

The Great Adventure: Man in Partnership with God

Bill Sadler's reflections on what The Urantia Book meant to him
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This being something of an open meeting of the Urantia Society, I pondered at length what I could talk to you about that would be most interesting, most useful, to all of you. We could talk about the facts of the Urantia Book and I think I could cover that in about six months of intensive discussion. We can talk about the meanings which can be derived from these facts, and I suppose that could be covered in about two years. But I thought I would share with you my feelings for this Book -- not the facts, not the meanings -- but what Value this Book has in my life as a human being here on earth. So I picked as a title for this discussion, "The Great Adventure -- Man in Partnership with God. "

This Book appeals to me because it presents the story of evolution in contrast to fiat creation. God can, and does, work apart from time, but when he works apart from time, no creature can participate in that development. When God works in time, he slows down the creative process to something which we call evolutionary growth, and this enables a creature, even a human being, to sense what is happening, and if he so elects, to go in partnership with God, to become a partner with God in this growth process.

I like the idea of sharing in the creative adventure with Deity, and when I speak of partnership with God, I mean no disrespect; I know I am the junior partner and God is the senior partner, but there is a difference when you are a partner. Even if you are a junior partner, you have something to say about policy. I don't change God's mind, but it is my decision as to whether or not he can change my mind.

How does God equip his junior partners -- human beings? Well, quite obviously, we have bodies and minds, but these don't come from God. What equipment does God give us that he is willing to enter into any kind of a limited partnership with us? He gives us two priceless pieces of equipment. First of all, he gives us an absolute sense of direction. He incarcerates a part of his love inside of us. He lives in us -- even as the Bible says, "The true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. " This part of God that lives in us is God's love made real to each one of us, and this part of God that lives in us knows the way to God. It points just as unerringly God-ward as the compass needle points northward. It came from God, so it knows the way back to God. It is our unerring pilot.

And God gives us a second priceless endowment -- he endows us with relative free will, freedom of choice. The pilot is not the captain. We are captain. The pilot can steer only as we choose. I think of all the priceless gifts which God could make to me, and none would transcend the endowment of freedom of choice. Otherwise, I would be a machine. With freedom of choice, I am a person. I can be a son of God. What does freedom of choice mean? It means that I just don't have to respond slavishly to what happens to me. I have something to say about what I become. Even physically, I have something to say. I can't avoid wrinkles, but I can choose which kind will etch themselves into my face. I can frown or I can smile.

In the sense that I have relative freedom of will, I am made in the image of God. I have been liberated from marching in lock-step to antecedent causation. This Book teaches me that the more outside of myself I go toward the material level, the less choosing I can do. I can't choose to be older or younger. The more I move inward away from the material level, inward and spiritward., the greater is my liberation of choice, until when I reach the supreme choice, pro or con concerning God, here my choice knows no restriction -- as to whether I choose to be His son, to do His will -- I am absolutely on my own. Here my choice is absolute. God has given us this perfectly splendid equipment -- freedom of choice and an absolute sense of direction. We can't miss if we let the pilot do a good steering job.

At the same time, God has confronted us with a great challenge. All religions teach this challenge. It is expressed in various forms. The challenge presented by medieval Christianity was not so much the hope of heaven as it was the fear of the devil in hell. I think that is still true today; many people operate on a negative basis. I recall a friend of mine who returned a piece of stolen merchandise -- it was a wrist watch -- and he returned it because he had a dream, and in this dream he saw himself sitting on a red-hot rock in the eternal tropics, looking at a wrist watch that was calibrated in cycles of eternity.

This Book teaches me that I have a challenge, but it is not the challenge of fear -- it is the challenge of a situation. This Book tells me that I am confronted with this kind of a challenge, and I quote the Book -- "In the evolutionary universes, energy-matter is dominant, save in personality, where spirit, through the mediation of mind is striving for the mastery. " That is a rather long sentence; let's break it down. Energy-matter is here first. Just consider our planet. It passed through its astro-physical evolution before life ever appeared, and it has been around here for about a billion years. Life has been here for only about two-thirds of that time.

Human life has been around here for only about a million years, less than a tenth of one percent of physical planetary history, and when man did appear on earth, he was confronted with a rather hostile material environment. He had to adjust to it, strive to dominate it, in order to survive.

Mind can whip matter because mind can be ingenious, it can manipulate matter. But that is not the challenge. The challenge is -- can spirit dominate matter, using mind as its tool? And this challenge holds true only in personality. How come? Only in personality, which possesses this priceless endowment of free will, can mind choose to attack matter on the outside, while at the same time subordinating itself to spirit direction on the inside.

This Book gives me a mature philosophy of religion, it gives me a theology which is spiritually satisfying and at the same time intellectually stimulating. This Book enables me to avoid the two great errors which cut right across human thinking all over this world. Error No. 1 -- "You strive with spirit alone -- spirit without mind. " If you really believe this, you will substitute prayer for work. This is the error which is fundamental to Hinduism and to southern Buddhism. This is an error which our Christian Science friends enjoy. Christian Science is American, or occidental, Buddhism.

When you attack the problems of living with spirit alone, you are forced to deny the reality of matter, and you wind up with a theology which is full of illusion. The Hindu has a name for the illusion of matter -- he calls it "Maya" -- it's not really there. He trusts everything is spirit and simply says "the world is not here. " Buddhism does the same thing. I love the story they tell about three Buddhist Monks in various stages of enlightenment. Each Monk is sitting by the side of the road with his begging bowl in front of him, and, of course, what the Monks in their saffron robes beg for is food, not money. The first Monk looks down in his begging bowl and he sees three hairs -- a very, very repugnant sight -- "I don't like the idea of hair in my eating equipment." They bother him. These three hairs symbolize the illusory reality of the material world. The second Monk is farther along in the process of enlightenment -- he sees the hairs, but they don't bother him because he knows they aren't real. The third Monk doesn't see the hairs.

Now, there is an alternative to this, and all too many people, especially occidental people, fall victim to this second alternative; this is to attack the physical problems of this world with mind alone, without spirit. This is at the root of secularism. Consider the medieval Christian viewpoint. Let's take Florence -- pre- renaissance Florence. It's about 900 A. D. -- the plague hits the city, and the devout Christian Florentine bows his head as he buries his loved ones and says -- "The Lord giveth, the Lord taketh away, blessed be the name of the Lord."

Comes the renaissance and men begin to rebel against this passive acceptance of material happenstance, and in their rebellion they swing all the way in the other direction. They become secularists -- man is the measure of all things. There is an answer to the black death. I don't look down my nose at the fruits of secularism -- this has resulted in modern science, representative government, relatively universal education, the highest standard of living we have ever had -- but something is wrong. With all of our unprecedented material progress, have men ever been so scared as they are today?

When mind attacks the problem without spirit, it progresses, but its progress is thwarted and jeopardized by selfishness, by fear, by lack of ethics and morality and love. We can't successfully run a free society without God anymore than you could run the solar system without gravity.

I'm sorry for my Hindu and Buddhist friends who say "the world is an illusion -- I'll do it all with prayer. " I tremble for the future of our secularistic society which is trying to work out all these problems with MIND ALONE. What a harvest of fear we are reaping. You know, that in my lifetime, in major wars, we have scientifically killed off more human beings than have been killed in all the recorded history of war. There is something wrong with secularistic society, isn't there? But the alternative is not "spiritistic" society. This Book tells me when you conjoin mind and spirit, you can have peace on earth, survival in death, and in the cosmos you can have the great adventure.

This is the most sane philosophy I have ever encountered. It presents no easy path to peace on earth or salvation in the future -- it offers lots of hard work.

Matter presents a challenge to each of us. Mind develops the techniques for solving this challenge of the reality of physical mass energy. What are we doing to this planet to civilize it? What is a pipeline, but an artery? What is a telegraph wire, but a nerve? We are doing to this planet what a contractor does to a sub-division when he takes rolling hills and dales and makes them habitable through bringing in utilities, conveniences and so on. Matter challenges us -- mind develops the technique -- spirit provides the motivation. Without spirit direction, this problem- solving mind eventually winds up in a cul-de-sac of hate, fear, jealousy, and perhaps death.

I was born in Chicago -- I love my city. It has the magnificence of civilization aborning about it. Carl Sandburg well called it "hog-butcher to the world. " It's a beautiful city, too. I work amidst the facade of skyscrapers along the lake-front. It has taken Americans nearly 150 years to build this city. It can be blown to hell in 150 minutes with the techniques we have developed today. I ponder that, and I know fear. Without spirit motivation, mind can be a Juggernaut -- a Frankenstein's monster -- because it knows power, it can know power without restraint.

It is personality -- it's this equipment which God has given us -- that can choose to subordinate this questing, adventurous, problem-solving mind, to spirit-direction. We can meet this mortal challenge without committing human suicide. I don't think there is anything magical or mystical about western civilization. I have studied history. Rome went down, Babylon went down, Assyria went down. China has gone down half a dozen times. Egypt broke up, Greece came and went. I don't think we have any guarantee of the future. In the struggle in which we are engaged right now, I don't think material techniques are enough. The biggest thing that is missing in American ideology is God. We are never going to beat our competitors by discussing our way of life which involves more mustard and piccalilli on our hot dogs and more chrome plating on our automobiles.

These Papers tell me that one of the great things that is taking place out here in these evolutionary universes is the unification of power and personality. This is what we have been discussing. As mind dominates matter -- this is power. And, that mind which dominates matter is the mind of a choosing personality. But if this powerful person is to persist, he must be spirit-motivated. Force alone never survives. No matter how much force you mobilize, eventually, if your power begets fear, there arises a coalition stronger than you are which drags you down in defeat.

What is the effect of spirit on power -- power, meaning just what we mean by that word, a powerful person? If a powerful person is spirit motivated -- and he can choose to be this -- then he is an ethical person, he is a moral person; he uses power with restraint. The power which he possesses causes him to be an object of admiration, not fear. He is a love motivated individual. And this Book defines love very wonderfully -- "Love is the desire to do good to others. " Such an individual lives up to one of the really great quotes from this Book -- "To have power and refuse to use it purely for selfish aggrandizement, this is the mark of a high civilization."

This challenge is the challenge which comes from a loving God, but not a soft God. God's love is not a soft love -- it is a stimulating love. It is like the love of a wise parent who would never do a child's homework for him until the child had exhausted his own efforts. This challenge is well stated by the Book when it says -- "The weak make resolutions, but strong men act. Life is but a day's work, do it well. The act is ours -- the consequences, God's."

Jesus lived such a life. Jesus was an intensely practical man. Among other things, he said "Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's. " We tend to forget that half of the quote, don't we? He said "Cast not your pearls before swine. "These are not the statements you might get from a starry-eyed impractical dreamer. The Christ that we paint before pictures of might just possibly have appealed to the ladies aid society of Capernaum, but he could have never carried those hard-boiled fishermen with him. He told his followers to be as "wise as serpents" as well as "harmless as doves. " When they didn't have any money in the treasury, did he say -- "Shall we pray?" He said "No, we will go fishing and we will sell the fish and finance ourselves, then we will go preach."

He was a good carpenter in Nazareth and he worked for money, he didn't pray for it. Incidentally, he was such a good carpenter that even when there was a depression, he had plenty of work to do. He didn't just "sprangle" through Galilee and Judea with 12 fellows -- he organized them. They had jobs to do. It was a simple but effective organization. He didn't just take these 12 men upon the mountain, place hands on them, imbue them with power from on high and say "Go spread the message. " NO I He gave these 12 men between four and five years of the most intelligently practical sales training I know anything about.

When he finished with them, he tested them, and he commissioned nine of them to spread the good news. One was dead, and two he sent back to the fish nets. He recognized human differences; he knew that prayer would not change a man's I. Q. He gave Peter one set of instructions. He gave the Alpheus twins, who weren't very bright, but very lovable, another set of instructions. To Peter, he said "Be a good shepherd, feed my sheep." To these slow-thinking but wonderful Alpheus twins, he said "Boys, go back to your fish nets, and remember, to a God-knowing kingdom believer, there is no such thing as secular work. All work is sacred. " I see this union of mind and spirit best exemplified in the inspiring but intensely practical life of Joshua ben Joseph, whom we know as Jesus of Nazareth.

When mind attacks matter, you get skill. I feel sorry for people who have no real skill, who are not really professional in doing something. You know, I would rather be awfully good at drilling dry holes than to drill sloopy holes. That language, I think, is good semantics in Oklahoma, isn't it? When you turn mind loose to attack the problems of matter, you get skill. Now, when you subordinate mind to spirit, you get love. And when you combine love and skill -- when you combine problem-solving ability with the desire to do good to others -- you get something pretty wonderful - you get wisdom. From a temporal standpoint, considering everything below the level of spirit, I think wisdom is the pearl of great price. If we have this kind of wisdom, we can attack the stimulating adventure of this life with courage, with tenderness, with worship, with humor. That is an unbeatable combination.

And so, as I distill the teachings of this Book, -- not the facts, not the meanings, but the Value, I see wisdom in this life, sonship with God in the next life, and forevermore spiritual growth in the business of knowing God, finding out more and more about him. This Book well teaches me that God is the first truth and the last fact. He is the first divine reality that I can feel, but he is the last divine reality that I will ever understand because he is infinite. And I have the feeling that if we choose to use mind's courage and spirit's love wisely together in meeting the challenge of matter, we can enter upon a never-ending partnership with God. And this partnership is one of adventurous service, in the execution of God's will in the ever growing universes, throughout all the endless cycles of eternity.