

DISOWNING THE PAST

by

Neal A. Waldrop III

An old French proverb, taking aim at doubt and indecision, declares that "He who crouches between two stools ends up seated on the ground."¹

The acid wit of Bertrand Russell offers us a contrary view: "The trouble with the world is that the stupid are cocksure and the intelligent full of doubt."

Thus are we confronted by the gap between action and contemplation. Those of us inclined to act have tended to do so, accusing the others of being dilatory and ineffectual. Those of us inclined to think have tended to do so, accusing the others of being foolhardy and rash. Between these extremes is there room for understanding?

Of the thousands of Chinese idioms, perhaps there is one which holds value for our quest. Rendered literally, it reads: "Plan deeply, ponder things distant."²

Planning, I would argue, is present action aimed at future possibilities. And planning is a task for us all, for no one person can see the issues from all sides.

While speaking today I merely hope to identify some questions which will require debate for many years to come. But first I offer you yet another paradox: these farsighted arrangements, this sweeping vision, must not and cannot be the result of minority diktat, majority vote, or any other technique for ensuring institutional uniformity. No, our profound unity must come from extended dialogue and free-flowing exchange, so that eventually we reach a spiritual consensus which fully reflects The URANTIA Book's richness.

* * *

In the late forties or early fifties of our present era, the Apostle Paul journeyed to Jerusalem, so as to confer with the Apostle Peter and with James, the younger brother of Jesus. Paul had been laboring among the Greek-speaking inhabitants of Syria and Asia

ACKNOWLEDGMENT: Quotations and other material contained herein are derived from the copyrighted work, The URANTIA Book, copyright © 1955 by URANTIA Foundation, all rights reserved, and are used, printed, and distributed with permission of URANTIA Foundation. Interpretations expressed herein are those of the author and are not necessarily those of URANTIA Foundation.

1 Demeurer entre deux selles (le cul à terre).

2 深謀遠慮 Pronunciation: shēn mǒu yuǎn lǜ.

Minor, but in Jerusalem there had arisen an angry hue and cry: "If those pagans would follow Jesus, let them first conform to the Law of Moses!" Waxing heated and eloquent, Paul ended the debate triumphant.

I by no means aspire to the mantle of Paul, but I do say this to you today: Just as the truths of Jesus' life could not be confined to the Hebrew people, so it is that the truths of The URANTIA Book -- a restatement and expansion of Jesus' real teachings -- cannot long remain encumbered by Judeo-Christian traditions! And just as the early Christians could not endure as an obscure sect within Judaism, so it is that believers in the fifth epochal revelation cannot long remain obscure footnotes to a Christian thesis!

But do not misunderstand me: I do not condemn the Christian religion; far from it. In extending the hand of friendship to all God's children, I certainly include those who follow traditional paths in envisioning Jesus as their hope and solace. The URANTIA Book tells us that "Christianity is a mighty religion,"³ "the product of the combined moral genius of the God-knowing men of many races during many ages" (2085). The URANTIA Book also states: "Jesus did not found the so-called Christian church, but he has, in every manner consistent with his nature, fostered it as the best existent exponent of his lifework on earth" (2085).

If we truly live up to The URANTIA Book's ideals, someday our movement -- together with the rivers of spiritual sustenance that spring forth from it -- will displace Christianity as the best existing exponent of Jesus's lifework. But we have not yet reached that point, and we therefore have good cause to speak softly and humbly.

* * *

How shall we develop our strategy for outreach?

In seeking to organize our thoughts, I believe we might best divide this question into three parts:

1. Our own personal ministry.
2. Our movement's supporting framework.
3. Our mutual goals and ideals.

Our Own Personal Ministry

Our own personal ministry is, and must be, highly individual. Each of us must use methods which are suited to him or her, and which are keyed to the needs of the other

3 URANTIA Foundation, The URANTIA Book, Chicago, 1955; page 2086. From this point on, references to The URANTIA Book will simply be indicated by parentheses enclosing the appropriate page number(s).

person. This requires sensitivity, for there is no magic recipe. Last September's statement from URANTIA Foundation and URANTIA Brotherhood puts it this way:

No single method of introduction is effective for everyone, hence the importance of knowing the book, and understanding the needs of your friend Become spiritually fragrant so as to better attract people to you and to these supernal teachings. When you have exhausted your "supply" of friends to whom you have already introduced the book or the teachings, expand your circle of friends, and never become discouraged.

Here, too, there is paradox -- for if enthusiasm and commitment are required in scouting and selecting the site, so also will generous supplies of tact and discretion be indispensable when laying the foundation.

In all of this we only follow in the apostles' footsteps:

Jesus knew men were different, and he so taught his apostles. He constantly exhorted them to refrain from trying to mold the disciples and believers according to some set pattern. He sought to allow each soul to develop in its own way, a perfecting and separate individual before God. (1582)

And in sending the apostles and evangelists forth, Jesus gave them explicit information about spiritual attraction:

If you, by truth co-ordination, learn to exemplify in your lives this beautiful wholeness of righteousness, your fellow men will then seek after you that they may gain what you have so acquired. The measure wherewith truth seekers are drawn to you represents the measure of your truth endowment, your righteousness. The extent to which you have to go with your message to the people is, in a way, the measure of your failure to live the whole or righteous life, the truth-co-ordinated life. (1726)

Nevertheless Jesus sent them forth, just as today he sends us forth also.

In responding to Jesus' call, is it better to promote interest in The URANTIA Book as a whole, or to select and spread certain of its central teachings, allowing them to blossom in the hearts of the listeners? I believe that both approaches are valid, and important. Our own personal ministry must be based on our own individual choices, responding to the leadings of God's spirit as it moves within us.

Our Movement's Supporting Framework

What is the framework which supports our movement's growth? The obvious, reflex response would be to point to The URANTIA Book itself, as well as to URANTIA Foundation and URANTIA Brotherhood.

But that answer is much too material-minded.

The primal and primordial framework for our movement's growth is God's spiritual nourishment:

- The ministry of the Thought Adjusters.
- The watchcare of the guardian seraphim.
- The inspiration of the Spirit of Truth.

Neither should we overlook the plans and policies of many spiritual governments on high, beginning with the seraphic planetary government here -- but extending to the spiritual administrations of Jerusem, Edentia, Salvington, and beyond.

Need I go on?

No, for I think you all have grasped the essential point: Spiritual sustenance comes from spiritual sources; material manifestations are only their ephemeral reflections.

And if we follow this train of thought where it truly leads, we will then be moved to ask: Why do we suffer from such a fixation on our human groupings, as if their shape or content were the engine of growth? Foolish, feebleminded, fatuous!

The Midwayers tell us that

To Jesus the kingdom was the sum of those individuals who had confessed their faith in the fatherhood of God, thereby declaring their wholehearted dedication to the doing of the will of God, thus becoming members of the spiritual brotherhood of man.

The Master fully realized that certain social results would appear in the world as a consequence of the spread of the gospel of the kingdom; but he intended that all such desirable social manifestations should appear as unconscious and inevitable outgrowths, or natural fruits, of this inner personal experience of individual believers, this purely spiritual fellowship and communion with the divine spirit which indwells and activates all such believers. (1865)

In contrast, traditional Christianity is based on:

1. Authority -- the view that God's true word flows in certain recognized channels, and that the cumulative conventions of the collective are superior to the personal experience of the individual.
2. Dogma -- the view that it is crucial to be taught and accept certain intellectual interpretations which are described as "fundamental doctrines" or "revealed truths."
3. Rules of behavior -- the view that observance of specified moral and ethical norms is a sign of high spiritual standing, and is also a requirement for attaining heavenly bliss.

Can the contrast with the ideals of Jesus be any more obvious? Rather than ask its adherents to engage in an active and enthralling inner quest so as to become a living expression of God's love, traditional Christianity merely insists on outward conformity.

"It is all too true," the Midwayers concede, "that such a church would not have survived unless there had been men in the world who preferred such a style of worship. Many spiritually indolent souls crave an ancient and authoritative religion of ritual and sacred traditions." (2085)

Traditions, after all, can be accepted passively; they require relatively little effort. And traditions protect those who prefer to remain detached. But let us once again listen to the Midwayers' voice:

Thinking man has always feared to be held by a religion. When a strong and moving religion threatens to dominate him, he invariably tries to rationalize, traditionalize, and institutionalize it, thereby hoping to gain control of it. By such procedure, even a revealed religion becomes man-made and man-dominated. Modern men and women of intelligence evade the religion of Jesus because of their fears of what it will do to them -- and with them. And all such fears are well founded. The religion of Jesus does, indeed, dominate and transform its believers, demanding that men dedicate their lives to seeking for a knowledge of the will of the Father in heaven and requiring that the energies of living be consecrated to the unselfish service of the brotherhood of man. (2083)

* * *

Those of you who are longtime readers of The URANTIA Book are familiar with the passages I have read. And perhaps you are wondering why I bothered.

I have two reasons.

First, any call for an organization's leaders to take energetic action implies that all others should "follow the leaders" and obey. To me that is a long step backward -- both ill-advised and dangerous. Does not recent memory afford us the sad example of a "leader" who wanted us to "follow" him?

Second, I am convinced that traditional Christianity's emphasis on evangelism and conversion pervades our psyches unawares, since our forebears mixed it with the milk we drank as children. Yet we, as readers of The URANTIA Book, understand that the Father bestows a fragment of himself to live in the mind of every human being who knows right from wrong, and that the lack of information in no way affects the quantity or quality of the Father's love. So why not make the utmost personal efforts of our own, but put aside our craving for an intense and unified mobilization of the group? After all, we also realize that there is no "hell" to ensnare the unknowing or unwary!

* * *

I consider it a signal honor to be personally acquainted with almost all those who lead and staff the Chicago offices of URANTIA Foundation and URANTIA Brotherhood. I have the utmost confidence in them, and in their judgment. They clearly understand that their task is to coordinate and facilitate, and that the spiritual sustenance which individuals receive is the wellspring of our movement's growth.

In all this they are right, and they richly deserve our applause.

Our Mutual Goals and Ideals

A goal is a vision, a projection on the future. A goal is something sought for which presently is not.

Actuality embraces whatever now is. And that remains true, even though our frame of reference allows us to perceive only a very small portion of what actually now is.

In contrast, ideals relate to attitudes and methods. Our ideals are the tools with which we modify what is, creating a new synthesis which brings us nearer to our goals.

But the future, like the present and the past, is integral, seamless. Dilemmas arise because our goals often conflict with aspects of the past and present which we cherish, and which we unwisely wish to prolong.

When looking into the distant past we can easily see this sort of contradiction. For example, The URANTIA Book informs us that clinging to the mother-family was one of the reasons why the Iroquois federation failed to develop into a full-fledged state (800).

Yet applying these types of insights to ourselves can sometimes be excruciating. In our minds we grasp the fact that Christianity is defective, but in our hearts we recoil from the implications, realizing that for millions it is comfortable and familiar. The Midwayers provide us with encouragement which in principle should prime us for our task:

Christianity is an extemporized religion, and therefore must it operate in low gear. High-gear spiritual performances must await the new revelation and the more general acceptance of the real religion of Jesus. (2086)

But on the other hand, the Midwayers also portray Jesus' understanding of how strongly human beings resist having to abandon old patterns of thought and behavior:

Jesus fully understood how difficult it is for men to break with their past. He knew how human beings are swayed by the preacher's eloquence, and how the conscience responds to emotional appeals as the mind does to logic and reason, but he also knew how far more difficult it is to persuade men to disown the past. (1722)

But disown it we must! For if we are to surpass Christianity, we must rise above its characteristic practices and outlook.

* * *

To begin with, we must rise above Christianity's characteristic patterns of spiritual observance.

Even now as I pause and look around the room, I still see some people nodding in agreement. But since what I plan to say next is extremely sensitive, I wonder how long these same people will continue to concur.

A URANTIA Book study group: what does it build on, where does it come from?

Can we not trace it back through several centuries of Bible study, originating in the Reformation and continuing even today as an integral part of mainstream Protestant tradition?

And like its Bible-study forerunners, do not URANTIA Book study groups mainly appeal to spiritually active individuals who also like to read and think, and who take pleasure in intellectual discussions?

Of the overall population, how large a portion is that?

Can URANTIA Book study groups, in and of themselves, attract the interest or attention of as many as one-fourth or one-third of our fellow countrymen, without even applying the question to an equal share of all mankind?

No. In isolation, study groups are clearly insufficient.

I am not saying that study groups should be discontinued. Quite to the contrary, for I believe that study groups should be reinforced, and that study group members should strengthen, deepen, and expand their personal relationships.

But I am saying that study groups, whatever their type, are not enough to bring about "the more general acceptance of the real religion of Jesus" (2086), and that other kinds of spiritual observances need to be evolved -- gradually, over an extended period of time.

I have no set formulas or pat answers, but a Brilliant Evening Star offers us some intriguing comments (965-966). For example, he declares that "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."

Perhaps we should pause here for a brief clarification concerning the word cult. Webster's New World Dictionary defines it as "a system of religious worship or ritual." Thus the Brilliant Evening Star's remarks have nothing to do with the extremist sects which have received inordinate publicity in recent years.

Noting that "a religious cult cannot be manufactured; it must grow," the Brilliant Evening Star tells us that

The old cults were too egocentric; the new must be the outgrowth of applied love. 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.

Referring to the cult as "the skeletal structure around which grows the living and dynamic body of personal spiritual experience," the Brilliant Evening Star warns us that "No cult can survive unless it embodies some masterful mystery and conceals some worthwhile unattainable." Emphasizing the importance of basing the cult "on the biologic, sociologic, and religious significance of the home," the Brilliant Evening Star calls for the cult to "recognize true meanings, exalt beautiful relations, and glorify the good values of real nobility." "But," he says,

a cult -- a symbolism of rituals, slogans, or goals -- will not function if it is too complex. And there must be the demand for devotion, the response of loyalty.

These profound ideas, and others like them, are presented on pages 965 and 966 of The URANTIA Book. I think they deserve considerable reflection.

When approaching the question of a cult, we must remember that what is intended is very different from what we normally experience in study group meetings: in the latter we seek spiritual insight by means of the intellect, whereas a dynamic and progressive cult affords its spiritual solace "by fostering and gratifying emotion" (965).

Yet our study groups, too, afford us an opportunity to rise above Christianity's characteristic patterns of spiritual observance. Our study groups do not have to operate on a purely intellectual level. As I said a few minutes ago, I believe that relationships between study group members can and should be strengthened, deepened, and expanded.

In discussing the seven psychic circles of mortal progression, the Solitary Messenger points out that

The psychic circles are not exclusively intellectual, neither are they wholly morontial; they have to do with personality status, mind attainment, soul growth, and Adjuster attunement. The successful traversal of these levels demands the harmonious functioning of the entire personality, not merely of some one phase thereof. (1209)

In Paper 100 a Melchizedek offers us a provocative and inspiring analysis of personal growth. In part, he states that

New religious insights arise out of conflicts which initiate the choosing of new and better reaction habits in the place of older and inferior reaction patterns. New meanings only emerge amid conflict; and conflict persists only in the face of refusal to espouse the higher values connoted in superior meanings. (1097)

What I am proposing is that study group members help each other deal with and overcome these inevitable conflicts, attempting to foster personal growth along every possible path. Once again I have no pat formulas to offer; but in any case, this is something which each study group should work out for itself.

* * *

A second aspect of disowning the past is rising above Christianity's racial and cultural limitations. This progressive approach primarily relates to international fellowship; but as I look around the room, I am reminded that present participation in our movement does not even reflect the richness and diversity of our own society. Let us try harder to meet more people of African, Latin American, and Asian descent, introducing them to the teachings of The URANTIA Book.

The authors of The URANTIA Book are quite clear about the Western coloration which Christianity has acquired. A Melchizedek, describing Christianity as "a religion well adapted to the social, economic, and political mores of the white races" (1084), states that it "has become so thoroughly Occidentalized that many non-European peoples very naturally look upon Christianity as a strange revelation of a strange God and for strangers" (1011). The Midwayers tell us that "Christianity has become a social and cultural movement as well as a religious belief and practice," drawing on "many olden cultural watersheds . . . as well as the high Galilean tablelands which are supposed to be

its exclusive source" (2083). Further, the Midwayers declare that "Christianity, as it is subdivided and secularized today, presents the greatest single obstacle to its further advancement," going on to remark that "especially is this true concerning the Orient" (2084).

But on page 2086 the Midwayers provide an even more incisive portrayal of Christianity's disabilities as it struggles to expand among non-Western peoples:

Christianity suffers under a great handicap because it has become identified in the minds of all the world as a part of the social system, the industrial life, and the moral standards of Western civilization; and thus has Christianity unwittingly seemed to sponsor a society which staggers under the guilt of tolerating science without idealism, politics without principles, wealth without work, pleasure without restraint, knowledge without character, power without conscience, and industry without morality. (2086)

In its original expansion from Palestine, Christianity moved almost exclusively westward. That was an enormous mistake. Declaring that "The teachings of Jesus, as they were held by the Mesopotamian believers of the first century, would have been readily received by the various groups of Asiatic religionists" (1432), the Midwayers remark that "it was regrettable that there was no one like Peter to go into China, or like Paul to enter India, where the spiritual soil was then so favorable for planting the seed of the new gospel of the kingdom" (1430).

Even in Arabia, far closer to Palestine in geography and culture, early Christianity made little progress. The Midwayers tell us that "There were numerous centers that might have responded to the Jesusonian gospel, but the Christian missionaries of the desert lands were an austere and unyielding group" (1051). Contrasting them with "the compromisers and innovators who functioned as missionaries in the Mediterranean countries," the Midwayers go on to state that

Had the followers of Jesus taken more seriously his injunction to "go into all the world and preach the gospel," and had they been more gracious in that preaching, less stringent in collateral social requirements of their own devising, then many lands would gladly have received the simple gospel of the carpenter's son, Arabia among them.

When I read that passage, seven words leap out at me: collateral social requirements of their own devising. These seven words contain a powerful lesson, for in another context the Midwayers warn us that we should "never make the mistake of identifying Jesus' teachings with any political or economic theory, with any social or industrial system" (1580).

From all this I would draw three conclusions:

First, we should make energetic efforts to translate The URANTIA Book into non-Western languages, so that Christianity's linkages to Western culture and civilization do not rub off on The URANTIA Book as well.

Second, we should be flexible in our practical approaches to international fellowship. For example, having study groups meet in private homes works well in the United States, but this custom rests on a complex set of attitudes and outlooks which is far from universal.

Third, we should be broadminded enough to welcome and encourage peoples of different cultures to be true to the noblest aspects of their own traditions, drawing on compatible elements and combining them with their own culture's insights into The URANTIA Book's teachings. I say this in the spirit of the Melchizedek who tells us, "What a mistake for Christians to make when, in presenting Christ as the supreme ideal of spiritual leadership, they dare to require God-conscious men and women to reject the historic leadership of the God-knowing men who have contributed to their particular national or racial illumination during past ages" (1092).

* * *

The third and probably most crucial aspect of disowning the past is adopting an attitude of loving consideration and tolerant kindness. Leaping from the pages of Christianity's chronicle are countless instances of exclusiveness, rigidity, and dogmatism. Time and time again minority groups put forth variant or divergent views; and time and time again these sincere believers were denounced, condemned, and persecuted, often with a fury that bordered on dementia. Of all the defects of Christianity, this heinous narrow-mindedness is its most obnoxious and appalling.

Jesus advocated patience and generosity of mind. During the stop at Ramah, he explained to the apostles that

True and genuine inward certainty does not in the least fear outward analysis, nor does truth resent honest criticism. You should never forget that intolerance is the mask covering up the entertainment of secret doubts as to the trueness of one's belief. No man is at any time disturbed by his neighbor's attitude when he has perfect confidence in the truth of that which he wholeheartedly believes. Courage is the confidence of thoroughgoing honesty about those things which one professes to believe. Sincere men are unafraid of the critical examination of their true convictions and noble ideals. (1641)

At Amathus Jesus told the apostles to approach their mission with simplicity and forbearance. He said:

When you enter the kingdom, you are reborn. You cannot teach the deep things of the spirit to those who have been born only of the flesh; first see that men are born of the spirit before you seek to instruct them in the advanced ways of the spirit. Do not undertake to show men the beauties of the temple until you have first taken them into the temple. Introduce men to God and as the sons of God before you discourse on the doctrines of the fatherhood of God and the sonship of men. Do not strive with men -- always be patient. It is not your kingdom; you are only ambassadors. Simply go forth proclaiming: This is the kingdom of heaven -- God is your Father and you are his sons, and this good news, if you wholeheartedly believe it, is your eternal salvation. (1592-1593)

Thus, as the Midwayers tell us, "in the brotherhood of Jesus there is no place for sectarian rivalry, group bitterness, nor assertions of moral superiority and spiritual infallibility" (2085). Instead, we should strive for "profound spiritual unity in the very face of the utmost diversity of . . . intellectual thinking, temperamental feeling, and social conduct" (1591). And instead of working out creeds and creating tests of religious

faith, we must live out our religion, dedicating ourselves to "the wholehearted service of the brotherhood of man" (1091). In these efforts we should associate ourselves with others, and actually cooperate "on the basis of unity of ideals and purposes rather than attempting to do so on the basis of psychological opinions and theological beliefs" (1091). "Goals rather than creeds" (1091) should unify us all.

In this same spirit, I want to emphasize that my words today have been directed specifically to you -- dedicated readers of The URANTIA Book -- rather than to other religionists or to the community at large. Can you imagine the reaction I would get if I were to walk into a fundamentalist prayer-group meeting and declare: "What you are doing has its good points; but on the whole your beliefs are suspect, and deep down you seem to me a hopeless bunch of turkeys!" That would savor of the very pettiness which we must eschew forever.

Instead we must adopt one of the insights which the Midwayers extracted from Jesus' late-night teachings to the apostles and evangelists: "Tact is the fulcrum of social leverage, and tolerance is the earmark of a great soul" (1740).

We must also be spontaneous and natural, avoiding the creation of complex theological concoctions which outwardly appear impressive, but which really conceal an attempt to intellectualize and control the personal spiritual experience which wells up within us. We must remember one of the Midwayers' cogent comments:

Jesus was a teacher who taught as the occasion served; he was not a systematic teacher. Jesus taught not so much from the law as from life, by parables. (1672)

And what better inspiration can we seek than Jesus, the incarnate Creator Son who was, and is, and shall ever remain "the way, the truth, and the life"! (242)

[Delivered on May 12, 1984 at the Allenberry Conference of URANTIA Book Readers, Boiling Springs, Pennsylvania.]

PEACE--CLARITY--LIGHT