we need to be energized and nourished by the value or spiritual level of reality.

Twentieth century psychologists and psychiatrists like Carl G. Jung, Viktor Frankl, 0. Herbert Mowrer, Henry A. Murray, Roberto Assagioli, Abraham H. Maslow and others have emphasized the overriding importance of this source of human empowerment. These values have been variously denominated as "transpersonal," "meta," "being," and "spiritual" values. These meta-needs are rooted in human biology and psychology. They are universal and not merely the product of social conditioning. Metavalues are the ground of human personality. they are intrinsic, supracultural, transpersonal, and related to Ultimate Reality. When these values are not actualized in our lives we become frustrated, maladjusted, and ill. We are cut off from our fully human empowerment.

To become creative and productive we must have a healthy, living connection with the source of all wisdom and power. The branches cannot bear fruit unless they have an organic connection with the vine and root system. The Supreme Being is this divine energizing influence undergirding creativity, competence, and achievement. This is the source of all empowerment.

We seek meaningful actualization and fulfillment as individuals and as a planet. How is divine empowerment mediated to us? Every person is unique. "The love of the Father absolutely individualizes each personality as a unique child of the Universal Father, a child without duplicate in infinity, a will creature irreplaceable in all eternity." (p. 138) Each person is "a natural" in some kind of activity or service. What is your deep motivation? Which activities do you find creative? Where do you find ideal play in which you lose yourself?

The Indwelling Spirit of God has an ideal plan and purpose for our lives. This is not necessarily a specific vocation but an optimal plan of development and service. As we sincerely strive to follow this divine calling, we will experience enthusiasm and empowerment. In optimizing this fulfilling activity, we need to ask ourselves how this creativity can be most helpful to others. It is the constructive and helpful work that is important, not our ego inflation. "When you feel important, you lose energy to the wear and tear of ego dignity so that there is little energy left to do the work. Self-importance, not work-importance, exhausts immature creatures; it is the self element that exhausts, not the effort to achieve. You can do important work if you do not become self-important; you can do several things as easily as one if you leave yourself out." (p.555) Creative work is an empowering joy. Burnout is ego-exhaustion.

When we actualize the Indwelling Spirit's plan for our lives, we initiate a partnership. This divine-human partnership is endlessly empowering. It is the exciting adventure of evolving our souls and serving humankind. It is the satisfying, self-forgetting absorption in work that is more important than ourselves. We can fine-tune our energy alignment by meditation and contemplation. But we open ourselves to the source of all power through self-transcending worship. In this life-long partnership, we recognize that we are not the senior partner but are endlessly grateful that we are associated with a loving helper with infinite resources.

Our daily capacity for creative work is a function of being. Based on the caliber of our native endowment, it depends on the openness and dimension of the channel connecting us to the source of human empowerment. Just as the quality and diameter of the wire of conduction linked with a dynamo determines the flow of electricity, so the quality and magnitude of our soul's connection with the Almighty Supreme determines the amplitude of our empowerment. This is not an introspective preoccupation, but a self-forgetting, reality oriented, even tough-minded, dedication to loving service. Our personality potential is a function of our spiritual maturity.

One of the most effective ways of expanding soul growth and concomitantly empowerment capacity is unselfish service. Our empowerment grows as we help others, contribute to truth, beauty, and goodness on our planet, and create that which will make the world a better place in which to live. "Service-more service, increased service, difficult service, adventurous service, and at last divine and perfect service-is the goal to time and the destination of space." (p.316) Service is the channel through which we are actualizing the will of God, expanding our potential of empowerment, and implementing our greatest source of happiness and fulfillment.

Next to promoting soul growth along with mastering the cosmic circles of personality development and the loving service of our family and associates, probably our most important concern should be the spiritual rejuvenation and empowerment of our planet. Our world is suffering from environmental pollution, social confusion , economic insolvency, and moral decadence. We desperately need the creative renewal of the Fifth Epochal Revelation.*The Urantia Book* is Christ Michael's saving answer to our spiritual isolation and confusion. This enlarged vision of reality will initiate one of the "most amazing and enthralling epochs of social readjustment, moral quickening, and spiritual enlightenment" ever experienced on our world.

How can we engage in this outreach ministry? Each person is different and we should make our own decisions about our service to others. Stemming from my own experience, I should like to share with you five convictions undergirding principles of ministry which condition our goals and objectives.

1.*We should never use authoritarian influence and control or attempt to tell other people what they should do in their spiritual service.*

For many years the power structure in Urantia Brotherhood attempted to designate what readers of *The Urantia Book* should and should not do in outreach ministry. Authoritarian influence was used in attempting to enforce conformity to these policies. When I announced my intention to found The Christian Fellowship of Students of *The Urantia Book* in 1979 several members of the Executive Committee tried to prevent me from doing so. They assumed that authority could be used to stop me from outreach activities which they thought violated Brotherhood policies. Fortunately others on the Executive Committee did not share their views or at least did not join in their authoritarian challenge. Privately Christy told me, "Pay no attention to them, they have been obstructionists for years." A little later Urantia Foundation attempted similar intimidation by summoning me to a special meeting of the Trustees. Urantia Foundation is still attempting to use authoritarian pronouncements to control outreach activities.

We should, of course, welcome and seriously consider the concern and highest wisdom which others have concerning our activities. But we should not attempt to dominate or control other people in their spiritual service; nor should we allow others to manipulate or intimidate us.

2. *Our ministry and service should be predicated on spiritual guidance and evolutionary human wisdom. It should be evaluated by concrete, time-tested experience.*
We should not allow fearful, defensive, negative thinking nor problems, difficulties, and suffering to override spiritual guidance and experiential wisdom.

Spiritual guidance and human wisdom should direct our service and outreach ministry. All too often we allow fear, personal pride, obstacles and difficulties, or theoretical assumptions to control our behavior. "The religion of the spirit means effort, struggle, conflict, faith, determination, love, loyalty, and progress." (p. 1729) Recently the Fraternal Relations Committee of the Fellowship has applied for membership in the North American Interfaith Network. Even such positive ecumenical outreach causes fear in some minds. A long-time reader of *The Urantia Book* called the chair of the committee and informed him that we were making a monumental mistake in taking this step. This kind of thinking would have kept Jesus in the carpenter shop all his life.

All too often our thinking and action is determined by theoretical assumptions rather than actual experience. I am not suggesting that we engage in stupid or immoral behavior to experientially validate its depravity. Rather, I am observing that on the growing edge of human progress, experience is an invaluable aid to wise planning and action.

Years ago while serving as president of the Brotherhood I had a running discussion over dozens of letters for several years with a man on the East Coast. He thought we should be using mass media to inform the public of *The Urantia Book*. Taking care not to sound authoritarian, I suggested that, in my judgment, it would be wiser and more effective to use evolutionary methods of outreach. Finally, seeing that he was not convinced, I wrote him saying, "Look, I've only been sharing our highest wisdom with you which is based on limited experience. Maybe we are wrong. Why don't you try what you are suggesting. If we are mistaken, your service could be a benefit to the entire Urantia movement." He must have done some experimenting with negative results for that was the last I heard from him. What I am suggesting is that theory, when questioned or challenged, should always be validated by concrete experience. At the same time, we ought not allow problems, difficulties, failure, and suffering to override spiritual guidance and experiential wisdom. But it should sharpen our perception and adjustment to both.

3. *Our world is in critical need of the spiritual vision, wisdom, and power of the Fifth Epochal Revelation. All who have the calling and courage should engage in this saving outreach ministry according to their highest wisdom.*
We should promote and encourage a pluralistic, many-faceted ministry by individuals and groups

There is a cliche´ in the Urantia movement that one should use the teachings of *The Urantia Book* without presenting the Fifth Epochal Revelation itself. For twenty-five years I tested the wisdom and effectiveness of this advice. I found that it is indeed a cliché which belongs to the old dispensation. It became obvious that this outreach methodology only enhanced the old and traditional frames of reference. Even gifted speakers like Harry Emerson Fosdick, Norman Vincent Peal, and Robert Schuler are limited to and by this horse and buggy spiritual cosmology and vision of the Middle Ages.

Experience demonstrates that only a spiritual paradigm shift, a major philosophical-theological model transformation can effect a major change in human civilization and culture. There is no substitute for the Fifth Epochal Revelation itself *The Urantia Book* presents a new spiritual cosmology and power which cannot be duplicated by sprucing up the old traditional model of spiritual understanding and vision. Substituting some enhanced religious euphemisms for the real power of the Fifth Epochal Revelation is simply inadequate for the needs of our torn and confused world.

The spiritual pioneers of the future are those who will bring the conceptual and spiritual power of the Fifth Epochal Revelation to humankind. With the new freedoms achieved in the Urantia movement, the stage is now set for initiating a pluralistic, many-sided outreach ministry by individuals and groups which will eventually transform our planet.
4. *We need to become true sons and daughters of the Supreme. This means that we must dedicate and prepare ourselves for the rigorous, long-term evolutionary struggle which is required in establishing spiritual foundations.*

Probably the most difficult human trait to acquire is confident, cheerful endurance to principle and purpose in the face of difficulties, reverses, and defeat. We thrive on success and positive feedback. But our enthusiasm tends to wane in the long, hard, evolutionary struggle. We are citizens of the Supreme, which means that we must learn to enjoy and invigorate in the long, hard struggle for even small gains. Intelligent and insightful planning combined with hard work are the indigenous requirements of evolutionary accomplishment. Grass roots achievement is the foundation of progress in the realm of the Supreme. My former room mate's grandfather worked for twenty years among the Winnebago Indians before he had his first convert.

We must become discouragement resistant and defeat proof. The pioneers of the future will "learn to feast upon uncertainty, to fatten on disappointment, to enthuse over apparent defeat, to invigorate in the presence of difficulties, to exhibit indomitable courage in the face of" the thrilling adventure before us, and "to exercise unconquerable faith when confronted with the challenge of the" seemingly impossible tasks facing this confused world of the cross. For we know that "in liaison with God, nothing—absolutely nothing—is impossible." (p. 291)

5. *Finally, our world needs new religious and social movements and innovative institutional developments born out of the enlarged vision and wisdom of the Fifth Epochal Revelation.*

We, of course, hope the Fifth Epochal Revelation will leaven the old religious and social institutions. I have devoted my life to interfacing with the most progressive elements of the Christian Church and contemporary philosophy. We need to have people interfacing with all major religions and social movements. But this is transitional activity.

The new spiritual-religious cosmology and reality framework of the Fifth Epochal Revelation demands new religious, philosophical, and social expressions. The history of religion and social movements reveals that every enlarged vision of reality produces new movements and institutions to actualize their purposes and goals. Somewhere young men and young women inspired by the thrilling message of hope which has been given to us, are evolving visions and preparing themselves to launch new movements and fresh approaches to rectify, and eventually transform, our increasingly critical human condition.

We who constitute the birth generation of the Fifth Epochal Revelation look forward with great anticipation to the brave spiritual pioneers who will follow us. We wish to encourage and support these spiritual heroes of tomorrow who will carry the baton on toward the goal of our planetary destiny.

The Meredith J. Sprunger Archive

The Cultural Impact of *The Urantia Book* in the Next Fifty Years

(Published in *The Spiritual Fellowship Journal*, Spring, 1992)

What will be the cultural impact of *The Urantia Book* during the next fifty years? Who of us can even be sure about what will happen tomorrow? People have been making predictions about the future since the dawn of history. As such prophesies are examined, one is impressed by the lack of accuracy of a large percentage of these predictions even when they are made by the most learned people. In the late 1800's when Lord Kelvin was president of the British Royal Society, he predicted that the radio would have no future, heaver-than-air flying machines were impossible, and X-rays would prove to be a hoax. Dr. James Bryant Conant, president of Harvard University, in addressing the American Chemical Society in 1951 predicted that by 1985 solar energy would be harnessed and power would be so cheap and abundant that fresh water would be distilled from the ocean and deserts would be turned into garden spots. Not only are our best forecasts often inaccurate, but unexpected historical events change the context of the entire cultural situation. Nevertheless, human beings are incurable futurists, we love to look into the unknown and construct a scenario of the future. Even though our vision may be inaccurate, such anticipation of the events of tomorrow is more creative and constructive than simply reacting to incidents after they take place.

Around 1960 I became interested in evaluating the future of *The Urantia Book* in our contemporary society. I made a study of many contemporary religious movements and found that it took about thirty years for them to become known to the informed public. Accordingly, I hypothesized that *The Urantia Book* would become known to the educated community sometime in the middle or late 1980's. This prediction has turned out to be partially true. At the University of Ottawa a Ph. D. thesis was completed on *The Urantia Book* in 1983. The American Academy of Religion held a consultation on *The Urantia Book* in 1985. Various academic people have inquired about the book and many people are aware of its existence.

From our vantage point in 1991, what cultural impact might we expect *The Urantia Book* to have on our society by the year 2041? As a background for our discussion we might look at the ten millennial megatrends cited by John Naisbitt and Patricia Aburdene in their book, *Megatrends 2000*, published early in 1990. They see these major influences dominating the early 21st century:

1. The Booming Global Economy of the 1990's.
2. A Renaissance in the Arts.
3. The Emergence of Free-Market Socialism.
4. Global Life-styles and Cultural Nationalism.
5. The Decline of the Welfare State.
6. The Rise of the Pacific Rim.
7. The Decade of Women in Leadership.
8. The Age of Biology.
9. The Religious Revival of the New Millennium.
10. The Triumph of the Individual.

Looking at their last two megatrends—the religious revival of the third millennium and the triumph of the individual—they see a decline in mainline religion and a boom in the New Age movement allowing individuals to practice spirituality in their own way without institutional hindrance. The highly individualistic religious revival predicted by the authors could create a cultural climate in which a knowledge of *The Urantia Book* would be facilitated.

In the light of these observations, what cultural impact might we expect *The Urantia Book* to have in the next fifty years? This is still difficult to predict. First of all, *The Urantia Book* is a new revelatory phenomenon; we do not have comparable historical parallels. Former major revelations were brought by personalities. Machiventa Melchizedek's mission lasted ninety-four years and the public ministry of Jesus took place in about three years. Both Machiventa and Jesus could communicate with only a limited number of people at one time. *The Urantia Book* is continuously present and is available to any number of people at the same time. Secondly, each historical period is unique and is governed by its own dynamics.

Mindful of these difficulties, I should like to present two possible scenarios illustrating two aspects of the evolutionary process: slow growth and sudden change. We observe that the major characteristic of evolution is its slow developmental nature. It took three hundred years for Christianity to become the dominant religion of Western Civilization. Five hundred years were needed to actualize the new vision of the renaissance and the reformation. Following this slow development pattern, I can visualize the following events in the Urantia movement in the next fifty years:

First, a modest increase in readership and study groups will take place, but this growth will remain largely a low profile movement.

Second, the Clergy Network will expand slowly and *The Spiritual Fellowship Journal* readership will gradually increase among the more progressive and adventurous ministers; however, the power structure in mainline denominations and seminaries will largely ignore the book.

Third, numerous new leaders and organizations will emerge and pursue various agendas.

Fourth, there will be a sharp increase of secondary publications following the expiration of *The Urantia Book* copyright in 2030.

Fifth, small groups will start churches representing new religious organizations.

The first hundred years of any viable new movement is spent establishing grass root foundations in the society and culture. If, however, a new movement should have its origin synchronized with the "sudden change" aspect of the evolutionary process, and if its purpose is harmonious with the thrust of that change, a different scenario will be followed.

Let us look at this "sudden change" scenario. Evolution is punctuated periodically by sudden changes. It is generally recognized that we are at a point in our economic, political, and social culture when basic changes are taking place. The growing edge of theological thinking is already harmonious with the spiritual outlook of *The Urantia Book.* The authors of *The Urantia Book* say we are "quivering on the very brink" of one of our most amazing periods of "social readjustment, moral quickening, and spiritual enlightenment." For decades spirit ministry has been preparing our planet for the Fifth Epochal Revelation. We are experiencing a spiritual vacuum longing to be filled. Unquestionably, we are living in one of the pivotal periods of history.

Even though the Urantia movement may be facing sudden changes in the next fifty years, we should also realize that all of the aspects of gradual evolutionary development which we previously enumerated will continue. But superimposed on this evolutionary growth, some or all of the following catalysts of rapid change may burst upon us:

1. A religious leader of national or international stature may espouse *The Urantia Book.* A Billy Graham, Paul Tillich, or Robert Schuler could quickly focus attention on *The Urantia Book.*

2. A leading figure in the business, political, creative arts, or entertainment world might champion the Fifth Epochal Revelation and lead a movement to bring its awareness to our society.

3. If the Clergy Network becomes large enough, it could result in a mainline interface with *The Urantia Book* that attracts general public attention.

4. A prominent Evangelical or Fundamentalist religious leader may promote a national attack against *The Urantia Book.* A Jerry Falwell or Jimmy Swaggert could bring about a confrontational atmosphere focused on *The Urantia Book* in the larger religious and educational communities.

5. An unexpected breakthrough may take place in the physical or social sciences which could change the way we view reality and how we establish human priorities. This, in turn, could direct attention to the compelling relevance of the teachings of *The Urantia Book.*

If one or more of these unusual events should take place in the next fifty years, the creative 1% of the world leadership could shortly thereafter be directing their lives out of the spiritual dynamics which they find in the Fifth Epochal Revelation. Such leadership, building on the considerable foundations which have already been established by creative spiritual evolution, could bring rapid change in our society. Such cultural-spiritual dynamics have already brought about some sudden changes in Europe considered visionary and unrealistic only a few years ago.

What is the probability that one of these catalytic events will happen in the next fifty years? I think there is a greater than 50% chance that one or more of these, or some other focusing event, will take place in the next five decades. If this assessment is correct, what can we do to prepare for it? Outside of being mentally and spiritually prepared, I think there is little that we can or should do—other than building an evolutionary foundation for future growth. This we should be doing irrespective of any "sudden change" possibilities; for whatever does survive must have this kind of solid foundation.

Unexpected events have their own dynamics. Outside of developing a stable grass roots presence in our society, we can do little to prepare for unusual events. If and when these sudden changes occur, they will be governed by their own leadership and our ability to respond wisely in the contemporary situation. Our task is to continue traveling the pot-holed, boulder-strewn road of evolutionary development. The sudden changes will shape their own destiny.

The Meredith J. Sprunger Archive

BEYOND FUNDAMENTALISM
12/91 Revised 11/94

Christian fundamentalists believe in the literal inerrancy of the Bible. They are so impressed with the spiritual truths of scripture that they assume the science, economics, sociology, and history of the Bible are of equal quality. The scholarship of mainline Christianity has long since delivered the church from such naive illusions. We have come to realize that the purpose of revelation is spiritual enlightenment which should be distinguished from the scientific and historical facts which may accompany this spiritual insight. The main body of Christianity has achieved the spiritual maturity to differentiate these abiding spiritual truths from the passing and sometimes erroneous material facts and conditions accompanying these insights.

It is interesting to observe that many students of *The Urantia Book* with high intelligence, but lacking the experiential background of mainline theological scholarship, are entertaining the same illusions as the Biblical fundamentalists. They assume the inerrancy of *The Urantia Book*, even though the authors of the book take great pains to warn us against such assumptions. While affirming the truths of the Fifth Epochal Revelation, they remind us: "But no revelation short of the attainment of the Universal Father can ever be complete. All other celestial ministrations are no more than partial, transient, and practically adapted to local conditions in time and space." (p. 1008) The authors clearly state: "The laws of revelation hamper us greatly @y their proscription of the impartation of unearned or premature knowledge .... The cosmology of these revelations is *not inspired* .... While divine spiritual insight is a gift, *human wisdom must evolve*." (p. 1109) They recognized that many of their statements about the physical sciences would soon need revision.

The science of the 1930's and 1940's was used for the material setting of the book. In 1957 as an aid to help my evaluation of the scientific orientation of *The Urantia Book*, I asked the head of the Physics Department and a nationally known nuclear physicist at Purdue University to appraise the quality of Papers 41 (Physical Aspects of the Local Universe) and 42 (Energy-Mind and Matter) of the book. Both of them said, in effect, "This is about where the leading thinkers in physics were a few years ago, we think we are a little beyond this now." Further research over the years has revealed that virtually all of the scientific material found in the book was the accepted scientific knowledge of the period in which the book was written, was held by some scientist of that time, or was about to be discovered or recognized.

Many other guards against infallibility concepts were included in the Urantia Papers. They speak of the difficulty of presenting enlarged concepts and advanced truth using our circumscribed and limited language. To be effective, the authors point out, all revelation must not be too far removed from the thought and reactions of the age in which they are presented. In order to achieve this relevancy they tell us, “... we have selected as the basis of these papers more than one thousand human concepts representing the highest and most advanced planetary knowledge of spiritual values and universe meanings." (p. 17)

The chairperson of the commission authoring the Jesus papers states, "The memoranda which I have collected, and from which I have prepared this narrative of the life and teachings of Jesus-aside from the memory of the record of the Apostle Andrew@embrace thought gems and superior concepts of Jesus' teachings assembled from more than two thousand human beings who have lived on earth from the days of Jesus down to the time of the inditing of these revelations, more correctly restatements. The revelatory permission has been utilized only when the human record and human concepts failed to supply an adequate thought pattern." (p. 1343) The extensive research of Matthew Block has located many of the human sources of *The Urantia Book*. Matt points out that they invariably improve on the human source, and sometimes even change the conclusion of the human author.
The Urantia Book authors further discourage any "literalism" concepts by stating that the angels of the churches and the angels of progress disagreed on how to report Jesus' teachings at Urmia because of the great difference in planetary affairs at the time the lectures were given and twentieth-century religious and political conditions. At various places in *The Urantia Book* the authors will inject a phrase like "stated in modem phraseology," or "in terms of modem thought," or "from the standpoint of the twentieth-century." They discourage any assumptions of infallibility by remarking, "we do not know, " "we surmise," "we conjecture," or "we are of the opinion." The authority of revelation is not established by dogmatic assertions of "literal inspiration" or "infallibility," but by its truth recognition in the minds and hearts of people.

The validity of revelation is determined by the quality of its spiritual enlightenment, which is tested by experience. The authors of *The Urantia Book* used the best of contemporary science and human philosophy, at the time it was indited, to show the integration of science, philosophy, and religion under the overcontrol of the First Source and Center of all things and beings. These celestial personalities used material, sometimes taken out of historical context, to teach spiritual truth. The spiritual insights and truth resonance of the harmonious integration of the entire universe pictured in *The Urantia Book* is without parallel in world literature. It is a magnificent coordination of fact, truth, and value, and, I believe, the most reliable and authentic view of Reality available to humankind.

Scholarly evaluation shows that *Urantia Book* fundamentalism is just as untenable as Biblical fundamentalism. In the same way that higher criticism established sound foundations for Biblical studies, so must critical scholarship prepare the way for creative study of *The Urantia Book*. Thus freed from any illusions about its literal infallibility, we are delivered from defensive fundamentalistic attitudes and open to evaluate its spiritual insights, cosmology, theology, and its view of human origins, development, and destiny. In this capacity its potentials are without parallel on the human scene.

The Meredith J. Sprunger Archive

The Purpose of Revelation

A Response to Martin Gardner's *Urantia: The Great Cult Mystery*
11/22/95

The purpose of revelation is to reveal and enlarge spiritual truth. All presentations of revelation are communicated in the intellectual-cultural frames of reference of the times in which they are given. These human concepts carrying the revelation are transitory, but the truth they proclaim is eternal. For instance, the seven-day creation story in the Bible which theologians now classify as "myth," made sense in the simplistic cosmology of prescientific times and effectively transmitted the spiritual truth that God is the source of all creation.

Every epochal revelation and all religions giving expression to the truths of revelation have a history of development that have many commonalities because human nature tends to exhibit consistent patterns, and we can learn from studying these past religious developments. There is a tendency in the early stages of all personal and social responses to revelation to identify the temporal intellectual-scientific-cultural vehicle concepts with the enlarged spiritual truths presented. The enlarged spiritual vision is so captivating and fulfilling that individual religionists and groups not only identify the temporal vehicle concepts with the eternal truths, they regard both as infallible and inerrant. Such theological beliefs have come to be referred to under the rubric of "fundamentalism." These fundamentalists are often dedicated, wonderful people.

Many individuals who believe in the inerrancy of the Bible have spent their lives attempting to harmonize its temporal human concept carriers with its eternal spiritual truths. It took centuries of experience and theological scholarship to finally separate the temporal Biblical carrier concepts associated with the Fourth Epochal Revelation from its eternal spiritual truths and prepare the planet for the Fifth Epochal Revelation. It is the eternal spiritual truths pointed to by the Bible which make it an enduring document, not its outdated scientific-cultural carrier concepts.

Demythologizing *The Urantia Book*

Students of the Fifth Epochal Revelation are now experiencing this same inclination to identify its scientific-cultural carrier concepts with the enlarged and inspiring spiritual truths it presents. The historic dichotomy which our planet has experienced between science and religion no doubt inspired the revelators of the Fifth Epochal Revelation to present an integrated view of the relationships of science, philosophy, and religion in the universe. The mandates under which the revelators worked, in my judgment, are wise and spiritually sound. They were required to use contemporary scientific frames of reference which they acknowledge will soon be in need of revision. They were instructed to use concepts indigenous to our culture and only use their own formulations when they could not find a human expression that was relevant to their purposes. They tell us that they used thousands of the highest human formulations of truth. The research of Matthew Block is verifying these statements and showing us the ingenious ways they have improved these human sources.

The central thing to remember about revelation, as we have mentioned, is that its purpose is to reveal and enlarge spiritual truth. The accompanying scientific facts and cultural folkways used to carry and present these spiritual truths are transitory. It is the genius of revelation that eternal spiritual truths can be presented using temporal facts and changing cultural customs. The cosmological and metaphysical concepts of revelation are important because they are the frames of reference which make its message relevant in the times in which the revelation is given. The enlarged spiritual cosmology of the Fifth Epochal Revelation is critically important for mainline, liberal Christianity—as well as all traditional religions. Since contemporary Christology is rooted in prescientific material cosmology and an extremely simplistic spiritual cosmology, theologians are regarding the doctrine of exclusive salvation through faith in the post-resurrection Jesus as increasingly unbelievable. They are no longer able to affirm what has been called "the scandal of particularity."

Christian theology is in desperate need of the spiritual cosmology presented in *The Urantia Book* to envision a metaphysical conception of reality that will enable theologians to comprehend the "glory of particularity" in the post-resurrection personality of Jesus. The Fifty Epochal Revelation "does synthesize the apparently divergent sciences of nature and the theology of religion into a consistent and logical universe philosophy, a co-ordinated and unbroken explanation of both science and religion, thus creating a harmony of mind and satisfaction of spirit which answers in human experience those questionings of the mortal mind which craves to know how the Infinite works out his will and plans in matter, with minds, and on spirit." (U. B. p. 1106)

The authors of *The Urantia Book* on page 1109-10 give an excellent description of the use of transitory knowledge and eternal truth in revelation. "Truth may be but relatively inspired, even though revelation is invariably a spiritual phenomenon. While statements with reference to cosmology are never inspired, such revelations are of immense value in that they at least transiently clarify knowledge by:
1. The reduction of confusion by the authoritative elimination of error.
2. The co-ordination of known or about-to-be-known facts and observations.
3. The restoration of important bits of lost knowledge concerning epochal transactions in the distant past.
4. The supplying of information which will fill in vital missing gaps in otherwise earned knowledge.
5. Presenting cosmic data in such a manner as to illuminate the spiritual teachings contained in the accompanying revelation."

While the enlarged spiritual cosmology is basic in presenting expanded spiritual truth, the authors of *The Urantia Book* repeatedly warn against identifying the temporal scientific-cultural frames of reference of the book with its eternal spiritual truths. *Urantia Book* fundamentalists seem to have just as much trouble separating the temporal scientific-cultural carrying-vehicle concepts from the eternal truths of *The Urantia Book* as do the Biblical fundamentalists. They retort, "*The Urantia Book* is not the Bible!" Obviously not, but the human mind makes the same identity responses linking the temporal and eternal aspects of revelation. In all probability, they will spend their lives attempting to harmonize the book's contemporary carrier concepts with its eternal spiritual truths.

Martin Gardner's recent book, *Urantia: The Great Cult Mystery*, is designed to undermine the credibility of *The Urantia Book.* To accomplish this purpose Gardner deals almost entirely with the human concept carriers of the spiritual truths, not the spiritual truths themselves. In actuality, history may show that it helped to focus attention on the real spiritual quality of the Fifth Epochal Revelation (which he totally ignores) that will ensure its recognition and appreciation for centuries to come. Although Gardner's book abounds with misinformation, erroneous assumptions, and fantastic speculations, it may be fortuitous that it appeared early in the Urantia movement.

Gardner is best known as the author of columns in the *Scientific American* and the *Skeptical Inquirer*. He is a professional debunker of psychic and esoteric phenomena. Gardner is an indefatigable researcher reporting facts, events, and rumors which make *The Urantia Book* appear in the worst possible light. *Urantia: The Great Cult Mystery* is a hodgepodge of information and speculation about Ellen White's revelations, Seventh-Day Adventism beliefs, Oahspe revelations, numerology, scientific errors in *The Urantia Book*, deviant activities, and controversy in the Urantia movement. The book is focused on the scientific-cultural carrier-vehicle aspects of *The Urantia Book* and largely ignores its spiritual truths. He believes Wilfred Kellogg channeled *The Urantia Book* and Dr. William S. Sadler edited and revised it. Since the supermortal authors of the Urantia Papers tell us they have used the ideas of thousands of human beings in the production of the book and research is confirming this fact, it would not be surprising if Dr. Sadler's ideas were among this distinguished group. But, for many reasons, I am confident that Dr. Sadler did not write or revise the book.

Gardner attempts to denigrate the spiritual quality of *The Urantia Book* not by dealing directly with this issue but by using many of the classic logical fallacies:
1. *The Genetic Fallacy.* Gardner asserts that *The Urantia Book* is the product of channeling; therefore, he implies, its message is inferior, or, at least the product of human authorship. *The Urantia Book* is not the product of channeling activity. In 1958 I arranged a meeting of a group of ministers who were making a critical study of *The Urantia Book* and Dr. William S. Sadler to discuss the origin of the Urantia Papers. When we arrived, he had prepared a paper for us listing every imaginable form of subconscious mind or psychic activity, including channeling. At the bottom of the outline he had a note saying, "The technique of the reception of *The Urantia Book* in English in no way parallels or impinges upon any of the above phenomena of the marginal consciousness." He went on to tell us that as nearly as he could determine, the appearance of the Urantia Papers was associated with some form of superconscious mind activity.

Even if the book were a product of channeling, or any other technique or source of authorship, the only way to ascertain its quality is by evaluating its content or teachings. The real issue of the spiritual quality is not seriously considered by Gardner.

2. *The Post Hoc Ergo Hoc Fallacy* (After this, therefore, because of this). Gardner points to the contradictions in Sister Ellen White's pronouncements, documents her plagiarisms, and recites disputes among Seventh-day Adventists. Early in my correspondence with Gardner I observed that he had an emotional fixation of Seventh-day Adventism. I was therefore not surprised to read on p. 181, "I have always been interested in the history of Seventh-day Adventism ever since as a young boy, for a period of about a year, I considered myself an Adventist." After these extensive references to Seventh-day Adventism, Gardner implies that since Dr. Sadler as a young man was active in Seventh-day Adventism ministry, *The Urantia Book* is in many ways an outgrowth of the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventism.

This is a vast distortion of fact and truth. *The Urantia Book* contains many theological and philosophical positions which are harmonious with insights in many of the world religions. Although it most closely parallels the insights of progressive mainline Christian theology, historical analysis may show that the Mormon movement, Seventh-day Adventism, and other contemporary religious movements were instrumental in preparing for the advent of the Fifth Epochal Revelation. *The Urantia Book* at the same time differs, particularly in its spiritual cosmology, from all traditional religious positions. Gardner again fails to discuss the spiritual truths presented by *The Urantia Book* with which he may disagree.

3. *The Faulty Generalization Fallacy.* Gardner cites the absurd dietary beliefs and practices of Dr. John Kellogg, Vern Grimsley's deceptive pronouncements, the strange visions of Joe Pope, and the controversial beliefs of the channeling movement, and implies that these reflect the content of *The Urantia Book* teachings. He cleverly avoids comparing any of these activities with *Urantia Book* teachings—for there are none!

4. *The Irrelevant Conclusion Fallacy.* Gardner analyzes and uses the scientific errors in *The Urantia Book* to depreciate its value even though the authors clearly state that the science and cosmology of the book are not inspired and will soon need to be updated. He also notes that human sources were used, which he labels as plagiarism, and thereby implies that the spiritual quality of the book is equally erroneous and human.

As we mentioned earlier, the authors of *The Urantia Book* clearly state that they have used human sources and why they are using them. The use of these human sources is often handled in such a way as to arrive at a position differing from that of the human author. To accuse the superhuman authors of plagiarism is a bit far fetched, as they are not concealing the use of human sources and they deliberately avoided reference to specific human personalities—they do not want any St. Peter or St. Paul connected with the Fifth Epochal Revelation. This, in my judgment, is certainly a wise decision. There is very little in *The Urantia Book* which would support *Urantia Book* fundamentalism! Nonetheless, revelation always gives rise to fundamentalists.

5. *The Ad Hominem Fallacy.* Since Gardner is apparently not interested in grappling with the spiritual content of *Urantia Book* teachings, he attacks the activities of people he assumes are associated with its origin or who are *Urantia Book* readers: Seventh-day Adventists, the atypical people in the Urantia movement, as well as Dr. Sadler. He quotes Harry Loose (So far as I know, no one in the Urantia movement has ever heard of him except Harold Sherman) as saying, "The truth is that Sadler is mentally unsound. A paranoiac with religeo-power complex—feverishly grasping for greater jurisdiction of the mentalities of the many" (p. 149) "Sherman was convinced," Gardner writes, "that after Lena died Sadler became paranoid, his mind 'perverse and deranged.' Both he and his son Bill, Sherman wrote, 'will lie and frame anybody and [do] anything to accomplish their purposes'" (p. 150) Gardner's personal opinion of Sadler is a little more reserved, "Although I do not question Sadler's honesty and sincerity, I am convinced that he fell victim in his declining years to delusions of self-importance and grandeur of the sort that occasionally descend on the elderly." (p. 403)

Anyone who knew Dr. Sadler will recognize that these statements are ridiculous. Dr. Sadler was an exceptionally well balanced, rational individual. He did not try to control people and usually did not express his opinion about an issue unless asked. He deliberately removed himself from leadership responsibilities in the Urantia Foundation and the Urantia Brotherhood and did not try to influence their decisions. He did everything he could to prevent his name from being associated with *The Urantia Book.* I was amazed at his ability to remove himself from leadership influence and allow younger people to assume responsibilities without his interference.

He was also a very competent leader and I assume he could be autocratic with anyone who wanted to alter the content of *The Urantia Book.* Christy (Emma Christensen, a member of the contact commission who received the Urantia Papers) told me that Harold Sherman wanted to enter material on extra sensory perception in the book and was categorically refused.

Urantia: The Great Cult Mystery is the first extensively researched public record of events surrounding the origin of *The Urantia Book* written by a skilled debunker who does everything possible to undermine credibility in its teachings. Although Martin Gardner's book contains many things which I think are erroneous and has evaluations with which I disagree, I think it is important in an open society to have such criticism available, and it helps prevent a cult mentality in the Urantia movement. Even the impartial reviewer of the book in the *Library Journal* recognizes its "patronizing tone" and "gross editorializing" and concludes the review by saying, "...it would be difficult to recommend this book to any library." The high spiritual quality of the Fifth Epochal Revelation will survive such attacks much as the spiritual truths of the Fourth Epochal Revelation survived the persecutions of the early Christian community.

A Critical Approach to *The Urantia Book*

We should encourage a critical approach to *The Urantia Book.* Since it purports to be the Fifth Epochal Revelation authored by supermortal personalities, it is important to have a clear understanding of the philosophical criteria of truth necessary in evaluating such claim. First of all, claim or authority is not a philosophic criterion of truth. Secondly, knowing the origin and/or authorship of a book may give some insights, but it is not a reliable philosophic criterion of truth. Whether supermortals or human beings wrote the book, it must be evaluated by the quality of its content, not by what it claims, or who may have written it.

The central objective in evaluating *The Urantia Book* is to assess the quality of its spiritual truth and insight. This must be done by individuals using their total capacity to evaluate its philosophic coherence and experiential spiritual relevance. Is the spiritual quality and insights of the book inferior to, equal with, or superior to our traditional sources of spiritual truth? During this period of testing, a consensus will gradually evolve regarding its quality. If the general opinion is negative, the book will fade into obscurity. If the consensus is positive, continued evaluation will determine the level of its spiritual contribution. Is it just another useful spiritual resource, or does it have the quality of revelation? My philosophic hypothesis is that if it has the spiritual quality of revelation, its influence will continue to grow in society throughout the world.

My personal view, after almost forty years of critical study and evaluation, is that *The Urantia Book* is of superior quality in at least four categories;
1. Its comprehensive view of Deity and Reality, including the Paradise Trinity.
2. The presentation of enlarged spiritual cosmology which is commensurate with our gigantic material astronomical cosmology.
3. An overview of a vast array of spiritual personalities that function in a hierarchical system of ability and power, which must exist if we are to make any sense of the spiritual cosmos.
4. And finally, a greatly expanded presentation of the life and teachings of Jesus, that is solidly rooted in the New Testament realities.
In short, *The Urantia Book* is the best view of an integrated universe, the best model of total reality that I have encountered.

Generations of scholars will be probing the human aspects and personalities whose concepts were the temporal carriers of the eternal spiritual truths of the Fifth Epochal Revelation. This is both interesting and appropriate research which may, along with the confines of the English language, shed some light on the limitations of the latest epochal revelation. But the real quality of *The Urantia Book* will be determined by its spiritual truths and insights. In my judgment, they are without peer on our planet.

The Ascendancy of the Fifth Epochal Revelation

During the first forty years of its history the Urantia movement has evolved from a handful of readers in Chicago to hundreds of study groups and tens of thousands of readers throughout the world. Without mass publicity or promotion over 250,000 copies of *The Urantia Book* have been sold and translations are available in French, Spanish, and Finnish. Work continues on the Dutch and Russian translations, with editions of Korean, German, Swedish, Hungarian, and Italian translations on the drawing board. Audio and computer versions of the book are available and numerous study aids have been published. Regional and International Conferences are being held and secondary works are proliferating.

All this is impressive but of much greater importance is the tempering and structuring of the Urantia movement in preparation for its world-wide mission. The rugged struggle of these early years has established solid foundations for carrying a new paradigm of spiritual reality to humankind. The Urantia movement very early in its history has encountered most of the challenges that have threatened religious transitions down through history. We have received an experiential vaccination against these viruses which have threatened creative spiritual growth in the past. The Fifth Epochal Revelation has demonstrated its dynamic and power in steering the movement repeatedly through critical periods and controversial encounters in our journey.

The Urantia movement has been confronted by centralized organizational control and we have witnessed the power of individual initiative and creative diversity to establish a pluralistic foundation for outreach ministry. We have escaped oligarchical-authoritarian direction in the triumph of participatory democracy and openness. We weathered the threat of legalistic-power strategies through the dominance of cooperative team work.

Soon after regional and national conferences were held, students of *The Urantia Book* were captivated and challenged by the intrigues of charismatic control of the Urantia movement. With the passing of time, we recognized the danger of charismatic influence and witnessed the emergence of evolutionary-rational decision-making. On the heels of this tempering experience, we were confronted by a more subtle form of charismatic influence in the captivating channeling movement among readers of *The Urantia Book.* Following the example of the Christian church in dealing with similar movements in its history, we have achieved the spiritual maturity to allow individual freedom to evaluate the authenticity of spiritual experience.

We are now entering the intellectual-spiritual struggle which took mainline Christianity centuries to largely resolve: distinguishing between the contemporary, fallible human carrier concepts used in revelation from its eternal spiritual truths. Martin Gardner's book, *Urantia: The Great Cult Mystery*, may help to shorten this period in the Urantia movement. It may also help to guard against cult attitudes among those who have living faith in the enlarged spiritual truths of the Fifth Epochal Revelation.

The solid core of the Urantia movement has come through these tribulations with renewed dedication and balance. We have come of age. Spiritual freedom and participatory democracy have taught us that there can be unity of purpose in the midst of intellectual and political diversity. The Fifth Epochal Revelation will make its way and overcome any barriers placed in its way. We are standing at the threshold of "one of the most amazing and enthralling epochs of social readjustment, moral quickening, and spiritual enlightenment" (U. B. p. 2082) on our planet. The preliminary, orienting growth developments of the Urantia movement are largely behind us. The Most Highs have prepared us and our planet for the most thrilling vision of spiritual reality since Jesus of Nazareth walked on our world. This outreach mission will be many-faceted, pluralistic, and victorious!

The Meredith J. Sprunger Archive

Prayerful Problem Solving

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Human beings are by nature problem solving creatures. Our basic needs and urges interact with environmental stimuli in search of organismic satisfaction and fulfillment. All problem solving from birth to death is set in the context of our nature, experience, and learning. How we solve our problems is most fundamentally determined by our nature and resources. We are material beings integrated and controlled by a neural system directed by mind and indwelt by spirit. Human beings, therefore, have physical, mental, and spiritual resources to aid in problem solving. All of these capacities and capabilities interact and function holistically.

Centuries of experience—verified by scientific discovery, rational insight, and spiritual revelation—have taught us that these triune human resources exist in a hierarchical relationship. Our material nature is directed by the meanings and quality of mind, and mind is eventually influenced and determined by the values of spiritual reality. The more immature and underdeveloped the individual is psychologically and spiritually, the greater the domination of the physical laws and conditions will be. Conversely, the more mature and developed we are mentally and spiritually, the less we are influenced and controlled by our physical condition and the material world.

The human approach to problem solving reflects this hierarchical relationship of resources and leads to a differential strategy in finding a solution to our difficulties. Usually we start by analyzing the situation, attempting to break it down into its simplest components. We isolate facts and influences. If this initial analytical process does not lead to a solution, we have learned to employ the more systematic techniques of the scientific method. The scientific method is especially helpful in understanding and solving problems related to the material world.

When these analytical-empirical attempts at problem solving bring inadequate results, we turn to the more holistic or integral method of creative thinking. Graham Wallas, a pioneer in creative thinking research, describes this type of thinking as a four-step process: preparation, incubation, illumination, and verification. This is solution by insight. In creative thinking we are able to cross the border line between our empirical-rational capacities for the resolution of difficulties and prayerful problem solving. We cannot distinguish whether insights originate in our conscious or subconscious mind or if they are received from spiritual, superconscious resources.

We do find that sooner or later we reach the limit of our human ability to solve difficult problems. At this point those of us who accept the reality and availability of spiritual resources and the efficacy of prayer may consciously engage in prayerful problem solving. At the outset, spiritually mature people need to rule out prayer as a form of magic or a technique in which we can bargain with or change God. God is infinite in goodness and love and does not need to be persuaded to do good. Secondly, we must have an understanding of God and universe laws which enable prayerful problem solving to operate effectively. Physical, mental, and spiritual laws were established by God to regulate the world and our lives. Prayer is not a means to circumvent these laws.

While God's relationship with material reality is largely through the utilization of impersonal laws, God's relationship with people is personal. Through personal communication God seeks to assist us in using universe laws more effectively to augment our welfare. We receive this spiritual ministry primarily through our minds and the minds of others. Mind is the area in which prayerful problem solving takes place.

Efficacious prayer is not a rocking chair solution to tough problems or an easy detour around the hilly road of rigorous living. When prayer is used as an escape mechanism or psychological safety net by the fearful, slothful, or cowardly, it does not achieve genuine spiritual quality or power. Prayer is not a spiritual crutch or magic wand. It is the actualization of an indigenous partnership with God. God works with us, not "for" us, as an indulgent wonder worker. There are elemental spiritual requirements which must precede problems solving prayer. We are required to face reality courageously, and to have exhausted our human ability to cope with our difficulties. Egocentric, selfish, or purely personal objectives must be surrendered for a dedication to spiritual values and growth. Indecision and vacillation are barriers to divine guidance. Only a wholehearted decision to follow God's will as we sincerely understand it will bring spiritual wisdom. Our prayer should be for guidance, not some miraculous happening. Finally, we need to pursue our quest with living faith, not doubting that our spiritual resources will be sufficient for any mortal eventuality.

Even though prayer does not change God's mind and is not a way of changing natural or spiritual laws, it is a process through which the natural course of events may be altered. We live in an open universe in which human thought and action may influence the sequence and quality of events. Prayer is a spiritual technique through which we sometimes discover or utilize higher laws that may nullify or counteract lower laws. It is a psychological-spiritual relationship that may change our thinking and behavior. As a result, different options or events take place, higher and more inclusive laws may be set in motion, or superior resources may be made available to help us solve or cope with problems.

The editors of *Guideposts* in *His Mysterious Ways* (1988, Guideposts Associates, Inc.) have compiled the stories of over a hundred people who have escaped tragedy or death or whose lives have been dramatically changed by seemingly miraculous happenings brought about as the result of prayer. How do we understand these unusual events? And why are people in similar situations, who appear to be just as good and righteous, not the recipients of such miraculous deliverance through their prayers?

While the answer to these questions is hidden by our incomplete knowledge and limited view of divine wisdom, it appears that the basic factor in God's relationship with persons is a spiritual quality of love which is unique for each individual in any given situation. The effect of every personal relationship with God is determined by the quality and circumstances of its singular reality.

It may be helpful to speculate about the methodologies of prayerful problem solving. Our minds are indwelt by the spirit of the Universal Father and nurtured by the Spirit of Truth and the Holy Spirit. There are, no doubt, many ways in which we may be assisted by this triune spirit ministry. The following avenues are suggested as ways in which prayer may bring spiritual help in problem solving.

1. New ideas or insights which result in changed attitudes and/or actions that alter our lives and the reactions of our associates.

2. Augmented faith and imagination activate psychological and spiritual resources which are able to change body chemistry and functions. Scientific research is building incontrovertible empirical evidence for the efficacious power of prayer in the healing process. Many medical schools and physicians now openly recognize prayer as a significant modality in healing.

Visualizing in prayer that particles, atoms, cells, organs, functions, and the entire body and mind are being perfectly renewed is an effective healing resource. These changes appear to be miraculous only because we are largely ignorant of universe laws which enable psychological-spiritual activities to change body functions when fully undergirded by faith visualization and creative imagery.

3. Possible greater utilization of latent extrasensory capacities: telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, and psychokinesis. In unusual situations and times of crisis we observe the association of prayer and exceptional perception, awareness, and other unusual events.

4. The activity of angels or other superhuman beings to minister to needs and bring help which is sought through prayer. The ministry of Seraphic Guardians may be more extensive than we realize. Such events may take place more frequently in extremely critical situations or when larger providential purposes are served.

5. Prayer may enable us to use channels, energy forms, or laws unknown to us. We are learning that entities are often connected even though widely separated in space. In the quantum world of physics we know that particles are connected even when distantly separated. Space, it appears, is filled with fields—invisible structures that are indigenous to the universe. There is considerable evidence that there are mental and spiritual fields or energy lanes that link and influence people across space. Sometimes it appears that prayer brings about a mysterious coordination of people and events.

Any or all of these methods of ministry may be involved in prayerful problem solving. Sometimes prayer enables us to find approaches to our difficulties which were not available to us through analytical-rational-creative thinking. At other times we find that prayer does not bring those ideas, attitudes, or actions which alter the the external conditions of the problem. It is still there in all its terrible reality. But even in these situations prayer is spiritually efficacious. It is a dynamic spiritual fellowship which inspires creative attitudes and courage, enabling us to live with even the most difficult problems such as personal deficiencies, tragedy, injustice, pain, and death.

One of the most difficult questions associated with prayerful problem solving is the place of intercessory prayer. Is it a legitimate spiritual technique for helping others or only a psychological-social way of expressing our concern for their welfare? Certainly intercessory prayer cannot be used to manipulate people. God does not need to be informed of their condition nor be persuaded to perform good deeds. God is our loving Universal Father whose spirit indwells each of us, and we do not need saints, supermortal beings, or fellow mortals interceding for us. Nevertheless, we are social beings and I believe the indwelling Spirit of God leads us to share in the ministry to others through prayer.

Jesus engaged in intercessory prayer and urged his apostles to pray for others. Jesus did not play spiritual games. He was sincere, forthright, and honest, and as a Creator Son he was thoroughly conversant with universe laws and resources. Jesus' attitude toward and practice of intercessory prayer assures us that there are channels through which we can minister to others through prayer.

Furthermore, there are many double-blind scientific studies demonstrating the efficaciousness of intercessory prayer in healing. Other scientific studies show the influence of prayer on enzymes, fungi, bacteria, and cells. It is my assumption that there mental and spiritual fields or energy lanes which can be accessed through prayer to undergird others; and in our personal relationship with God there is always the opportunity, within God's loving discretion, to share in personal divine ministration to those in our loving concern.

Regardless of its effect, we spontaneously pray for those we love. There is great value in the psychological-social ramifications of intercessory prayer. There is evidence, however, that intercessory prayer has more than autosuggestive or sociosuggestive validity. If this is so, how do we understand this form of ministry? One explanation is that our extrasensory capacities have the ability to enter other minds and bring comfort, strength, and love. Another possibility is that God not only gives us the opportunity to be co-partners with him in shaping our own lives, but, as we have intimated, may have created spiritual channels through which we are privileged to be co-ministers with him in helping others within the limits of their spiritual autonomy.

In concluding our thinking about prayerful problem solving, we should remember that the stimulus of problems is basic to personal and spiritual growth. Problems are really opportunities for development and service. There are, therefore, inherent limits to problem solving in the evolutionary universe. These limitations are germane to our glorious destiny and the quality of spiritual perfection which we are forging out between the hammers of anguish and the anvils of necessity here on planet earth.

The best picture of the efficacious use of prayer is to observe the prayer life of Jesus: "Jesus never prayed as a religious duty. To him prayer was a sincere expression of spiritual attitude, a declaration of soul loyalty, a recital of personal devotion, an expression of thanksgiving, an avoidance of emotional tension, a prevention of conflict, an exaltation of intellection, an ennoblement of desire, a vindication of moral decision, an enrichment of thought, an invigoration of higher inclinations, a consecration of impulse, a clarification of viewpoint, a declaration of faith, a transcendental surrender of will, a sublime assertion of confidence, a revelation of courage, the proclamation of discovery, a confession of supreme devotion, the validation of consecration, a technique for the adjustment of difficulties, and the mighty mobilization of the combine soul powers to withstand all human tendencies toward selfishness, evil, and sin. He lived just such a life of prayerful consecration to the doing of his Father's will and ended his life triumphantly with just such a prayer. The secret of his unparalleled religious life was this consciousness of the presence of God, and he attained it by intelligent prayer and sincere worship—unbroken communion with God—and not by leadings, voices, visions, or extraordinary religious practices." (U. B. p. 2089)

The Commission to Minister

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> If you are not a positive and missionary evangel of your religion, you are self-deceived in that what you call religion is only a traditional belief or a mere system of intellectual philosophy.
> (U.B. p. 1780)
>
> Service—more service, increased service, difficult service, adventurous service, and at last divine and perfect service—is the goal of time and the destination of space.
> (U. B. p. 316)

The distinctive characteristic of the religion of the Spirit is the centrality of service and evangelism. Both Jesus and the authors of *The Urantia Book* point out that anyone who has experienced a dynamic personal relationship with God and has dedicated themselves to the demands of this relationship must *do* something about it. Genuine religion always motivates action and changes lives.

Many of us have received just enough of an inoculation of religion to have developed an immunity to the real thing. We can comfortably intellectualize and emote about it endlessly and thereby escape the fruit-bearing demands of action. Neither high sounding words, grandiose plans, nor good intentions are substitutes for service and ministry, for actually *doing* the Father's will.

The Centrality of Service

Jesus constantly emphasized the centrality of service and fruit-bearing in our relationship with the Father. Religionists have often side-stepped the demanding discipline of spiritual ministry by engaging in religious substitutes such as theologizing, in-group rule-making, legalism, defensive power struggles, dogmatic proclamation, and mystic contemplation. The basic teaching of Jesus can be summarized by three words: *attitude*, *action*, and *outreach*. We are to love God with all of our heart, soul, and mind, and our neighbor as our self.

We actualize this love in the concrete action of creative service; and this ministry is to be directed in an outreach to the ends of the earth.
Let us recall in more detail what Jesus has to say about this life of ministering to our fellows. In the parable of the Sower he illustrates the importance of sowing the seeds of truth. This seed will obviously fall on different types of soil. The sowing is our responsibility, but the results, to a large extent, are in greater hands. We are reminded on p. 557 of *The Urantia Book* that "The evolving soul is not made divine by what it does, but by what it strives to do." We ought to strive to whet the appetites of our associates for truth, but not be overly concerned about results.

The parable of the Two Sons points out that good intentions are not enough; actually *doing* the Father's will is required of all true sons and daughters of the heavenly Father. Or as Matthew phrases it, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." (Matt. 7:21) To Peter he said, "Feed my sheep." (p. 2048)
The parables of the Good Samaritan, the Lost Sheep, and the Lost Coin all emphasize the importance of reaching out to others. Cults and Study Groups tend to be centripetal, inward; their primary relationships and focus is with insiders. Knowledge is shared with in-group members and special guidance is often claimed by the select few. A mature religion or religionist is open and outgoing and seeks to bring ministry to all humankind. When we turn from our in-group preoccupations, we see that, indeed, the "fields are white for the harvest but the laborers are few." The world hungers for a vision of a larger understanding of the universe and of God. Our world is desperately in need of the enlarged reality paradigm of the Fifth Epochal Revelation.

Jesus admonishes us that we are responsible for amplifying and sharing the truth that has been given to us. On pages 1917-18 we read, "Truth is living; the Spirit of Truth is ever leading the children of light into new realms of spiritual reality and divine service. You are not given truth to crystallize into settled, safe, and honored forms. Your revelation of truth must be so enhanced by passing through your personal experience that new beauty and actual spiritual gains will be disclosed to all who behold your spiritual fruits and in consequence thereof are led to glorify the Father who is in heaven. Only those faithful servants who thus grow in the knowledge of the truth, and who thereby develop the capacity for divine appreciation of spiritual realities, can ever hope to 'enter fully into the joy of their lord.' What a sorry sight for successive generations of the professed followers of Jesus to say regarding their stewardship of divine truth: 'Here, Master, is the truth you committed to us a hundred or a thousand years ago. We have lost nothing; we have faithfully preserved all you gave us; we have allowed no changes to be made in that which you taught us; here is the truth you gave us.' But such a plea concerning spiritual indolence will not justify the barren steward of truth in the presence of the Master. In accordance with the truth committed to your hands will the Master of truth require reckoning."

A Clarion Call for Action

These ringing words of the authors of *The Urantia Book* are a clarion call for action and growth! Are we becoming missionary evangels or in-group comfort seekers? We are told on pages 279-80, "In the universal regime you are not reckoned as having possessed yourself of knowledge and truth until you have demonstrated your ability and your willingness to impart this knowledge to others."
The latest and greatest truth which the Master has committed into our hands is the Fifth Epochal Revelation. What fruits of the spirit show that you have done something creative in spreading this enlarged vision of truth in your community and in the world? Where have you sown this improved seed of truth? Are you cultivating personal and social soil and planting seeds with care; or, are you merely letting nature take its course and busying yourself with other things while the winds of chance broadcast the seeds at random? Are you content to admire this beautiful treasure of wisdom, drinking in its great truths, and circumspectly sharing them with a few initiates of your in-group and then returning the treasure again to its closet? Or are you putting this treasure to work in the world where it can enrich all of the peoples of the earth?

A mere handful of apostles and disciples of the Fourth Epochal Revelation turned the Roman world up-side-down. Although thousands of people are students of *The Urantia Book* most of them are "closet" followers of the Fifth Epochal Revelation. After over forty years of preparing for the time when we will have an intentional outreach program, the world, generally, is oblivious of its existence. I think the time has come to initiate a wise, but open, outreach ministry to the world. Obviously, this will not be easy. "The religion of the spirit means effort, struggle, conflict, faith, determination, love, loyalty, and progress." (p. 1729)

The Key Function of Laypersons

I would remind you that virtually all of the major spiritual advances of history were spearheaded by laypersons. The religious professionals not only are the stewards of vested interests, but their spiritual vision has been shaped and circumscribed by institutional forms and theological structures. After forty years of trying to interest the most progressive mainline ministers in *The Urantia Book*, I have regrettably come to realize that the paradigm shift to a new revelation is just too great for them. It was perfectly natural for the priests living in Jerusalem to doubt that anything of real value could originate in Nazareth. This places an extraordinary responsibility in the hands of lay people for the initiation of a spiritual renaissance powered by the Fifth Epochal Revelation.

It is easy for new spiritual movements to be captured by cult dynamics. The only escape from this cultocentric trap is to follow the ministry Jesus taught his apostles—that of engaging in an active outgoing proclamation of the good news. We can transcend the cultocentric predicament through a courageous attempt to share these great truths with all humankind. I am convinced that the base for such evangelistic activities must be religious institutions dedicated to outreach ministry. I would invite all serious students of the Fifth Epochal Revelation to become missionary evangels in some form of active outreach ministry.

This ministry can take many forms and each of us must discover which function or channel we find creative. We can serve the Universal Father in every vocation and through all of the arts and sciences. We need to seek the Father's guidance and direction in our service. All of us are not called to the same ministry. Courageously keep step with the music that you hear. Whether it be the call of the trumpets, the cadence of the drums, the melody of the woodwinds, the exquisite strains of the violins, or the quieting harmony of the harp—follow your own inner leading and so will the Father's symphony of service benefit all humankind.

There are three basic forms of service in which each of us is challenged to participate. First, we should strive to live the great truths given to us. This is elemental. Second, we ought to engage in various kinds of material service. We should aid the needy, work for social, economic, and legal justice, and foster the actualization of human well-being. Finally, and most importantly, we are called to engage in a spiritual ministry to the minds and souls of our fellows. This sharing and proclamation of the good news has, historically, effected the greatest transformation of human life and society of all of the forms of ministry. Spiritual ministry is the most vital and far-reaching way to share the great truths of revelation and experience.

The Unique Function of a New Spiritual Paradigm

After more than forty years of experimenting with ways to "bootleg" the teachings of the Fifth Epochal Revelation, I am convinced that only the unique cosmological reality paradigm of *The Urantia Book* itself has the potential to bring a spiritual renaissance to our planet. Most of the concepts of *The Urantia Book* are already in the thought patterns of Western Civilization. It is the unique integration of these ideas in a new cosmological setting presented in the Fifth Epochal Revelation that makes them effective. Many theologians, ministers, and educators are currently presenting the essential truths of *The Urantia Book* in their teaching. This is doing much good but it lacks the integrative spiritual vision and power of the Fifth Epochal Revelation. Only the coherent message of *The Urantia Book* itself has the dynamic to bring about a transformation of the contemporary human condition.

I recognize that such an open ministry is not for timid souls. It is difficult for people who are balanced, solid citizens in their communities to risk being viewed as "different" or belonging to some strange cult or movement. Pioneers always face difficulty and hardship. Spiritual pioneering is a rigorous and lonely path of service. Do not imagine that opposition and oppression are only aberrations of the past. New and enlarged presentations of truth have always been, and will always be, attack by religious traditionalists and fundamentalists.

Nevertheless, for those who have the courage, guided by wisdom, to bring a knowledge of the Fifth Epochal Revelation to the individuals and the institutions of our world are engaging in one of the most important ministries of our times. Such missionary evangels will open the door to a spiritual dynamic that will transform our planet in the next thousand years. An Archangel of Nebadon reminds us, "The weak indulge in resolutions, but the strong act. Life is but a days work—do it well. The act is ours; the consequences Gods." (p. 556)

Principles of Ministry

Whatever form of outreach ministry you should choose to engage in, let me share some principles of ministry that may help to guide this service. I would invite you to adapt, internalize, and live by the following seven principles of ministry.

1. *Use wisdom and balance in all of your service.* Avoid extremes, exhibitionism, oversell, and the spectacular. Learn to distinguish between artistic good taste and the theatrical. Remember that personal contact is more effective than impersonal mass communication. Understand the wisdom and effectiveness of small groups. These groups form coalitions and networks more open and dynamic than hierarchical bureaucracies and self-serving cults. Such a network is many times greater than the sum of its parts. It has multiple leadership, pluralistic policies, and its center is every where.

Start were people are, not where you are. Communicate in their frames of reference and anticipate their natural reactions. Combine the most expert knowledge with the highest values in all of your ministry. Master your mind through the power of the spirit. Be strong in the spirit; know that in liaison with God nothing can defeat the spiritual purposes of your life. Be fearless but act with discretion.

2. *Let love create the atmosphere of all of your interpersonal relationships.* Remember that you cannot communicate effectively with others unless you positively and unconditionally accept them with all of their imperfections. Strive to prevent your own biases and limitations from interfering or distorting your service to them. Support, stimulate, and help people; do not seek to coerce them. See all of your fellows as persons of worth and strive to build their self-confidence and self-respect. Be natural and genuine and enjoy their company.

Serve out of love, a thankful heart, and the joy of the act itself. Ministry is an intrinsic activity of the creative mind and the loving soul. Extrinsic motivation in service compromises its spiritual value. Serving God even for good extrinsic purposes such as building your study group or church, or even to bring about a spiritual renaissance limits its spiritual value and personal satisfaction. Minister out of the intrinsic motivation of love, thankfulness, and joy and the extrinsic repercussions or results will largely take care of themselves. Serve with the openness of creative love; but do not try to manipulate people.

3.*Temper your personal convictions with philosophic objectivity.* Always be honest and open. Cultivate freedom of opinion and respect the right of others to disagree with your most deeply held convictions. Honor each person's God-given right to self-determination. Try to establish common ground but do not contend with people. Let your enthusiasm for truth animate your discussions but never knowingly put people down or offend.

4. *Recognize that evolution is the underlying principle of life.* Do not expect immediate results. All growth is unconscious and has mustard seed beginnings. The roots of a new tree of life take decades to penetrate the rocks of tradition on which it is planted. Be patient but do not become the victim of a fearful "do-nothing" psychology and bury your talents and treasure in stagnation or cult obscurities. Be concerned about ministering effectively but relatively unconcerned about results. Realize that your ministry must be planned and conducted in the context of the law of readiness. Always minister at the point of evolutionary readiness but do not confuse this basic preparation for the surface conditions of psychological and social readiness. All who have prophetic vision know that evolution, the plow of history, eventually breaks the crust of individual resistance and moves the clods of social stagnation. Be loyal and persistent in your service without needing to see results or be honored by success. It is our privilege and responsibility to minister; the results are in the hands of God the Supreme. In all things cultivate in yourself the mind and attitude of the Supreme. The vicissitudes of time do not change the goals of eternity.

5. *Be actively involved in routine, commonplace experiences.* Grow, bloom, and bear fruit in the soil where you are planted. If possible, keep your old social and religious ties strong and healthy. Share at the level of spiritual acceptance. When you are a tadpole don't pretend to be a trout or an eagle. Only dedicated and creative tadpoling will bring you inner satisfaction and a sense of fulfillment. These mundane activities and identifications will bring a sense of proportion, genuineness, and integrity to your ministry. Forget the failures of the past and do not allow yourself to be preoccupied anticipating the future. Live in the present in constant fellowship with the Universal Father and absorbed in the existential moment of experience.

6. *Cultivate an active sense of humor.* Humor helps us maintain a proper sense of perspective. You can carry useful man-sized or woman-sized loads when you get the world off your shoulders. Do not take yourself too seriously even though you are participating in important work. Be unconcerned about prestige and status. Strive to avoid self-contemplation and cultivate self-forgetfulness. Finite personalities can become tragic figures when they lose their sense of perspective and fail to appreciate the comedy of life. We need to learn to laugh at our selves and the frustrating, ridiculous, and absurd situations we encounter. A light hearted spirit can be a great asset in carrying the sometimes heavy burdens of ministry.

7. *Above all, live with joy in your heart and find joy in your ministry.* You belong to the Father's kingdom which has an eternal future of unimaginable adventure and reward. Nothing can long prevent the fulfillment of your most ardent spiritual hopes and fondest dreams. All who experience this faith in an eternal destiny live with irrepressible joy even in the midst of material hardship, social conflict, and seeming personal defeat. As you free yourself from the slavery of the lure of things, the adoration or criticism of people, and the importance or preoccupation with self, you will experience the liberating joys of service. You will also discover that in doing so you are free from the egocentric social pressure of being successful and establishing or maintaining a reputation.

When our will is in harmony with the Universal Father, the joy of service also brings a deep inner peace. When you no longer experience this peace of mind and joy in your ministry, find another channel of service which does fill your heart with joy because you feel that you are where you belong, where your heavenly Father wishes you to serve.

Summary

Let us now summarize what we have shared together. Jesus by example and teaching tells us the one thing necessary in our relationship with the Universal Father is to experience a personal fellowship with him, a living faith. This living faith activates three great spiritual truth responses: 1. Loving attitudes toward God and our fellows, 2. Dedicated action in service motivation, and 3. Outreach ministry communicating the good news to all the world.

These three great spiritual truth responses are augmented by seven principles of ministry: wisdom initiation, love radiation, philosophical discretion, evolutionary consideration, commonplace participation, humor realization, and joyful consummation.
Now may living faith, the one all-encompassing requirement of sonship, inspire us to actualize the great truth responses of love and service, guided and enhanced by the seven-fold principles of ministry. May each of us experience Godspeed and joy in the adventure of our commission to minister!

The Meredith J. Sprunger Archive

The Future of the Fifth Epochal Revelation

2/10/93 Revised 1/14/98

In October of 1955 *The Urantia Book* was published with great enthusiasm. The newly organized Urantia Brotherhood visualized organizing thousands of study groups and gradually chartering well grounded societies. The specific nature of these societies was ambiguous. Most of the founding members regarded the Urantia Brotherhood as a religious or quasi-religious organization. Dr. Sadler clearly saw societies developing as bona fide religious groups. The leaders of the Forum who developed the Brotherhood Constitution did not take the time to structure it directly from the teachings of *The Urantia Book*, but used and adapted the ready-made constitution of the Presbyterian Church for this purpose. Under Sadler's leadership, the Brotherhood Constitution provided a key place for ordained teachers. Following the publication of the book, Dr. Sadler started a school to train and ordain teachers. On numerous occasions Dr. Sadler and I discussed the nature of this new religious organization and its future development.

Disillusioning Experience

As the Brotherhood grew, a quite different view soon surfaced. The majority of the early members of the Urantia Brotherhood had a pronounced anti-church and anti-institutional bias. There was a marked uneasiness regarding the use of prayer and group singing at Brotherhood meetings. To guard against moving in the direction of a religious institution, we removed the term "ordained teacher" from the constitution. It was made clear that we were not interested in starting a new religion. If anyone identified us as a cult, we were irritated and defensive. We defined ourselves as "an educational-social organization with a religious purpose."

We were enthusiastic about introducing religious, educational, and political leaders to *The Urantia Book.* Illusions of grandeur about initiating a spiritual renaissance on our planet invigorated Urantia Conferences. Gradually, evolutionary reality began to change the picture. Religious and political leaders were not impressed. The book was succinctly dismissed as a contemporary gnostic document or politely ignored.
Internal disillusionments have compounded the evolutionary picture. The licensing agreement controversy, the Clayton incident, the Foundation-Brotherhood schism, the proliferation of lawsuits, and the wide-spread interest in channeling have sobered our naive idealism. Most of us now realize that the Fifth Epochal Revelation has been launched on the troubled and turbulent seas of evolutionary struggle.

Hunger for a Religious Community

In recent years, spiritual seeking has emerged on an unprecedented scale, accompanied by a disenchantment with contemporary religious institutions. The Most Highs are structuring excellent conditions for the advent of the Fifth Epochal Revelation. There has also been an increasing longing in the Urantia movement for a "religious community" which goes beyond the usual study group, one that furnishes a sense of "spiritual family" and communion, along with worship and a community identity. There is a growing sense of need for spiritual nourishment from birth to death. Study groups and societies, which are primarily intellectual-social groups, can't furnish all of the functions of traditional religious institutions, although they may serve as preliminary steps toward such religious organizations. I believe the single most important activity in the Urantia movement at this time is to focus on the development of resources which may help actualize new religious institutions. Hopefully, such institutions will serve as vehicles through which the Fifth Epochal Revelation can be carried out into the world. We need dedicated students of *The Urantia Book* researching an "Appropriate Symbolism and Socioreligious Expression of the Fifth Epochal Revelation."

I'm confident that sooner or later such new religious institutions will evolve in the Urantia movement. There have been several aborted attempts to do this already. When this does happen, there is a danger that these religious institutions may be extemporized, without adequate time and consideration to formulate organizations that best reflect the truth-insights of the Fifth Epochal Revelation. A wiser approach is for competent teams of interested people to evolve a body of resources associated with theology, polity, and liturgy before the pressure of necessity fashions religious organizations without such help.

There is a great need for institutions to serve on the growing edge of spiritual development in our world—religious institutions which will appeal to the highest spiritual aspirations of humankind. This was a concern of Rabbi Abraham Heschel, who, in a conversation with Robert Greenleaf shortly before his death, asked, "Why do so many of the great religions which have their origins in the mystery [of spiritual power] come ultimately to be social service agencies, or in their religious life to be preoccupied with form and concerned more with the container than the content?" To which Greenlief replied, "In the face of these conditions, **one simply builds anew** (emphasis added). We are called to listen to the prophetic voices who have the rebuilding message for these times so that we can support and encourage them." (*Servant Leadership*, p. 255)
We must evolve religious institutions which will bring spiritual nourishment to hungry souls, within which we can achieve personal-spiritual identity and a level of service and worship heretofore not possible by individuals working singly, in study groups, or in outmoded religious institutions. With the Father's guidance, they will become social-religious vehicles carrying the Fifth Epochal Revelation throughout the world. *This, I believe, is the most important challenge of our times!*

Principles Inherent in the Development of Religious Institutions

There are a number of principles inherent in the development of new religious institutions which we should keep in mind, such as:

1. The idealist in many of us who have been inspired by *The Urantia Book* has projected a vision of the Fifth Epochal Revelation upstepping all of the religions of the world and uniting humankind in a common spiritual fellowship. We are turned off by the parochialism and rigidity of contemporary religious institutions and feel that the last thing we need is another religious institution. But the lessons of history and the teachings of *The Urantia Book* tell us that the most effective social agents of spiritual change are new religious institutions embodying larger spiritual truths. The Supreme works from the grass roots up, not from the top down. This approach is not as romantic as our idealistic vision, but it is the only realistic process that builds the foundation for social and spiritual growth in the culture.

2. New religious institutions are not "designed"— they evolve. The authors of *The Urantia Book* remind us, "Man cannot cause growth, but he can supply favorable conditions." (p. 1097) We should establish this "conditional" type of research. There will be many types of new religious organizations stemming from the Fifth Epochal Revelation. We need to prepare materials for possible use by such new religious organizations. Numerous people have asked me for such help in the last ten years; they may or may not find this research helpful. The assumption is that resources compiled over a period of time by mature students of *The Urantia Book* will provide helpful insights and wisdom which might not otherwise be available.

3. We should be aware of the larger spiritual context in which a religious institution functions. The brother/sisterhood of all people, the kinship of all humanity, takes place in the realm of the Supreme. A genuine spiritual fellowship, which is the basis of a religious institution, has its inception in soul consciousness. The soul bears the imprint of its divine-human creation and originates a second or ancillary mind consciousness. As we grow in the Supreme, our personal identity is increasingly transferred from the material mind to soul consciousness. More and more, we operate out of our "soul-mind." This fellowship of souls is the foundation of a bona fide religious institution.

But human beings are much more than disembodied souls. We have unique material bodies and material based minds. We integrate our lives with dissimilar personalities and function in diverse social groups. A sound and serviceable religious institution, therefore, must have the spiritual depth and theological-social flexibility to serve a wide variety of human beings. Its polity needs to embody the highest experiential wisdom.

4. I, personally, do not think the Fellowship should be organically or officially connected to this research or any religious institutions stemming from it. Many students of *The Urantia Book* are still uncomfortable with institutional religious activities. The Fellowship has a place in coordinating all types and levels of activity associated with *The Urantia Book.* It might encourage or even facilitate these religious activities without being organically involved with them. Hopefully, the Fellowship can establish cooperative relationships with many diverse organizations while remaining organizationally independent from them.

A Socioreligious Expression of the Fifth Epochal Revelation

More than forty years of experience in interfacing with the most progressive segment of mainline Christianity has taught me that anything purporting to be a new revelation is not within the boundaries of current theological-institutional respectability. In the main, Christian clergy will require a longer time frame to discover the supernal teachings of *The Urantia Book.* I have always assumed that the most important channel for carrying the Fifth Epochal Revelation to our world would be new religious institutions. It is now time to promote research in discovering an "Appropriate Symbolism and Socioreligious Expression of the Fifth Epochal Revelation." The mission of *The Spiritual Fellowship Journal* is to serve as one of the platforms for this discussion.

The central objective of people interested in initiating such a new religious organization should be to create a polity with maximum flexibility, one that would function with small groups or large congregations, utilize lay leadership and/or ordained ministry, have cross cultural adaptability, and broad theological inclusiveness. Robert Greenleaf, in his book *Servant Leadership*, has a vision of such an institution "as a gathering of persons who have accepted a common purpose, and a common discipline to guide the pursuit of that purpose, to the end that each involved person reaches higher fulfillment as a person, through *serving and being served* by the common venture, than would be achieved alone or in a less committed relationship." (p.237)

There are many appropriate areas of research for those interested in building resources to use in initiating new religious organizations. These materials should not be seen as definitive, but serve as stimuli for creative thinking whereby these groups may be helped to make their own carefully considered decisions.

Our intent is to prepare the soil for the advent of grass roots religious institutions which will become the channels of spiritual power, bringing the Fifth Epochal Revelation to our troubled and spiritually hungry world—Christ Michael's gift and saving guidance to our confused planet. The future of the Fifth Epochal Revelation rests upon the spiritual and evangelical dynamics of new religious institutions which will carry it to the four corners of our world.

UNDERSTANDING EVIL IN HUMAN EXPERIENCE

3/2/94 Revised 3/2/99

The ultimate problem in theism is the enigma of evil. How can one reconcile belief in an all-wise, all-good, and all-powerful God with the destructiveness of nature, the unjust and arbitrary suffering of people, and the social evils which are endemic and culminate in events like Dachau and Auschwitz?

The history of religion is replete with attempts to answer this question. All of these theodicies have more or less failed to give a satisfying answer to these divine-human incongruities. Traditional theological answers to the problem of evil are rooted in a geocentric and prescientific understanding of the nature of the universe. The central ambiguities and incomprehensible nature of the problem of evil in human experience center in our immature and simplistic understanding of reality and God's relation to the finite universe. Scientific discovery has greatly expanded our knowledge of the size and complexity of the material universe. *The Urantia Book*, in a similar way, has enlarged our conceptualization of spiritual cosmology and opened a view of the astonishing complexity and variation of the forms of reality.

Man can find the love of God without facts, and man can discover the laws of God without love, but man can never begin to appreciate the infinite symmetry, the supernal harmony, the exquisite repleteness of the all-inclusive nature of the First Source and Center until he has found divine law and divine love and has experientially unified these in his own evolving cosmic philosophy. (U. B., p. 1222)

The Finite Universe

How, then, do we unify divine law and divine love in human experience? First, we need to realize that God does not act as a transcendental puppeteer in the finite universe. Except for a fragment of God indwelling the human mind, God is not *directly* involved in the direction and functions of the finite universes. The First Source and Center of all things and beings is actualizing his wise and loving purposes for the finite creation by delegating creative power and administrative functions to his Creator Sons and Local Universe Daughters. Second, we need to understand the basic nature and methodology of finite reality. The finite universes were created to actualize two basic divine purposes: to evolve intelligent beings with free will, who could participate, in cooperation with the indwelling Spirit of God, in their own growth toward perfection (God's will); and at the same time factualize a finite, experiential aspect of Deity known as the Supreme.

To accomplish these purposes a special form of reality was created through the evolutionary process. It is unique in nature, methodology, and control. Starting with elemental energy particles that are governed and controlled by indigenous, finite universe laws that include a complex mix of random chance and purposeful direction, the physical universe evolved over billions of years. Within the evolutionary process, physical mechanisms evolve and combine to establish a base through which mind (control functions) can operate. These physical-mindal mechanisms evolved over millions of years to produce many kinds of organisms, plants, and animals.

Inherent in the evolutionary process are mindal stimuli, "adjutant mind spirits," which are able to make contact with physical-mindal organisms at different levels of development. When evolving mind capacities reach the level of intelligence that can be contacted by the spirit of worship and the spirit of wisdom, human beings with truth, beauty, and goodness perception have evolved. Capping the Universal Father's plan to create independent mortals who have free will is the bestowal of a fragment of his Spirit in each mind that has truth, beauty, and goodness perception.
When finite, imperfect beings are given free will, mistakes, violation of universe law (evil), and deliberate transgression of spiritual truth (sin), are virtually inevitable. If human beings are to grow toward wisdom and spiritual perfection, certain environmental conditions are necessary. Experience is the basic medium of learning and education. Spiritual growth requires certain learning experiences which serve as guides to spiritual reality. To develop courage we must live amid surroundings that necessitate struggling with hardship and danger. If hope is to evolve, then must one be constantly confronted with insecurities and uncertainties. In order to establish the love of truth in the human heart, one must live in a world where error is present and the evils of falsehood confronted. Unselfishness is acquired when we repeatedly discover the unhappiness brought on by an ego continually clamoring for pleasure, honor, and recognition. Evolutionary beings must live in an environment of relative and potential evil in order to experience and learn the validity of the higher spiritual realities of the universe. In the finite, evolutionary universe, a certain amount of evil and suffering is necessary to guide intelligent, free will beings toward spiritual growth.

The confusion and turmoil of Urantia do not signify that the Paradise Rulers lack either interest or ability to manage affairs differently. The Creators are possessed of full power to make Urantia a veritable paradise, but such an Eden would not contribute to the development of those strong, noble, and experienced characters which the Gods are so surely forging out on your world between the anvils of necessity and the hammers of anguish. Your anxieties and sorrows, your trials and disappointments, are just as much a part of the divine plan on your sphere as are the exquisite perfection and infinite adaptation of all things to their supreme purpose on the worlds of the central and perfect universe. (U. B., p. 258)

God's Relation to the Finite Universe

In the finite universe the Universal Father has chosen to work primarily through the intrinsic control of autonomous universe laws. The many violent activities of nature such as floods, fires, storms, and atmospheric cataclysms, are the outworking of universe laws and are not the direct or personal activities of God. Within the apparent randomness of physical activities, there is an integration of universe laws which makes for checks and balances in nature and an overall purposefulness creating a condition favorable to intelligent manipulation. Through the process of experience and scientific discovery, we are learning the dynamics of natural laws, so that we can utilize them to improve our safety and health, and design natural phenomena for the benefit and welfare of humankind.

God's *personal* contact with humanity is through his indwelling Spirit in our minds. Neither God nor subordinate universe administrators, such as angelic beings, normally intervene to suspend or countermand the operation of natural laws in our lives. The Universal Father is neither a cosmic puppet master nor an anthropomorphic trouble shooter whom we must call upon to change the realities of creation to shield us from problems and suffering. The design and purpose of the finite universe is to encourage and enable us, through our own intelligence and ingenuity, to meet and cope with the problems, frustrations, and tragedies of mortal experience. God's purpose for our lives is to help us evolve into spiritually mature people who are stimulated by perplexities, difficulties, and suffering, and who know that in partnership with God all things eventually work for good. This requires a life predicated on courage, invigorated by hardships, and inspired by divine fellowship and guidance.

Intelligent and effective prayer does not ask God to suspend natural law or perform "miracles," but seeks God's support and guidance in finding the solution of our problems. Through the guidance of his indwelling Spirit, we are often led to initiate activities which do change the outcome of natural laws. Sometimes, in extreme or critical conditions, which we do not adequately understand, guardian angels, or other supermortal personalities, may intervene to give special help that seems to change the outcome of natural law.

We see, then, that God's presence in the finite universe is primarily an immanent, indigenous reality—even in his personal, indwelling relationship with each person. The traditional religious dichotomy of the natural and the supernatural is an illusion resulting from a lack of knowledge of how God acts in the finite universe. It may be meaningful to speak of material, mindal, or spiritual reality, but anything which the creative action of God effects in any of these categories is an immanent, endogenous event. All spiritual ministrations to finite beings must be down-stepped. This is the essence of the incarnation message.

The divine plan for the finite universe was to evolve an imperfect creation in which mortals could start as the lowest beings who have the capacity for God-consciousness, and through their own free will decisions and actions, evolve immortal souls of Paradise potential. The finite creation is designed as an essentially closed evolutionary system where God works through indigenous laws, mechanisms, and overcontrol functions, instead of direct (transcendent) Deity control. This self-limitation of God is basic to the actualization of the great and good universe plan to evolve in human personality a unique quality of being which could be produced in no other way.

Everything divine which the human mind grasps and the human soul acquires is an experiential attainment; it is a *reality* of personal experience and is therefore a unique possession in contrast to the inherent goodness and righteousness of the inerrant personalities of Havona .

The creatures of Havona are naturally brave, but they are not courageous in the human sense. They are innately kind and considerate, but hardly altruistic in the human way. They are expectant of a pleasant future, but not hopeful in the exquisite manner of the trusting mortal of the uncertain evolutionary spheres. They have faith in the stability of the universe, but they are utter strangers to that saving faith whereby mortal man climbs from the status of an animal up to the portals of Paradise. They love the truth, but they know nothing of its soul-saving qualities. They are idealists, but they were born that way; they are wholly ignorant of the ecstasy of becoming such by exhilarating choice. (U.B., p. 52)

Irrational Aspects of Evil

Once we understand the divine plan for the finite creation, much of the imperfection and suffering in human experience makes sense. Through the educational process encountered in the vicissitudes of human experience, the creative evolutionary process is forging out of humankind the beginnings of a noble, strong, and thoroughly experienced being whose potentials transcend our fondest dreams. Human anxiety, trials, and suffering are just as much a necessary part of a wise divine plan for universe education as the lessons of childhood, the rigors of school days, and the psychic suffering of adolescence are basic to developing character in our contemporary development. There is historical, scientific, and experiential evidence which gives considerable support to this purposeful view of suffering in human experience.

Nevertheless, many troubling questions remain unanswered regarding the catastrophic and irrational aspects of the problem of evil. The first major source of such incomprehensible forms of evil in human experience are the anomalies of nature. Floods, fires, tornadoes, disease, and many forms of malfunction readily come to mind. These imperfections are germane to the nature of reality in the evolutionary finite universe. In, with, and under the apparent random behavior of the energy and mechanisms of universe laws there is divine intelligence and purpose. These innate balance and control forces and mechanisms take aeons of time to establish and consolidate their effect. Many centuries are required for the indigenous integrative and synergistic influences to become dominant. These melioristic forces are greatly assisted by human ingenuity as we learn how to use universe laws to accelerate the evolutionary process.

The second major source of evil in human experience is centered in finite personalities. Much of the suffering experienced in our world is the result of human evil—the ignorant violation of universe law and spiritual truth, and in humankind's sinful behavior—knowing and deliberate infraction of natural law and the will of God. These innumerable human forms of evil and sin precipitate crime and violence, and are socially compounded, resulting in brutalities like Dachau and Auschwitz and in wars with mass destruction like Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Over and above the imperfections of natural phenomena and human evil and sin, the most destructive effect on human welfare was brought about by the misadaptations and rebellion of supermortal beings who are native to the finite universe. Our planet has suffered extensive setbacks through sinful improvisations and mistakes in superhuman universe administration. The Lucifer rebellion and the Adamic default were catastrophes of major proportions that have temporarily handicapped the outworking of the divine plan.

When we contemplate the pervasive openness and inherent autonomy, guided by benign intrinsic spiritual purpose designed into the evolutionary universe, we catch a glimpse of the enormous forbearance and love of the Universal Father. Knowing the potential hazards of sin and rebellion in the finite universe, the Universal Father has established rescue and salvaging plans. This reclamation plan uses methods which are harmonious with autonomy and self-determination. In addition to the Father's indwelling presence in the human mind, other immanent guidance techniques, such as supermortal incarnation and other forms of epochal revelation are bringing the Father's saving ministry to humanity. God's transcendent love in many down-stepped, immanent forms is at work on our world. Slowly but surely the reality dominance of spiritual truth and the drawing power of divine love is winning the struggle with evil and sin without violating humankind's complete personal-spiritual independence. God's creativity in the evolutionary cosmos begins at the lowest levels but is destined to achieve the highest ends.

Summary Statement

We have observed that the divine plan for the finite universe is to create beings with a unique spiritual-reality quality through evolutionary experience. God's purpose is for humankind to participate in its own development and destiny without divine coercion. This requires both freedom of will, and an imperfect environment where learning is possible, where the foundations of reality are intrinsically present in the material-mindal world of experience. Here human beings can discover the enduring and dependable verities in daily living, taste the bitterness and suffering of evil and sin, and repeatedly verify the fulfilling and synergistic character of truth, beauty, and goodness. In this educational atmosphere we are free to make our own value decisions and evolve immortal souls.

The unsurpassed educational character of this kind of experience, along with the indwelling presence of the Spirit of God, is the reason that, even in the face of intense and irrational suffering, the great majority of humankind remain courageous in their coping ability and steadfast in their faith in the ultimate triumph of good. God's wise, loving, and farsighted design for the finite universe will not fail. The Universal Father, therefore, does not arbitrarily "step in" with transcendent power to alter the divine evolutionary methodology for overcoming evil and sin. Indeed, error and spiritual rebellion are more clearly seen for what they are if allowed to run their evolutionary course. Over the centuries, more good will accrue in the lives of individuals and in society by this experiential process than would occur through forced, arbitrary, or revolutionary solutions.

The final answer to the problem of evil for each person resides in fellowship with the Spirit of God which indwells the human mind. Although we live in a world and universe where Immanent Intelligence is detected by inference, where the knowledge of God is mediated through all reality, we know God personally only through inner experience. By faith and spiritual fellowship we establish a God-consciousness and a living partnership with the Universal Father. As we then face the problems and perplexities of life, we are aided by divine wisdom. When suffering and tragedy enter our experience and we have exhausted our own ability to cope, an augmented inner peace, a new understanding, a fresh combination of resources undergird our life. Those who establish this inner relationship with the Father are invulnerable to life's most crushing blows. These children of the finite universe are learning "to feast upon uncertainty, to fatten upon disappointment, to enthuse over apparent defeat, to invigorate in the presence of difficulties, to exhibit indomitable courage in the face of immensity, and to exercise unconquerable faith when confronted with the challenge of the inexplicable." They are discovering that "in liaison with God, nothing—absolutely nothing—is impossible." (U. B., p. 291)

The Challenge of the Twenty-first Century

8/95 Revised 4/99

We are living in one of the major turning points of history. Our times have been labeled variously as the post-industrial, post-modern, and post-Christian era. The traditional paradigms of cosmology, value, and reality have lost their unquestioned relevance and authority among contemporary people. The social institutions which were structured by these traditional concepts and values are deteriorating in vitality and influence. The economic and political infrastructures of society are breaking down and losing their credibility and effectiveness. The mores that have been the foundation of human behavior and ethical standards in society are crumbling and immorality, crime, and violence are endemic. Religious institutions that were once the central pillars of society are now relegated to a peripheral position.

As we face the twenty-first century there are numerous scientific-technical innovations which will revolutionize the way we live. Computers and computer technology is changing the way we handle information and communication. Microbiology is opening a vast potential for altering living organisms. Recombinant DNA technology makes it possible to restructure both plants and animals and produce a variety of drugs, industrial lubricants, and enzymes. Human applications will range from predicting inherited genetic diseases to applying gene therapy for correcting genetic disorders. The new physics is radically changing our conception of the nature of material reality. We are, literally, being ushered into a new world of potential development.

Among the many problems that we face the material-environmental, economic, and political difficulties are much easier to cope with than the personal-spiritual and social-cultural problems. Our industrial-technological civilization has broken up the small communities which were indigenous to the agricultural society and isolated the individual in specialization and urbanization. The advent of the computer has accelerated this separation and seclusion. The sense of community and the extended family are greatly diminished. Even the segregated industrial-business groups and the nuclear family exist in relative cultural isolation. This detachment and isolation contributes to the deterioration of family and community influence. The inherent human hunger for community and belonging causes young people to join gangs with territorial-defensive agendas and motivates adults to affiliate with ideological and religious groups with exclusive-restrictive boundaries.

At the root of the breakdown of individual behavior, the deterioration and malaise of our social institutions, and the failure of our religious institutions to satisfy our spiritual hunger and inspire our creativity is that our civilization is trying to draw resources and energy from a horse and buggy paradigm of reality which has lost its relevance and serviceability. There are diverse and confused views of reality in today's world. Many scientifically oriented people have a materialistic-positivistic understanding of life. Most religionists have a simplistic view of spiritual cosmology that does not harmonize with our astronomical view of the cosmos. And a great portion of society are confused about what to believe. The basic dilemma of our times is that we have no unifying conception of reality.
The singular ingredient which will bring meaning and unity into planetary existence is an inspiring paradigm of reality which will harmonize science, philosophy, and religion and inspire humankind to strive for common goals and objectives. Only a new and enlarged revelatory vision of reality has the potential of doing this. Hopefully, the searchers of our world will discover the Fifth Epochal Revelation in the twenty-first century. *The Urantia Book* is the only source of reality that is large enough and spiritually empowering enough to unify and energize the entire planet. Enculturating the world with the inspiring and ennobling teachings of the Fifth Epochal Revelation is the challenge of the twenty-first century!

The Heart of the Problem

Where does one start in healing our ailing society? At the heart of the many problems of contemporary society is the failure of the individual to experience a meaningful relationship with spiritual reality that initiates and sustains a dedication to truth, beauty, and goodness. The individual fails to experience this relationship because the source of our introduction to spiritual reality in contemporary culture lacks credibility. It is not an integral part of our educational exposure to the complex modern world in which we live.
Two basic changes need to occur in the twenty-first century to overcome this educational deficiency. First, our culture needs to discover the Fifth Epochal Revelation which will give us the expanded picture of spiritual reality that harmonizes with our scientific-technological society and unifies science, philosophy, and religion. Secondly, our entire educational system needs to be redesigned. Philosophy and spiritual values need to be integrated into the humanities educational curriculum and taught from kindergarten through college. Of almost equal importance, the educational curriculum must be restructured to involve pupils in "real life." Just as education in the agriculture society required working in farming activities, so must we involve pupils in the real world very early in their educational experience. Education should not be a preliminary exercise to real life, but a continuing activity throughout life.

The teachings of *The Urantia Book* are tailor-made for the problems of the twenty-first century. Not only does it present a paradigm of reality that unifies science, philosophy, and religion but it emphasizes the importance of family and community life. Its picture of planetary life as the foundation of an ongoing career of personality and spiritual growth provides strong motivation for contemporary growth and achievement and an inspiring vision of the endless adventure of eternity. Young people are challenged to actualize their potentialities and those who are disillusioned in middle-age are assured that personality and spiritual development is more important than worldly success. The elderly are encouraged to continue growing and given a vision of the potentials of a renewed body and an improved mind at the next level of existence. Those who find themselves isolated and lonely learn that they are never alone. The indwelling presence of their Thought Adjuster and guardian angels provides a sense of community. The extensive wisdom shared concerning economic, political, and religious institutions will serve as an antidote for the ills of our troubled society. Finally, the life and teachings of Jesus will inspire all people to seek fulfillment in the religion of Jesus: the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man.

The Ascendancy of the Fifth Epochal Revelation

During the first forty years of its history the Urantia movement has evolved from a handful of readers in Chicago to hundreds of study groups and tens of thousands of readers throughout the world. Without mass publicity or promotion over 250,000 (400,000 - 1999) copies of *The Urantia Book* have been sold and translations are available in French, Spanish, and Finnish (Russian and Dutch - 1999). Work continues on the Dutch and Russian translations, with editions of Korean, German, Swedish, Hungarian, and Italian translations on the drawing board. Audio and computer versions of the book are available and numerous study aids have been published. Regional and International Conferences are being held and secondary works are proliferating.

All this is impressive but of much greater importance is the tempering and structuring of the Urantia movement in preparation for its world-wide mission. The rugged struggle of these early years has established solid foundations for carrying a new paradigm of spiritual reality to humankind. The Urantia movement very early in its history has encountered most of the challenges that have threatened religious transitions down through history. We have received an experiential vaccination against these viruses which have threatened creative spiritual growth in the past. The Fifth Epochal Revelation has demonstrated its dynamic and power in steering the movement repeatedly through critical periods and controversial encounters in our journey.

The Urantia movement has been confronted by centralized organizational control and we have witnessed the power of individual initiative and creative diversity to establish a pluralistic foundation for outreach ministry. We have escaped oligarchical-authoritarian direction in the triumph of participatory democracy and openness. We weathered the threat of legalistic-power strategies through the dominance of cooperative team work.

Soon after regional and national conferences were held, students of *The Urantia Book* were captivated and challenged by the intrigues of charismatic control of the Urantia movement. With the passing of time, we recognized the danger of charismatic influence and witnessed the emergence of evolutionary-rational decision-making. On the heels of this tempering experience, we were confronted by a more subtle form of charismatic influence in the captivating channeling movement among readers of *The Urantia Book.* Following the example of the Christian church in dealing with similar movements in its history, we have achieved the spiritual maturity to allow individual freedom to evaluate the authenticity of spiritual experience.

We are now entering the intellectual-spiritual struggle which took mainline Christianity centuries to largely resolve: distinguishing between the contemporary, fallible human carrier concepts used in revelation from its eternal spiritual truths. Martin Gardner's book, *Urantia: The Great Cult Mystery,* may help to shorten this period in the Urantia movement. It may also help to guard against cult attitudes among those who have living faith in the enlarged spiritual truths of the Fifth Epochal Revelation.

The solid core of the Urantia movement has come through these tribulations with renewed dedication and balance. We have come of age. Spiritual freedom and participatory democracy have taught us that there can be unity of purpose in the midst of intellectual and political diversity. The Fifth Epochal revelation will make its way and overcome any barriers placed in its way. We are standing at the threshold of "one of the most amazing and enthralling epochs of social readjustment, moral quickening, and spiritual enlightenment" on our planet. The preliminary, orienting growth developments of the Urantia movement are largely behind us. The potential of an exciting outreach mission of the Fifth Epochal Revelation is awaiting us. The Most Highs have prepared us and our planet for the most thrilling vision of spiritual reality since Jesus of Nazareth walked on our world. This outreach mission will be many-faceted, pluralistic, and victorious!
8/30/95 (Midwest Conf.)

4/99 Update
During the first forty years of its history the Urantia movement has evolved from a handful of readers in Chicago to hundreds of study groups and tens of thousands of readers throughout the world. Without mass publicity or promotion over 400,000 copies of *The Urantia Book* have been sold and translations are available in French, Finnish, Spanish, Russian, and Dutch. A vast amount of information about the Urantia Papers is available on the Internet. Audio and computer versions of the book are available and numerous study aids have been published. Regional and International Conferences are being held and secondary works are proliferating.

Meredith Sprunger's Synopsis of The Urantia Book

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Read the unabridged version of
The Urantia Book

MY INTRODUCTION TO THE URANTIA BOOK
By Meredith J. Sprunger

It is difficult, if not impossible, to adequately review a complex 2000 page book in thirty or forty minutes. So I have elected to share with you how I found The Urantia Book, make a few general statements about its content, and then open the meeting to a discussion period.

I have placed an Introduction sheet to The Urantia Book on the tables, which gives an outline of the book's content, sources of publication, basic theological positions, and organizations associated with the book. I have also placed a pamphlet on "The Origin of The Urantia Book" on the tables because usually the first thing people wish to know about The Urantia Book is who wrote it – what are the circumstances of its origin.

Thomas Kuhn in his classic book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* points out that it is almost impossible, even for experts in any scientific field, to introduce a new paradigm in that scientific field. It usually takes generations to make this transition. It is even more difficult to bring a new paradigm into the field of theology and religion. This is probably good because evolution is a more constructive methodology of change than disruptive revolution.

Although The Urantia Book reinforces and enhances the basic truths of traditional Christian theology and the best spiritual insights of the major religions of the world, it does present a new paradigm of spiritual reality. After forty years of critical study and evaluation, I am confident that in the centuries to come The Urantia Book will be generally recognized as one of the major spiritual touch-stones on our planet.

You may be interested in knowing how I came across this unusual and challenging book. In December of 1955, my wife, Irene, and I stopped in to visit our friends Dr. and Mrs. Edward Brueseke. Dr. Brueseke was pastor of Zion United Church of Christ in Sound Bend, Indiana. During the course of our visit, Ed reached over and handed me a large blue book saying, "Judge Hammerschmidt gave me this book. Some businessmen think it's a new Bible." I opened the book to the Table of Contents and read chapter titles like: "The Nature of God" – author, A Divine Counselor; "The Universe of Universes" – author, A Perfector of Wisdom; "Personalities of the Grand Universe" – author, A Mighty Messenger. This was enough to turn me off and strike me as ludicrous. We had a good laugh about Judge Hammerschmidt's naivete and I assumed that was the last I would ever see of the book.

Judge Louis Hammerschmidt was a prominent member of Zion Church and a respected layperson in the larger United Church of Christ. He was instrumental in bringing a Children's Hospital to Sound Bend and he had donated a chapel to Elmhurst College. Hammerschmidt was also the lay member of our Indiana-Michigan Conference Council. At the time I was Vice-President of the Indiana-Michigan Conference and I picked up Hammerschmidt for our January Council meeting in Jackson, Michigan.

During the drive to Jackson, Judge cautiously mentioned his tentative investigation of Spiritualism. He had lost his wife about ten years before. What he found in Spiritualism did not impress him. When he saw that I was not disturbed by this discussion, he said, "Say, I've got a book that I would like to have you read and tell me what you think about it." I knew what was coming, but I didn't want to hurt his feelings, so I said, "O. K., Judge, send it to me."

In about a week I received this big blue book. I tried various times to read sections but just couldn't get interested; and I didn't want to waste my time reading 2000 pages of what appeared to be gobbledygook. Because of the esoteric names, I thought maybe it was some form of theosophy. I even took it along on vacation that summer, but things didn't get boring enough to prompt me to read it. Finally, in September I realized that I would be in a meeting with Hammerschmidt in October and I had to read something to get off the hook. I decided to read a small section and tell him what I thought about it.

In examining the Table of Contents again, I was reminded that it had a section of the Life and Teachings of Jesus. I though with my academic theological background I could make short work of this text. I had read the apocryphal stories of the boy Jesus making clay birds and then turning them to life and this did not impress me. I had read books like The Aquarian Gospel and its philosophical-theological slanting was very obvious to me. As I started reading, I did not find what I had expected to find. It had the ring of reasonable historicity. When the narrative progressed to the story of John the Baptist and paralleled the New Testament account, I was deeply impressed. Sometimes I would read with tears running down my face. When I finished The Urantia Book account, I not only realized it was solidly rooted in the New Testament realities, but was the most profound and inspiring Life and Teaching of Jesus in print.

Thus motivated by the high quality of this 700 page Life and Teachings of Jesus, I began reading the Forward and read the entire book. It is the most complete and integrated picture of science, philosophy, and religion I have ever read. Its enlarged description of Spiritual Reality was mind-boggling. After contemplating this new paradigm of Reality for some time, I said to myself, "If this is not an authentic picture of Reality, it is the way it ought to be!"

I contacted Judge Hammerschmidt to inquire as to where he had gotten the book and he informed me that a friend, Mr. W. F. Harrah, the co-founder of the National-Standard Co., had given him the book. Mr. Harrah was a member of a group in Chicago who received the papers. A luncheon meeting was arranged with William Harrah who informed me that Dr. William S. Sadler was the leader of the group who published the book. I knew Dr. Sadler by reputation. He is sometimes referred to as the father of American psychiatry and I had friends who tad taken his course of Pastoral Counseling at McCormick Theological Seminary.

Mr. Harrah wrote me a check to get copies of the book to share with around a dozen of my young ministerial colleagues. All but one, who admitted that he did not read the book, were as impressed as I was. On May 7, 1958 our ministerial group arranged a meeting with Dr. Sadler to begin research on the origin of The Urantia Book. This is a story, which we probably do not have time to relate today, but the origin pamphlet summarizes the basic findings of this research.

AN APPROACH TO A TIME OF TESTING FOR THE URANTIA BOOK

I should like to conclude the formal part of this presentation by suggesting an approach to a time of testing for this remarkable book. The basic theological positions of The Urantia Book, as I have said, reinforce the essential tenets of mainline Christianity, but on a vastly enlarged universe scale. Without mass media publicity or promotion, the book has sold more than 250,000 copies. Translations are available in French, Spanish, and Finnish. Work continues on the Dutch and Russian translations, with editions in Korean, German, Swedish, Hungarian and Italian translations on the drawing board. In the judgment of tens of thousands of discriminating people, including many ministers, the book contains the greatest stimulus to spiritual growth in contemporary literature. It certainly merits critical examination and evaluation by all who are seriously interested in the future of religion on our world.

Since The Urantia Book purports to be the Fifth Epochal Revelation, authored by supermortal personalities, it is important to have a clear understanding of the philosophic criteria of truth necessary in evaluating such claim. First of all, claim of authority is not a philosophic criterion of truth. Secondly, knowing the origin and/or authorship of a book may give some insights, but it is not a reliable philosophic criterion of truth. Whether supermortals or human beings wrote the book, it must be evaluated by the quality of its content, not by what it claims, or who may have written it.

The central objective in evaluating The Urantia Book is to assess the quality of its spiritual truth and insight. This must be done by individuals using their total capacity to evaluate its philosophic coherence and experiential spiritual relevance. Is the spiritual quality and insights of the book inferior to, equal with, or superior to our traditional sources of spiritual truth? During this period of testing, gradually a consensus will evolve regarding its quality. If the general opinion is negative, the book will fade into obscurity. If the consensus is positive, continued evaluation will determine the level of its spiritual resource, or does it have the quality of revelation? My philosophic hypothesis is that if it has the spiritual quality of revelation, its influence will continue to grow in the church, the society, and the world.

My personal view, after forty years of critical study and evaluation, is that The Urantia Book is of superior quality in at least four categories:

1. Its comprehensive view of Deity and Reality, including the Trinity.
2. The presentation of an enlarged spiritual cosmology, which is commensurate with our gigantic material astronomical cosmology.
3. An overview of a vast array of spiritual personalities that function in an hierarchical system of ability and power, which must exist if we are to make any sense of the spiritual cosmos.
4. And finally, a greatly expanded presentation of the life and teachings of Jesus, that is solidly rooted in the New Testament realities.

In short, The Urantia Book is the best view of an integrated universe, the best model of total reality that I have encountered.

Let's now open the meeting to a discussion period to see what questions or comments you may have.

The Dynamics of Inner Spiritual Guidance

Meredith J. Sprunger
October 1984

Contents

Basic conditions which facilitate the reception of spiritual guidance
How do we test the validity of spiritual guidance?
Questions for thought and study

- I. Basic conditions which facilitate the reception of spiritual guidance.

Seeking to recognize and follow spiritual guidance is the most important aspect of human life. It is central to the teachings of Jesus and the great religious prophets of history.

- **A.** Wanting to do the Father's will more than anything else.
  - **1.** A categorical will decision to dedicate one's life to God.
  - **2.** The source of an all-pervasive motivation for our lives.
  - **3.** Learning to discipline and master our minds--we need to control, guide, and direct our thinking as it is the key of all personality development and growth.
    - **a.** Develop a habitual spiritual frame of reference.
    - **b.** Eliminate the garbage and emotional poisons from our thinking.
- **B.** Take short retreats for relaxation, thought clarification, and recharging the spiritual resources of our soul.
- **C.** Engage in prayer and worship. It is important to understand the essential principles of creative prayer and worship.
  - **1.** Prayer and worship are complementary. Prayer has an element of self or creature interest and concern. Worship in the contemplation of God and is an and in itself. Prayer may lead to worship and be an aid to worship.
  - **2.** Prayer is communion with God which expands insight. It is both a sound psychological practice which augments self-realization and an effective spiritual technique to expand the soul.
  - **3.** Prayer is not a technique to escape life's difficulties but a way in which we can learn to face conflict and suffering meaningfully and courageously. Prayer does not change God's mind but it may change the person praying.
  - **4.** Primitive and immature prayer attempts to plead or bargain with God for health, wealth, power, or preference. Prayer, however, cannot be used to circumvent universe laws and the limits of time and space. The spiritual level of people is revealed by the nature of their prayers; however, the more mature should not criticize or ridi cule the naive and the immature.
  - **5.** Words are not important in prayer; God responds only to the true and sincere attitudes of the mind and soul. We should pray for divine guidance to solve human problems, not for some cosmic, miraculous solution.
  - **6.** To pray effectively we must face reality honestly and intelligently, attempt to solve problems creatively through spiritual guidance with the resources which we have, be dedicated to doing the will of God, and have living faith. Efficacious prayer should be: unselfish--not alone for oneself, believing--according to faith, sincere--honest of heart, intelligent--according to our insight and knowledge, and trustful--in submission to the Father's all-wise will.
  - **7.** Only prayers which are rooted in spiritual reality and sustained by faith are answered in the frames of reference of the petitioner. Prayers are answered in terms of true spiritual needs. We should not attempt to use prayer as a substitute for human ingenuity, and action; it cannot be used to escape reality. Some prayers because of their visionary aspirations and all-encompassing nature can only be fully answered in eternity.
  - **8.** Prayer is a vital and indispensable factor In spiritual growth, Even immature and presumptuous prayers expand the soul's potential. Prayer is a major resource for the achievement of human self-realization, effectiveness, and inner peace, Prayer also has great social repercussions and is an antidote to personality isolation.
  - **9.** Worship is spiritual communion with God; it is the part identifying with the Whole. It should not be confused with psychic or mystical experiences. God-consciousness is humanity's greatest opportunity and challenge.
  - **10.** Worship is the most creative activity of personal growth. It renews the mind, stimulates soul growth, eliminates insecurity and personality isolation, and greatly increases the total resources of the individual. Worship should alter with service; it is ancestor to the highest joys of humankind.
- **D.** Making decisions and taking action--grappling with specific life opportunities and problems.
  - **1.** The clearest spiritual guidance comes through experience, not theoretical contemplation.
  - **2.** Spiritual guidance is especially communicated through the process of service to our fellow human beings.
  - **3.** The spirit of God can most effectively adjust, guide, and direct when we are engaged in the concrete activities of human life--when there is something tangible to guide and direct.
  - **4.** The feed-back of human experience is the most substantial and reliable channel of receiving spiritual wisdom, direction, and vision.
  - **5.** The spirit of God indwelling each of us has a plan for our lives. Our greatest adventure in life is discovering and actualizing that plan.

- II. How do we test the validity of spiritual guidance?

- **A.** First we must realize that our minds are quite capable of deceiving us. If we do not critically examine our inner leadings, it is easy to mistake our own subconscious will for the will of God (superconscious direction). Even genuine spiritual guidance can be distorted--often leading to half-truths and fanaticism.
  - **1.** Spiritual guidance is often on the unconscious level. God's leading is so benign, subtle, and unimposing, so admixed with the ordinary things of life that we often cannot be certain whether our inclinations have their source in our subconscious motivational needs or our superconscious value direction.
    - **a.** We hear naive, fundamentalistic Christians glibly declaring "God spoke to me..." or "God told me to do this or that." Even as a small boy when my parents attended one of these emotional groups I had some doubts about the 20/20 spiritual vision of some of the statements I heard.
    - **b.** The phenomena of voices heard by the mind's ear and visions seen by the mind's eye have been relatively frequent in religious experience. Such unusual events are impressive to the person experiencing them; however, we should not over-react but apply to them the same tests for validity that we give to the "inner leadings" of our every day life.
  - **2.** Who can say for certain that the coincidental circumstances which seem to focus meaning or value in our lives are of divine direction or are merely the chance happenings of experience?
    - **a.** Usually our first response to an inclination, leading, or idea is intuitive. We "feel" it is right, wrong, good, or questionable. Many of our decisions are made at this intuitive level.
    - **b.** Over the years as one observes these "meaningful coincidences" and ponders their precise timing one begins to suspect and then often believe that some kind of spiritual planning and guidance must have been involved in the production of such meaningful juxtapositions of events.
    - **c.** Since so much of our spiritual guidance seems to be associated with the common experiences of every day life, one suspects that the presence of God is a matter of using circumstantial manipulation as a communication technique.
  - **3.** Following our intuitive reaction to inner leadings, we need to use our common sense and logical thinking to evaluate our inclinations. We ought to be particularly wary of those leadings which logically could have origins in our conscious or subconscious fears and anxieties or those which reinforce our egocentric psychological needs--pride, selfishness, security, justification, importance, prestige, etc. It is dangerous to uncritically accept our own human desires and needs for divinely inspired direction. Conversely, if we have a tendency toward guilt and self-punishment, we ought not reject leading simply because they contribute to our fulfillment as sons-and daughters of God.
- **B.** All of this subjective difficulty in evaluating and testing spiritual guidance points to the need for some objective standards by which we can assess our inner orientation.
  - **1.** We should apply objective criteria to complement our subjective evaluation.
    - **a.** Is it harmonious with the highest teachings of The Urantia Book? Is it something Jesus would approve?
    - **b.** Is it harmonious with the highest values and thinking of human religious culture?
    - **c.** Is it contrary to scientifically verified facts and the best scientific orientation?
    - **d.** What do the people whose judgment I most respect think about it? The approval of others is not of paramount importance but listening to the wisdom of others may be helpful to our discernment.
    - **e.** How does time and experience affect this leading or sense of mission? We need to "sleep on it," to allow days, weeks, and months to see how inner convictions look over a period of time.
    - **f.** After we are confident in our thinking that the idea or action contemplated is good and consistent with the highest and best that we know it is time to get experiential validation--we need to act.
  - **2.** After taking the leap of faith-in action, service, and living what does this experience reveal? How does it measure up to the following seven-fold pragmatic experiential test?
    - **a.** Does it improve one's physical health?
    - **b.** Does it improve one's mental functioning?
    - **c.** What social effects does it have -- does it promote love and unity or fear, anger, and disharmony?
    - **d.** Does it contribute to the spiritualization of one's every day life?
    - **e.** Does it enhance one's appreciation of truth, beauty, and goodness?
    - **f.** Does it conserve one's most basic and highest values?
    - **g.** Does it increase one's God-consciousness?
    - **h.** Does it help bring God to humankind and lead humankind to God?
  - **3.** The feedback of experience will give us information and wisdom which thinking and theory cannot reveal. In this testing of our "inner leadings" through thought and action, and altering our behavior on the basis of the feedback of experience we have exhausted our human evaluative capacities. We then must live in faith and inner conviction that we are following the will of God for our lives because we are living and acting on the highest and best that we know. Our lives are then enhanced by the power of the Spirit.

- Questions For Thought and Study

- **1.** Why do all people--unbelievers, evildoers, and psychotics-- seem to have "inner guidance?"
- **2.** Is our "conscience" a reliable guide to spiritual reality or synonymous with the will of God in our lives?
- **3.** Are strong feelings and emotions a reliable guide to the will of God?
- **4.** In our prayers should we ask God for things which would alter universe laws for our benefit?
- **5.** Does God have to be pleaded with or persuaded to do good things for us?
- **6.** Do our prayers ever change God's mind or purposes?
- **7.** Why do sincere and dedicated people come to such different views regarding the will of God on such issues as abortion, genetic engineering,euthanasia--or even about smoking, drinking, and wearing jewelry?
- **8.** Should we give more weight to guidance if it comes through "hearing voices" or "seeing visions?"
- **9.** Is it common or rare that we human beings mistake our will for the will of God? What are the results of such confusion?
- **10.** Does the state of our health, wealth, or happiness have any relationship to God's love for us? Is health or wealth a sign of God's special blessing?
- **11.** Why are we human beings often victimized by naive, simplistic views of God and his ways in our lives?
- **12.** How important is intelligence or formal education in determining our capacity to receive spiritual guidance, develop spiritual insight and wisdom, and achieve spiritual growth?