

RELATIONSHIPS TO WORLD RELIGIONS

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INTRODUCTION

We are beginning a new discussion today -- whether The URANTIA Book should be systematically introduced to organized religion, Christianity, in particular. This discussion will be going on for a long time; nothing will be settled today.

Ask yourselves some questions: Do you think, as some people believe, that it is premature to introduce The URANTIA Book directly to world religions? Do we know enough about the doctrines in those religions that might preclude acceptance of the teachings of the book? Is there a conservative trend in religion today that might mitigate against acceptance of ideas that could seem to many to be cultist? What are the risks to the book and to the movement of more of a public push of the book?

From time to time the people at URANTIA Brotherhood and URANTIA Foundation review their policies. This usually happens when someone questions them. Often a challenge comes from someone who feels he has greater experience in a certain field than the people who conduct the day-to-day affairs of the Brotherhood and Foundation.

I am not sure that it would be proper to characterize what the Brotherhood does as policy. More properly, it could be said that when people ask for advice, we offer recommendations and make suggestions. We'd like to think of it as experiential wisdom, but sometimes its just precedence that nobody's argued with lately.

I would like to emphasize that we really don't want to be encumbered with lots of policies. This is especially true when it comes to establishing guidelines having to do with how we relate to individuals and other religious groups. By "we", I mean "we" as URANTIA Book readers and "we" as the official URANTIA organizations.

However, I must separate these two relationships -- those of URANTIA Book readers and those of the organizations -- from the personal spiritual fellowship of one God-knowing human being with another. We would never presume to issue guidelines on spiritual relationships. The URANTIA Book offers ample guidance which everyone will search out for himself.

It is within our province to bring out for discussion how the revelation itself will enter the mainstream of religious thought on this planet. How this will occur will be a major topic among URANTIA Book readers in the years to come.

I will review what are, I believe, the commonly accepted ways of proceeding, and the rationale behind them. These are the longstanding philosophies concerning the promulgation of the book and its teachings, as they relate to world religions and religionists.

I am taking the position of advocate of these so-called policies. They have been reviewed by certain members of the Board of Trustees of URANTIA Foundation and by two officers of URANTIA Brotherhood. They are not sacred; they are not rigid for all time. We think they are sensible and could go on for a long time. But, perhaps the time has come to modify them, or improve upon them. Please feel free to contribute your ideas and experiences.

(Certain portions of the speeches given at the 1979 Workshops of URANTIA Brotherhood are being cited throughout this presentation. The names and paragraph numbers refer a 5-page paper distributed at the 1980 Fraternal Committee Workshops at Lake Forest, Illinois, Excerpts of 1979 Workshops.)

ADVERTISING POLICY

First, in the early days it was decided that The URANTIA Book would not be publicly announced to the world upon publication in 1955, nor has it ever been promoted by the Foundation or Brotherhood since. It was not intended that The URANTIA Book and its teaching would never be known to the world. It was simply a question of when and how. Early on, it was believed that it was much wiser to build up -- quietly -- a broad base of students and believers -- people who were fully convinced of the authenticity of the revelation. With enough people we might be better able to withstand controversy engendered from outside sources.

(See Thomas A. Kendall, Yesterday, Today, and Our Future, Paragraph #1.)

The matter of how we could be perceived negatively by established religions was brought out by both Jeff Wattles and Bettina Gray last August. First Bettina:

(See Bettina Gray, Spirit of Urmia -- Sharing Religious Experiences, Paragraph #6.)

(See Jeffrey Wattles, Parallel and Divergent Concepts in World Religions, Paragraph #2.)

The question for us today is, should we continue our low profile activities of quietly organizing study groups -- thousands of groups; of training teachers and leaders; of not publicly announcing our conferences and workshops; and most of all, not advertising The URANTIA Book? Is this still a valid program? Do you believe that we now have the broad base of believers that we did not have 25 years ago?

THE PERSON-TO-PERSON APPROACH

In the absence of a public proclamation or a promotional drive, it was believed that the best way of introducing this wonderful new revelation to the world was by means of the person-to-person approach. We were all to try to reach the people who were ready for it. Naturally, it was assumed that the people who were ready for it would most likely be religious people, the churches and their members.

At first a program of introducing the book to the Christian churches was actively promoted. Very soon, however, URANTIA Book enthusiasts were asked to refrain from efforts to proselytize the members. A few were even urged to resign their memberships in churches. Some of the churches responded defensively: The URANTIA Book was portrayed as the work of the devil, or as communist-inspired -- both sure-fire turn-offs. But when some of our own Societies and study group were visited by cultists and became the targets of efforts to convert our members to their group, it was evident that it was just plain bad manners to go into an existing church with the intention of changing their teachings. We began to counsel readers to seek for people who were looking for alternatives to conventional religions, and to leave the churches alone.

Nevertheless, I would guess that a very large number of URANTIA Book readers are convinced that the goal of everyone who approaches a church-going Christian should be to convert him to The URANTIA Book. I suspect that they think that every conversation with a clergyman should lead to an introduction to the book, with the hope that he will espouse the teachings, bootleg them in his sermons, sway his congregation, convert his fellow ministers, rewrite the Sunday School curriculum -- in short, turn the entire Christian world upside down. All in one generation.

Marvin Gawryn, in his address last year outlined his approach to an individual who is already happily engaged in organized religious pursuits:

(See Marvin Gawryn, Communicating a Spiritual Image of The URANTIA Book, Paragraph #1.)

Harry McMullan emphasized a similar thought about doctrinal debates:

(See Harry McMullan, A Positive Approach to Fundamentalists, Paragraph #6.)

Marvin's objective is to know other religionists and to share religious experience, not with any thought of luring people away from their churches. We are not to be spiritual scalp-hunters. Bettina Gray suggested we purify our own motives in dealings with other religionists:

(See Bettina Gray, Par. #2., and URANTIA Book, Page 1130, Lines 8-12.)

Well, you might ask, didn't Jesus approach the religious leaders of Rome with the purpose of laying the groundwork for the later acceptance of his own teachings?

(See Tom Kendall, Par. #2)

How often do we take the time to determine whether a religionist is "tradition bound" before we mention The URANTIA Book? How often do we really get to know the spiritual longings of a priest or minister before we jump in with the whole system of thought that is The URANTIA Book? No wonder our success rate has been so poor! Any wonder they recoil from our exploitative zeal!

Shortly after publication many books were sent by individuals to prominent theologians and to ministers. Many more have been sent since that time -- paid for by individuals and mailed from 533 Diversey with introductory brochures and a covering letter. The Brotherhood has not encouraged the program. In fact, it usually tries to discourage the sending of unsolicited URANTIA Books to anyone in positions of leadership. Positive response has been virtually non-existent. The books are seldom acknowledged, occasionally returned, and sometimes they turn up in used book stores. The personal element -- the give and take -- the human warmth -- is missing in this approach.

When you encounter someone who is in serious spiritual or emotional difficulty, is it compassionate to hand him a brochure, or even The URANTIA Book, with the instruction to "Read this."? To my mind, that is not personal ministry! That is trying to make a piece of paper, even a 2000 page book, do your talking for you.

(See Barbara N. Kulieke, Publications of a Religious Organization, Paragraph #5)

READINESS FOR THE REVELATION

All along we have been convinced that this revelation was sent long before the planet as a whole was ready for it. There may well be wars and ideological upheavals that will distract mankind from the pursuit of spiritual truth for many more generations. One of our most important responsibilities in the spread of The URANTIA Book is to recognize the readiness for its teachings. Concerning Hinduism, Jeff Wattles said:

(See Jeff Wattles, Par. #1 & 2 & 4.)

Ask yourself if the Islamic religion would be open to many of the teachings of The URANTIA Book,

(See Jeff Wattles, Par. 8.)

We were delighted to learn that the Baha'i faith accepts

Jesus as well as the teachings of Baha'u'llah, until we found, as Scott Forsythe pointed out:

(See Scott Forsythe, A Survey of Significant Sects and Cults, Paragraph #9.)

I was fascinated by a survey taken by Better Homes and Gardens Magazine in September and October, 1977. The results were published in June, 1978. The title of the survey was, What's Happening to the American Family? A very large number of readers responded. 302,602 families were represented in the results. Religion generated more comments from readers than did any other subject. 61% of the respondents think it is important to attend church. 59% believe that the church should not limit itself to concerns about spiritual needs.

What did the other 39-41% -- the minority -- say? They think that the churches should limit their concerns to spiritual needs. One person wrote in to say, "I think the church lost something when it tried to become all things to all people." Respondents complained about the church's emphasis on sports, pageants, fund-raising dinners, clubs, guilds -- everything except religion. Among those in the 39-41% category, they didn't necessarily equate church-going with religion. They attach a much lower priority to attending formal worship services. Some indicated that they worship in their own ways.

It would appear to me that if there is a significant segment of the population -- 59-61% in the first group -- of a large civilized country that is perfectly satisfied with things as they are, we shouldn't go out of our way to upset their stability.

As you look about you every day, do you think that the world at large could give the 5th Epochal Revelation an unprejudiced evaluation? Most of the people on this planet are probably not ready to read The URANTIA Book; wouldn't read it even if they knew what it was. But it doesn't mean that they aren't spiritual or that they don't know and love God. It may simply mean that they don't want to read The URANTIA Book.

The question is, how do we find the people who are ready for spiritual enlightenment and advanced revealed truth? Should we look for them in the churches where the members are either satisfied, or only mildly dissatisfied, with the truth content? Should we approach the church leaders, who themselves might be searching for something more -- the professional religionists -- who in turn could influence spiritual and intellectual teachings in the church? Or should we simply continue to plow our own fields, finding adherents from among the organizationally non-aligned?

The time between its arrival and the later acceptance of The URANTIA Book is being put to good use. Unlike 25 years ago virtually anyone who is actively searching for new truth today can find The URANTIA Book. Any person who is not quite satisfied with the religious doctrines of the contemporary

world can tune into one of several channels that will eventually lead him to the book. It is happening all the time. People are finding it in libraries and bookstores. The URANTIA Book has been mentioned in unorthodox literature, although admittedly, not always in a favorable light. Quite a number of people are engaged in public programs where they present the basic teachings of the book in an intriguing format, without ever mentioning the name of the book as the source of their inspiration, and without quoting from, or paraphrasing, the book. Truth is metered out in portions that are assimilated readily by a hungry world. Martin Myers described the Brotherhood's relationship to some of these groups in his address last August:

(Martin W. Myers, URANTIA Brotherhood: Possibilities for Significant Planetary Service, Paragraph #2.)

As concerns readiness, there are many possible ways to facilitate it: We could go actively hunting for those who are ready for The URANTIA Book. We could step up our programs -- libraries and bookstores -- to make The URANTIA Book itself more accessible to religious seekers. Or we could contrive to set out more lures to bring inquirers to our doors. Readiness can either be manipulated, or it can just be allowed to happen naturally.

WE ARE NOT A SEPARATE RELIGION

We ought always to clarify our status as a religious entity. We have always said that we do not want to become a separate organized religion. As Martin Myers implied, we are indeed unusual:

(See Martin Myers, Par. # 1.)

Because of the fact that one third of The URANTIA Book is comprised of the life and teachings of Jesus, the probability exists, as Jeff Wattles predicts, we will be seen as a sect of Christianity by followers of the many world religions. Most of the current readers of the book are also Christians, or hail from a Christian background. We note that some of our groups have already begun to adopt traditional Christian activities, such as celebrating Christmas, formal and organized prayers, and a structured Remembrance Service. This is not said with any intention of prohibiting these things, but rather that we become aware of what we are doing, and can think about the effect these activities have on persons coming from non-Christian backgrounds.

(Read Page 206h, Lines 7-18) Comment on the early days of the spread of the gospel of Jesus.

Last August Tom included a similar reminder, one that has been written many times in letters from headquarters: "The best hope of spreading the teachings to the greatest number of people is to keep them free from any apparent connection with any one religious group. To identify The

URANTIA Book with any one system of thought will close the doors of acceptance to those holding opposing views."

If we can avoid identifying ourselves as neo-Christians, we may succeed in minimizing the development of a sectarian image to other religionists.

(See Bettina Gray, Par. #1.)

Many of our people think that it is only a matter of time before we will indeed become a true separate religion. Some believe it has already happened. We can just as easily institutionalize ourselves by looking inward instead of looking outward: by devoting so much time and attention to the work of administering the various organizations and their projects, that there is no time for personal ministry to our fellow human beings.

(See Scott Forsythe, Par. 5 on the Mormons.)

(I am including a portion of a speech by K. David Schlundt, Comparing and Contrasting of URANTIA Book Teachings and Current Christianity, given in Indianapolis, IN, 6/10/79. I have used his remarks with his permission several times.)

"When we identify ourselves as members of URANTIA Brotherhood or a URANTIA Society we become part of an institution. Institutions cannot love. Only people love. Institutions evolve slowly. Individuals evolve rapidly. Institutions put up a wall between themselves. Institutions, and sometimes churches, are a refuge for the insecure. When we try to interface with an institution as an institution, there is little flexibility. I don't think we were meant to interface with institutions: I think we were meant to interface with persons. Each person is like a grain of yeast. Many grains of yeast can change the face of evolution on this planet. Jesus never tried to penetrate the temple. Nicodemus came to Jesus, not the other way around. Jesus always approached religious leaders on the personal level, never on the official level. Hunger not for institutional religion!"

Fortunately, we have shunted aside one of the most common means of institutionalization, the practice of rendering official interpretations of the sacred books. Tom Kendall outlined the prevailing philosophy on interpretations of the meanings of The URANTIA Book:

(See Tom Kendall, Par. 3.)

(Presented at the Workshops of URANTIA Brotherhood, Wednesday, August 6, 1980. The foregoing remarks do not in any way represent an official statement. They are solely my own expression and opinion. They were reviewed by others and found not to be inconsistent with their own thinking.)