



Ritchie D. Mikesell
University of Illinois
Champaign, Illinois

204 E. John Street
Champaign, Illinois
October 21, 1957

Dear Dr. Sprunger:

I was contacted by your brother (-in-law?) today about the book that you loaned me last year. I will give it to him tomorrow.

I'm very sorry about being so negligent. I saw very little of the book last spring because I was very much overworked, none at all this summer, and had just started to take an interest in it this fall. My roommate this semester is a Ph.D. candidate in the philosophy department, and we frequently have discussions together. In one of these discussions I brought the book out, and we've been using it ever since.

I'll be quite frank with you - this book has more absolute nonsense in it than any other single book I've ever seen. Furthermore, as a religious liberal who finds Christian theology almost completely untenable, this book seems especially ridiculous in that it

retains most of these old ideas, adds very unlikely new ones, and tries to pass itself off as a "new revelation".

My roommate has commented:

- 1) The parts of the book which deal with factual knowledge can be found in elementary textbooks dealing with sociology, psychology, astronomy, biology, etc. and are certainly no revelation to anyone.
- 2) The use of terminology seems to be designed to arouse emotional responses independent of cognitive meaning (where there is cognitive meaning). To be more specific, the terminology is a curious mixture of that of science fiction and of Mormon theology.
- 3) It would be interesting to know what criteria were used by you to determine the authenticity of the material in the book.

Despite this rather severe criticism of the book, I hope that you will accept my thanks for the use of a very interesting book.

Sincerely,

Ritchie Mikesell

P.S. Your stamps are enclosed.

October 23, 1957

Mr. Ritchie Mikesell
204 E. John Street
Champaign, Ill.

Dear Ritchie:

Thank you for your interesting letter; I much enjoyed your reaction to the Urantia Book. Am certainly now going to try to convince you of the worthwhileness of the Urantia Book. But to answer your question as to criteria on which I have accepted its high quality, briefly I would say it was the same criteria caused you to reject it - previous convictions. I had come to most of the basic assumptions of the Urantia Book before ever seeing the book.

May I point out a few observations which to me seem significant: It presents the only reasonable spiritual cosmology I know of which is in harmony with our present astronomical knowledge of the universe, the discoveries in the field of psychic research, and the assertions of the major religions of the world. Its spiritual insights are higher than any other source material with which I am acquainted - i.e. the golden rule in N. T. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Urantia version, "Do unto others as I would do unto them." This changes the concept from one of brotherly love to that of fatherly love - a deeper concern. It makes reasonable sense out of the incomprehensible or untenable aspects of the Old and New Testaments. It gives a more adequate picture of the life of Jesus in the light of his effect on history than any of the naive accounts produced by historical research.

There are many other reasons why I am most impressed by the Urantia Book. May I say that I am not impressed because it claims to be new revelation. But after studying it thoroughly I have come to the conclusion on the basis of internal evidence that no human could have produced it. In the first place the breadth of knowledge is tremendous. And in all this I know of no one who has been able to prove even little things to be erroneous - and some very brilliant people have read the book. A friend of mine in reading of the origin of man noted that all of the early men usually mentioned by anthropology were mentioned. He told me he went over the paper four times looking for the pittdown man. It's not there and although the papers were written in 1934 scientists did not discover until recently that the pittdown man was a hoax. This is just one of many such observations. I believe I am acquainted with the best philosophic writing from Plato to Kant but never have I found a volume of philosophy much shorter than the Urantia Book's two thousand pages in which there are not contradictions in point of view - humans are not thoroughly consistent. You will not find a contradiction anywhere in the Urantia Book's involved story. If it were produced by a group of men contradictions would be inevitable. Taking the book as a totality, I seriously doubt that any human kind could have produced it.

The reason I sent you the book was not to interest you in its religious or philosophic aspects but to get your reaction as a scientist on paper 42 on Energy - Mind and Matter. As you may recall I wanted to know whether as a scientist you thought this paper was "impossible" or "probable". For as you know if you have read this section, it makes certain claims not yet verified by scientific

discovery, such as ultimatons, atomic cohesion, etc. A number of things have been verified since 1934 in this chapter but others are still a matter of question. I feel quite competent to evaluate the philosophical-religious aspects of the book but I would enjoy your opinion as a scientist on these as yet unproven observations. Forget about the "new revelation" aspect of the book - so far as I am concerned it stands or falls on the worth of its insights. When I first started reading it I was convinced it was far-eastern mysticism but soon found that the quality of material was far superior to such literature and so I began evaluating each concept presented and for me is the most authentic philosophical-religious material I have encountered to date.

I can understand, as you find Christian theology almost completely untenable, that the Urantia Book would be "ridiculous in that it retains most of these old ideas" but my guess is that unless yours is a completely materialistic philosophy you are much closer to the Urantia position than the Biblical tradition. As a matter of fact I think it is good that people have widely differing philosophies of life. Its been good to visit with you, Ritchie, via letter - if you get to Culver, would be glad to have you visit for a good philosophical discussion. I think one is stimulated most by people of honest philosophical convictions which differ from your own. I hope you have a good year in school.

Cordially yours,

Meredith J. Sprunger

P.S. I find it rather interesting that very recently I received a letter from a young physicist in Pennsylvania who after reading the cosmology of the Urantia Book writes stating that in his opinion the discoveries in recent years in the field of gravitational energy postulates a cosmology almost identical with that pictured in the Urantia Book! That's one aspect of the book which I would assume could never be proved - at least not until man is fairly advanced in space exploration. It's all quite interesting.



Ritchie D. Mikesell
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Champaign, Illinois

204 E. John Street
Champaign, Illinois
October 28, 1957

Dear Dr. Sprunger:

Your attitude toward the Unantia Book concerns me a great deal. There is no doubt whatsoever in my mind that the individual parts of the book were written by men, probably by experts in their fields, and that the editing was done with utmost care to make the whole consistent in style and in content.

To be sure, we were impressed by the quality of the extrapolated scientific hypotheses; if every one of these hypotheses stands the burden of proof from this time onward, then the book is indeed remarkable. I mean this in the strict sense: many of these things were stated in such vague terms that no matter what is discovered, a person who really wants to believe in the book can easily say that these things were so predicted. Witness our "fundamental" Christians: many parts of the Bible are clearly allegorical, but these people

interpret them literally as prophecy, and then rationalize in their own minds what happens in the real world to avoid the obvious contradictions. Indeed, if you want to believe something contrary to fact, it is extremely easy to do so. Your young physicist is guilty of this: he knows the known facts about gravitational theory, and because he wants to believe in the book, he makes the nonsense statement that he does. When a scientist states facts, he is a scientist, but when he offers opinion, he is a man like any other. This, I think, is not understood by most people. Mueller, the geneticist, has obtained a few facts about the effect of radioactivity on genes; the Atomic Energy Commission has a few facts about the concentration of radioactivity after an atomic explosion. So, Mueller says that atomic testing should be stopped at once, and the AEC says that the testing is completely harmless. These conclusions are completely unwarranted from the known data.

My philosophy - and religion - is this: accept what is known and take it in its entirety. Because what is known for sure is very small compared to what is not known, we must form opinions about these things that 1) are consistent with the known facts, 2) are constantly altered as new facts become known, and 3) are clearly labeled as opinions. There are many ideas which are



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held widely as important ~~ideas~~ that in actuality have no significance for mankind except perhaps to satisfy his conceit, eg, the belief that a God (with unmistakable human characteristics) created mankind and that Nature works for the benefit of mankind. To make it worse, the philosophers go ahead and give this God such properties as omnipotence, omniscience, etc. Don't misunderstand me; It is my opinion that there is order in Nature and, again in my opinion, that this order is not merely a function of our observing it; however, it is also my opinion that this order was not created by any man-like God. So, you see, I am a materialistic humanist in my thinking. } Who does he believe created it?

There is no such thing as a single source of absolute truth, ie, the Bible, the Urantia Book, or anything else. To search for such a source can only lead to frustration; this is the reason why I feel that you are very much mistaken in your attitude toward the

Sincerely,

Ritchie

P.S. I have not read the following book but have read a review of it which makes it sound very interesting. Two of the authors are psychologists, the other is a sociologist; their thesis is this: when someone wants to believe something contrary to fact, contradictory evidence strengthens ~~their~~ ^{his} belief, rather than weakens it as one might have expected. They use the following plot allegorically: a group of people believe that the world will be destroyed on a certain date, and that they, and only they, will be saved. The fateful day comes and passes, and as a result, the group more strongly believes that they are the chosen ones and that some error had been made. I have personally seen this over and over again: when you show a Christian where his thinking is wrong, he more firmly believes what it was that you were trying to shake him out of. There are other obvious instances of this as well.

Leon Festinger, Henry W. Riecken, and Stanley Schachter,

When ~~The~~ Prophecy Fails, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis,

Minnesota, \$4.00.