

Journal of URANTIA Brotherhood

The following was given as a talk at a Conference in Atlanta in the spring of 1983. The editors.

THE URANTIAN RELIGIONIST

Friends, fellow adventurers . . . I salute the God within you.

When Cap asked me to speak here today, I said sure —there had been a thought lingering in the back of my mind for several years. I told him I could say it in two words. Cap said: How about a half hour, forty-five minutes. Figuring I could speak very slowly, I told him okay.

It all seemed quite simple at the time. I had already memorized the two words. But in thinking about it, it didn't seem so simple after all. Several large and very puzzling questions kept getting in the way. So after reading books, praying for greater understanding, talking ideas over with several people, and then rediscovering some beautiful passages in *The URANTIA Book*—the two words began to take on additional dimensions.

It didn't seem right for me just to start by talking about what we as Urantians could share. This had a ring of arrogance. The question kept coming into my mind: Who are we anyway? So, starting with the question: "Who are we anyway?" and then assuming that sharing is a two-way street—that we can learn from other religions at the same time we are sharing—the talk began to take shape around three basic ideas that seem to be strongly inter-related:

- What we are, in a collective sense, as members of the URANTIA movement;
- What we can learn from Capital "R" Religion; and
- · What we can share—as Religionists.

The way it turned out, my original two words didn't get lost. They got buried somewhere in the middle of this talk. And when I tell you what they are a little later on, some of you are going to think: He was going to come all the way here just to say that? The desire to share is the first consequence of the process of spiritual transformation. And this is quite natural. All of us encountered the towering experience of *The URANTIA Book* in some prior state of spiritual development. But whatever our prior estate there were things we had in common , , . Here is this big blue book with a lot of funny words; it claims to be a major revelation of truth. Any number of books make the same claim, What's so special about this one? We approach it with initial skepticism. We are not about to get caught up in anybody's spiritual swindle. And then we begin to read , , .

We feel a mixture of excitement and great caution. There is something about it that seems to transcend all known planes of human thought. Could it be true? A major revelation of truth in our time? We keep reading. We decide to put it up against the hardest tests our mind can conceive, like: Are the URANTIA Papers fair to every human being on the planet? The answer is YES! The book survives the toughest tests we can devise, There is an unmistakable quality of authenticity about it. It is in a class by itself. Truth is ringing from every page, and the beauty is rising in our soul—more than 2,000 pages, held together in an incredible unification of truth, beauty, and goodness . . . We become believers.

And then it begins to happen, The love of God is stirring within us. It was always stirring within us, only now we feel it with more sureness. The thrill of God cannot be contained. Our cup is overflowing. And deep within us there is a powerful need to share the wonder and richness of this discovery with everyone who will listen. The world will never be the same again. All things are becoming new. And we know — we know — that the transforming power of these teachings is the hope of the world.

Divided Emotions

At this point some Urantians begin to experience divided emotions. I have seen it many times. And I have also seen it in some young men and women whom I thought might someday become great leaders in the URANTIA movement. On one hand they begin to feel alive like they have never been alive before. But on the other hand, there is a conflict brewing in their souls. They have embraced the new, but do not wish to forsake the old, And for some, the conflict emerges in their minds as a crisis of confused religious identity. They begin to feel that they must choose between the URANTIA teachings and the Church.

The URANTIA Book requires no such choice. It is 100% consistent with the URANTIA teachings to remain an active and loyal member of an organized religion. It is also 100% consistent to develop a complete new religious identity that may not necessarily be connected with any organized religion. The URANTIA Book provides us with a firm foundation for going either way. But the intriguing question is: How is it that the URANTIA teachings enable us to develop a religious identity that is consistent with any religious framework for living?

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Copyright@1985 by URANTIA Brotherhood Corporation. All rights reserved. Printed in U.S.A. To get at this question I think we first have to come to an understanding of what it is that we are, in a collective sense, when we become believers in the URANTIA teachings. And one way of approaching that question is to turn it around and come at it from the other side, by asking what is it that we are not?

What the URANTIA movement is not—what we are not—is a separate religion. And if we remain faithful to the teachings of The URANTIA Book, we will never attempt to form a separate religion or a church. And there are three very powerful reasons for this:

- The first comes from something the very early members of the URANTIA movement were told during the time of the presentation of the revelation. The early members were told that "We are in association with a revelation of truth which is part of the natural evolution of religion on this world."
- The second comes from Paper 120 of The URANTIA Book, from Immanuel's prebestowal instructions to Michael of Nebadon. Included in Immanuel's instructions was this statement: "As you may see fit, you are to identify yourself with existing religious and spiritual movements as they may be found on Urantia but in every possible manner seek to avoid the formal establishment of an organized cult, a crystallized religion, or a segregated ethical grouping of mortal beings. Your life and teachings are to become the common heritage of all religions and all peoples." (*1330:2) Certainly Jesus lived up to this instruction. He did not come to supplant, but to uplift, to expand, to disencumber, to free us forever from the enslavement of ignorance and fear. And as followers of Jesus let us always remember Immanuel's instructions as a guide to our own decisions.
- The third reason is this: We know for a certainty that "If religion is to promote supreme loyalties, it must not be formalized."
 (*1089:12) And what is the purpose of the URANTIA movement if it is not to promote supreme loyalties?

If anyone seriously believes we should become a religion or form a church, I would urge him to read page 1092 of The URANTIA Book, which lists sixteen very real dangers that all religions face to the extent to which they become institutionalized, any one of which should be enough to make students of The URANTIA Book shudder in their bones.

What page 1092 teaches us is that "... as religion becomes institutionalized, its power for good is curtailed, while the possibilities for evil are greatly multiplied." (*1092:4) The warniung fairly bristles with words like "petrification," "fossilization," "chosen-people attitudes." "fixation," "vested interests," and so forth. (*1092:4)

There is a suggestion that movement in the direction of an organized religion that would begin to focus our attention away from the service of God and more toward the service of our organization. There is a strong implication that we might gradually lose "... the saving message of the gospel of eternal salvation." (*1092:4)

The moment we begin to think of ourselves as a new religion separate and apart, we enter into a fundamental change in our relationship with all religions. Instead of a cooperative relationship, we become competitors. "Religion is the most rigid and unyielding of all human institutions, . . . " (*1004:5) very slow to change, very slow ". . . to accept advanced revealed truth." (*1012:1) And in the face of this major fact, as a competitor, we would simply be just one more religious group among some 200 conventional Christian and Jewish Denominations and about 1,300 other religious groups in the United States alone.

Leavening Essential

It begins to become very clear that unless we adopt an unmistakable policy of becoming a leavening influence within all of the world's religions—which is exactly the opposite of remaining separate and apart — we may gradually lose all further hope of playing an important role in the spiritual transformation of mankind.

Now all of this does not mean we should be afraid of becoming too social in our practice of religion. Just the opposite. We know that "spiritual growth is mutally stimulated by intimate association with other religionists. Love supplies the soil for religious growth . . ." (*1094:2) The URANTIA Book also says that "While religion is exclusively a personal spiritual experience — knowing God as a Father—the corollary of this experience—knowing man as a brother—entails the adjustment of the self to other selves, and that involves the social or group aspect of religious life." (*1090:10)

To make this point even more dramatic, The URAN-TIA Book also tells us that "... it is most important that you should be exposed to the knowledge of a vast number [—a vast number—] of other religious experiences...to the end that you may prevent your religious life from becoming egocentric—circumscribed, selfish, and unsocial." (*1130:3)

The dilemma appears to be that if The URANTIA Book is encouraging us to be social while at the same time warning us not to form a separate religion, that leaves us with another big question: How do we attempt to socialize our religious experiences in a way that is fully consistent with the URANTIA teachings?

Having a religion, not being one

I think The URANTIA Book makes a critical distinction; and this critical distinction is not that we are a religion, but rather than we have a religion. We are religionists. You might even say that we are a religion of religionists.

Once we understand that we are religionists, we have now established a definitive URANTIAN identity. And I think we have to begin with this discovery of our essential religious identity so that we do not later become confused and torn apart by inner conflicts.

Of course, the fact that we read The URANTIA Book does not make us religionists — it is the inward transforming experience that does it, the development of an ever-expanding and renewing relationship with God and fellow man. But having identified ourselves as religionists, we now have a place to stand. In a sense, we have carved out a piece of conceptual territory that provides a framework for sharing relationships. But where do we go from here?

This is where the two words come in: Get involved! It doesn't matter where we are — inside the church, outside the church — the time has come for URANTIANS to get involved with the religious life of mankind.

For anyone who is already a member of an organized religion, there are many ways of becoming a more active religionist. Once the commitment is made, the opportunities for sevice begin to unfold everywhere we turn. Every person has some special gift that is useful to the purpose of God. For some it may only be that we can be a true and faithful friend or a warm and sympathetic listener.

For religionists who are not members of an organized religion, but would like to be — or for those who are in a formal religion but are uncomfortable and searching for something more satisfying, the question of how to get involved becomes more intriguing. There are at least "... five hundred different definitions of religion," (*1129:8). Which one do we choose?

When Mary and I faced this question back in the

mid-60's, we had between us already experienced long periods of religious training in Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism. But we had not been comfortable with any of our prior religious experiences, and we were searching for something more closely attuned to the teachings of The URANTIA Book.

Our approach may sound a bit unusual to you, but we literally looked through the Yellow Pages and began to explore what was around us in the way of an organized religion. It did not take long before we had found our place. We did not know that formalized religion could be so beautiful, more beautiful than anything either of us had ever experienced in the years before we began the search. And over the next five years there were several occasions when the value of what we experienced within that religious group was so vivid and profound I have no doubt those experiences will be part of our Urantia heritage through all eternity.

And all of this was within the framework of a formal religious denomination that had never heard of *The* URANTIA Book.

For those who are searching for a better way than they have yet found, The URANTIA Book provides numerous important clues. The world's definition of a major religion is one that attracts very large numbers of followers. But the URANTIA Papers help us to see this in a different way. They help us to understand that a major religion is one that is greatest in its God perception, one that most effectively leads its followers to become progressively more Godlike. The URANTIA Book explains that "The truth and maturity of any religion is directly proportional to its concept of the infinite personality of God and to its grasp of the absolute unity of Deity." (*28:8)

There are also any number of passages that illuminate various dimensions of true religion. The essence of these definitions is that "True religion is to know God as your Father and man as your brother" (*1091;2) "... a living love, a life of [wholehearted] service." (*1100:8)

In contrast, "...organized religion is man's attempt to socialize the worship of individual religionists," (*1616:4)

But whether we function inside the church or outside, we should always be learning. Truth did not stop with The URANTIA Book. The fifth epochal revelation does not claim to be the end of revelation. The love and uplifting inspiration of God is flashing all the time into the lives of sincere and truth-seeking religionists throughout the world. Because we have The URANTIA Book does not for a moment mean that we alone are in possession of Capital "T" Truth. The book we study would call this

"...theological arrogance..." and would tell us that 'There is not a Urantia religion that could not profitably study and assimilate the best of the truths contained in every other faith, for all contain truth." (*1012:5)

The important thing to remember when we consider our individual relationship with organized religion -Capital "R" Religion - is this: All religions are limited, but man is unlimited. I have observed that in every religion sincere religionists seem to rise above the limitations of their religion. Outwardly they may go through the "...rites, rituals, ... ceremonies..." (*1005:5), but inwardly they have grasped and attempt to live at levels of truth comprehension that transcend the limitations of their religion. For those who are sincere, really sincere, the indwelling spirit of the Father lifts them up step by step to become great beacons of light for the rest of us. The point of this is that in every religion there are brilliant spiritual leaders who can teach us much. We can learn from them at the same time we are sharing with them the brilliant things we have found. But let us share with a warm and open heart, a sincere and humble heart.

Building bridges

After all the research I did trying to find out what is best in every religion, where the anchoring points could be for us to build our bridges, I have to confess that I can't even come close to giving you a balanced picture, or even a very complete one. My own personal experience is entirely with Western religions, and I didn't even realize how limited it was until I began the preparations for this talk. The books I read only helped in part.

It seems a little risky to study religion with a scholar's approach. The books are too theoretical. Most of the descriptions of various religions are collections of the sacred writings and descriptions of the rituals. The thing that would be more useful would be to find out what people actually do, and even more important, what they become. To find out what is the living theology of the religion. So when it comes to the subject of what we can learn from Capital "R" Religion, all I can offer at this point are a few scattered bits and pieces from a much larger picture.

One interesting idea I found in the March 1983 issue of U.S. News and World Report, is that "Eastern religions have always tended to place emphasis on personal growth, while Western religions have always stressed social action." So, it would seem to me that as a very general observation, all of us could learn from Eastern religions more of an emphasis on meditation as

a way of balancing our action orientation.

Every major religion is unique in its approach to God, but there are some interesting parallels. For example, Hinduism, Judaism, and Islam are about as different as you can get. Yet all three of them seem to have one thing in common, which is that in their own individual ways all three focus on the idea of practicing the presence of God.

Hinduism does not separate life in any small detail from religion. In fact, there is no Hindu term that corresponds to what we call "religion." In Hinduism life and religion are the same fabric with which we weave our destiny. In Islam the Muslim lives face to face with Allah at all times and will introduce no separation between his life and his religion. The immediacy of the presence of God is the central and paramount fact in the religion of Islam. In Judaism the parallel continues. 'The characteristic Jewish experience of God is the awareness of His presence in human events... The emphasis of Jewish faith is neither on metaphysical speculation nor on dogma, but on human action. Life is the arena of moral choice, and man can choose the good . . . There is a feeling of partnership with God in the work of creation." (From a series of books on The World's Great Religions published by George Braziller, New York, 1961.

Catholicism is an artful blending of mysticism and logic. At the center of the religion there are "three phases of revelation of God to man (which) form (the) central tenets of Catholic belief:

- (First is) the natural revelation of God through reason;
- (Second is) the supernatural revelation of God in Christ; and,
- (Third is) the revelation in the church", which is regarded as the mystical body of Christ (from the series on the world's religions).

The emphasis on reason has pervaded the history of the Church, and has produced some of the world's greatest literature. The emphasis on solemnity and holiness has produced some of the world's greatest art and music.

One of the most advanced religious movements within the framework of Catholicism today is an organization called Opsu Dei, which means "the work of God." Founded about 55 years ago, the organization is made up of lay people working within their natural occupations as doctors, lawyers, housewives, engineers, truckdrivers, etc. They believe that all work can be sacred in the service of God. Opus Dei is a worldwide movement that has had the encouragement of five Popes. The object is to become perfect in this sphere even as God is perfect in His sphere. Members of Opus Dei believe that by complete selfgiving to the service of God and man — by means of total commitment on a day-to-day basis — they will enable Jesus to live on earth again through the lives they lead in the flesh. The lifelong motto of the founder of Opus Dei was this: "I have to pass unnoticed and disappear so that Jesus alone may be in the limelight."

The organization operates without committees, assemblies, meetings, etc. It is bound up with no country, no government, no political parties. It teaches that each member should see himself as a son of God, with Jesus as an older brother. In Opus Dei, pluralism — which means different members doing things in different ways — is not only tolerated, it is desired and loved in no way hindered (see 'The Way," Eccelia Press, Shannon, 1972).

And if URANTIANS can learn nothing else from Opus Dei, maybe we can learn to live pluralism. To love each other for our differences.

Protestantism, as we know, was a protest movement within Catholicism. Conceptually, all branches of Protestantism "rest firmly upon the belief that God deals directly with man as a person, so that salvation is gained by faith alone... that the authority for man's relation to God is within man and not in the church."

Of course, any religious movement that puts the seat of religious authority within man himself is bound to be troubled for a very long time with divisiveness. Every difference is bound to carry great weight. And this is what happened to Protestantism, a constant splitting away among groups of believers, forming branch after branch of a very divided religion.

Trust in Christ alone

But notwithstanding the divisions, Protestants who really practice their religion believe that "man in his freedom should renounce trust in all external religious authority ... and to trust in Christ alone." (World religion series).

The most unique religious group within the general framework of the Protestant faith is the Religious Society of Friends, or, as they are more commonly known, the Quakers,

Although from one area to another there may be significant differences in the way Quakers practice their faith, there are three fundamental beliefs in which all Quakers are united:

- First is the belief that there is a light that lights every man who comes into the world. Quakers call this the Inner Light. We call it the Thought Adjuster. They believe, and we believe, that the Inner Light is the will of God abroad in the universe. Quaker meetings that center in silent workshops are a response to the Biblical injunction: "Be still and know that I am God." In their practice of silent prayer and worship, Quakers attempt to become responsive to the leadings of the Indwelling Spirit.
- Second, Quakers believe that the highest responsibility of living, and the source of all true growth and satisfaction, is to seek the will of God and do the will of God, not just on Sunday, but seven days a week.
- And third, all Quakers are united in believing that the sure and inevitable result of sincerely seeking to become God directed will lead to a life that is increasingly devoted to loving service toward one's fellow man. ("Faith and Practice" of the Philadelphia yearly meeting of The Religious Society of Friends, 1961).

I think we can build bridges to every religion because there are strong anchoring points in each. The list of things we can learn from Capital "R" Religion could fill up days of discussion. But before leaving this point, I would like to mention briefly several other religions that have made an impression on me.

We can learn from the Mormons, from the beautiful emphasis they place on family life, and for their ability to plan ahead. Mormons believe in self-reliance and on service to others. They place great importance on training and preparing their youth for progressively larger responsibilities. There is a disciplined, no-nonsense quality in the way they practice their religion.

We can learn from the Baha'i faith very much about the true spirit of human brotherhood. The Baha'i's are like a human rainbow of great beauty.

We can learn from the Unity Church, from their breath-taking emphasis on positive thinking in every activity of living.

We can learn from the Christian Scientists something very basic about the universe concept of pattern, an understanding that if the overlay of time is removed from our destiny progress there is revealed that our true nature is already present in our eternal relationship with the fragment of God with whom we shall some day fuse. Without the overlay of time, we would be able to see more clearly the true nature of our spirit identity.

From the Fundamentalists we can learn much about how to bring dynamism into the practice of our religious activities. The Fundamentalists are out there working with great energy to spread the beliefs that form the center of their faith. They represent the fastestgrowing religion in America.

There is no question in my mind that there is a great richness of religious life that is going on around us that we can, and should, be part of. And we can find it if we look for it.

After you spend some time studying the various religions, something begins to get very clear in your mind. It is as though each religion is like a partially completed jigsaw puzzle of the spirit. And here we are with the missing pieces.

This is where the sharing starts.

I think there are at least two levels of sharing. We can share at the level of fact and we can share at the level of truth.

At the intellectual level, the level of fact, we share by what we say. And I'm not suggesting for a moment by the distinction of levels that there is anything wrong with sharing this way.

At the factual or intellectual level we exchange facts and information, an absolutely necessary enterprise. At this level we might say something like, "There are at least 36 references in the Bible to the indwelling spirit of God — 18 in the Old Testament and 18 in the New Testament." Or, "Did you know that the Bible refers to God as 'Father' 233 times?" Or, at this level we might share any number of magnificent passages from The URANTIA Book. Fine. Keep doing it.

Spiritual sharing

But let us not ever confuse sharing at the intellectual level with the deeper and more profound level, which is the level of inspiration, the sharing of truth. This is the level at which we share not by what we say, but rather by what we do, or what we're willing to do. This is the level of living example. This is the spiritual level of sharing.

At the spiritual level, the first thing we can share is the actual experience of encountering and believing a major revelation of truth. The second thing we can share at the level of truth is our willingness to base our entire life plan on these teachings, and if it should ever become necessary, to defend them to the death. The third thing we can share is our faith. A faith that has driven all fear out of our being. A faith that shows by our actions, not merely by our words, that we really trust God. The

fourth thing we can share is our determination to practice the presence of God in our life during every waking hour — not as an external authority looking down in judgment, but rather as a partner in destiny who at every single moment is capable of connecting us with infinity, if we will but let him.

As religionists we know that at every waking moment in our lives we can enter into the second greatest adventure of all time by seeking the will of the living God. And if we are brave enough we can go beyond that, into the most satisfying and thrilling adventure of all time — and that is "...the supreme experience of honestly trying to do that divine will... [and we know that] the will of God can be done in any earthly occupation. Some callings are not holy and others secular. All things are sacred in the lives of those who are spirit led..." (*1732:5)

As religionists we know that God is not in hiding from us somewhere in the far-off skies or distant universes. His immediate presence is with us at every moment, loving us with a power and beauty and infinite tenderness beyond anything we have ever imagined. And we can practice his immediate presence simply by deciding to do it in the wholeness and sincerity of our hearts. Only when the actual love of God is flowing through us, reaching out, touching the lives of others, are we sharing the living reality of the great truths we have come to comprehend.

As religionists we can share the active and positive and joyful nature of Jesus' inspiration. Jesus was never passive. Even when he told us to turn the other cheek, he wasn't telling us to become wimps or jellyfish. He told us to turn the other cheek with active love for our oppressor; and active love means doing something good. Our mission of uplifting all of the institutions of human society and all of the religions of the world must be conceived as an active and positive mission. We are the yeast of the fifth epochal revelation.

And let us never forget that leavening means uplifting, not arguing. Jesus never argued. And like Jesus let us always focus on the best and ignore the rest. And by this means, by following Jesus' example, we will never compromise our beliefs. We will never have to. Jesus was no compromiser. Truth must never be compromised.

As religionists, what we can share is our daring. We "...dare to depend solely on Jesus and his incomparable teachings." (*2082:10)

As religionists, what we can share is not a religion about Jesus, but the actual religion of Jesus, "...the most dynamic influence ever to activate the human race." (*1091:3). And we will ever proclaim that the very spirit of our religion is the Father's infinite life of living love, (*1730:3).

"The world needs to see Jesus living again on earth in the experience of spirit-born mortals who effectively reveal the Master to all men." (*2084:1) As religionists we have volunteered for this mission. What we have to offer is not a religion that leads to a blissful life of ease, What we have to offer instead is "...effort, struggle, conflict, faith, determination, love, loyalty, and progress." (*1729:6). This is the meaning of the religion of the spirit.

The religious vision that we offer does not require a wooden pulpit — not for a moment. You and I don't need a wooden pulpit. Our hearts will become the living pulpits of the love of the Universal Father, the mercy of the Eternal Son, and the ministry of the Infinite Spirit.

All of us have friends who are followers of Jesus who see him primarily through the powerful symbolism of the cross. They see Jesus on the cross as the innocent lamb of God, whom mankind has offered up as a blood sacrifice to God to appease him, to expiate the sins of all mankind. They see Jesus innocently suffering, even wondering at times why he must endure this monstrous deed.

But as religionists we have a vastly differnt vision of Jesus on the cross. We see the same spikes pounded through his flesh. We see the beaten body, dripping with the deep wounds of the scourge. And every one of us who has ever smashed a finger must know the far deeper, extreme, and excruciating pain those pounding spikes caused him as they tore through his flesh,

But we also see something else — a man so magnificent in his love for the Father, so beautiful and tender in his love for all of us, who at any moment simply by desiring it, however briefly, could have wiped out his oppressors in the blink of an eye . . . yet he did not. As the pain crescendoed through his body he did not even for a moment desire that they be struck down. Why? Because his dedication to the Father's will was complete and absolute; because he loved each of his oppressors, and every man, woman, and child in all mankind then and forever with an amazing and thrilling devotion. And, all he asks of us is that we go and do likewise . . . This is the great and powerful love we can share.

God bless you, my friends, and keep you in his love forever.

FROM THE EDITORS

As this issue completes its final production process, we are beginning to receive the first responses to the questions we posed in the last two issues. We will begin to include some responses in our next issue, but just to keep you thinking, here's another question based upon this quote from Paper 3 of the The URANTIA Book:

"It is a great blunder to humanize God, except in the concept of the indwelling Thought Adjuster, but even that is not so stupid as completely to mechanize the idea of the First Great Source and Center." (*53:4)

What do you think this sentence means?

While our intent is to stimulate the submittal of finished articles for publication, we will also welcome, edit (if necessary), and publish in summary form any responses to this question you care to send us. In fact, if this approach generates the level of interest we hope it will, we plan to use it on a regular basis to provide a way for our readers to share their thoughts, observations, and responses to questions many of us struggle with on a regular basis, alone, or in our study groups, as we seek to understand our Father better through the mechanism of *The URANTIA Book*. Thanks in advance for your willingness to participate with us in a more active way of using The URANTIAN Journal to crossfertilize our thinking.

Warmly.

-The Editors

"Be not deceived by those who come saying here is the kingdom or there is the kingdom, for my Father's kingdom concerns not things visible and material. And this kingdom is even now among you, for where the spirit of God teaches and leads the soul of man, there in reality is the kingdom of heaven. And this kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.' "(*1536:6) Jesus in the synagogue in Capernaum.