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HOPE FOR AN ALIENATED SOCIETY

Meredith J. Sprunger

Our whole civilization is in a ferment and is groping toward a new spiritual awakening. We are experiencing one of the great innovative periods of history. Like the fourth century which witnessed the triumph of Christianity and the seventeenth century which marks the dawn of modern science, we are entering a new epoch of human existence.

It is generally recognized by contemporary <sup>cont</sup> philosophers that we have come to the end of a philosophic age. Numerous obituaries have been written for the death of philosophy as well as the death of God. At professional meetings philosophers spend much time telling each other that nothing significant is being said. Not having anything dynamic to present, they spend endless time telling what they are going to discuss and then bore their colleagues with elaborate minutiae.

At one time philosophers like Socrates and Giordano Bruno were put to death because their ideas were so vital and disturbing people were afraid they would turn the world up side down. Philosophers are again beginning to sense that only when they abandon their citadel of epistemological escapism and venture boldly into real life to face the new problems of living and the enlarged problems of the ultimates in human existence will they have something to say. It is comforting to realize that, historically, the Owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of dusk. The shadows are now deep and the time of awakening is at hand.

This awakening, however, will not advance from its initial stirring and stretching until mankind is stimulated and challenged by the perception of enhanced realities which once again have the potential of turning the world up side down. This is essentially the result of an enlarged spiritual awakening, the burden of the prophet, the mission of a relevant religion.

The decade of the 1960's has been marked by revolutionary changes in religion. Historians of the future will probably mark this decade as the beginning of a new spiritual era. Perceptive minds have labeled our times variously as the post-Christian, post-Puritan, post-modern, and post-industrial age. These expressions of profound dissatisfaction with traditional modes of religious expression are rooted in a world wide cultural revolution which is forcing contemporary man to search for new and more adequate spiritual foundations.

The appearance of radical theology marks the bankruptcy of a decadent theological-religious tradition. Theological empiricism completed its self-fulfilling prophesy. Social anthropology traced cultural and religious forms to biological needs, social-economic problems, and historical events. Modern textual criticism applied the methods of archaeology, anthropology, and historical analysis to the Bible. The social, economic, political, and religious biases of biblical material were demonstrated. Additions, deletions, and editing of biblical material became obvious. The process of "demythologizing" scripture culminated in the work of Rudolf Bultmann. The end result of decades of empirical study of the Bible is summarized in the cryptic statement: "Even though scripture may not be revelatory in the sense of God speaking in some miraculous way and although the scriptures are lacking in historical validity - they, nonetheless, contain myths which do speak some of the finest wisdom of man." Unchallengable authoritarian revelation was discredited. For the educated man biblical authoritarianism has become an untenable position. The death of authoritarianism and magic in religion has left many with a spiritual void or at best only a humanistic ideology.



Paul Tillich carried this negation of face-value symbolism one step farther in asserting that biblical and religious symbols are illusions unless we get to the philosophical-religious meaning behind these symbols. God, for instance, must be understood not as an old man with a beard or some vague spiritual entity but as "the ground of being." While Tillich rendered a significant service to the intellectual community by infusing relevant meaning into threadbare religious symbols, theology was becoming so esoteric many fundamentalists regarded Tillich as a disguised atheist. Just as Bultmann and Tillich pronounced the death of literal, authoritarian revelation, Dietrich Bonhoeffer declared the world has now "come of age" and announced the death of the church and Christianity as "separate" institutions of significance.

There was only one more logical step in this progression: the announcement of the death of God. Among contemporary theologians, this was accomplished first by Gabriel Vahanian, in 1961, with his book The Death of God: The Culture of Our Post-Christian Era. The "death of God" theologians brought some basic spiritual insights into sharp focus. We have come to the end of a philosophic-religious era. Radical theology has dared to make public the realization that the primitive idea of God as "an old man with a beard," the "deus ex machina" is dead in our culture. They have reinforced the elemental philosophic insight that the empirical method alone cannot find Ultimate Reality.

The rise of radical theology, ipso facto, demonstrates the old religious orthodoxies of Western civilization have been shorn of most of their cultural relevance and power. There is a sense of frustration, alienation, and despair along with, here and there, a new humanistic optimism about religion. The challenge of the radical theologians has

brought to light a great spiritual hunger in our secular society. Young people, although largely abandoning the church, are pre-occupied with moral-spiritual issues. As the spiritual vacuum in our society increases, forms of religious extremism and the occult flourish among common people similar to the extremism of the mystery religions in the Greek and Roman world just before the advent of Christianity.

Prophetic attempts to reconstruct and revitalize Christianity are numerous and significant. Peter Berger's The Noise of Solemn Assemblies (1961) challenges morphological fundamentalism. John A. T. Robinson's Honest to God (1963) and Harvey Cox's The Secular City (1965) are stirring popular attempts to rethink and vitalize religion. Recognizing the decadent state of the old religious institutions and traditions, Martin Marty wrote The Second Chance for American Protestants (1963) and E. E. Y. Hales speaks of the drastic Roman Catholic theological and institutional reformation in Pope John and His Revolution (1966).

In spite of these heroic attempts to bring spiritual relevance and power to traditional religious institutions, there is a sense of futility in the life of the church. There is a general recognition among thoughtful people that the time-honored structures of Christianity are irrelevant to the actual conditions and needs of the world. Youth has lost faith in the old religious institutions but search earnestly for spiritual reality. The urge toward nihilism is powerful; and the tendency to irrational thought and action or social isolationsim is very strong.

In this spiritual wasteland we are already witnessing an occult explosion. As people experience alienation from themselves, their fellowman,



and Reality they grasp for straws of hope. Occult book sales have doubled in the last three years. Nearly seventy percent of our daily newspapers carry columns on astrology. Over two million ouija boards were sold last year. There are 10,000 professional astrologers and 400 witch covens practicing in America. We have become a land in which palmists, phrenologists, numerologists, tarot card readers, satanists, and alchemists exist in large enough numbers to form associations and hold meetings. Gurus and mystics are fashionable and experimentation with mind-altering hallucinogens has become epidemic.

The shadows of the downfall of Western civilization threaten us. Philosophers of history such as Arnold J. Toynbee and P. A. Sorokin have pointed out that only a new spiritual dynamism can redeem our crumbling culture. Both historical analysis and prophetic insight suggest they are correct. Is there such a spiritual rejuvenation gestating in the womb of history? A realistic prognosis of the spiritual condition of our society does give some ground for hope. We have already observed the radical and irreversable constructive change in American religion during the 1960's. In addition to these prophetic voices, there are many constructive movements at work. Informally we see activities such as "the underground church" and there are various formal organizations like World Perspectives which are making great contributions toward a transformation of values in our society.

In spite of these encouraging signs of hope, one must acknowledge their limited potential at a time when earth-shaking measures are needed. Our space age needs a spiritual stimulus and cosmology commensurate with the vast universe we are beginning to explore. Where shall we look for this

kind of spiritual ministration? Religious philosophers would tend to give a cynical answer to such a question. Nevertheless, there is a spiritual movement already started which I believe has the potential of shaping human destiny. In advancing this prediction, I am aware of the danger of making premature judgments. At the inception of dynamic movements there is, it seems, a very fine line between the occult, the esoteric, and that which later is recognized as a reality oriented-spiritual break-through.

I have been observing this movement for fifteen years and it seems to have all of the qualities basic to a significant religious renaissance. Its dynamic is rooted in a challenging book entitled The Urantia Book published by the Urantia Foundation, 533 Diversey Parkway, Chicago, Illinois 60614, in 1955 and contains 2097 pages. Examining its contents you discover it claims to be written by numerous celestial beings as a special revelation to man living on this world, Urantia. It asserts that it contains the first major divine revelation since the coming of Christ to our planet.

This is certainly claim enough to make anyone suspicious of its contents. People who pose as the bearers of new revelation are quite common. Almost every generation produces a number of such individuals and movements. What is surprising about The Urantia Book is that it has almost nothing in common with these radical movements. It does not advocate a new religion. Elements of fanaticism will find no support in its teachings. The book contains nothing contrary to the highest insights or basic convictions of the major religions of the world. From ancient Gnosticism to modern Secularism, it cannot be accused of falling into any of the traditional heresies of theistic faith. Yet its viewpoint is fresh, expansive, and profound.



The superior quality of the philosophic-religious insights of The Urantia Book is clear to anyone of discriminating mind who will read it. It is a book, however, that cannot be properly evaluated until one grasps its comprehensive universe cosmology - its total religious picture. Just as students of the life of Jesus recognize the superlative quality of his character even though they reject his divinity, so one is impressed with the quality of the insights of The Urantia Book even though one may not accept it as a new revelation.

At this time I believe the question of revelatory authenticity is a secondary consideration. Should this book continue to grow in influence and become a shaping force in our religious world, it will take generations of time for the church or society to make up its mind about its revelatory status. Individuals, of course, will probably make up their minds much sooner. The real question which this stimulating book poses is: does it have something creative and constructive to contribute to our modern philosophic-religious outlook distinctively superior to the prophetic voices which we have already considered? After years of pondering this question, I must give an unqualified "yes." There is little question but that it can and will make a significant contribution to our religious thinking. It presents the finest world view of religion which I have ever read, yet it is not actually syncretistic. Evaluated on the basis of spiritual insight, philosophic coherence, and <sup>reality</sup>~~reality~~-centeredness it is far superior to any book with which I am acquainted.

We should remind ourselves that every advance in knowledge is a disturbing and painful experience to man. This is true of both quantitative

knowledge (science) and qualitative knowledge (religion). The prophets are stoned and the pioneers of science are ridiculed. Man's historic resistance to truth is greatly aided by his tendency to accept second-hand sources of information - usually authoritarianism and tradition. If you are interested in progressive philosophical and religious thinking which has the potential of molding world destiny, The Urantia Book is a first hand source of information which you cannot afford to miss.

I would not urge anyone to accept The Urantia Book as "revelation" but highly recommend a critical reading of the book. Colleagues, including around a dozen ministers whom I have enticed into reading this huge volume, have been profoundly impressed and enthusiastic about its content. For ten years I have made periodic assignments in The Urantia Book in my philosophy classes. These students, engineering and science majors, many of whom have fundamentalistic religious backgrounds are quick to detect fraud and esoteric nonsense. Yet these students generally are impressed and many become so interested they can hardly put the book down.

The Urantia Book has many superior qualities. First, it presents an inclusive, integrated, and masterful concept of Reality. It bridges the gap between a monistic and pluralistic concept of Reality without doing violence to either. Mechanism and vitalism are integrated in such a way as to bring unity rather than diversity. The Urantian deity concept ranges from the finest theism (Universal Father) to an impersonal absolute (Unqualified Absolute) which is so well unified the concepts are not antagonistic. The devotees of Unitarianism, Trinitarianism, and Christology will find each view enhanced and stimulated with each view included in the essence of the metaphysical picture. The book pictures a gigantic, marvelously organized astronomical universe which includes millions of



inhabited planets in all stages of physical, mental, and spiritual evolution. It contains what is probably the most realistic and inclusive material-mindal-spiritual cosmology in the entire field of philosophy and religion.

The Urantia Book, secondly, structures what appears to me as the most reasonable concept of immortality in the field of religion. Survival is pictured as dependent only on the spiritual reality status of the individual which in turn is the result of the free choice motivation and decision of the individual toward truth, beauty, and goodness as he sincerely understands these values. Nevertheless, evil, sin, and judgment are seen as stern and sober realities in the universe. The interrelationships of body, mind, soul, and spiritual realities are insightfully presented and more comprehensively treated than in any parallel description in the field of religious psychology or theology. Growth toward perfection is seen as the most fundamental motivation of human life. This growth is evolutionary, culminating, and virtually eternal.

The third basic reason for the superior quality of The Urantia Book is its insightful understanding of planetary history, dynamics, and destiny. It recognizes evolution as the key *modus operandi* of our planet. It integrates the mechanisms of the physical universe with the intelligence of "overcontrol." The book gives an excellent summary of planetary history, civilization, and institutions of religion with admirable conciseness and insight. There is a penetrating analysis of religion, culture, and the family which is of exceptional quality. Its basic philosophy of the various forms of energy is that matter is ultimately subject to mind and that mind is eventually controlled by spirit.

Finally, a life of Jesus is presented which is unsurpassed in theistic philosophical reasonableness, spiritual insight, and personality appeal. The life of Jesus is basically acceptable to all religions as well as Christianity. It emphasizes believing with Jesus rather than a narrow, dogmatic belief in Jesus. There is a sharp distinction between the religion of Jesus which is unifying as opposed to the religion about Jesus which is divisive. This superb presentation of the life of Jesus will inspire almost everyone reading it. The greatest challenge to man is seen as a well-balanced effort to achieve better communication with the indwelling presence of God - to attain God-<sup>consciousness</sup>~~consciousness~~.

The history of philosophy and religion tells us that a book of this stature will almost certainly become controversial and be condemned by fundamentalists and those who emphasize forms of religious orthodoxy. Nonetheless, it is my guess that The Urantia Book will become a major influence in shaping man's philosophic-religious thinking in the years to come.

Research concerning the origin of The Urantia Book is an interesting story which is beyond the scope of this paper. Briefly, the "Urantia Papers" were received by a group of people in Chicago in 1934 and 1935. Permission to publish the book was given shortly before its publication in 1955. To prepare for the publication of The Urantia Book the Urantia Foundation was organized on January 11, 1950 by a Declaration of Trust under the laws of the State of Illinois. The Urantia Brotherhood was organized on January 2, 1955. The constitution of the Urantia Brotherhood designates it as a voluntary, locally autonomous, fraternal organization. Provision is made for chartering local societies and fostering study groups. In December of 1959 the Internal Revenue Bureau ruled that the Urantia



Foundation and the Urantia Brotherhood were exempt from paying income taxes and that contributions made to these organizations are deductible from the income taxes of such donors. A French edition of The Urantia Book was published in 1961.

It is interesting to note that there has been no attempt to advertise or promote the sale of The Urantia Book or to establish study groups other than the spontaneous activity of interested people. In spite of this low key approach, over 20,000 books have been sold (at \$20.00 per volume) and numerous study groups have sprung up - usually without the knowledge of the Urantia Brotherhood.

After a somewhat thorough study of The Urantia Book and the Urantia Brotherhood for more than a decade, my considered evaluation is that among all of the hopeful sources of spiritual rejuvenation in our society the stimulus of the message of The Urantia Book is the most likely to succeed. It may turn out to be the major means by which our alienated society is reunited with its "ground of being" and at the same time enabled to rediscover the Universal Father.

We are, I believe, only in the initial stages of one of the greatest advances in social and religious development our planet has ever experienced. The process of change is now centered in what Abraham Maslow called the growing tip of humanity - the one percent of the population who are the innovators and the pioneers. This is where the action is - our world is quivering on the edge of one of its most amazing epochs of social readjustment, moral quickening, and spiritual enlightenment. There is a great need for our culture to be inspired by an enlightening and ennobling spiritual

vision which will energize the minds and hearts of men where it will incubate and spring forth in creative activity which will enable us:

To build more inclusive concepts of truth, beauty, and goodness which bind together naturalism and idealism, the humanities and technology, science and religion.

To develop a new concept of man enabling him to appreciate his potentials and encouraging him to participate in his own creative evolution inspired by a vision of his great destiny.

To construct a mature view of the goals of social evolution and stimulate us to initiate wise programs of social engineering.

To present an enlarged concept of the gospel of love and thereby teach man the baseness of violence and war and inspire him to develop personal, governmental, and universe potentials of love and brotherhood.

To envision a comprehensive plan of our planetary evolutionary destiny which in turn will unify culture, governments, and religion.

To enlarge and enhance man's conception and understanding of his eternal destiny and thereby fill his life with vital meaning and dynamic purpose.