The Family: Birthplace of Cosmic Citizens

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I salute the God within you.

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We bring a child into the world. A simple and ordinary thing, but wonderfully complex. Whether we know it or not, we have now become engaged in the supreme responsibility of human existence.[1] We have now begun the process of nurturing and shaping a cosmic citizen. What faith the Father in heaven has in us to allow us the privilege of doing this.[2] To entrust His children to our watchcare.[3] Of all human trusts, this is the most sacred,[4] our highest human duty.[5] Whether we know it or not, these are the facts of life.

(By the way, you'll notice quite a few *Urantia Book* references in what I have to say. I'll mention only a few of them specifically.)

What is it about the idea of family that makes it so profoundly important? Why does *The Urantia Book* say that almost everything of lasting value has its roots in the family,[6] that the home is civilization's only hope of survival?[7] Why is it that the family occupied the very center of Jesus' philosophy of life, here and hereafter?[8] What is it in this simple notion that resonates from here to Paradise and beyond?

I think we can find some of the answers by looking at what families do. Every family is unique. No two have exactly the same dynamics. And yet, families all do the same things, with greater or lesser skill.

In family life we are like sharp rough-edged stones all thrown together. We continuously toss against each other in the river of time. After all the rubbing and rubbing the sharp edges begin to disappear. We become smooth pebbles. We adjust our antagonisms. We teach the pursuits of peace to our children.[6] The family is the master civilizer.[9]

With some assistance from friends, neighbors, and community, the true family teaches most of what is really essential in life.[9] This is what *The Urantia Book* tells us. This is what our own experience confirms. Well, what are the essentials of life?

First and foremost, we begin to learn about love, how to love, how to be loved. All of the foundations of cosmic citizenship are built upon the enduring base of love. Without love we are nothing. Without love there is no place for us in the universe. In the way we love our children we begin to get a glimmer— we actually begin to experience— the way God relates to His universe children. And at the same time— if we get it right— we portray to our children the first of a long series of ascending disclosures of the love of God for all universe children.[10] We begin to portray unconditional love.

Second, we learn about mercy. I have so often received mercy that I did not deserve, that I have come to define mercy as what you extend to someone who doesn't deserve it. If it's deserved, it's not

mercy, it's justice.

Someone once told me that home is where you go when you can't go anywhere else. When I think about that, when I think about all the children who can't ever go home again— when I imagine their eyes— it tears my heart out. Mercy is what you extend to someone who doesn't deserve it. Home is where we first begin to learn about mercy and forgiveness. Mercy is applied love. [11]

Third, we learn about ministry. A true parent continuously ministers to the child.[12] And ministry does not mean indulgence. Just the opposite. Ministry focuses on things that build character. In time, children come to recognize this and appreciate it. And this service endures as long as there is a parent-child relationship. You never stop being a father. You never stop being a mother.

The list could go on and on. So many other things. The family teaches culture to the next generation.[13] The family teaches patience, altruism, tolerance, forbearance.[14] And it also teaches duty, responsibility, discipline, consequences. It teaches us that we are all bound together, that we rise or fall, a little bit or a lot, with the actions of each member.[15] It's not like a big corporation in which you can say: We're having some financial problems this year. We'll have to downsize. Sorry, but we'll have to let a few of you kids go. Good luck.[16]

No way. In a family you can't lay off or fire anyone. The family teaches: We are all in this together. We will rise or fall with each other . . . Somewhere the thought recurs again and again in my mind: It is the Father's will that none should be lost.

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Six months after I discovered God I discovered *The Urantia Book*. This was in 1965, and Mary has been with me in this since the beginning. I can't begin to tell you how valuable that has been.

The Urantia Book made us aware of a presence, within our reach, of a sphere of life infinitely more valuable than the natural life of humankind.[17] We wanted to find out more about this, explore its higher pathways wherever they would lead. We wanted to introduce our children to the majestic cosmic framework of the Urantia teachings. But how?

This was no easy question.

Not knowing what else to do, we plunged ahead. We made every mistake we could think of, and a few more. We tried reading passages from the book at dinnertime. We tried formal lessons, with lesson plans and diagrams, the whole works. A certain telltale glaze would come over the children's eyes. We tried to make a family study group. We tried a few disastrous family councils. We weren't connecting.

One day, at the mention of Jesus, we observed about 7 or 8 seconds of pure, apprehensive silence among the children. Then one of them said: "Here comes another brainy lecture."

That stopped us in our tracks. We felt like total failures. For more than six months we made no mention of the book or the teachings. And then we began accidentally to stumble forward into the light.

What began to work was quite simple and practical. It started at the dinner table. Over the months and years that followed, we did other things— we did a lot of study group activity, <u>always</u> with children who were free to wander in and out as they pleased. We took part for years in a beautiful meeting for worship in an organized religion. But it was the dinner table that turned the tide.

Mary and I had both taken steps to arrange our lives so that we could have family sit-down dinners. No television. No distractions. I restricted my travel to only a few days a year.

Sitting around the table we began to tell stories from *The Urantia Book*. We didn't plan this as a teaching exercise. It just unfolded naturally from our enthusiasm. We began to tell stories about the Garden of Eden, Adamson and Ratta, the fandors, the midwayers, the goings on in Dalamatia, the Lucifer rebellion, Van and Amadon, life on a neighboring planet, what happens when you awaken after mortal death, the morontia journey, Jesus on Mount Hermon, Jesus and Rebecca— so many Jesus stories. *The Urantia Book* has lots of good stories. Some of them are spectacular.

The children found these stories fascinating, and would ask questions. It was a natural and easy transition to move beyond the stories into teaching. In the normal conversations about the events of the day, issues would always arise from which the perspectives of the Urantia Papers could shed some larger illumination.

Much of what we tried to teach came in response to questions. All of the children have great curiosity and lively imaginations. But in the beginning, we tended to over-teach, to say too much. We quickly found we had to learn a fundamental lesson, which was this: The child must remain in control of the learning process, and feel in control.

Because of your own enthusiasm for the teachings, you may not always watch closely enough for body language that tells you the point has been made or the lesson has ended. You have a great urge to add one more thought to round out the concept, to list one or two additional facts, to give one more example, to offer one more cogent observation. . . Don't.

When the look in the eye says stop, when the body language says stop, bite your tongue and stop. Let the child remain in control. This makes all the difference. It keeps things relaxed. It stimulates the child to keep on asking questions. . . I can remember nights when we never left the dinner table until midnight. Two children on one knee, another child on the other knee. Questions, questions, questions. It was exhilarating.

There is one other thing I should mention about the dinner table discussions. Mary and I quite often see things in different ways. We share the same values, but our perceptions come in from different angles. I should also mention that Mary— bless her heart— has never been hesitant to speak her mind. Over the years there were many times when Mary and I would present different interpretations of some of the Urantia teachings. At the time I thought to myself: My God, we are really going to confuse the kids. It was not until many years later that we learned they weren't confused at all. What they took away from these exchanges was this: There is no dogma. You are free to have your own opinion. For a young mind, this was a liberating revelation.

* * *

In our years of child rearing there were two things we were consciously trying to do.

More than anything else, we wanted each of our children to develop a personal, private, powerful relationship with God, and a desire to follow the inspiration of Jesus' life and teachings wherever it would lead them.

Second, we wanted to help our children develop a framework for living their mortal lives that would be fully consistent with all phases of living anywhere in the universe beyond— through all the morontia progressions, even to the realms of Paradise. We wanted our children to feel at home in the universe,[18] to know we have friends on other worlds.

We didn't call this cosmic citizenship then, but in retrospect that's what we often talked about. Except for the Supreme. We just nibbled around the edges of the Supreme.

Cosmic citizenship does not begin in the mansion worlds. It begins here and now. One of the major purposes of *The Urantia Book* is to tell us that. Beyond its purpose of spiritual transformation, the revelation introduces us to the idea that we are entry-level participants in an immense enterprise. It says in effect: Folks, this is the way the universe works. It's time you knew it. These are the facts of universe reality. Start getting used to it.

We live and move and have our being within the Supreme Being[19] — the evolving Mother God,[20] the Finite God,[21] the God of Time and Space,[22] the God of Experience.[23] We can only approach the Supreme by means of experience.[24] We have to do something.[25] We cannot evolve without the Supreme. The Supreme probably cannot evolve without us.[26] Thus, we have a duty to the Supreme.[27] Our duty is to help build dynamic levels of experience-based spirituality into the immanence of the Supreme.[28] This is a big job. It involves the entire grand universe.[29] We have to work together to do our tiny, tiny, tiny irreplaceable part.[30]

Where do we start? How do we begin? I am going to suggest eight types of action, eight modes of living, that repercuss in the Supreme, that not only help us evolve, but also help the Supreme evolve. There are many, many more things we can do in addition to these eight ideas, but these eight

are illustrative of how we can proceed as individuals. I won't even try to suggest how we can proceed as groups. But as individuals, these are the kinds of things that begin to build an enduring foundation for cosmic citizenship. In more extended detail, these were the kinds of things we discussed over the years around the dinner table.

The first action is to stay focused.

Each of us has to make a decision about survival and continuing growth, to become ever more godlike. We have to want to go forward. Mary and I gave absolute assurances to the children that none of them would ever be dragged kicking and screaming into higher states of being. When life gets you down, stay focused on the larger scheme of things.

Staying focused means staying focused on the Father's will as the singular enduring principle of all existence, the sure pathway to progress now and forever.

But there is an important companion word. We have to stay intelligently focused. What this does not mean is saying: Hey, boss, tell me what to do and I'll do it.[31] You can't get anywhere near Paradise with that attitude. You need to supply some real volitional horsepower.

What it does mean is intelligent partnership, always knowing who the senior partner is. Intelligent focus means we express again and again— forever— within our mind, the full volitional power of the personality prerogatives God has given us: Father, I will to do your will. I choose your will. I understand its supernal value.

Many people believe the Father's will applies only to big decisions, major actions. They think God is too busy to get involved in the small and commonplace details of daily living. Those who hold this view simply do not understand that God is truly infinite.

There is one phrase, just part of a sentence in *The Urantia Book*, that clearly teaches that the will of God extends even into the smallest details of life, that at every moment of our conscious being, we have the opportunity to choose His will. The sentence is on page 1555, in the middle of paragraph 2, in a description of the Apostle John.

I think this is the most powerful sentence in *The Urantia Book*. It says that Jesus always deferred his slightest wish to the will of the Father in heaven.

To the casual mind,[32] commitment at this level— the 100 percent level— would be terribly restrictive, like a straitjacket. It would turn us into spiritual zombies. The fact is, it would lead to just the opposite. The Father's will is the greatest liberating force in the universe. Jesus proved that over and over again in his life. And the more fully we progress as cosmic citizens, the more fully we will come actually to experience the truth of this statement.

The second action is to stay relaxed.

I don't mean lounging around in your bathrobes. I mean inwardly relaxed. Spiritually relaxed. Don't keep feeling your spiritual pulse. The action nucleus of this idea comes in moving from a state of tension to something approaching spiritual serenity. We will have to do this long into the future. You can't grow when you're tense.

The most spiritually relaxing story I ever heard grew out of a meeting long ago between George Foxx, founder of the Quakers, and William Penn, before he moved to Philadelphia. As the story was told to me, Penn was then a young Englishman, a pretty tough guy, a sword-carrying swashbuckler. He was becoming interested in the Quakers and was thinking of joining their religious society. But he was hesitant. So he met with George Foxx.

- Penn said: If I become a Quaker, how long can I carry my sword?
- Foxx said: Let's sit down and pray together about that.
- They prayed together for a good period of time. Then finally, Foxx looked up and said: As long as you can.

I think this story reveals God's attitude toward us. Go forward with your whole self. Don't keep looking back at the baggage you left behind. Carry your sword as long as you can. But when you put

it down, when it's just not you anymore, put it down forever.

The third action is to stay balanced.

Just because we study *The Urantia Book* doesn't mean we are in a halfway house to heaven. All it means is that we have expanded potential. We are not chosen people. We are not special. What we have is the sustenance of a far-flung cosmic perspective.[33] Our challenge is to translate potential into actual— into living the teachings we have begun to comprehend. But the road from here to there is long and difficult.

Always, we emphasized: Use common sense. Keep things in proportion, even *The Urantia Book*. Assimilate the wholeness of the teachings. Don't get lost in a single part.

Year after year, as a family, we witnessed individuals walking around with *Urantia Book*s, but who had clearly lost their balance and were becoming strange. Some of them seemed to do it all by themselves. Some of them seemed to fall victim to the distractions that interlace the Urantia movement.

We consistently taught the children that there is inherent dignity and worth in every other person, that in time we will all become brothers and sisters of destiny. And we often told our children that we can never know where, or when, or how the light of God will illuminate another mind. The only thing we can know for sure is that God always works in strikingly original ways. So we should listen carefully to what others say, try to remain spiritually aware.

Over the years, all of us had to weigh these teachings against the observations and assessments necessary to determine when we were in the presence of truth, or when we were in the presence of an exaggerated religious ego.[34]

With Jesus as your role model, these assessments are much easier to make. The symmetry of Jesus' personality is balance in its most exquisite form. We are clearly taught that "... the secret of his unparalleled religious life was his 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."[35] That says it all.

The fourth action is to stay loyal.

Stay loyal to the highest values you can comprehend. We have been taught that human loyalties, once mobilized, are hard to change.[36] Our most profound loyalties underlie the actions of everything we do.

We wanted our children to find pathways that would lead to the deepest ranges of soul mobilization.

Jesus placed a very high premium on loyalty. And so does the human race. The Urantia Papers tell us that children are permanently impressed only by our primary loyalties.[37] And children cannot be fooled about this.

When we have established the sovereignty of truth, beauty, and goodness in our heart,[38] we will nurture it and support it wherever we find it. We will be loyal to what these values represent.

People tend to say truth, beauty, and goodness almost as a singular phrase. They grasp what truth means. They understand goodness. But too often— much too often— people forget that beauty is the middle word, of equal value with the other two. Beauty is a primary aspect of God we too often ignore.

Not only the beauty of things physical and material, but also the beauty of relationships in which the integrity of the relationship is honored and never violated or betrayed. Beauty of the spirit of things. Cosmic levels of beauty. Beauty that rises within the great spiritual power of wholehearted devotion to a common cause, mutual loyalty to a cosmic Deity.[39]

The great thing we can teach our children is hope and faith in the ultimate goodness, truth and beauty of creation.

God-centered loyalty is fundamental. Loyalty to truth, beauty, and goodness is fundamental. Our primary loyalties will be tested over and over again in our godward adventure. And these tests will usually come out of ambush, to catch us when we're not looking, to capture what is the real

spontaneous and instantaneous reaction of the heart.

The fifth action is to stay determined.

Persevere. Grow to the maximum of your being. Don't ever stop, except for an occasional rest. Use the talents you were given. Use it or lose it[40] – that's the law of the universe.

Life will knock you down again and again. Get up stronger each time. Pick yourself up and go forward. Learn from your mistakes. Become better for the experience.

One of my favorite stories comes from the boxer, Archie Moore. Archie Moore had remarkable endurance as a fighter. He was 45 years old and still knocking 22-year olds out of the ring.

One night Archie was up against a tough young fighter in a 15-rounder. Archie was holding his own right into the 15th round when his opponent knocked him to the canvas. The referee began the count. At the count of nine Archie got up, and quickly proceeded to knock the other guy out of the ring.

In the dressing room some reporters crowded around Archie. You know how reporters are— sometimes they ask really dumb questions. But sometimes the dumb questions produce remarkable answers. One of the reporters asked: Archie, when you were down for the nine-count, what were you thinking about?

Archie thought for a few moments, then he said: Well, I kind of got to thinking— like he's got all afternoon— if I don't get up off the mat, I'm gonna lose the fight.

That story has inspired our whole family for 30 years. When times are really tough, when you have worked to the point of utter exhaustion and there is still more to do, when you're up against an impossible deadline and all the energy seems gone, when the odds against you seem overwhelming, just say to yourself: If I don't get up off the mat, I'm gonna lose the fight. Then get up off the mat and win the fight.

The sixth action is to stay nonjudgmental.

This is an action because you usually have to work at it. It doesn't just pop into your head naturally as your first response, unless you have become very spiritual.

Staying nonjudgmental means we have to be cautious about making judgments about other people, especially about their motives. I'm sure that all of us, at one time or another have found ourselves accused of motives that were the exact opposite of what we were thinking. So we all understand the social danger.

To be judgmental is to be quick to condemn, quick to assign motives, quick to assume a superior morality; quick to gossip, quick to mistrust. I think we can all imagine that life in the cosmos cannot proceed on this basis. So it is best we start learning the lesson now, that we begin to place a high value on accuracy. To give others the benefit of the doubt. To approach life situations with a nonjudgmental attitude.

Sometimes what you think you see is not what you're seeing at all. *The Urantia Book* portrait of our snarling primitive ancestor facing a sabre-tooth tiger is only one of countless examples we could use. What we are instructed to look for is the truth content in what is going on.

Here is one of my favorite examples.[41] About a thousand years ago King Canute the Great united Denmark, Norway, Southern Sweden, and England into a Viking empire. The history books you probably read told you that Canute had a massive ego and was so intoxicated with power he did a strange thing. He took his throne chair to the edge of the sea and commanded the waves to stop. This is the story of the false historian.

The true historian would tell you this. Yes, Canute did take his throne chair to the edge of the sea. Yes, he did command the waves to stop. But let's look at the motive behind the act.

Canute was angered by the constant flattery of those around him. They kept telling him he was so powerful he was capable of any achievement. He needed to teach them a lesson they would never forget.

"After ordering back the sea and getting his feet wet, Canute then said: Let all men know how empty and worthless is the power of kings, for there is none worthy of the name but He whom

heaven and earth and sea obey by eternal laws."

"Afterward, Canute never again wore his crown. He hung it instead in Winchester Cathedral."

So what looked like ego and intoxication of power to a false historian was in truth a demonstration of profound humility to a true historian. Let us not become false historians, even in the small details of our daily lives and interactions. This is a lesson for all time.

The seventh action is to stay driven.

Stay driven to excel in whatever you undertake. You can't get to Paradise with half-hearted effort. The universe is a place of whole hearts. Might as well learn that right now. Always do your best. Whatever is worth doing is worth doing well. Put your heart into it. These are not clichés. This is Reality 101.

We have been taught that "... it is repugnant to the divine nature to suffer any sort of deterioration or ever to permit the execution of any purely personal act in an inferior way."[42] The work of this world is of paramount importance, but important as it is, the work itself is not nearly so important as the way we do this work.[43]

As cosmic citizens, the quest for perfection— relaxed perfection— must become the underlying urge for everything we do.

The eighth action is to stay cooperative.

If we're not already cooperative in nature, we had better start learning fast. One of the most important lessons we learn on this planet is teamwork,[44] how to work effectively with other people, especially people who are not at all like us. Once we learn the transcendent value of teamwork, we will begin to get a glimpse of what is really going on in the universe.

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So much to do. So many things to keep in mind. And this is not even basic training— it's just the introduction to our basic training as citizens of a universe teeming with life and purpose.

Fortunately, *The Urantia Book* comes to our rescue. It provides a basic model for universe progression— a primary progression technique for cosmic problem solving. And it also reveals a primary progression attitude. These two things together will get you from here to there.

The progression technique is very simple, and you always have it with you wherever you are. The technique is to trade your mind for the mind of Jesus[45]— the Jesus of *The Urantia Book*. The Jesus we have come to know as having a superbly balanced character, a wonderful symmetry of toughness and compassion, an unflinching dedication to seeking and doing the Father's will.

As you face decisions, actions, situations, think to yourself: What would Jesus do? Your honest answers to that question will begin to guide your actions with great spiritual power. Once you have done this with real success the first time— once you actually experience the mind of Jesus, however briefly, you will never want to go back to your old ways.

The primary progression attitude is equally simple. A Melchizedek revelator tells us that the keys to the kingdom of heaven are: sincerity, more sincerity, and more sincerity. All of us have these keys within us, and we use them by decisions, by more decisions, and by more decisions.[46] In time, we build up a gathering momentum that carries us ever godward.

Mary and I taught our children that *The Urantia Book* is not the end of the search, but only the beginning. Everything in life becomes more fascinating in the cosmic glow of the Urantia teachings. The first time I read the book cover to cover was in 1967. I discovered the majestic beauty of the writing, the supernal character of the philosophical observations, the symphonic quality in the way the revelation unfolds. I have often said: I have been bored only four times since 1967.

We live in a dangerous world, but one that is alive with promise. All through the world, even now, we can feel the stirrings for love and beauty,[47] the hunger for truth and righteousness rising in the human heart. Let each of us, each day give nourishment to these splendid hungers.

We who believe in the Urantia teachings are called voluntarily to a higher standard of conduct

and action. We are now called upon to act out the meanings of what we have discovered. But how? What would Jesus do?

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God bless you my friends, my brothers and sisters of destiny, and keep you in His love forever.

Footnotes

(Unless otherwise indicated, all references are from *The Urantia Book*.)

1. 941:6
2. 79:4; 939:6-7
3. 2067:1
4. 1403:1
5. 1389-90
6. 765:5
7. 943:1
8. 1581:1
9. 913:2,3
10. 942:1
11. 75:10
12. 941:7
13. 909:4
14. 941:9
15. 619:0
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18. 1117:1
19. 1280:5; 1283:1
20. 1288:1
21. 1266:2; 1283:3
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25. 1260:1
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27. 1206:8; 1284:4,5; 1301:1
28. 1271:2; 1278:1
29. 1278:4
30. 138:5
31. 1589:0
32. 1097:6
33. 1092:6
34. 2088:1
35. 2089:0
36. 1488:6
37. 1094:6
38. 1089:12; 1279:5
39. 1776:2
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43. 137:6
44. 435:6
45. 312:1
46. 553:7
46. 435:7
47. Max Lerner, *New York Post* columnist, June 6, 1961.