

SPIRITUAL COMMUNITY: THE QUEST FOR SUPREMACY

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INTRODUCTION

The Urantia Revelation has profoundly enriched the individual lives of its readers and devotees. In a chaotic world, it has offered meaning and direction to our individual life struggle. Beyond the story of personal salvation, we see its teachings applied and envision a better world. Pondering the infinite creation from our state of imperfection is awe-inspiring. Seeing ourselves as individually inadequate, we can only realize this vision as a collective effort. Thus we seek human association. On a deeper level, The Urantia Book challenges us with a great and exciting task to be performed. Consciously and unconsciously, we seek spiritual community to accomplish this task. The sum total of this process, I feel, is more correctly understood as "The Quest for Supremacy."

OUR CHALLENGE

The Urantia Revelation is unique in that it is not the work of a single personality, but many personalities indited the papers. Likewise, it is not presented to the world by a single personality, but by all of those who read, study and live by its teachings. The message of Jesus had to fit in to the groove thinking of the first century Roman world. In comparison, *The Urantia Book* is enmeshed in the technology and communication grid of the late 20th century. As our revelation is the written word, we are without a central authority and dissemination is limited only by literacy and human understanding. Experience tells us the greatest success is accomplished by sharing the book personally. Standing between these forces of dissemination and focus, we are an organization bringing itself up by the bootstraps and true community seems to elude us.

HISTORICAL COMMUNITY

In our present struggle for community, we can gain insight by exploring the life in four communities, two historical and two contemporary. Their common bond has given them spiritual unity and enhanced their mission in the world.

EARLY CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

Will Durant said the Roman eagle RE made straight the way for Christ, and many think Christianity filled a spiritually impoverished empire. On the other hand, history is nearly silent regarding the spiritual fragrance and its persuasive power in these early Christian communities. People from every station and all walks of life were fully accepted in the community as they announced the spiritual equality of mankind. Women for the first time were given responsibilities in the community. They were orderly, industrious and financed other impoverished communities. They upheld a strict moral code for the time, ate many common meals together, and above all they loved and cared for each other. Little is written about these communities prior to Constantine. John Bennett in his work *Needs of A New Age Community* offers the most fascinating account. According to him, they existed in the Jewish communities of the

diaspora; in Egypt, Syria and Asia Minor. The inspiration and ethic of Christ offered hope and happiness and was the common bond which held them together. Their spiritual power arose not from their individual strength but by their love and sacrifice for one another, not by their civility but by their service to one another, and not by their tolerance but their wholehearted acceptance of one another. They were governed not by rules but by a new attitude and pattern of living.

Their great strength arose from living by the tenets of the Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon on the Mount can be viewed as steps in the development of spiritual community, whereas the first four faith attitudes concern the inner life and the second four transcendent attitudes address the outer life and work in the community. These principles of living gave these communities an inner life not subject to disruptive forces. Against all odds they won the day, and by A.D. 300 a network of spiritual communities served as a foundation to disseminate the message of Michael to Urantia. At the end of this era Tertullium, one of the fathers of the Latin church, stated, "we are only of yesterday but already we fill the world."

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

Bill W., the co-founder of A.A., for years struggled with alcoholism unsuccessfully. He regained his sanity only when he accepted his condition and "turned it over" to a higher power. He found he could only maintain his sobriety by helping other alcoholics. In his association with Dr. Bob, A.A. was founded, has since spread internationally, and has transformed millions of lives.

A.A. is a true community of kindred souls with a secular religious teaching at its core. Success occurs because it calls on two of the greatest reservoirs of power known to man, religion and association with one's fellows. Members are average citizens from all parts of the world and represent many of its occupations. Among members there is a common fellowship. True community results from having shared a common peril and serves as a cement which binds them together. Service is seen as the pathway to health and

sobriety. Therapy is based on the kinship of common suffering. For members life takes on new meaning; to watch people recover, to see them help others, to watch loneliness vanish, and to see a fellowship grow up around you.

The nature of God is not so important as one's relationship to him. Like rays of color in the spectrum of light, there are a multitude of paths in finding a relationship to the creator. For most this evolves unconsciously over a period of time. In summary, through "The Program" the alcoholic "overcomes his excessive concentration upon himself. Learning to depend upon a higher power and absorb himself in his work and with other alcoholics he remains sober day by day. The days add up to weeks, the weeks into months and years."

THE HOLOCAUST

The images of genocide from a Nazi concentration camp are well known to us. In spite of these adverse circumstances, communal efforts toward survival and spiritual growth are noteworthy. In his book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, Victor Frankl portrayed how a group of men with nothing left could find bliss. A man, it was discovered, could get used to anything, and in this life of endurance and sacrifice engendered a redefinition of the human character. Soon after admission to a camp, the situation separated the "saints from the swine." Those with an inner spiritual life survived the experience while those spiritually impoverished were destroyed.

The concentration camp experience enhanced group wisdom. Everything not connected with the immediate task of keeping one's self and one's closest friends alive lost its value. Many helped train each other to have a sense of humor as one of the soul's weapons in the act of self-preservation. Living with the certainty of suffering and possibility of death every minute, life took on new meaning. These men experienced a fundamental change in their attitude toward life: "It did not matter what we expected from life, but rather what life expected from us." They learned their sacrifices, suffering and dying had meaning and if they survived with their bones intact this experience would be an asset in the future.

THE CASTRO

The AIDS epidemic in the San Francisco Castro district took on many characteristics of the Holocaust. The Castro was a direct descendent of the Haight Ashbury district and gay settlers began arriving around 1972. San Francisco, being a tolerant city, the Castro became a focus of gay liberation. With liberation self-restraint gave way to self-expression and the AIDS epidemic hit near the end of 1981. A devastating loss of young, productive lives ensued.

The response of this community to the immense challenges of this epidemic is truly remarkable. The inclusive and fully integrated programs of health care and social services will serve as a model to other communities. The Shanti Project, the San Francisco AIDS Foundation, and Hospice provide

housing, counseling, help with medical bills and home care for AIDS patients. Through education community consciousness has been raised to encourage safe sex practices and prevent transmission. The churches have opened up to the community and the AIDS Interfaith Network has formed. New and original expressions of religious faith have arisen to embrace life as precious, even with the specter of death ever present. This struggle encouraged a new community attitude of growth, a new intimacy, a new maturity, and a sense of interdependence. Today, political enthusiasm has given way to personal relationships—friendships. Circles of friends function as families and true community is continuing to grow from this foundation of mutual trust.

These communities were chosen because of their unique formation under adverse and challenging circumstances. Through religious living each developed a pattern of spiritual unity through service to the larger benefit of mankind. These patterns are pure in the sense they have paid their social and political gravity debt to project over time to serve a future age.

The spiritual community offers an enlarged and transcendent pattern beyond individual religious growth. The individual lives by a set of rules whereas the community lives by a pattern of action. Altruism and an individual ministry give way to sacrifice and community service. Meditation and prayer become group worship and communion. Individual's self-respect is expanded to communal love and fellowship. Independence becomes an illusion with the realization and discovery that all experiential creations are interdependent in their realization of destiny. The qualities of self-reliance, self-assertion, and self-awareness are incorporated into the community and are mutual trust, group wisdom, and communication. Finally, in the community the individual's religious experience is better directed toward spiritual growth.

THE QUEST FOR SUPREMACY

The previous communities are distinguished expressions of the spiritual fruit from the Fourth Epochal Revelation. In essence, our communal mission with the Fifth Epochal Revelation is to encourage relationships and living patterns contributing to the growth of the Supreme. We must accept our role as created co-creators as we dedicate our life experiences to the Supreme.

As one pours through *The Urantia Book*, there is a sense of purpose in the order in which it has been presented. As one reads from Part I to Part III, there is a gradual shift from eternity and first causes to results in time and space. It seems as though our universe journey is taken in reverse order and time is taken along the way to clarify misunderstandings and to enhance partial truths resulting from disordered planetary thought. Near the end of Part III this ministry to the mind is nearly complete, and a level intellectual playing field is established from which to interpret higher states of reality. As Paul of Tarsus taught, salvation

is open to all, likewise the message from the Urantia teaching is that understanding is open to all.

The Supreme papers are then presented at the end of Part III as something totally new. These papers seem to be a watershed as the teachings build up to and away from them. They also contain the most explicit statements concerning the challenge of today and what we are about as a group. On Page 1260, the debate of faith versus works is eternally put to rest by the statement "with God the Father, sonship is the great relationship. With God the Supreme, achievement is the prerequisite to status—one must do something as well as be something." We understand our role as created co-creators in the creature-creator unification of evolving deity. We participate by effort, perseverance and faith.

The challenge of time and space is stated on Page 1275. "In the evolutionary superuniverses energy-matter is dominant except in personality, where spirit through the mediation of mind is struggling for the mastery." This is necessarily a group process because we are taught on Page 1290 "all experiential creations are interdependent in their realization of destiny." We know that with the Father it is the each relationship and with the Supreme it is the all relationship. And we are bound together and driven in this collective process by love. Love has been described to me as the energy of the personality circuit. Here love is portrayed as a dynamic force on Page 1289: "All true love is from God and man receives divine affection as he himself bestows this love upon his fellows. Love is dynamic. It can never be captured. It is alive, free, thrilling and always moving... The great circuit of love is from the Father through his sons to brothers and hence to the Supreme."

THE READER FAMILY—LOCAL COMMUNITY

I feel there are two forces at work in the Urantia movement and, as already stated, they are the outward direction of dissemination and the inward direction of focus. This has also been termed outreach and inreach. Jacob Needleman describes these as the two fundamental forces of the cosmic order, the movement of creation and the movement of return.

We should ask ourselves, are we striving toward one large spiritual community or are we more realistically a community of communities. We should consider ourselves the latter, with the local family of readers as the core of our community experience. This may be represented by a society, a local study group, or a close network of readers. Having studied the teachings, understanding opens the way for all to perceive spirit reality. The culmination of this process is the ability to know and nourish each other's soul. They are held together by a common bond of experience through the Urantia Revelation and their love for one another.

In this context, the concept of family can be redefined. With our common ground as a source of solidarity, we can become

more diverse and still be inclusive. Spiritual needs could be fulfilled; for example, single people could satisfy child-rearing requirements prior to the mansion worlds. Group activities of worship and work open the opportunity for group transformation.

OUTREACH, THE GLOBAL COMMUNITY

As the process of dissemination or outreach extends our readership through the world, community is begun through personal contact and by regional conferences beginning to take on the dimensions of spiritual town meetings. We should also simplify our message because mankind is influenced decisively by ideas that all can share.

We stand at the vanguard of a world being made ready for the reception of the Urantia Revelation. In a recently widely publicized article entitled "The End of History?", the author claims history has reached an end point with the success of Western liberal democracy. The noble goals of past human adventurism are now provided for by the global economy. Society will soon be reduced to the role of perpetual caretaking. A critic observes that little consideration has been given to the higher needs of society now crying for expression, namely the longing for spirituality and community. The opening up of the developed world from totalitarian regimes presents us with an unprecedented challenge.

These bruised souls are now crying for spiritual rejuvenation where our challenge will mainly involve cultural and language barriers.

The larger challenge is our presentation to the developing world. Hope for the developing world rests with a village-based agrarian civilization using the world's oldest cultures as vehicles to assimilate the artifacts of scientific achievement. A large majority of the world's population inhabits these two million communities. The global village has come of age. A critical mass of human energy has evolved to integrate these artifacts while still maintaining the sovereignty of individual community expression. These artifacts I feel are initially incorporated into three major areas of development: medical care (public health measures), food (self-sufficient agricultural techniques), and education (information, storage and assimilation). Resulting will be a decentralized global network of largely self-sufficient communities.

Care must be taken to insure this progress takes root through an understanding of reciprocal obligation which leaves the native and moral religious beliefs undisturbed, lest the developed world is accused of colonization on a larger scale. There are six main cultural variations in the rural third world: Confucian, Malay-Javanese, Hindu, Christian, Islamic, and African. The moral and ethical system accompanying aid from the developed world should be simplified to incorporate basic values inherent in all of these cultures. All people can share these three values: family, brotherhood, and duty. Family life (filial piety) is the pattern for the