

SERVING HUMAN NEED

A Critical Appreciation of Harry McMullan's Paper "Promoting The Urantia Book"

What is our responsibility as students of The Urantia Book in our time? It is certainly not, as Harry pointed out so well in his paper, to slavishly follow the dictates of the Foundation, a group of fellow mortals as imperfect as the rest of us, who are unfortunately not very open to outside opinion, even if it comes complete with reams of quotes from the revelation to support it. It's not unusual that offices and titles can sometimes encourage people to take themselves too seriously - something Dr. Sadler (again an imperfect human being) should have taken into account before he set up the Foundation as a group that serves for life and chooses its own successors. But my point here is not to criticize the Trustees, or the Distrustees as some choose to call them, though I may have a little fun at their expense. I really don't think the Foundation is all that important to the future of the larger Urantia movement (though its members, as individuals, apart from their official functions, are as important as anyone and deserve our respect and loyalty). There are already too many books out, which can speak for themselves, and too many people involved, for the Foundation to seriously hinder what's begun. My point is to get at the question I opened with.

But first let me emphasize my agreement with many of the points Harry made: that there is a danger of stagnation in the movement, aggravated by overprotective official policies; that it's superficial and silly to give meticulous attention to things like the proper capitalization of the word "Urantian" while ignoring higher obligations, such as promoting a spirit of trust and cooperation in the movement, and facilitating open decision-making; that the book is overpriced; that we shouldn't assume that people aren't ready for it; that the last thing official activities should be involved with is restricting distribution of the book, either actively or passively; that the responsibilities of the Foundation and Brotherhood have nothing to do with trying to keep control of the spread of these teachings; that we shouldn't worry about people misunderstanding the papers; that official Urantia organizations and activities are of infinitesimal importance compared to the book itself, and the need to get it to people; that the best way to protect the text (the principal, if not only, duty of the Foundation) is to distribute as many accurate copies of it as possible; that the leadings of the Spirit are our legitimate authority, not someone in Chicago; and that the revelation belongs to the planet, not to those who hold its copyright.

However, I feel that Harry has slighted our most vital responsibility, even though he touches on it several times, and though many of the quotations he uses from the book state it boldly and clearly.

Our mission is not just to sell books, but primarily to live lives that exhibit the values the book describes. This is enormously more difficult than distributing Urantia Books, but this is our mission (see my final quotations from Jesus for his explicit instructions to this effect). The world has had two thousand years of preaching and talk about spiritual living - much of it entirely loveless - now it needs to see what has been talked about all this time. And we need to learn how to do this directly from the Spirit of Truth, not from emulating the apostles or the "saints," or even from reading about it in The Urantia Book. Our primary responsibility is not to get books in everyone's hands, but to serve them in Godlike ways, according to the wisdom of our inner spirits.

The problem I see revealed in Harry's paper is: that the question that should be of primary importance to us is not whether some people are to be allowed to keep the book hidden (that's impossible now anyway), or hinder its distribution, or whether we should advertise or not advertise, but whether we're going to forsake the challenge of transforming ourselves, for the sake of selling books. We have to do both, but personal transformation is primary. A transformed person is hundreds of times more valuable to the world, including as a promoter of The Urantia Book, than one who is operating out of ignorant enthusiasm. If half the time and energy that's been spent on lawsuits, haggling among ourselves, defining what can and can't be done with the circles, etc., had been spent on finding ways to make each of us better recognizers and servers of human need, we would be well on our way right now to becoming a group of people that would amaze the world with our unselfish dedication and skillful devotion.

Harry unfortunately seems to be suggesting that all we are capable of in this regard is "to sit back with beatific smiles trying to be spiritual, waiting for others to ask us why we are such fine people." He sells all of us short, and himself as well, I'm sure, by such a dismissal of our spiritual possibilities. Certainly we will never accomplish anything in this direction if we refuse to focus our minds and hearts there because we see such development as hopeless. It is not hopeless. All the power of the universe is mobilized to help us in this, and it's much easier than we think. Jesus knew that, and knows it. We should trust his judgement, not our ignorant appraisal of ourselves. But it requires nothing less than all from us. It requires transformation. We can not do it and remain who we are.

The fault of the Trustees is not, as I see it, that they've made errors in judgement, or come to wrong conclusions, or made mistakes in reasoning, or even that they haven't studied the book enough for their positions (though this last would certainly have a bearing on their suitability for trusteeship, about which, however, none of us have any say, they say) - even the worst mistakes can be borne with equanimity if someone is learning from them, if the spirit is right. Our Trustees are good people, as we all go, and will certainly do for their legitimate duties if they continue to grow. Those of us who are impatient with their rate of growth should simply go about our creative projects without really worrying too much about what anyone thinks of them, if our inspiration and direction really come from within. "Creative" and "inspiration" are the key words, however - if one is not in touch with the spirit,

such an attitude of inner independence is destructive and even insane.

Peter, James, and John, as Harry points out, actually did, at times, almost, think Jesus was crazy, he was so fiercely loyal and uncompromising - so far from being conservative, cautious, and wary - "bold" and "emphatic" are the words the book uses to describe him, and Harry asks, "Does this sound like a man who would blanch at the thought of fifth-level outreach?" No, it doesn't. It also doesn't sound like someone who would be satisfied selling books. Even if the apostles had thought Jesus crazy in the world's eyes, they would have continued to love him as a friend, and would have willingly died for him if need be, because he inspired whole-hearted loyalty and love in those he served, not just intellectual assent. He wanted something even more difficult and challenging from the apostles than their deaths: he wanted their lives, their hearts, their souls, their every breath, now and forever. He wanted to be with them. He wanted to know them and have them know him, to explore them and welcome their exploration of his being without fear, in the beginning of an endless friendship - one which, once deeply entered, would almost appear somehow to have always been.

To Jesus, at all times, the most important thing was the person in his immediate presence. We have to learn from this, learn to really see each other. No one was ever a stranger to him.

In Harry's paper, he suggests at one point that what the revelators meant by a "cup of water" given to a thirsty soul was The Urantia Book, but if Jesus came upon someone who was desperately thirsty, he wouldn't hand him a book. He would minister to him, skillfully, spontaneously, and uniquely, as in that great scene in Ben Hur when he gives drink to the fallen slave, and bathes his head with the water, tenderly with his hands, even though he sees an enraged centurion approaching him, whom he then transforms as well, with a look. Jesus let God shine through him, and remained a simple, unpretentious layman. He was the power of the universe in human form, and he chose to live his life as he did, self-evidently, non-grandiosely, out of the same infinity of wisdom as the infinity of power which he steadfastly refused to use for self-aggrandizement or status. He loved men and women. His attitude toward women was revolutionary, especially the corps of women disciples at a time when a man was not even supposed to address his wife in public. Both men and women found him beautiful and majestic, fearless and peaceful - "the one altogether lovely, and the greatest among ten thousand." They were drawn to him by more than human emotions, though their human emotions were more powerfully moved by him than by any other of all their mortal experiences. He never left anyone the same, who really encountered him. Just the way he moved, the way he carried himself, so slowly and graciously, never in a hurry (being in eternity), was a revelation to those who really saw him. People's hearts burned within them when he spoke to them. But to find his eyes, that was the supreme blessing. To have him stop for you, and look into your eyes, and show you how much you really mattered. No one was ever the same after such an experience. It wasn't something he worked himself up to do; it wasn't something he was trying to do. It was his supreme, self-evident pleasure to meet you and serve the needs he saw in you that you didn't even know you had until he touched them at their root. He didn't leave people tearful. He left them suspended. He left

them stunned to their cores. He left them in a new world. To those who really understood, he left them in the universe and eternity.

He is with us always. He is our power to change the world. If we substitute The Urantia Book for him, because it doesn't challenge us as powerfully and relentlessly as his actual presence, then we will be backsliding and committing the same error as the Christians. What is expected of us is that we will allow the Spirit to work through us, with our active cooperation. How do you think the Spirit would like to operate through us in our time? As book salesmen with circles on our briefcases?

Sure, why not. That's one way.

But we had better be selling more than a book. We had better make each customer the most important person in our lives when we contact him or her. We had better be more concerned with our customer than with our sale. The Truth may be recognized through a book, but it is not found there. It is found in human hearts, where we live; and if we don't live there, in our whole intelligence, not just in our intellects, then we're not really alive, we're wasting the life that's been given us. It's from there and to there that we have to give the teachings, to make them real. If someone needs water, we don't sell him a book. We are here to recognize and serve whatever real human needs we see, but especially the need to be aware of the fact that we are never alone, that we are together, that we are known and understood and loved more deeply than we can imagine by God, through his Spirit within us, now, at every moment - though we naturally hunger to find this companionship on a personal human level as well, in other human beings to love and be loved by. Our responsibility, certainly not secondary to selling books, is to live in this place where we love freely and deeply, without favor - though some can share more love with us than others, and some, rare, beautiful, eternal friends, open up to all of us with their all, with the implicit trust of Paradise children finding each other even in the flesh.

These are the supreme experiences of life.

The Urantia Book is like a great university. But universities are not homes, except temporarily, even for teachers. And they are not the truth they teach. The Urantia Book is a place to learn of the existence of the truth, it is not the place to find it. The truth is found within oneself, and from the Spirit in others, in one's relationships with other people, especially those consciously in process, like oneself, of continuous transformation - the proof of the reality of which is an inexpressible, expanding gratitude for the beauty, meaning, and value of living in a space where the most important presence is the human Spirit, leading the human being to the dignity that is his due, that is really him, is really her.

There is nothing more important than sharing our inner experience with God. Nothing. Not a book, not a movement, not a work, not a world. If we fail at what's most important, it doesn't much matter how we try to compensate. It doesn't matter how straight and swift your arrow flies if it's in the wrong direction. No matter how logical or ingenious or dedicated our methods of promulgating The

Urantia Book, none will be worthy of the revelation itself if we lose sight of the Spirit in which we need to proceed. That Spirit is the Truth which people need, which The Urantia Book can help teach them how to find, give instruction to, but which we, and others like us, can show them, in a way that will lead them to find its presence in themselves. The Truth is between us, and within us, not in a book, no matter how beautiful, and if we fail to live it, we will be like someone who studies the printing of a name but fails ever to find the presence the name belongs to.

He who has seen me has seen God, Jesus said. This means to see with the eyes of the soul, not just to read a description in a book. Men don't put a candle under a bushel, neither do they expect a description of a candle to give actual light.

The world needs the living truth, and this is the greatest gift we have to give. Of course we should share The Urantia Book with everyone who might be open to it, and not hide how much it means to us. But if our zeal to sell Urantia Books blinds us to people's need for us to really care about them, acknowledge their problems, and respect their lives, whether The Urantia Book is a part of them or not, then we are foolish enthusiasts unprepared for public ministry, not mature and seasoned sons whose whole beings have become their service. There is a time, different for each individual, to be public. Some may be so for a lifetime, some for only a moment, some not at all. Jesus spent only a few short years at it out of his thirty-five, during which he set in motion events that sent the world reeling for, so far, twenty centuries. We are here to continue his work, by exhibiting his spirit - by letting the Truth be seen - in the way we live our lives, sell our books, or, like the Alpheus twins, who just didn't know any more to do, simply go fish.

The way we are will determine the success of what we do, no matter what it is.

Augustine^e, that old sinner, said it well: "Love, and do what you will." Don't love, and no matter how many Urantia Books you sell, you will be anxious and more or less obviously miserable, and contribute to the misery around you.

Let's get things clear. Every personal relationship is an end in itself. Everything else is a means to an end.

The Urantia Book is not a personal relationship, though it may teach that such relationships are of supreme value.

"Going all the way" is a phrase not just about teenage sex but also about the life of a person who chooses to follow the Truth wherever it leads, all for the love of it, for whom even death, if his loyalty takes him there, is really incidental.

We need to be intensely, wholly serious about life and our responsibilities, but about our trembling or cocky or finally balanced selves we need to be amused and forgetful, simply giving of ourselves freely, without question, to those who haven't yet realized their own reasons to be joyful. Of course The Urantia Book is a wonderful tool for learning of supreme realities, but for really

experiencing them and sharing the wonder of them with others, the real value of them, The Urantia Book itself is like the train that takes us there. Once there, we don't carry the train around with us on our backs.

The book is a seed. We are its soil. If nothing grows in us, if the seed just remains a seed, unchanged, no matter how many are planted, we will simply have a barren field of promise. But if the rain of the Spirit comes, and the seed softens and grows, then what will come of such a source will be no ordinary grain.

Our love and service must not be like the common level of affection and loyalty which sustains the world in its present desperate state. A comfortable, easy relationship which doesn't really go anywhere is not love. Our love is not of the Spirit unless it is new and amazing, unless it transforms us, those we meet, and eventually the world.

If we simply pass the book on to people, we are like the slothful steward who buried his one talent and gave it back unchanged. Nowhere in The Urantia Book are we exhorted to sell Urantia Books. We are exhorted to be messengers of the Truth to those who haven't yet experienced the message. We are exhorted to let our light so shine, not just talk about doing it or sell people a story of how Jesus did it.

The Urantia Book is the most beautiful and important book ever written, but it is only a book. Even Paul himself said it: the letter kills, the spirit gives life.

A map is not the experience of a place.

I'll end this with some of the last directives of Jesus, when he appeared to the Greeks and Jews in his morontia form, directives which put my point much more authoritatively than I can:

"You are all to proclaim this gospel of love and truth by the lives which you live in the flesh. You shall love one another with a new and startling affection, even as I have loved you. You will serve mankind with a new and amazing devotion, even as I have served you. And when men see you so love them, and when they behold how fervently you serve them, they will perceive that you have become faith-fellows of the kingdom of heaven, and they will follow after the Spirit of Truth which they see in your lives, to the finding of eternal salvation." p. 2044

"Forget not to minister to the sick and strengthen those who are fainthearted and fear-ridden." p. 2033

"As I have revealed the Father, so shall you reveal the divine love, not merely with words, but in your daily living. I send you forth, not to love the souls of men, but rather to love men. You are not merely to proclaim the joys of heaven but also to exhibit in your daily experience these spirit realities of the divine life since you already have eternal life, as the gift of God, through faith." p. 2043

"Your mission to the world...shall consist in the life which you

will live among men - the actual and living experience of loving men and serving them, even as I have loved and served you." p. 2043

"By so drawing close to your fellow men in understanding sympathy and with unselfish devotion, you will lead them into a saving knowledge of the Father's love." p. 2043

- Stan Hartman, July 16, 1983