

Eric Schaveland and Kristen Maaherra were sued after displaying the Banner of Michael, shown here, on the Internet. The couple says they've exhausted their finances in a battle against the Urantia church, which sued claiming the couple violated its copyright.

Ken Papaleo
Rocky Mountain News



Earthlings feud for cyber-rights

Urantia Foundation wages war on couple who put "celestial" writings on Internet

By Sue Lindsay

Rocky Mountain News Staff Writer

The Jamestown couple just wanted to publish an Internet index to the Urantia Book, a mammoth tome that details the teachings of their alternative religion.

But Eric Schaveland and Kristen Maaherra soon found themselves in a legal fight with the Chicago-based Urantia Foundation.

The foundation last year slapped them with a lawsuit alleging copyright and trademark infringement.

It's an unusual case that focuses on the legality of publishing celestial teachings in cyberspace. It's

being decided in the terrestrial domain of Colorado's U.S. District Court.

Schaveland and Maaherra argue that religious teachings given to earthlings by heavenly beings — the main belief of Urantians — can't be copyrighted.

But the Urantia Foundation contends it must protect its ownership of the book.

Battling this lawsuit and an earlier one in Arizona has brought the couple to the brink of poverty.

Unable to pay their lawyer, the two will represent themselves when they go to Denver federal court Monday for a hearing in the case.

"We've been in a firefight for 6½ years," Maaherra said. "We don't have time for much else."

Schaveland and Maaherra and their 15-year-old son live simply in their rustic mountain cabin in northern Boulder County with two goats, one dog and one cat.

There's an outhouse out back.

The cabin overflows with books and computer equipment. They sleep in a nearby greenhouse, where they can see the stars.

"We're totally bankrupt," Maaherra said. "It's cost us a lot. It's cost us everything. Everything we could get our hands on has gone to pay for legal costs."

Schaveland works as a mason, but more times than not his wages are used to pay for copies of depositions, he said.

"It takes a lot of creativity away," Schaveland said. "There's always a court date or a brief to respond to. It's hard to have a normal life."

"It keeps us at poverty level and keeps us distracted from what we'd really like to be doing."

Maaherra, during an interview at the couple's cabin Thursday, heaved a copy of the formidable book onto the sofa.

"Here are the Urantia Papers,"

she said. "It contains more than 2,000 pages of revealed truth. It's philosophy, cosmology — it's complicated stuff."

Believers say the Urantia Papers were channeled by superhuman, extraterrestrial beings to a group in Chicago over a 20-year period until 1935. Earth is called Urantia by these beings.

The 196 "papers" in the Urantia Book, first published in 1955, describe the history of the planet and universe as seen from the perspective of beings from another world.

Believers view Jesus as just one son of God. They believe Jesus was sent to form and rule this universe. Humans are evolving beings destined to become angelic spirits as they ascend through different stages of enlightenment.

"It was our dream to create an index to the Urantia Papers that could be used as a study aid,"

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