

FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD, THE FATHER

by

Scott Forsythe

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- Sometimes when I find myself too embroiled in the troublous affairs of the world I go and seek out the ocean. In the sea's ceaseless energy and yet fastness my tumultuous and finite inner self finds, in temporal diminution, the reflection and perspective of the Father's eternity, universality, and infinity. On these occasions I am often reminded of the opening refrains, only half remembered, of an old mariner's prayer which goes, "Oh, Lord! The sea is so vast and my ship is so frail..." The sea to me is an earthly symbol of the Father's vast and far flung creation and yet I can sit in the face of that vastness and feel his presence near me and in me. The experience of that presence reminds me of yet other words, the words of Jesus. He said, "In preaching the gospel of the kingdom, you are simply teaching friendship with God." (Page 1766) In attempting to describe the indescribable, a man's individual relationship with God, these words, more than any I have found or thought, describe the profound closeness I feel with God. I feel I share friendship with God, the Father!
- * A Divine counselor speaking to us on Page 28 of the URANTIA Book says, "Notwithstanding that God is an eternal power, a majestic presence, a transcendent ideal, and a glorious spirit, though he is all these and infinitely more, nonetheless, he is truly and everlastingly a perfect Creator personality, a person who can 'know and be known,' who can 'love and be loved,' and who can befriend us; while you can be known, as other humans have been known, as the friend of God."
- Friendship with God, intimate personality association between mortal man and his spiritual Father, is a fundamental prerequisite for universe progression, ascension, and growth. Fellowship is the pattern of the universe in associations between personalities. Human fellowship is a finite reflection of divine associations. On page 1228 we are told, "All mortal concepts of reality are based on the assumption of the actuality of human personality; all concepts of superhuman realities are based on the experience of the human personality with and in the cosmic realities of certain associated spiritual entities and divine personalities. Everything nonspiritual in human experience, excepting personality, is a means to an end. Every true relationship of mortal man with other persons--human or divine--is an end in itself. And such fellowship with the personality of Deity is the eternal goal of universe ascension."
- * And on page 1235 it is written: "...much of material experience will pass away as onetime scaffolding which, having bridged you over to the morontia level, no longer serves a purpose in the universe. But personality and the relationships between personalities are never scaffolding; mortal memory of personality relationships has cosmic value and will persist. On the mansion worlds you will know and be known, and more, you will remember, and be remembered by, your onetime associates in the short but intriguing life on URANTIA."

* How tremendous! How exciting! Even our human personality associations have
 * "cosmic value" (1235:4); and personality association with the Father "is the eternal
 * goal of universe ascension." (1228:3) The true excitement rests in the fact that a
 mere mortal can experience a relationship so close, it can be called friendship,
 with God, the infinite creator and upholder of reality. What must develop from this
 association, this fellowship? Let us again turn to Jesus for our insight. He said,
 "Ganid, no man is a stranger to one who knows God. In the experience of finding
 the Father in heaven you discover that all men are your brothers, . . . to become
 acquainted with one's brothers and sisters, to know their problems and to learn to
 * love them, is the supreme experience of living." (page 1431)

In Jesus' relationship with his apostles we discover that in the ultimate challenge, in
 the face of apparently certain defeat, his friendship with them held their loyalty to
 him. "Real men simply could not actually desert a revered teacher who had lived so
 close to them and had been so devoted to them as had Jesus. Through the dark hours
 of the Master's death, in the hearts of these apostles all reason, judgment and logic
 were set aside in deference to just one extraordinary human emotion--the supreme
 sentiment of friendship-loyalty. These five months of work with Jesus led these
 apostles, each one of them, to regard him as the best friend he had in the world.
 And it was this human sentiment, and not his superb teachings or marvelous doings,
 that held them together until after the resurrection and the renewal of the proclama-
 * tion of the gospel of the kingdom." (page 1546)

The life of Jesus is the consummate expression we have available to us of mortal
 friendship with God and Divine friendship with man. "Jesus did not live his life on
 earth in order to set an example for all other human beings to copy. He lived this
 life in the flesh by the same mercy ministry that you all may live your lives on earth;
 and as he lived his mortal life in his day and as he was, so did he thereby set the
 example for all of us thus to live our lives in our day and as we are. You may not
 aspire to live his life, but you can resolve to live your lives even as, and by the same
 * means that, he lived his. . ." (page 1426)

The Master voyaged through his life with an ease and a charm that made it simple to
 accept his friendship and return it. "Most of the really important things which Jesus
 said or did seemed to happen casually, 'as he passed by.' There was so little of the
 professional, the well-planned, or the premeditated in the Master's earthly ministry.
 He dispensed health and scattered happiness naturally and gracefully as he journeyed
 * through life. It was literally true, 'He went about doing good.'" (page 1875:5)

Jesus admonished the apostles, and through them he admonishes us, to become so
 "truth co-ordinated" in our lives, so filled with friendship with God, so expressive
 of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, that men will come in search
 of us to discover the truth of our being. He said, "Let me emphatically state this
 eternal truth: If you, by truth co-ordination, learn to exemplify in your lives this
 beautiful wholeness of righteousness, your fellow men will then seek after you that
 they may gain what you have so acquired. The measure wherewith truth seekers are

drawn to you represents the measure of your truth endowment, your righteousness. The extent to which you have to go with your message to the people is, in a way, the measure of your failure to live the whole or righteous life, the truth co-ordinated life." (page 1726:2-3) At another point the Master says, "So conduct your lives that you make eternal friendship with the forces of righteousness in order that, when all things earthly fail, you shall be joyfully received into the eternal habitations." (page 1854)

The world is deeply in need of living expressions of friendship with God based on the life giving gospel of Jesus. "The world needs to see Jesus living again on earth in the experience of spirit-born mortals..." (page 2085:4) "The living Jesus is the only hope of a possible unification of Christianity." (page 2085) "The great hope of URANTIA lies in the possibility of a new revelation of Jesus with a new and enlarged presentation of his saving message which would spiritually unite in loving service the numerous families of his present-day professed followers." (page 2086) "What an awakening the world would experience if it could see Jesus as he really lived on earth and know, first hand, his life-giving teachings!" (page 2083)

"Religion does need new leaders, spiritual men and women who will dare to depend solely on Jesus and his incomparable teachings. If Christianity persists in neglecting its spiritual mission while it continues to busy itself with social and material problems, the spiritual renaissance must await the coming of these new teachers of Jesus' religion who will be exclusively devoted to the spiritual regeneration of men. And then will these spirit-born souls quickly supply the leadership and inspiration requisite for the social, moral, economic, and political reorganization of the world." (page 2082)

The world does indeed need living revelators, living prophets of the religion of Jesus-- living examples of the reality of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. The truth of the gospel needs to be carried to the whole world. "The hour is striking for presenting to Buddhism, to Christianity, to Hinduism, even to the peoples of all faiths, not the gospel about Jesus, but the living, spiritual reality of the gospel of Jesus." (page 1041)

In 1964, at the First Triennial Delegate Assembly of the URANTIA Brotherhood, the President of the URANTIA Brotherhood, E. L. Christiansen, better known as "Christy", said the following in her presidential address:

"It is our burden to bring life on this planet up to a new level, which we can and will do when we sincerely become imbued with the idea that we are ambassadors of a heavenly kingdom just as surely as were the twelve apostles who followed Jesus. Those twelve men were so inspired by Jesus' life and teachings that they went forth and turned the whole world upside down. I pray we will do likewise.

"During my short tenure as President of URANTIA Brotherhood I have expounded on two theses: first, that we become living prophets of the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, and second, that we remember to subordinate the URANTIA Book to the service of God.

"Perhaps we should take a moment now to listen once again to Jesus' admonition to his apostles during one of his profound discussions on religion: 'I admonish you to give up the practice of quoting the prophets of old, and instead aspire to become living prophets and spiritual heroes of the coming kingdom.' What is a prophet? Webster says a prophet is: The proclaimer of a revelation, one who speaks for another, especially for God, an inspired revealer, interpreter, or spokesman, and one whose office it is to deliver a message.

"What a message we have to deliver! We have in our hands a veritable El Dorado of riches. Only a handful of men and women on URANTIA are so fortunate, so privileged, as we are.

"I am not too much interested in the number of URANTIA Books you dis-
 pense, but I am tremendously interested in the souls you will lead into the kingdom by your own proclamation of the dynamic truths about God and his universe which Jesus has revealed to you; in how you are feeding the hungry souls that you meet 'as you pass by.'

"To emphasize my point I want to paraphrase a statement made by our first President in his report to the Brotherhood at the end of his three-year tenure: We must be careful not to confuse primary and secondary loyalties. Our primary spiritual loyalty is to the Universal Father, and to him alone. When we encounter some spiritually hungry brother our first objective is to bring him closer to his heavenly Father. This we may attempt to do with or without the book. All things are secondary and subordinate to the acquisition of this one prize: the realization of sonship with God. The book itself is not an end; it is a most important means to an end. If the URANTIA Book becomes mandatory in our ministry, then we have truly subordinated to it our first and primary objective and purpose, as URANTIANS, which is: the service of God."

If we URANTIANS truly are friends of God, living exponents of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, prophets and revealers in our lives of the Father's love and mercy, then surely we must share our living faith experience through loving service with our fellows. The corollary of friendship with God is friendship with our fellow mortals. "And it will not be so much by the words you speak as by the lives you live that men will know you have been with me and have learned of the realities of the kingdom." (page 1569) "And it behooves the Master's followers in all ages to learn to minister as 'they pass by'--to do unselfish good as they go about their daily duties." (page 1875)

"You cannot truly love your fellows by a mere act of the will. Love is only born of throughgoing understanding of your neighbor's motives and sentiments. It is not so important to love all men today as it is that each day you learn to love one more human being. If each day or each week you achieve an understanding of one more of your fellows, and if this is the limit of your ability, then you are certainly socializing and truly spiritualizing your personality. Love is infectious, and when human devotion is intelligent and wise, love is more catching than hate. But only genuine and unselfish love is truly contagious. If each mortal could only become a focus of dynamic

* affection, this benign virus of love would soon pervade the sentimental emotion-stream of humanity to such an extent that all civilization would be encompassed by love, and that would be the realization of the brotherhood of man." (page 1098)

* We URANTIANS have an incredible challenge before us. We are challenged to so live that as we journey through life we are living examples of friendship-loyalty to God and loving-service friends to our brethren. Each one of us who is so faith motivated as to be a friend of God is important, for we, each in our own way and in our own time, are extending the kingdom of God in the hearts of men. The people of the world need and languish for the living truth we can lovingly and selflessly share with them. Said Jesus, "You know, Ganid, most human beings are like the lost child. They spend much of their time crying in fear and suffering in sorrow when, in very truth, they are but a short distance from safety and security... And all those who know God should esteem it a privilege, not a duty, to offer guidance to their fellows in their efforts to find the satisfactions of living. Did we not supremely enjoy this ministry of restoring the child to his mother? So do those who lead men to God experience the supreme satisfaction of human service." (page 1465)

* Edmund Burke once said, "All that is necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing." "As you view the world, remember that the black patches of evil which you see are shown against a white background of ultimate good." (page 2076)
 * "When there is so much good truth to publish and proclaim, why should men dwell so much upon the evil in the world just because it appears to be a fact? The beauties of the spiritual values of truth are more pleasurable and uplifting than is the phenomenon of evil." (page 2076)

* "By teaching that the kingdom is within, by exalting the individual, Jesus struck the deathblow of the old society in that he ushered in the new dispensation of true social righteousness. The new order of society the world has little known because it has refused to practice the principles of the gospel of the kingdom of heaven. And when this kingdom of spiritual pre-eminence does come upon the earth, it will not be manifested in mere improved social and material conditions, but rather in the glories of those enhanced and enriched spiritual values which are characteristic of the approaching age of improved human relations and advancing spiritual attainments." (page 1862)

Considering the challenge before us to begin the creation of a "new order of society" based on the gospel of Jesus, I have often reflected on my personal experience of several years in Southeast Asia. I have become acutely aware through that experience of a spiritual vacuum which is slowly opening up in the world, particularly in the part known as the "Third World", the technologically underdeveloped world. The past dies hard and of those elements of the past which die hardest, fossilized, tradition incrustated, and ecclesiastically authoritarian institutionalized religion is perhaps the last. Due to social, economic, and political upheaval the grip of the past is being broken and institutionalized religion as part of that past is receding as an effective element in much of the world's life. The past is far from gone. Most of history

seems a rearguard action against change. Our times are no different, if anything the element of undiminished and ever-increasing change causes people, to hang ever more rigorously on to the past in general and religion specifically.

In much of the world where this spiritual vacuum is appearing, Christianity has proved ineffective because it has functioned as an institutionalized social organization encased in Western Civilization's cultural preconceptions and not as the visible social outworking of a living spiritual brotherhood based on the individual mortal's faith relationship with the Father. As an URANTIAN I have often pondered how we might approach these peoples with our saving message, how we who are their spiritual brothers and yet who are so culturally different, might extend to them the living truths of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man.

* In reflecting upon this question, I have turned to the section of the book entitled "The Nature of Cultism" on pages 965 and 966. This section has proved a source of insight and thoughtful consideration for me on this point. I would like to quote what I conceive to be important passages from that section.

* "Regardless of the drawbacks and handicaps, every new revelation of truth has given rise to a new cult, and even the restatement of the religion of Jesus must develop a new and appropriate symbolism. Modern man must find some adequate symbolism for his new and expanding ideas, ideals, and loyalties. This enhanced symbol must arise out of religious living, spiritual experience. And this higher symbolism of a higher civilization must be predicated on the concept of the Fatherhood of God and be pregnant with the mighty ideal of the brotherhood of man."

* "No cult can endure and contribute to the progress of social civilization and individual spiritual attainment unless it is based on the biologic, sociologic, and religious significance of the home."

Before considering the above passages, it might be wise to pause a moment and develop a concept of the cult. In the popular mind the cult is synonymous with the word sect. A sect is a religious denomination. On page 966, the cult is characterized as "a symbolism of rituals, slogans, or goals." Significantly the cult is described on page 965 as having emerged "out of the traditions of 'old families'..." and we are informed that "all families have a cult of some sort." Also, on page 965, the cult is stated to be a "type of social organization" which "persisted because it provided a symbolism for the preservation and stimulation of moral sentiments and religious loyalties." A cult then is a social organization, which sprang up out of the family and is based on the family, and which perpetuates a symbolism which can preserve and stimulate "moral sentiments and religious loyalties." We are further informed on page 966 that a cult "will not function if it is too complex." So, a cult to be effective, must remain at a relatively simple social level while a sect often represents a more formally complex sociological association for religious purposes.

Now, having gathered some illumination on the definition of a cult for our purposes, let us consider the cult as a possible social mechanism for the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus. A most significant statement concerning the cult is that it must be

* "based on the biologic, sociologic, and religious significance of the home." "Jesus desired to substitute for the idea of the kingdom, king, and subjects, the concept of the heavenly family, the heavenly Father, and the liberated sons of God engaged in joyful and voluntary service to their fellow men and in the sublime and intelligent

* worship of God the Father." (page 1860) "The family occupied the very center of Jesus' philosophy of life--here and hereafter. He based his teachings about God on the family,..." (page 1581) "Almost everything of lasting value in civilization has

* its roots in the family." (page 765) "He (Jesus) taught that the religion of the kingdom is a genuine personal experience which no man can contain within himself; that the consciousness of being a member of a family of believers leads inevitably to the practice of the precepts of the family conduct, the service of one's brothers and

* sisters in the effort to enhance and enlarge the brotherhood." (page 1862) "The religion of the kingdom is personal, individual; the fruits, the results, are familial,

* social." (page 1862)

Nuclear family life, two parents--male and female with children, is the basic sociologic unit throughout most of the world. Few of URANTIA's peoples are unaware of or beyond the experience of family life. My experience in Southeast Asia confirmed for me, regardless of cultural differences, I could recognize and appreciate familial life as my brethren lived it there.

It would seem to me that the passages on cult combined with Jesus' concept of the kingdom indicate the family as a sociologic unit has powerful possibilities as an avenue of ministry for the gospel of the kingdom. The family is recognizable everywhere regardless of cultural difference. One of the main blocks to the spread of the attenuated gospel of Jesus in Christianity has been Christianity-deep identification with Western cultural conceptions. By allowing the gospel to move through family units rather than a social organization, as institutionalized Christianity is, the gospel would spread without the cultural impediments that held it back in its Christian form. I am not advocating missionary family units but rather a natural evolutionary growth spread as one family unit composed of faith born son and daughters seeks fellowship and gives loving service to other families.

My concept of the family as a nucleus for the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus is just that--a concept. It does seem a noble possibility. What a remarkable picture, to see the world changed in coming generations by families composed of God knowing men and women who ask only to serve their fellows in selfless loving devotion. Truly would the world be seeing the living revelation of the gospel of Jesus, the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, brought forth in the lives of men and women who could be called the friends of God, the Father.