

A COLLEGE COURSE ON THE URANTIA BOOK

Perceptions and Possibilities

By

Robert W. Hunt, Ph. D.

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During the Fall Quarter of 1972, on the campus of California State College in Bakersfield, Professor Philip Calabrese and I conducted a one-unit, nongraded course entitled "An Introduction to the URANTIA Book". The brevity of the time allotment (five two-hour meetings on alternate Monday evenings) and the scope of the undertaking presented incompatible, but challenging, constraints on the project. The twenty-three students registered for credit formed a diverse group both with respect to major fields and extent of familiarity with the URANTIA Book, the latter ranging from none to some. Purchase of the book was not required although many did acquire their own copy; three copies were available in the library, two of which were donated by the First URANTIA Society of Los Angeles. In addition to the regular students, about a dozen other interested persons attended some or all of the class sessions.

The course developed in a fairly straightforward, generally low-keyed fashion with presentations covering a preview of the primary aspects of the book, conceptions of religion and the religious experience as presented in Papers 99-103 (I have found this to be an excellent set of papers for the beginning reader), and sketches of the cosmology of the URANTIA Book, the history of URANTIA, and the life and teachings of Jesus. These were discussed in general outline with some continuity being provided by specific concepts and thematic organization.

Both the planning and implementation of the course involved some frustration and difficulty as well as continued challenge and resulting fulfillment. I feel that the total experience was positive, rewarding, and successful as an introduction to the URANTIA Book. Most of the students are continuing, independently, to read and study the book. The entire project was regarded as experimental and could certainly be repeated or expanded although there are no current plans to do so.

Based upon this experience and, more broadly, upon my experience in the area of higher education blended with my study of and experience with the URANTIA Book, I wish to extend my commentary to more expansive considerations.

Currently, higher education, at both the immediate postsecondary and graduate levels, is not enjoying a particularly enviable reputation or pleasant circumstances. Faced with declining enrollments, reduced financial support, and public attitudes that range from hostile criticism and cynicism to demands for both relevance and accountability, the academic community has many problems to contend with while concurrently struggling with exponential rates of growth of both information and technological impingements on the educational process. In the formulation of responses to the accumulated difficulties, there seems to be a confusion that fails to distinguish between training and educating, between skills and knowledge, between performance and understanding. This entire issue is, of course, extremely complex; and I do not intend, by

these brief observations, to oversimplify significant matters. I simply acknowledge them as a preface to suggesting why some of the problems exist and predicting a way in which some of them may, at least in some measure, be resolved.

I would like to go before the entire faculty of my college and request its indulgence while I present some ideas concerning the curricula of all of the various disciplines represented. I would then unfold a glorious plan in which every course would utilize both concepts and insights derived from the URANTIA Book. I would suggest that wherever possible values as well as meanings be incorporated into the academic milieu to provide new dimensions in intellectual pursuits at virtually every level. I would issue a challenge to each of my learned colleagues to read, to study, and to analyze the URANTIA Papers from the perspective of his or her own expertise, to seek out concepts or ideas, general material or specific subject matter, or anything at all that could be incorporated into a college course in such a manner as to enhance and enrich the course. There would be no necessity, during these studies, to suspend critical appraisal, a meaningful area for URANTIA Book scholars to explore both now and in the future. I am certain that many valuable and evolutionarily uplifting realizations will result from careful, constructive, and wise evaluations of the URANTIA Papers. And there will come a time when meetings or conferences such as this will be commonplace and widespread rather than unique and esoteric. Readers, students, and teachers will gather to present and discuss scholarly studies generated by the URANTIA Book.

But first, and of initial concern in my appeal to my fellow faculty members, the emphasis should be upon an open and positive spirit of inquiry, a search for anything that might be helpful or enlightening to a student or a professor (or both) in a specific college course or collection of courses. If these conditions can be achieved, and I am hopeful that one day they may be, then I have supreme confidence in the results. If the seeds can be sown, the harvest will be abundant. In fact, the yield has the potential of reaching actual levels of reality as yet unimagined in the history of man on this planet. I shall try to be more specific. First, I assert that virtually any area of academic study and pursuit, as traditionally accepted and defined in modern higher education, has an untapped vein, an unexplored depth, an unrecognized dimension - namely, the values and meanings, the truth, the beauty, and the goodness that impinge upon the material facts of the subject matter content. It is certainly true that the arts, and even the sciences at times, are recognized and taught with aesthetic and emotional, as well as intellectual, regard. But values and higher meanings are most often relegated to something less than the prime and ultimate role of importance, to a lesser or greater extent depending upon the discipline and the personality of the spokesman therefor. And detachment or, at best, a subtle aloofness, is certainly more the rule than the exception among academicians regardless of their field or personal persuasions. I am suggesting that this is the very antithesis of what really ought to be, that every concept, every idea, every fact of any study should be examined not only for logical or scientific or aesthetic acceptability but also with respect to its value in the cosmic scheme, to its spiritual importance, and to its role in the enhancement of evolutionary growth and achieving the will of God. I think that virtually any academic subject at any level of sophistication, elementary or advanced, can be expanded so as to be embedded in a dynamic, growing, cosmic reality that retains all current development while adding a new perspective that is undeniably worthwhile.

I am not asserting that the URANTIA Book should replace the text books or materials of any course, only that it offers a most enhancing supplement. In some areas, such as philosophy, religious studies, history, sociology, and anthropology, the URANTIA Book offers specific content as well as an unsurpassed frame of reference. For many other traditional disciplines, the URANTIA Book presents broad conceptual directions with startling and succinct perceptiveness. Such clarity and perspective are invaluable to the motivation of and focus for any particular area of study.

For physics, astronomy, and mathematics, Paper 12 (pages 133-135) includes sections on space, motion, and time, concepts that occur at frequent intervals throughout the book and culminate in Jesus' Carthage discourse on time and space, Paper 130 (pages 1438-1440). Paper 15 (pages 169-172) discusses nebulae and the origin of space bodies while Paper 41, "Physical Aspects of the Local Universe" (pages 455-466) is packed with topics such as sun density, solar radiation, and solar energy, each of interest to the chemist, the physicist, and the astronomer. For more advanced scientific considerations, Paper 42, "Energy - Mind and Matter" (pages 467-484) is replete with discussions of energy and matter, including the illusive, as yet undiscovered ultimatum and its relation to electrons and atoms. Physics, astronomy, earth science, and geography are all involved in Paper 57, "The Origin of URANTIA" (pages 651-663).

Biology and the related life sciences are well-served by a variety of considerations of evolution ranging from "The Evolutionary Idea" in Paper 32 (pages 360-362) to Paper 65, "The Overcontrol of Evolution" (pages 730-740) and including, in Part III, an incredible sequence of papers with applications to history, anthropology, and geology as well. These are Paper 58, "Life Establishment On URANTIA" (pages 664-671); Paper 59, "The Marine Life Era On URANTIA" (pages 672-684); Paper 60, "URANTIA During the Early Land-Life Era" (pages 685-692); Paper 61, "The Mammalian Era On URANTIA" (pages 693-702); Paper 62, "The Dawn Races of Early Man" (pages 703-710); and Paper 63, "The First Human Family" (pages 711-717). In the first of these, on page 665, is the fascinating statement: "The URANTIA midwayers have assembled over fifty thousand facts of physics and chemistry they deem to be incompatible with the laws of accidental chance, and which they contend unmistakably demonstrate the presence of intelligent purpose in the material creation. And all of this takes no account of their catalogue of more than one hundred thousand findings outside the domain of physics and chemistry which they maintain prove the presence of mind in the planning, creation, and maintenance of the material cosmos." What a beautiful, natural, and exciting project for a college science class - to formulate such a list of its own!

The possibilities for academic philosophy and religious studies are too great for enumeration. In addition to the many compelling and carefully articulated themes that occur throughout the book, there are numerous outstanding specific presentations such as "Morontia Mota" (pages 556-557), Paper 56 on "Universal Unity" (pages 637-648), and Papers 160 and 161 (pages 1772-1787) dealing with Rodan of Alexandria. Historical perspectives are discussed and expanded in the series of papers from Paper 85 to Paper 98 (pages 944-1085). These deal with origins and evolution of worship and the life and teachings of Machiventa Melchizedek. Sociology and religion are interwoven in Papers 99-103 (pages 1086-1142) which deal with religion in society and in human experience,

Book over which we might become divided unless we have already been self-critical ahead of time. These areas could be openly discussed, tested and resolved through actual life experiences at such URANTIA living and learning centers.

7. Finally, the URANTIA Movement is in its formative stages; basic ideas and practices are being formed which will serve somewhat as a guide for later years. These basic concepts and practices ought to be grounded and tested in living experience rather than based on a simple reading of the URANTIA Book. And to gain such experience we should begin now toward building a true URANTIA Society (or a Society of societies) not just isolated study groups living mostly within contemporary secular society.

8. While there may be certain dangers inherent in such internal organization, the alternative risks seem to me much greater. As always the right path lies in a wise balance.

IV Community Relations

1. Speaking of balance, it seems to me that we early URANTIA Book devotees face a special task of maintaining our balance while we live on a world seemingly overflowing with intimidation, violence, deception, hypocrisy and general injustices. We face problems of humility as we imagine the importance of URANTIA in our local universe, the importance of this epochal revelation to URANTIA, the possible significance and importance of our individual roles in the URANTIA Movement. Subtle types of pride endanger us. We might act just to increase our status rather than out of loving service. Some of us might expect some special reward or presume some special place in the scheme of things. As humans living together, we might succumb to jealousy or the suspicion of jealousy.

2. How harmonious is our URANTIA Movement when we all exhibit the attitude of the Apostle James Zebedee. The URANTIA Book says, "Of all the twelve, he came the nearest to grasping the real import and significance of Jesus' teaching. He, too, was slow at first to comprehend the Mater's meaning, but ere they had finished their training, he had acquired a superior concept of Jesus' message." (page 1552) "He was modest and undramatic, a daily server, an unpretentious worker seeking no special reward when once he grasped something of the real meaning of the kingdom." (page 1553) How beautiful is our URANTIA Society when we live more faithfully Jesus' admonitions to the twelve at their ordination: "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and be led to glorify your Father who is in heaven." (page 1572) "...when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you." (Mathew 6, 3 & 4)

3. When we love each other as brothers and sisters we partake of the infinite spiritual wealth of our Father; when we love each other as Jesus loved us, our spiritual wealth is immeasurably multiplied. Each act of love increases our total wealth as well as all individual wealth. Thus with God everyone gains and no one loses. Thank you.

* section of Paper 16 dealing with "The Cosmic Mind" (pages 191-192). "The cosmic mind unfailingly responds (recognizes response) on three levels of universe reality. ... These levels of reality are: 1. Causation - the reality domain of the physical senses, the scientific realms of logical uniformity, the differentiation of the factual and the non-factual, reflective conclusions based on cosmic response. This is the mathematical form of the cosmic discrimination. 2. Duty - the reality domain of morals in the philosophic realm, the arena of reason, the recognition of relative right and wrong. This is the judicial form of the cosmic discrimination. 3. Worship - the spiritual domain of the reality of religious experience, the personal realization of divine fellowship, the recognition of spirit values, the assurance of eternal survival, the ascent from the status of servants of God to the joy and liberty of the sons of God. This is the highest insight of the cosmic mind, the reverential and worshipful form of the cosmic discrimination. These scientific, moral, and spiritual insights, these cosmic responses, are innate in the cosmic mind, which endows all will creatures." ... "It is the purpose of education to develop and sharpen these innate endowments of the human mind;..."

* (page 192).

I began by saying that I would like to present these ideas to my faculty colleagues. I would do this with the hope that a new and significant development would result and with the conviction that any institution that initiates and maintains such a program will ultimately be recognized for both the courage and the vision so demonstrated. Were I to carry out this idea in hopes of launching a plan that seems so promising and, eventually, inevitable, what would the reception be? An attempt to answer offers some interesting possibilities for speculation. However, the general consensus of how such a suggestion would be received would probably offer scant encouragement together with advice to take care lest I sacrifice my intellectual respectability. There is, of course, a matter of much greater importance than the reaction from my faculty audience; and that is, would this be a wise course of action? Are my fellow faculty members, or is any similar group, ready to hear such a suggestion much less act upon it? Would this action be counter to the many reminders in the URANTIA Book concerning the counter-productivity of haste or impatience? These are questions that must be considered carefully, wisely, and sincerely, both now and as they continue to arise in analogous situations and very likely with increasing frequency. For me and for now, the conclusion seems clear.

I will not go before my faculty friends with such a proposal. In fact, there is probably no other group to present it to at this time besides the one here assembled or one of similar composition. I have done so, then, because I think you will understand what I am saying and because I perceive that, for the record, such a seed needs planting. Some day it may spring forth, blossom, and bear good fruit that will feed the mind, sustain the soul, and yield the spirit.