

will retain the wisdom of the past, make meaningful the challenge of the present, and give humankind a vision of the future which 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.

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 Rheume 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 Religion 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 Views of the Superconscious and Transpersonal Psychology"

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

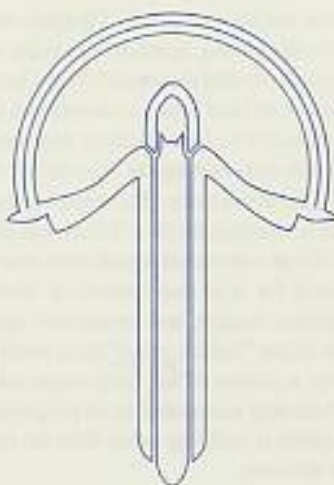
"*The Urantia Book* View of Jesus' concept of Man Contrasted with the Pauline Understanding of Human Nature"

"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 found 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 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 man. 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 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.



For literature related to *The Urantia Book*, or for additional copies of this brochure, please contact:

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About Dr. Meredith J. Sprunger

Dr. Meredith J. Sprunger, a retired minister in the United Church of Christ, served congregations in Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. Dr. Sprunger was President of Indiana Institute of Technology. During his tenure, he served as a professor, head of the Department of Psychology and chairman of the Division of Liberal Arts. He also taught at Elmhurst College where he headed the Psychology Department.

Dr. Sprunger has been President of URANTIA® Brotherhood, chairman of the Education and Fraternal Relations Committee and a Field Representative. Today, Meredith is the Executive Director of Ministry of the Jesusonian Foundation while serving on the Board of Directors. He also founded and directed The Christian Fellowship of Students of *The Urantia Book*.

(Paper presented at the American Academy of Religion meeting at Anaheim 11/25/85)

The Urantia Book and Religious Studies

by Meredith J. Sprunger, Ph.D.

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 the 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 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 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 clergymen 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 behind 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 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, one of the finest world views of religion available to contemporary humanity.

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 in 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 which 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 which 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 field 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 modern man 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 fundamental motivation of life. This growth is evolutionary, culminating, and endless.

The book describes the origin and evolution of events on our planet. In addition to the 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 which describe the loving nurture of the indwelling Spirit of God in the mind of man are of exceptional quality and parallel the world's finest insights derived 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 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 which 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 mankind living on this world, "Urantia." It purports to be the first major or epochal 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 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 teaching. Its message is balanced and profound. Its approach is open and benign. There are no other threats or coercions to "believe." It seeks to work in and through the evolutionary process and within the social institutions of our world.

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 which is both horizontal and vertical in nature. The illusions of secularism, reductionism, and naive utopianism are challenged with a breathtaking 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 theologians, 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 Cosmogogenesis 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 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,