

February 18, 1958

Dr. James E. Wagner
1505 Race Street
Philadelphia 2, Pa.

Dear Dr. Wagner:

Henry Kroehler brought me word that one of our elders had written to you concerning the Urantia Book. May I assure you that my concern regarding the harmony and proper teaching of the people of Grace Church is identical with your judgment and Henry Kroehler's. In fact I had decided on this policy before Henry spoke to me.

There are two reasons why I introduced the entire congregation to the book. First, it is a most unusual book and we have people who would enjoy studying it. And second, to form a study group of certain select people as a clandestine group is an underhanded and cowardly procedure. In a church fellowship you can have no "secret" groups. When I introduced it I, of course, told them not to accept it as revelation but those who were interested should read it critically like any other book.

Now that everyone knows about the book, I intended to mention it no more. Since an elder has protested, this procedure will be most carefully observed. For I have no desire to disturb anyone. To over-teach people is almost as bad as to mis-teach them and I want no part in either.

I should like to defend the elder who took this some what brash action in by-passing our local consistory and the Synodical Council. He is a fine man and I believe he has a good heart. I am rather certain he did not act entirely on his own but was guided or undergirded by a minister of our region who has steadfastly refused even to read the Urantia Book in critical evaluation.

When Louis Hammerschmidt gave me a copy of the book several years ago I looked it over and came to the conclusion almost any minister would arrive at: "this is for the birds." My guess was that it was a form of far-eastern mysticism or even a modern Gnosticism. As I find some of the far-eastern philosophy interesting, I started reading it. The more I read, the more amazed I became. When the book was finished I knew it was one of the significant books of our time.

Naturally, I started a rather thorough investigation of the origins of the book and found that everything seemed to stand investigation. Incidentally, Dr. William S. Sadler, one of the most respected psychiatrists in the country (He taught at McCormick Theological Seminary for almost thirty years), was the leader of the small group of people to whom the papers were given. Dr. Sadler has written two books exposing and refuting mediums and spiritualism and holds the same opinions today. He even called in the expert exposor of fakes, Howard Thurston, to help solve the mystery.

Of course the only way to evaluate the book is not by what it claims but by what it says. As you probably know we have a group of ministers in this section of the Synod who have been studying the Urantia Book critically for some time. It holds up under every test we apply to it.

Two of these young ministers were rank liberals before they read the book and after reading it came to the conclusion that the evidence for the concepts of orthodox Christianity are so overwhelming that they have come back to them. One of the Congregational ministers, who is an individualist of the first order, says with a smile and some seriousness, "I'm mad at the book because it says the things I've been claiming for the last twenty years." The greatest point of skepticism of the group now it, in one fellow's words, "It's too darn perfect to be true."

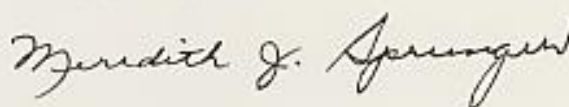
We had planned to introduce you to the book but first we wanted to put it in the hands of some of our young and capable theological professors. I'm sure you have a Christian concern for us. One of the finest services you could render is to help us discover where we are being misled, if we are.

Our greatest problem is to get ministers and other capable people to take it seriously enough to read it critically. The book appears so preposterous when you browse through it that most men will not read it unless they have a friend in whom they have confidence who assures them it is worth reading. To date, I know of no one who has completely read the book who takes it lightly.

I should like to urge you to select at least three young theologians like Moss or Shinn and ask them to read the book critically and share their evaluations with us. We should like to meet with at least one of them. Unless they have read the entire book and are intelligent enough to understand its concepts, it would be a waste of time to meet with our group. Because they are not so much interested in the book as revelation as they are in the quality of the concepts and insights of the book. Probably you should suggest to these men that they start reading the life of Jesus and then read the rest of the book - but if they read it all the procedure is not too important. I would be happy to send them some materials which would help them in their evaluation.

That you may get the feel of the quality of the Urantia Book, I am sending you a loan copy. Would you please read from page 1495 (John the Baptist) to the end of the book. It would be good if you would check it with The Harmony of the Gospels. The light it sheds on difficult passages, where only one gospel records a story, etc. is most amazing. We hope, in particular, that it may be possible for a number of young, brilliant theological professors to guide us in this matter.

Cordially yours,



Meredith J. Sprunger

Copies to Grace Church Consistorymen, members of the Synodical Council, and pastors in the Michiana Urantia Study Group.