

# The First Evangelical and Reformed Church

United Church of Christ

Goshen, Indiana

K. David Schlueter, Pastor

Parsonage:

418 So. 5th St.

Phone: 4-4657

Church:

5th St. at Lincoln Ave.

Phone: 4-7344

April 8, 1961

Meredith J. Sprunger  
Grace E. S. K.  
307 E. Plymouth St.  
Culver, Ind.

Dear Meredith,

Last evening I had an experience which, on top of others, has brought me to a solid conviction I want to share with you.

It was my last meeting of the year with my Junior Confirmation class, ages 12-14. Since I have experimented with a good bit of different materials with them throughout the year in an effort to build an ever better curriculum, I decided to see how they would react - if at all - to the little paper you did for confirmation, "The Story of God and Our World", based on the Urantia Book. I only told them it was a summary done by a fellow minister of something else. I asked that they would give me their honest and forthright reaction. As usual they did.

After I had read a page and a half they insisted that we stop and talk about it. Now in what follows, Meredith, I do not wish to imply any criticism of your writing ability. I certainly could not have done better and I doubt that anyone could. In a sense this will be my point. I had only three present last evening, but they are a good cross section of the usual confirmation class. The one boy is very bright, so much so as to present a problem in any confirmation group. I may even have to get along with him some time or to avoid his frustration. One girl is about average, the other (slightly below) is interested. The two girls turned in their noses and said it was fantastic. More, it was boring, like reading a list of names from the O.T.. The boy's criticisms were unobtrusive. "Junk", he said. "Very poorly written. The thoughts behind it may be O.T., but the way it is put is terrible." He went on to say that it was all too "real", i.e. liberal. I did not read any further, but went on, to his boredom of the girls, to talk symbolism with him, which he can more than grasp. For example, in defining an angel he said, "An angel is something that is 'nothing'". He meant this constructively. After a time what I had read was becoming more table to him as he saw the necessity of describing the unknown with word symbols from the known. But the paper itself remained trash to him.

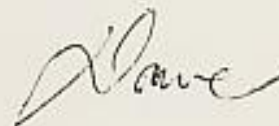
Now here is my point. In relation to the cosmology and pre-history of the Urantia Book, I am convinced (not only by this incident) that a condensation or summary is worse than useless. It is downright destructive. I recall my own reaction

reading the "official" summary - refuted by your excellent evaluation when you first gave me the book. My respect for your judgment been less, I would have chided the "holo procopterous mess" at them and there, calling it "mystic, esoteric, jargonized, and superficial" as our brothers who do not apparently respect your judgment have done. My attempt to summarize or condense the Urantia Book, or have someone read a summary before the book itself, would be like trying to convince someone Van Gogh is great by sending him a sketch I had hastily made. The greater the masterpiece, the greater the folly of trying to pass a two-dimensional substitute. Indeed, many philosophical and religious insights can be pulled from the Book and used profitably, even as a preparation for the Book itself. But I do not believe huge numbers of the "details" can or should be. It is like a Van Gogh. You must see it all before it is believable, even though you may talk about color before seeing it. The Urantia Book among other things is a remarkable work of art, indeed without parallel. Read a summary. Then turn to the Book itself. Two worlds. The Book has an immediate "atmosphere" on any and all pages that cannot be imitated. I can not explain it, for it is much more than style (what style for example?). But it is there. I experienced it from the beginning. I still do.

Our problem is to get people to read the Urantia Book itself or not at all. I know full well any summaries or exerpts are not meant to be a substitute, but this is clearly the way they tend to be used. May I suggest that from this point on when a book is given to someone, any summaries or exerpts be withheld until after the Book is read. In the "official" booklet of exerpts that you have tended to give with the book, I believe the following could be profitably used: your introduction and evaluation, the Titles of the Papers, Reading Suggestions, and the last page, The Urantia Brotherhood. Chuck the rest until the person has read the book itself. Send or make verbally no summaries. I do believe, however, further introductory material dealing with basic philosophical and epistemological principles could be used. In time I will try my hand at this myself for discussion with the group - but I hope you will try too.

Think it over.

Sincerely,



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Meredith Schuyler  
Grace L. S. R.  
54 N. Franklin St.  
Culver, Ind.

Dear Meredith,

Indeed I now remember your saying the very things I wrote you at our last meeting together, which only was to show that words and thoughts were little untiles until one has become experientially aware, at least for one such as myself. Please remember this as you continue to function informally as our group leader. You have been with this much longer than the rest of us. Thus many things that have become clear and experientially valid to you are as yet only on the thin edge of our thinking, not yet a genuine part of ourselves. To have all sensed that you are far out ahead of most of us at least. In spite of this you cannot give us your experience, your internally validated thoughts, your inexpressible intuitions and surties. Rather do I ask of you patience and understanding as each single one of us groves through this totally unarticulated confrontation in our own individual ways and at our own speed.

I have come to feel a bit rushed of late, and after talking with Boyd the other day I am sure he shares this feeling. The initial conflict with "men in authority" had much to do with this. So long as the pressure was on I felt the need to make decisions at least in a fairly "public" sense as quickly as possible. I will never as you know cease to fight without qualification for the right to read, possess, discuss, study, and believe as I feel I must. This was my deep conviction before I ever saw the book, and most certainly afterwards. But this is one thing, and an endorsement of the book as being what it claims to be is another—even quietly to a friend I ~~might~~ introduce it to. As you well know I do believe the Urantia Book is genuine. The more critical I become the stronger it becomes to me. I have no trouble with its basic insights, even most of its un-basic ones. But the book-itself as an extra-terrestrial revelation presents a much more difficult situation. I dare not short cut my own integrity, intellectual, emotional, or otherwise. This whole matter involves tremendous personal responsibility. I want time—not to let it sit on a shelf, but to actively study and test it in my own life, and gradually in the life of my congregation. You yourself when you gave the book to me and others said that we should take a year before any really final evaluations. You were right, psychologically and spiritually. I predict that in a year every member of our present study group will be more than ever behind it. But we must grow into it through the most intensive kind of

individual study, prayer, self criticism etc. The Way is every bit as important as the Goal. We are not all at your level yet. I am still fragmented. I continue to have attacks of radical doubt, and I must go through them not around.

I want others to read and study and test this book - even here, its insights. But if I sign my name to any letter of introduction, I insist that it be made very, very clear that I am unwilling to grant the book is what it claims to be. Understand that I have the courage to face what others may think of me. This is not the point. It is my own integrity that I must keep. I am sure at present. But I must know how it looks six months from now. This is too big to jump at and run with. It must have the test of a reasonable length of time. This opportunity you have had. Help us make sure we have the same. I would even suggest you encourage us to go more slowly. I guess I feel that you have rushed us a bit too. But remember, this may only be my emotional reaction to your being the one to introduce me to it. I told you I might hate you at times as I struggle emotionally with it. Please be if by your own inner struggle and resulting occasional hostility slashes over on you at times. Nothing personal is meant by it. Yet Boyl also feels rushed, so maybe you are unconsciously getting over enthused with our apparent progress. Let's not overdo the mission work yet - as a group that is. May the little we do be quiet and careful. As individuals we can of course do as we wish, but as a group - something else enters then. I feel we must talk this over much more thoroughly as a group. I am presently inclined to think we would do well to cut off any group mission work by mail until next September.

I think e.g. that a "Devils Advocate" approach to the book as a whole, i.e. in relation to its basic assumptions, would be most healthy in our group study. I do this often myself, but would like to see it done in the group too. For example, why really do our critics call it Gnostic? Can we be accused of an Asian heresy as well? Why does Trochler call it a heresy? I want to understand our critics. I want to be able to grapple with attack, because I have first attacked it myself. Naturally my own view of the church makes heresy a meaningless accusation, but we must evaluate where we stand socially and historically. I do not want to walk into this with any blind spots if it can be helped.

Thanks for your time and thought.

Sincerely,