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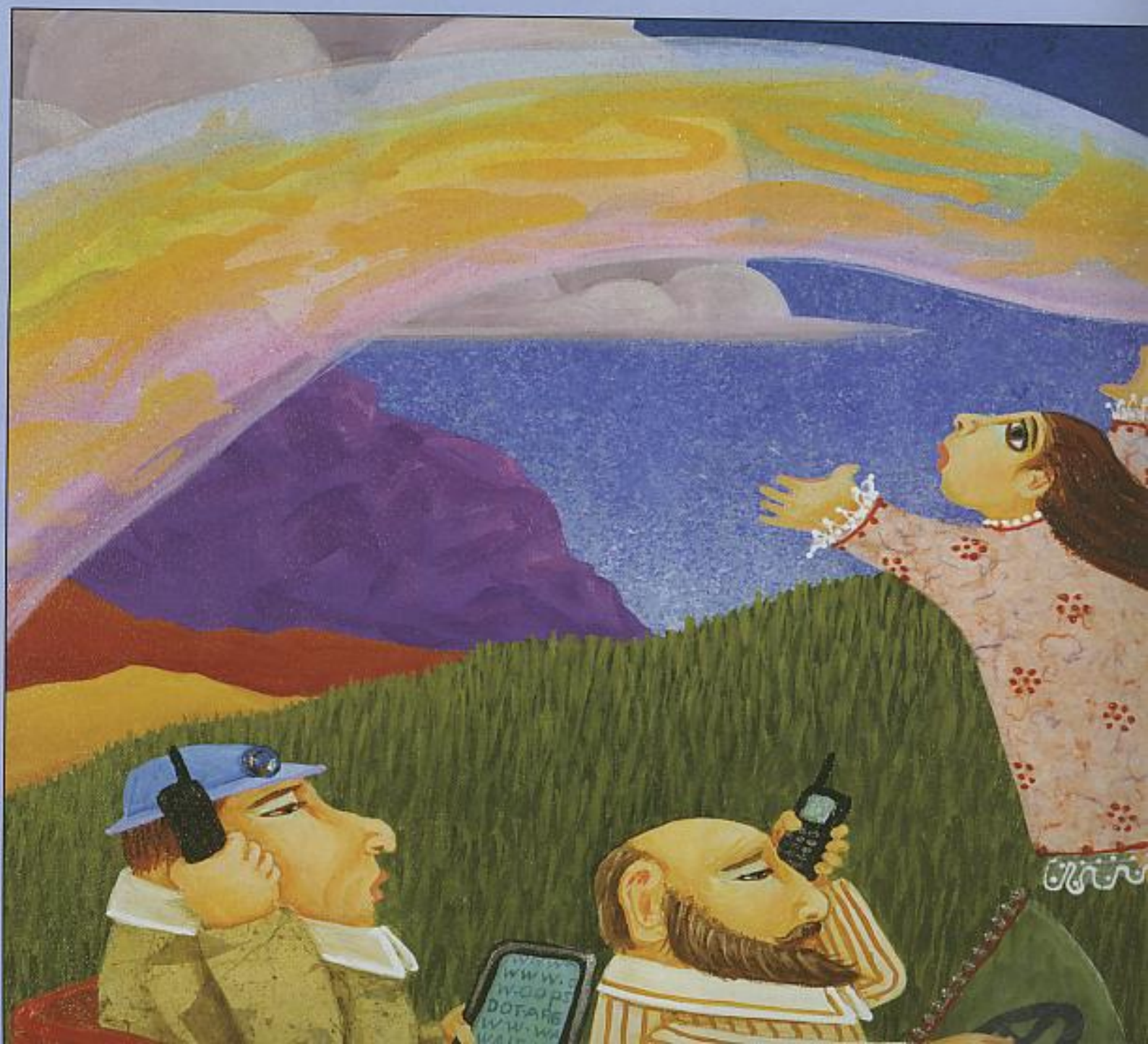
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CHALLENGING THE BIBLE

An interview with
Bishop John Shelby Spong

EXPLORE THE URANTIA BOOK, NATURAL HORMONE BALANCING and ADJUSTING TO DIVORCE

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menopause, as well as chronic or degenerative diseases are inevitable. However, that being said, a 30- or 40-year-old shouldn't be chronically fatigued, stressed out, depressed or totally uninterested in sex. Likewise, while a 70- or 80-year-old may not enjoy the bloom of youth, he or she needn't to be confined to a recliner and a bedpan.

When it comes to hormones and health, there's a spectrum of possibilities ranging from unrealistic expectations to futile resignation. Using human growth hormone when you're 75 in an attempt to take up Olympic ski jumping may lean towards the unrealistic side. On the other hand, struggling through menopause or midlife weight gain isn't necessary either. Sometimes the smallest changes in lifestyle can balance hormones and create harmony in the body. In other words, put a world-class violinist in a middle school orchestra and you

Please see HORMONES on page 26

one again: sting to divorce

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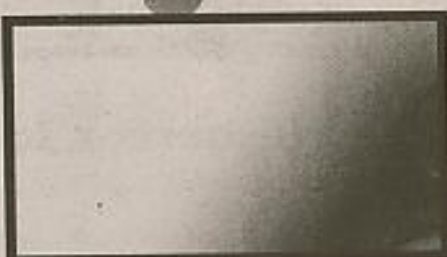
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make adjusting to divorce a little quicker, and maybe less painful—and maybe experience something better than mere accommodation. This story is about what happens after you've worked out a system to handle children and money, set up separate households, gotten used to living with the slight stigma that still attaches to divorce, finalized the legal proceedings, and are ready to stop thinking about yourself as part of a couple or one side in a war. It's about the moment when you're ready to say, "What must I undertake to be the person I want to be now?" with-

Please see DIVORCE on page 26



Uncovering Urantia: What would Jesus say?

BY ROZ BROWN

If you're like me and enjoy reading what various religions are all about, you too are probably mystified as to why the Christian-based *Urantia Book* is vilified by many calling themselves Christians.

The Urantia Book was written by an anonymous author in Chicago between 1934 and 1955. Its first chapter was printed in 1950. More on the Book's history below.

It's true that *The Urantia Book* does take exception to some of what is written in the Bible, but overall the message is about the teachings of Jesus. Wouldn't Christians consider that a complementary message? Apparently not.

"*The Urantia Book* may be one of Satan's greatest masterpieces of deception," writes an anonymous author at www.creationists.org. In all fairness, many of the harshest critics of Urantia would be considered fringe themselves—especially since, of all the other current world religions, Urantia's teachings are most consistent with the teachings of Christianity.

"Urantia was a holistic approach to the evolution of our physical and mental states before the word 'holistic' ever became popular," says Paula Thompson, director of the Boulder-based Jesusonian Foundation, a non-profit religious foundation that promotes Urantia. "Urantia gives us back the human Jesus who was both a man and a God; he touched people in real ways."

Thompson's advocacy is linked to the core of Urantia theology, that it is a religion of Jesus rather than a religion about Jesus. And that is at the core of what bothers traditional Christians. They take offense that Urantia suggests that the Bible "got it wrong."

Please see URANTIA on page 28

What is Urantia?

Urantia skeptics typically latch onto its origins and history to support their criticisms. The book originated in Chicago between 1934 and 1955. Its contents are attributed to transmissions from an unnamed man who appeared to speak on behalf of super-mortal personalities, according to the psychiatrist who examined him, a Dr. William S. Sadler.

Sadler and the others initially involved in the Urantia movement claimed that the papers "physically materialized" and insisted the transmissions did not involve spiritualism, channeling or automatic writing. He said that no human person wrote any of the text used in the book. The teachings in *The Urantia Book* cover the origin of the universe, planet Earth, science, evolution, history, philosophy, religion, destiny and an in-depth portrait of God.

The word Urantia is defined as the name of the planet Earth, and a Urantian is someone who reads the book. After compiling the materials, Sadler organized a group called The Forum to review and discuss the materials. In 1950, the Urantia

For more information about Urantia, see the following resources:

- *The Urantia Book* (Urantia Foundation, 1999)
- *The Center Within: Lessons from the Heart of the Urantia Revelation*, by Byron Belitso and Fred Harris (Origin Press, 1998)
- *An Introduction to the Urantia Revelation*, by David Bradley (White Egret Publications, 2002)
- www.truthbook.com
- www.ubfellowship.com/rmsf
- www.uran-tia-iaa.org
- www.uran-tia.org

To attend an introductory meeting about Urantia or join a newly forming Readers Group, call Ruth or Stan Hartman at 303-440-4115.

Foundation was established and the first book was published in 1950. Since then, nearly half a million copies have been sold in English, and the book has been translated into French, Spanish, Finnish, Russian, Dutch and Korean.

The Urantia Book is a total of 2,097 pages, including a Forward and 196 papers, divided into four parts:
Part I: The Central and Superuniverses
Part II: The Local Universe
Part III: The History of Urantia
Part IV: The Life and Teachings of Jesus

The book comes under scrutiny by Christians and others because many of its concepts, said to be transmissions from spiritual beings, have been traced to earlier works and to very human authors, including scientists and early Seventh-Day Adventists teachers.

Mike Oppenheimer, founder of Let Us Reason Ministries, says Urantia is nothing more than a cult and likens it to Jehovah's Witness and Mormon theology. Oppenheimer says he dabbled in all sorts of "new age" religious movements before he was "saved" and

returned to traditional beliefs based on the Bible.

"The Urantia Book is nothing less than new age Gnostic enlightenment with a space age twist," Oppenheimer writes on his website, www.letusreason.org. "It attracts the pride of man." In his view, the book offers no authoritative truth, but only truth measured by its subjective effect on any given individual.

And yet, authoritative truth is exactly what Mo Siegel derived from the book more than 30 years ago. Siegel is Colorado's famous tea maker, the co-founder of Celestial Seasonings and Chairman of the Jesusonian Foundation. He first read *The Urantia Book* in the late '60s, and he talks passionately about his discovery.

"There's nothing like experience to transform your life, and this book transformed mine," he says. "I spent two years in a Catholic monastery and consider myself a 'spiritual adventurer.' But when I found *The Urantia Book*, particularly Part IV on the teachings of Jesus, there was no turning back. It's like seeing and knowing Jesus in 3D."

Finding Jesus

Part IV is often what's examined

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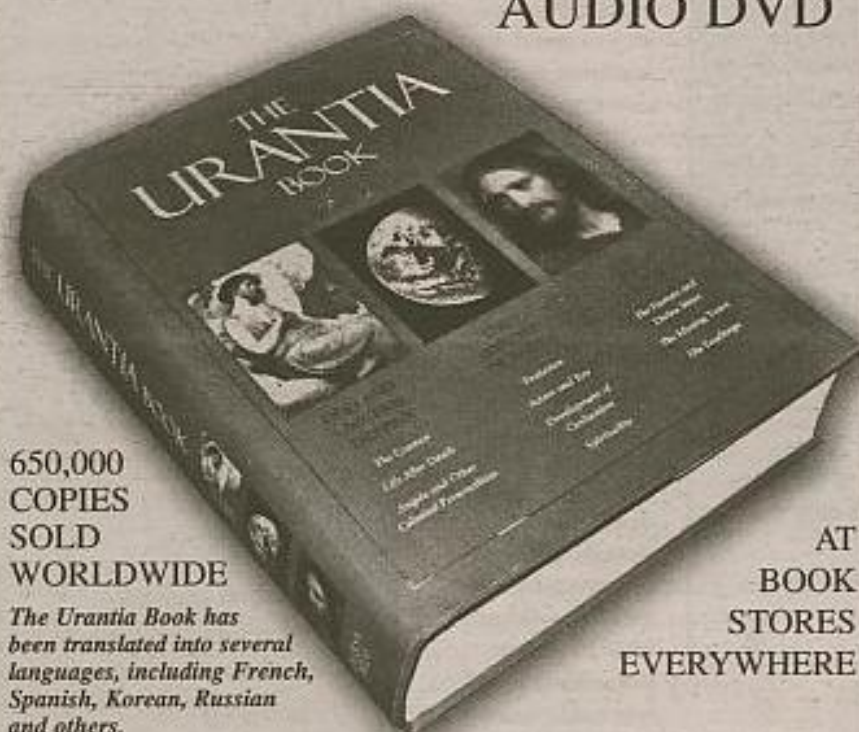
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URANTIA

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the most, or even exclusively by Urantia study groups. To be clear, Urantia is not considered a "complete" religion. In other words, it does not have a clergy, a creed or rules of behavior to follow. Study groups, including the 500 Colorado members, meet weekly, at homes or church facilities. Either the complete *Urantia Book* is read sequentially, or Part IV, The Life and Teachings of Jesus, is read sequentially. The Rocky Mountain Spiritual Fellowship also has quarterly social get-togethers, but for the most part formal gatherings are characterized as a time for service and study.

"For a spiritual seeker like myself," says Thompson, "Part IV shows us the encounters Jesus had with people, how he treated them and how we're supposed to treat each other. He shows us that relationship with others is our purpose. Jesus said, 'Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth.' In other words, always remember that the only thing we take with us is the quality of the relationships we've created."

The book and words used by its followers sound like Christian theology and, in fact, readership is mostly Christian, but also involves many Jews, Muslims and other theists. One notable difference between the Urantia teachings and some Christian groups is that Urantians do not claim to follow the only way to God or salvation. *The Urantia Book* (paper 196, the final paper) states: "To follow

Jesus' means to personally share his religious faith and to enter into the spirit of the Master's life of unselfish service for man. One of the most important things in human living is to find out what Jesus believed, to discover his ideals, and to strive for the achievement of his exalted life purpose. Of all human knowledge, that which is of greatest value is to know the religious life of Jesus and how he lived it."

Stan Hartman of Boulder has been studying Urantia since 1969, because he says it keeps reaffirming itself in deeper ways. "Urantia is not at war with any other religion, but rather illuminates many other spiritual traditions," he says. "It lays out a path for your life that promotes a growing spiritual maturity that allows you to put the events of the world in perspective."

The book itself says: "The many religions of Urantia (the Earth) are all good to the extent that they bring man to God and bring the realization of the Father to man. It is a fallacy for any group of religionists to conceive of their creed as The Truth; such attitudes bespeak more of theological arrogance than of certainty of faith. There is not a Urantia religion that could not profitably study and assimilate the best of the truths contained in every other faith, for all contain truth. Religionists would do better to borrow the best in their neighbors' living spiritual faith rather than to denounce the worst in their lingering superstitions and outworn rituals." (92:7.3, page 1012)

The tolerance component is also

central to Siegel's admiration for Urantia. "Its comprehensive approach embraces the best in all religious views which is unprecedented in world literature. Its teachings also bring peace to the religion versus science argument which makes me think it will be the next great religion of the world."

Where waters part

The Urantia theology does, however, promote major differences from some accounts in the Bible. For example, Earth is viewed as one of 10 million inhabited worlds in our local universe, called Nebadon. Second, it does not fully agree with evolution as currently understood by scientists. Urantia purports that humans are destined to evolve and become spirit beings, called "finaliters," much like lower animals evolved into humans.

It further teaches that a fragment of God's spirit, called the "Thought Adjuster," dwells within each person to guide individuals to a spiritual understanding. Thought Adjusters are similar to conscience, or God's presence as a "divine spark," but are described as pure spiritual beings that act as a compass to elevate mortal minds to achieve a higher level of spiritual perfection.

Perhaps most objectionable to Christians, the book attempts to "correct" the account of Adam and Eve, and debunks the concept of atonement. It says people do not suffer from original sin and therefore don't need to be redeemed by the blood of Christ. Finally, the book says that Jesus proclaimed the spiritual equality

of women. (For related commentary on these points, see the interview with Bishop John Shelby Spong, page 30).

That last statement by itself is a tough sell for many Christians, who point out that women were not even allowed on the main floor of the synagogue when Jesus allegedly made the pronouncement. And for skeptics, it's more evidence that *The Urantia Book* is nothing more than delightful science fiction, historical fiction or a fantasy text. But for many followers of Urantia, like Ulrich Stachel, critics or skeptics are easily ignored. Stachel is a native of Germany who says he was not impressed with the religious introductions he was offered in either the public school system or by well-meaning people who were trying to save him from some unknown, undefined infraction, or some "sin" about which he knew nothing.

"These actions caused a life-long personal search for the truth about God, religion and how I fit in," he says. "I must say, *The Urantia Book* found me, not the other way around. I'm impressed, delighted and amazed, even after my seventh complete reading. Regardless of the question about who caused this book to be written or who transcribed it into the language of the realm, I am impressed and although not much impresses me, this book does."

Roz Brown is a regular contributor to *Nexus* on spiritual and metaphysical topics. By night she has authored two collections of ghost stories about Boulder, and by day writes about celestial mysteries for an aerospace company. ☐