

Major Growth Steps in the Urantia Movement

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1. Freedom from oligarchy and authoritarianism and the triumph of democracy and openness.

During the first thirty-five years of its existence the Urantia movement has evolved from a handful of readers of *The Urantia Book* in Chicago to hundreds of study groups and thousands of readers throughout the world. Without mass publicity or promotion over 200,000 copies of the book have been sold and grass root foundations of the movement have been established. But perhaps the most important development during these early years has been the triumph of spiritual freedom and participatory democracy.

When I first started attending General Council meetings in the early sixties, everything was preplanned, predetermined, cut and dried. No one was expected to interject anything new or different. After being in the group for a while, I recall I had the audacity to suggest that we initiate a Newsletter. One of the "old timers" got to his feet and facing me with pointed finger told me in no uncertain terms what a ridiculous idea that was. Fortunately, not long after that, the Executive Committee did start publishing a Newsletter. But I had learned my lesson, if you wanted to propose something, go to a member of the controlling oligarchy to get it approved.

Another key factor in the development of the Urantia movement was the early loss of its most creative and effective leaders, such as Bill Sadler and Warren and Alvin Kulieke. As a result of this loss of creative leadership and Dr. Sadler's death, the temperament of the second-order Chicago leadership became increasingly conservative, defensive, and fearful. Policies and activities were geared to protect the status quo and decisions, in my judgment, were made more out of fear than guided by wisdom or spiritual direction.

When I became president of the Brotherhood one of my central objectives was to establish the principles of participatory democracy, openness, and freedom in Brotherhood activities. We fairly well succeeded in starting the process but it took many years for it to be fully accepted and flower in the Fellowship. This was a foundational growth step in the Urantia movement.

2. Freedom from charismatic control and the ascendancy of evolutionary-rational direction.

Most of you are acquainted with the Vern Grimsley-Clayton incident. Vern is as gifted person with exceptional oratorical abilities. He founded the Family of God Foundation and established an extensive radio ministry. For years his inspirational talks were the highlight of conferences. His charismatic eloquence captivated many people. For years I was disturbed by his clever manipulative control in the Urantia movement. I observed Vern increasingly building a power base of influence in the Brotherhood but always gave him the benefit of my doubt and concern.

In late 1983, a year after Emma Christensen (the last Contact Commissioner) died, Vern announced that he was receiving special messages telling of the imminent beginning of World War III and urged the Executive Committee of Urantia Brotherhood to move their headquarters to his

place in Clayton, California which, he assured them, would be safe. I immediately warned the Executive Committee and General Council against this deception. There ensued considerable confusion, fear, and agitation among the readers of *The Urantia Book* and it took years for the scene to clarify. The Family of God disintegrated and Vern was deserted by all but a few people.

This was a sobering, healthful, and strengthening experience for the new movement. As a result, it is highly unlikely that any charismatic person or channeling phenomena will ever be able to capture the Urantia movement. Evolutionary-rational thought and solid experiential judgment has triumphed over charismatic emotionalism and psychic delusions.

3. Freedom from legalistic-power control and the growing dominance of cooperative team work.

In the 1960's Martin Myers was invited to move in with Dr. Sadler and Christy to help with the chores and activities of the Foundation and Brotherhood offices. Following Dr. Sadler's death, Martin increasingly took over leadership influence at the Chicago office. In some ways Christy became a captive of this situation and at times discussed it with me. She felt there was little she could do about it; however, she did prevent Martin from quitting his bank job to take over formal direction of the headquarters offices as he wished to do.

As Martin Myers' influence increased, he was soon elected ~~as~~ a trustee of the Foundation. As a result, legalistic thinking and legal counsel began to direct Foundation activities. Legal minds devised a method through the registered marks to control the entire movement. Under Martin's direction the Foundation became increasingly autocratic. On several occasions he implied or directly threatened to take away the service marks of the Brotherhood if they did not follow his advice. Over a period of years he became the center of controversy. Finally, in 1989 three Foundation trustees resigned and two professional office administrators handed in their resignations because they could not work with him and maintain their spiritual integrity.

During this same period the Executive Committee of Urantia Brotherhood informed Martin that they would no longer tolerate his autocracy. After a series of exchanges in which the Brotherhood refused to follow his directives, Martin took away their license to use the service marks and terminated their office lease at 533 Diversy.

This action brought about the birth of the Fellowship of Readers of *The Urantia Book* and finally freed the Urantia movement from legalistic and authoritarian control. It is highly unlikely that the Urantia movement will ever again be shackled by legalism and autocratic domination. (In this epic struggle, I should like to express my gratitude for the integrity and courage of two members of the Central Connecticut Society: Helena Sprague and David Elders who served in key roles to make this significant growth step possible.)

4. Freedom from centralized organizational control and the awakening of the power of individual effort and pluralistic outreach.

We have made great strides in opening the Urantia movement to the freedom of spiritual

guidance and to the dynamics of participatory democracy. We have matured and gained strength through traumatic experiences educating us to the dangers of charismatic manipulation, channeling fantasies, and legalistic power control. As great and important as these growth steps are, there still lingers in the minds of many the illusion that the march of the Fifth Epochal Revelation into the world is dependent on the plans and directives coming out of the so called "official" organizations in Chicago.

Recent events demonstrate that the Urantia movement has come of age. The Fifth Epochal Revelation has left the protective confines of centralized control in Chicago and has gone out into the world. Local societies and study groups are no longer waiting for official directives to determine their outreach ministry. Independent organizations like the Asoka Foundation, the Jesusonian Foundation, The Christian Fellowship of Students of *The Urantia Book* and others are breaking ground for the spread of a diversified, pluralistic outreach ministry.

Individuals like Kristen Maaherra and Ron Syr who are willing to sacrifice for their right to share *The Urantia Book* reveal the power of courageous individual action. As a result, First Amendment rights in relation to *The Urantia Book* are being tested. It is even possible that Urantia Foundation in declaring under legal oath that *The Urantia Book* is a "book for hire" written by the Urantia Foundation has defaulted their sacred trust. Even so, the integrity of the Fifth Epochal Revelation is sure. With 250,000 copies of the book in circulation, there will never be any reasonable doubt about the text given by the revelators.

In the long run, it makes little difference whether Urantia Foundation wins or loses their current lawsuit. They have already lost their spiritual credibility and for all practical purposes have eliminated themselves from any significant influence in the Urantia movement outreach ministry. The Urantia movement has escaped from centralized organizational control. It has come of age and has started its movement out into the world. The Fifth Epochal Revelation's spread throughout our planet will be many-faceted, pluralistic, and victorious! It will establish its own evolutionary pace and overcome any barriers placed in its way.

Convictions Undergirding Principles of Ministry and Conditioning Our Goals and Objectives

1. **We should never use authoritarian influence and control or attempt to tell other people what they should do in their spiritual service.**

For many years the power structure in Urantia Brotherhood attempted to designate what readers of *The Urantia Book* should and should not do in outreach ministry. Authoritarian influence was used in attempting to enforce conformity to these policies. When I announced my intention to found The Christian Fellowship of Students of *The Urantia Book* in 1979 several members of the Executive Committee tried to prevent me from doing so. They assumed that authority could be used to stop me from outreach activities which they thought violated Brotherhood policies. Fortunately others on the Executive Committee did not share their views or at least did not join in their authoritarian challenge. Privately Christy told me, "Pay no attention to them, they have been obstructionists for years." A little later Urantia Foundation attempted similar intimidation by summoning me to a special meeting of the Trustees. Urantia Foundation is still attempting to use authoritarian pronouncements to control outreach activities.

We should, of course, welcome and seriously consider the concern and highest wisdom which others have concerning our activities. But we should not attempt to dominate or control other people in their spiritual service; nor should we allow others to manipulate or intimidate us.

2. **Our ministry and service should be predicated on spiritual guidance and evolutionary human wisdom. It should be evaluated by concrete, time-tested experience.**

We should not allow fearful, defensive, negative thinking nor problems, difficulties, and suffering to override spiritual guidance and experiential wisdom.

Spiritual guidance and human wisdom should direct our service and outreach ministry. All too often we allow fear, personal pride, obstacles and difficulties, or theoretical assumptions to control our behavior. "The religion of the spirit means effort, struggle, conflict, faith, determination, love, loyalty, and progress." (1729) Recently the Fraternal Relations Committee of the Fellowship has applied for membership in the North American Interfaith Network. Even such positive ecumenical outreach causes fear in some minds. A long-time reader of *The Urantia Book* called the chair of the committee and informed him that we were making a monumental mistake in taking this step. This kind of thinking would have kept Jesus in the carpenter shop all his life.

All too often our thinking and action is determined by theoretical assumptions rather than actual experience. I am not suggesting that we engage in stupid or immoral behavior to experientially validate its depravity. Rather, I am observing that on the growing edge of human progress, experience is an invaluable aid to wise planning and action.

Years ago while serving as president of the Brotherhood I had a running discussion over dozens of letters for several years with a man on the East Coast. He thought we should be using

mass media to inform the public of *The Urantia Book*. Taking care not to sound authoritarian, I suggested that, in my judgment, it would be wiser and more effective to use evolutionary methods of outreach. Finally, seeing that he was not convinced, I wrote him saying, "Look, I've only been sharing our highest wisdom with you which is based on limited experience. Maybe we are wrong. Why don't you try what you are suggesting. If we are mistaken, your service could be a benefit to the entire Urantia movement." He must have done some experimenting with negative results for that was the last I heard from him. What I am suggesting is that theory, when questioned or challenged, should always be validated by concrete experience.

At the same time, we ought not allow problems, difficulties, failure, and suffering to override spiritual guidance and experiential wisdom. But it should sharpen our perception and adjustment to both.

3. **Our world is in critical need of the spiritual vision, wisdom, and power of the Fifth Epochal Revelation. All who have the calling and courage should engage in this saving outreach ministry according to their highest wisdom. We should promote and encourage a pluralistic, many-faceted ministry by individuals and groups.**

There is a cliché in the Urantia movement that one should use the teachings of *The Urantia Book* without presenting the Fifth Epochal Revelation itself. For twenty-five years I tested the wisdom and effectiveness of this advice. I found that it is indeed a cliché which belongs to the old dispensation. It became obvious that this outreach methodology only enhanced the old and traditional frames of reference. Even gifted speakers like Harry Emerson Fosdick, Norman Vincent Peal, and Robert Schuler are limited to and by this horse and buggy spiritual cosmology and vision of the Middle Ages.

Experience demonstrates that only a spiritual paradigm shift, a major philosophical-theological model transformation can effect a major change in human civilization and culture. There is no substitute for the Fifth Epochal Revelation itself. *The Urantia Book* presents a new spiritual cosmology and power which cannot be duplicated by sprucing up the old traditional model of spiritual understanding and vision. Substituting some enhanced religious euphemisms for the real power of the Fifth Epochal Revelation is simply inadequate for the needs of our torn and confused world.

The spiritual pioneers of the future are those who will bring the conceptual and spiritual power of the Fifth Epochal Revelation to humankind. With the new freedoms achieved in the Urantia movement, the stage is now set for initiating a pluralistic, many-sided outreach ministry by individuals and groups which will eventually transform our planet.

4. **We need to become true sons and daughters of the Supreme. This means that we must dedicate and prepare ourselves for the rigorous, long-term evolutionary struggle which is required in establishing spiritual foundations.**

Probably the most difficult human trait to acquire is confident, cheerful endurance to *slide by*

principle and purpose in the face of difficulties, reverses, and defeat. We thrive on success and positive feedback. But our enthusiasm tends to wane in the long, hard, evolutionary struggle. We are citizens of the Supreme, which means that we must learn to enjoy and invigorate in the long, hard struggle for even small gains. Intelligent and insightful planning combined with hard work are the indigenous requirements of evolutionary accomplishment. Grass roots achievement is the foundation of progress in the realm of the Supreme. My former room mate's grandfather worked for twenty years among the Winnebago Indians before he had his first convert. "Service—more service, increased service, difficult service, adventurous service, and at last divine and perfect service—is the goal of time and the destination of space." (316)

We must become discouragement resistant and defeat proof. The pioneers of the future will "learn to feast upon uncertainty, to fatten on disappointment, to enthuse over apparent defeat, to invigorate in the presence of difficulties, to exhibit indomitable courage in the face of" the thrilling adventure before us, and "to exercise unconquerable faith when confronted with the challenge of the" seemingly impossible tasks facing this confused world of the cross. For we know that "in liaison with God, nothing—absolutely nothing—is impossible." (291)

5. Finally, our world needs new religious and social movements and innovative institutional developments born out of the enlarged vision and wisdom of the Fifth Epochal Revelation.

We, of course, hope the Fifth Epochal Revelation will leaven the old religious and social institutions. I have devoted my life to interfacing with the most progressive elements of the Christian Church and contemporary philosophy. We need to have people interfacing with all major religions and social movements. But this is transitional activity.

The new spiritual-religious cosmology and reality framework of the Fifth Epochal Revelation demands new religious, philosophical, and social expressions. The history of religion and social movements reveals that every enlarged vision of reality produces new movements and institutions to actualize their purposes and goals. Somewhere young men and young women inspired by the thrilling message of hope which has been given to us, are evolving visions and preparing themselves to launch new movements and fresh approaches to rectify, and eventually transform, our increasingly critical human condition.

We who constitute the birth generation of the Fifth Epochal Revelation look forward with great anticipation to the brave spiritual pioneers who will follow us. We wish to encourage and support these spiritual heroes of tomorrow who will carry the baton on toward the goal of our planetary destiny.

MJS

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