

CONTEMPORARY BROTHERHOOD CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Sept. 5, 1977

During the past two years, in addition to observing an accelerating spread of The URANTIA Book and a growing number of people becoming involved in the URANTIA movement, the Brotherhood has experienced the most traumatic period in its short history. The emotional connotations surrounding this period of debate are elicited by simply mentioning the term "Confirmatory Agreement."

Although the recent and historically important General Council meeting and events following it have largely eliminated polarized and antagonistic attitudes in the Brotherhood, it is my conviction that this extended dialogue has been an essentially healthy and maturing experience for both the Foundation and the Brotherhood and the end result will be helpful to the URANTIA movement.

It might be good to review some of the lessons we ^{have} learned. Our major problem, as is usually the case in social groups, was attitudinal not substantial, legal, or constitutional. URANTIA Brotherhood is in its infancy and I observe we at times suffer from the illusions of immaturity. Some of us are so enthused with the message of The URANTIA Book that we somehow assume that members of URANTIA Brotherhood are special people immune from the foibles of human nature. Our idealism needs to be tempered by evolutionary reality. Brotherhood members have the same normal distribution of human traits which one would find in any representative social group. The Brotherhood has no special quota of saints or sinners. We have a superlative message to proclaim but we ourselves are made of very common human clay. Therefore, we should not be disillusioned when some of our fellows do not measure up to our idealistic expectations. Rather, we must learn to accept, love, and work with people as they are in the here and now. This is a creative challenge and a thrilling possibility even for beings of our lowly status.

It might also be helpful if we used religious clichés with greater restraint. How often I hear people talking about "Doing the will of God" or "Doing the Father's will." This catch-all phrase, I assume, is intended to assure the purity of the speaker's motivation. As a child I constantly heard this expression in the fundamentalistic church we attended. I soon learned that when translated it often meant "That which I am doing or that which I believe." Magic words like "Urantian" or "Jesusonian" can also take on near fetish symbolization when used as clichés. It may keep us a little more honest, reality-centered, and humble if we resort less to such ambiguous religious clichés. Basically, we have again learned that accepting, loving, and trusting each other is the key to resolving differences of mind and personality. I hope that this knowledge has been so well rehearsed in our short term memory that it will be coded and stored forever as an active part of our long term memory in URANTIA Brotherhood.

A second ^{important} basic lesson which some of us have learned is that we are not clear about the philosophy and practice of Foundation and Brotherhood relationships. Many years ago Bill Sadler recognized the difference in the basic functions of the Brotherhood and Foundation could cause problems and advised that these differences always be kept in mind and that interrelationships be directed wisely. I hope we have learned the wisdom of this observation.

The Foundation's primary function is the publication of The URANTIA BOOK, protection of copyright, trademark, and service marks. In carrying out their responsibilities the Foundation must place emphasis on purity of text, propriety of activities associated with the service marks, copyright defense, and the economic necessities which these actions require. The ultimate social-temporal requirement demanded by this basic function is to establish the authority demanded by the Declaration of Trust; and such authority in our society is finally determined by legal procedures. The Foundation's image, therefore, will take on connotations of political and legal authority.

The Brotherhood's primary function is to organize study groups and societies and generally stimulate individuals and groups to actualize the teachings of The URANTIA Book in their lives. To carry out their responsibilities the Brotherhood must place emphasis on fellowship, leadership development, stimulating individual growth and creativity, spiritual enlightenment, group dynamics, and group decision-making. The ultimate social-temporal requirement demanded by this basic function is to evolve an effective brotherhood; and brotherhood is achieved through love, freedom, and loyalty. The Brotherhood image of necessity will take on connotations of openness, service, and freedom. In the various relationships between the Foundation and the Brotherhood, individuals have sometimes unconsciously assumed the function, methods, and image of the two organizations should be the same. As a result people in both organizations have often been unable to understand each other. The Foundation may be perceived as "legalistic" and "dictatorial." Brotherhood societies, study groups, and individuals may be seen as "libertine" and "unloyal."

It is time that we recognize the distinctive function of both the Foundation and the Brotherhood and separate their proper images in our thinking. Our objective should not be to make the Foundation over in the image of the Brotherhood nor to make the Brotherhood over in the image of the Foundation. Both of their functions are needed and proper. Neither organization, as an organization, has sovereignty over the other. There are priority relationships. The Foundation has ownership and control of the copyright of The URANTIA Book, the trademark, and the service marks. The Brotherhood has priority over its own organizational structure and activities. Their proper relationship is that of cooperation with mutual assistance and unity of purpose.

Being ignorant of or confusing these basic functions of the Brotherhood and the Foundation can cause much misunderstanding and antagonism. Recently I received a long distance call from a very articulate man who had just received the Foundation news letter. He expressed dissatisfaction with its preoccupation with copyright, financial, and legal problems. He informed me that he was losing confidence in the Foundation and had stopped sending them money. I explained the different functions of the Foundation and Brotherhood, assuring him the primary concern of the Brotherhood was spiritual ministry and fellowship, and shared with him some of the concrete realities of copyright violation the Foundation had to deal with. Given this information, he reacted with sympathetic understanding. He commented, "I didn't know there was a difference of function between the Foundation and the Brotherhood. I feel a lot better about everything now."

No matter how important these organizational, legal, and materialistic problems are - and they are important - we should never forget that they are means and not ends. I should like to emphasize as forcefully as possible that we not allow these secondary issues to obscure or divert us from our primary responsibility: the spiritual ministry to mankind.

To bring you up to date on this organizational problem, the old Confirmatory Agreement has been retired and the legal counsel of the Foundation is drawing up a Licensing Agreement giving URANTIA Societies permission to use the trademark and service marks. Communications are now open and attitudes are positive, constructive, and brotherly; I, therefore, anticipate no serious difficulties in resolving this organizational problem.

With these time-consuming and secondary organizational problems behind us, what about our primary mission to minister to the spiritual needs and potentials of mankind on this planet? What can we expect in the future? What kind of long range planning should we be doing?

I would like for us to think about this question in some depth during the next year or two. In pursuing this problem we face the ancient Scylla and Charybdis dilemma.

On the one hand, as David Gray has commented, "if you don't know where you are going, you may end up somewhere else." On the other hand, as Dick Prince has eloquently pointed out, the future is often unpredictable and plans made today are found to be not only obsolete but detrimental as we face the realities of the future.

As possible guides for our long range planning, I should like to make three basic observations. First, if my evaluation of the sociological dynamics of contemporary philosophical-religious movements is correct, we can expect the URANTIA movement to emerge from its relative obscurity to become part of the general knowledge of a great many people in our society in the next ten to twenty-five years. This exposure will bring various types of confrontation and attack. There will be caustic denunciations of The URANTIA Book labeling it as false doctrine, heretical, and racist. The equanimity, balanced judgment, and loving attitudes with which we face such challenges will limit the negative repercussions of these attacks. At the same time a much larger field of service will be open to the Brotherhood. We should ask ourselves how we might more adequately prepare ourselves experientially for this new era.

My second observation is that I see a ^{couple} number of general principles which might guide us in determining "how" we meet the future. The "what" of the future must be determined in the situational fullness of that future existential moment.

First, we should be guided in our long range planning by the biological-evolutionary-psychological model rather than the mechanistic-engineering-organizational model. The uniqueness and primacy of the individual is of paramount importance in spiritual ministry. Although social organizations are important and necessary, they must be kept in a secondary position, ~~in spiritual ministry~~. Spiritual truth must take pre-eminence over any interpretations, organizational embodiments, or social applications. The latter are time, person, and group conditioned. The former is eternal and universal.

Second, we should seek to promote a leavening type of spiritual ministry. We strive to work in and through the evolutionary process and within the social institutions of our world. Contemporary religious institutions can and will serve as an adequate source of religious ministration for our society. URANTIA Brotherhood, therefore, seeks to avoid being seen as, or to function as, a "church," and eschews implications that it is promoting a "new religion." It strives rather to support, encourage, and strengthen all religious institutions toward the fulfillment of their unique potentials in ministering to the needs of mankind. The Brotherhood's singular aspiration is to act as a leavening influence in the great and many faceted religious heritage of our world.

Finally, although URANTIA Brotherhood, in the main, cannot be specific concerning the "what" in our long range planning, we can and should encourage the various individuals and institutions of our society to translate the teachings of The URANTIA Book into personal-social-institutional responsibilities. Looking ahead I anticipate all sorts of activities and life styles being promoted by individuals and groups associated with The URANTIA Book. Some we will be happy to acknowledge and encourage. Others we will wish to dissociate ourselves from ~~an~~ even condemn. But I suggest that URANTIA Brotherhood act with great restraint and as much as possible allow individuals and groups to find their own level in our society.

I should like to encourage each of you as individuals to find your own calling and creativity in life. As you share this dedication ^{with others} you will inspire ^{others} of like mind and personality to augment your work.

There are innumerable and diverse ~~aspects~~ ^{avenues} of service. The most important long range planning in URANTIA Brotherhood is that which is going on in individual lives under the

direction of the indwelling Spirit of the Father. As this planning is executed with sincerity, integrity, wisdom, and patience the long range service and destiny of URANTIA Brotherhood will be in good hands.

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August 29, 1977

Mr. Paul Snider
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Dear Paul:

I trust you folks had a refreshing vacation and that you are now recovered from its rigors and are reorganized for the fall activities.

As you know, John and I are leaving to attend the Third Western Conference Wednesday. Both of us have been asked to speak to the conference. I decided to review some of the lessons learned during the past couple of years in the Brotherhood and then make some comments about the future.

Since we will be getting together to talk about long range planning in the not too distant future, I will enclose a copy of the talk I'm giving at the conference. From the bottom of page two on, I outline my current thinking on long range planning. I'm sending you a copy not to suggest that you agree or disagree with the ideas or even that I am "settled" in my own views but simply to let you know where I am in my own thinking so that our discussions can be as fruitful as possible.

Ruth and Wayne will welcome their second child via Caesarean section Wednesday. Irene will be spending time at their home for a week or two. Grace and Greg will be in Fort Wayne around the 18th of September. These family events make our planning somewhat indefinite for a month or so. But I do hope we can get together later in September or early in October.

Cordially,

Meredith J. Sprunger