

PRINCIPLES OF MINISTRY

Meredith J. Sprunger

Anyone who has experienced a dynamic personal relationship with God and has dedicated himself to the demands of this relationship must do something about it. Genuine religion always motivates action and changes lives. Jesus emphasizes that service is the true indicator of our sonship with the Universal Father. Religionists have often side-stepped the demanding discipline of spiritual ministry by engaging in religious substitutes such as theologizing, cult cultivation, organizational administration, and mystical contemplation. Cults and sectarian groups tend to be centripetal; inward; their focus and primary relationships are with insiders. A more mature religion or religionist is open and outgoing and seeks to bring ministry to all mankind.

Service to our fellowman can take many forms, and each of us must discover which function or channel we find creative. We can serve God in every vocation of society and through all of the arts and sciences. Jesus directs us to seek the Father's guidance and direction for our lives. All of us are not called to the same ministry. Courageously keep step with the music you hear; and so will the Father's symphony of service benefit all people.

There are three basic forms of service in which each of us is challenged to participate. First, we should strive to live the inspiring truths given to us. This is elemental. Second, we ought to engage in various types of material service. We should aid the needy, work for social, economic, and legal justice, and foster the actualization of human well-being. Finally, and most importantly, we are called to participate in a spiritual ministry to the minds and souls of our fellows. This sharing and proclamation of the good news has, historically, effected the greatest transformation of human life of all of the forms of service. And today there is a great need for the restructuring of the spiritual foundations of society along with a growing hunger in the world for a larger understanding of the universe and God.

New Potentials of Ministry

The latest and greatest truth the Master has committed into our hands is the fifth epochal revelation. This momentous event has opened vast new potentials of ministry. Each of us should ask ourselves, how are we actualizing these dynamic possibilities? What fruits of the spirit show that we are doing something creative with this enlarged vision of truth in our lives and in our service? Where have we sown this new seed of truth? Are we cultivating soil and planting seed with care; or are we merely letting nature take its course and busying ourselves with other things while the winds of time broadcast the seed at random?

Although there have been many evolutionary periods of spiritual revival spearheaded by great religious leaders, the most significant eras of spiritual awakening on our world have been initiated by the advent of epochal revelation. We have many charismatic religious leaders today who recognize the need for the spiritual renewal of our society, and who are exerting their best efforts to bring about such a spiritual transformation of our culture. The spiritual rejuvenation of our planet, however, requires something more than religious genius and human heroics.

The depth of our world dilemma and the decadence of our spiritual resources is seen in the relative impotence of the religious leaders and the religious

institutions of our day. Because of this depletion of our evolutionary spiritual reserves, we have been given the fifth epochal revelation. It has come in the fullness of time; for only an enlarged and integrated vision of Reality along with the faith-power of new revelation can bring about a spiritual renaissance on our world. The crisis of our age challenges every serious student of The URANTIA Book to dedicate himself or herself to some form of active and systematic outreach ministry.

Fields of Ministry

The most significant fields for spiritual ministry which will have a lasting effect on our culture and civilization are the religious institutions of our society. No spiritual influence has ever made an enduring contribution to our world unless it has become institutionalized. Although religious organizations increase the potential for evil and cultocentric misdirection, no spiritual dynamic has been able to make its way as a viable aspect of history without utilizing institutional channels. This means that the teachings of The URANTIA Book must either leaven the religious traditions of the world or new religious institutions will have to be created to serve this purpose.

In view of these experiential realities, it becomes clear that one of the most important avenues of service in which students of The URANTIA Book can function is within the religious institutions of society. Spiritual leavening always comes from within. This is, obviously, a slow and difficult process; but there is no other way to spiritual growth. Those who are too "turned-off," disenchanted, or frustrated to serve actively in the religious institutions of society largely eliminate themselves from one of the most important evolutionary instrumentalities in bringing about a spiritual renaissance on our world.

This does not mean that one must be a member of a religious institution to contribute to spiritual progress. Individuals and noninstitutional religious groups can make great contributions to religious growth. These "freelance" contributions, however, must eventually be incorporated in religious institutions if they are to survive. If the fifth epochal revelation is to make its way into our culture it must first influence the lives of individuals; but in order for these teachings to survive and become a social force in civilization, these individuals must either leaven the traditional religions of our world or create new entities which become the channels through which these truths enlighten mankind.

Hopefully, the URANTIA movement will move in both of these directions. Although URANTIA Brotherhood is a new religious organization, it seeks to serve a unique role as a human institution. It does not aspire to initiate a new religion or become a religious body which furnishes pastoral, sacerdotal, or worship services as do churches and synagogues. The Brotherhood functions primarily as an educational-social institution with a religious purpose. As such, it may be able to contribute an important ecumenical ministry to all of the religions of the world. The Brotherhood's objective is the spiritual transformation of mankind through the leavening influence of the fifth epochal revelation (and God's continuing, unified spirit ministry) in all of the institutions of our world.

In time there will be new religious groups arising that recognize The URANTIA Book as the center of their faith and practice which will furnish all of the pastoral, social, educational, and sacerdotal services of contemporary churches and synagogues. In the overall picture, however, these new groups will most likely serve a significant but minor role in the evolution of religion on our planet. The major events of future religious development, probably, will take place within

the religious traditions which have served the spiritual needs of humanity for centuries. It is, therefore, vitally important that ever increasing numbers of URANTIA Book students assume active leadership roles in the religious institutions of the world. If we wisely prepare the ground, eventually thousands of study groups will spring up within these historic communions.

PRINCIPLES OF MINISTRY

Whatever form of outreach ministry you should choose to engage in, the quality and effectiveness of that service depends, largely, on how it is done. Divine revelation and human experience have taught us the importance of the following seven principles of ministry.

Use Wisdom

Use wisdom and balance in all of your service. Avoid extremes, exhibitionism, oversell, and the spectacular. Learn to distinguish between artistic good taste and the theatrical. Remember that personal contact is more effective than impersonal mass communication. Understand the wisdom and effectiveness of small groups. These groups form coalitions and networks more open and dynamic than hierarchical bureaucracies and self-serving cults. Such a network is many times greater than the sum of its parts. It has multiple leadership, pluralistic policies, and its center is everywhere. Start where people are, not where you are. Communicate in their frames of reference and anticipate their natural reactions. Combine the most expert knowledge with the highest values in all of your ministry. Master your mind through the power of the spirit. Be strong in the spirit; know that in liaison with God nothing can defeat the spiritual purposes of your life. Be fearless but act with discretion.

Let Love Create

Let love create the atmosphere of all of your interpersonal relationships. Remember that you cannot communicate effectively with others unless you positively and unconditionally accept them with all of their imperfections. Strive to prevent your own biases and limitations from interfering or distorting your service to them. Support, stimulate, and help people; do not seek to coerce them. See all of your fellows as persons of worth and strive to build their self-confidence and self-respect. Be natural and genuine and enjoy their company. Serve out of love, a thankful heart, and the joy of the act itself. Ministry is an intrinsic activity of the creative mind and the loving soul. Extrinsic motivation in service compromises its spiritual value. Serving God even for good extrinsic purposes such as building your study group, society, or church, or even to bring about a spiritual renaissance limits its spiritual value and personal satisfaction. Minister out of the intrinsic motivation of love, thankfulness, and joy; and the extrinsic repercussions or results will largely take care of themselves. Serve in the openness of creative love; but do not try to manipulate people.

Cultivate Openness

Temper your personal convictions with philosophical objectivity. Always be honest and open. Cultivate freedom of opinion and respect the right of others to disagree with your most deeply held convictions. Honor each person's God-given right to self-determination. Try to establish common ground but do not contend with people. Let your enthusiasm for truth animate your discussions but never knowingly put people down or offend.

Co-operate with Evolution

Recognize that evolution is the underlying principle of life. Do not expect immediate results. All growth is unconscious and has mustard seed beginnings. The roots of a new tree of life take decades to penetrate the rocks of tradition on which it is planted. Be patient but do not become the victim of a fearful "do-nothing" psychology and bury your talents and treasure in the bogs of stagnation or the quagmires of cult obscurities. Be concerned about ministering effectively but relatively unconcerned about results. Realize that your ministry must be planned and conducted in the context of the law of readiness. Always minister at the point of evolutionary readiness but do not confuse this basic preparation for the surface conditions of psychological and social readiness. All who have prophetic vision know that evolution, the plow of history, eventually breaks the crust of individual resistance and moves the clods of social stagnation. Be loyal and persistent in your service without needing to see results or to be honored by success. It is our privilege and responsibility to minister; the results are in the hands of God the Supreme. In all things cultivate in yourself the mind and attitude of the Supreme. The vicissitudes of time do not change the goals of eternity.

Live with the Commonplace

Be actively involved in routine, commonplace experiences. Grow, bloom, and bear fruit in the soil where you are planted. If possible, keep your old social and religious ties strong and healthy. Share at the level of spiritual acceptance. When you are a tadpole do not live under the illusion that you are a trout or an eagle. Only dedicated and creative tadpoling will bring you inner satisfaction and a sense of fulfillment. These mundane activities and identifications will bring a sense of proportion, genuineness, and integrity to your ministry. Forget the failures of the past and do not allow yourself to be preoccupied anticipating the future. Live in the present in constant fellowship with the Father and absorbed in the existential moment of experience.

Develop a Sense of Humor

Cultivate an active sense of humor. Humor helps us maintain a proper sense of perspective. You can carry man-sized or woman-sized loads when you get the world off your shoulders. Do not take yourself too seriously even though you are participating in important work. Be unconcerned about prestige and status. Strive to avoid self-contemplation and cultivate self-forgetfulness. Finite personalities can become tragic figures when they lose their sense of perspective and fail to appreciate the comedy of life. We need to laugh at ourselves and the frustrating, ridiculous, and absurd situations we encounter. A light-hearted spirit can be a great asset in carrying the sometimes heavy burdens of ministry.

Serve with Joy

Above all, live with joy in your heart and find joy in your ministry. You belong to the Father's kingdom which has an eternal future of unimaginable adventure and reward. Nothing can long prevent the fulfillment of your most ardent spiritual hopes and fondest dreams. All who experience this faith in an eternal destiny live with irrepressible joy even in the midst of material hardship, social conflict, and seeming personal defeat. As you free yourself from the slavery of the lure of things, the adoration or criticism of people, and the importance or preoccupation with self, you will experience the liberating joys of service. You will also discover that in doing so you are free from the egocentric social pressure to be successful or to maintain a reputation. When your will is in harmony with the will

of God, the life of service also brings a deep inner peace. This meaningfulness and joy of worship and service transcends the rewards of all other human activities.

Living Faith Acts

We are living in one of the major transitional periods of human history. Our society desperately needs an enlarged spiritual vision which will give guidance and stability to the new age which is struggling to be born. The URANTIA Book has been given to us providing the spiritual fulcrum to lift our world into a new era of human achievement. Our Sovereign Master speaks to us as to Peter, "If you love me, feed my sheep."

6/1/82