

Pioneers in the New Epoch

by Meredith J. Sprunger, Ph.D.



In the Old Testament, prophet Habakkuk exclaimed, **"Look, there is work being done in your day which will astonish you and which you will not believe when it is told to you."**

Today, we live in a time when amazing things are being accomplished by the spirit of God.

Modern science has exhausted the spiritual creativity of the renaissance and the reformation. Horse and buggy technology has disappeared along with the geocentric universe concepts of our forefathers. The prophetic voices of our day proclaim that a new era has begun. We teeter on the edge of tremendous growth or destruction.

The most creative minds of our generation face increasingly perplex and frustrating problems. Nuclear fallout and toxic waste threaten our existence. The significance of our predicament triggered our unseen spiritual supervisors to act. They recognized we needed a new epochal revelation to restructure our planetary and universe views while inspiring us to new levels of material and spiritual growth. As a result, we were given the Fifth Epochal Revelation, *The Urantia Book*.

Importance of Outreach

One of our most important responsibilities and opportunities is to spread this new vision of reality throughout the world. Everyone who discovers the significance of *The Urantia Book* must decide what their role should be in this many faceted outreach mission. The Fifth Epochal Revelation will exercise its transforming power if we give wholehearted dedication to outreach ministry.

St. Paul said, "Whatsoever you do, put your whole heart into it as a service to the Lord, not just to mankind." On page 1780 of *The Urantia Book* we read, "If you are not a positive and missionary evangel of your religion, you are self-deceived in that what you call a religion is only a traditional belief or a mere system of intellectual philosophy." We are told on page 279-80, "In the universal regime you are not reckoned as having possessed yourself of knowledge and truth until you have demonstrated your ability and willingness to impart this knowledge and truth to others." On page 556 we are admonished, "The weak indulge in resolutions, but the strong act. Life is but a day's work—do it well. The act is ours; the consequences God's."

Living Spiritual Truth

I challenge you to act on the spiritual service leadings you have. I invite you to ascend the seven-step ladder of outreach ministry. Step *one* requires living the teachings of *The Urantia Book*. This is elemental. None of the other steps of outreach service will be effective until we have reasonably mastered the principles of inspired living. Without honesty, integrity, sincerity, trustworthiness, loving attitudes, and action directed by experiential spiritual wisdom, no outreach service will bear fruit. With these qualities of behavior, our lives are an eloquent message and we will be hungering to share the great truths of the Fifth Epochal Revelation which have inspired us.

Sharing Spiritual Truth

Most of us then take step *two* and begin sharing these enhanced spiritual realities. We usually begin

by spreading new truths without revealing the source. For one reason or another, we do not publicly announce we are readers of a strange new book or that we believe it is the Fifth Epochal Revelation. This bootleg ministry is constructive but lacks forthrightness and power. I encourage you to take the important *third* step: summon that level of openness and courage where you become a discriminating herald of *The Urantia Book*.

Now you are presenting insights appropriate to specific situations while sharing a veritable library of truth and wisdom where people can find an entire philosophy of life and a new view of the universe. When you introduce people to *The Urantia Book*, you become a missionary in the traditional sense of the word. When you inspire others to engage in such outreach work, the effect geometrically multiplies.

Social Groups and Cultural Influences

All this is good, but very soon we become aware of the necessity for the *fourth* step in outreach activity: the cultivation, organization, and direction of study groups. There are several hundred Urantia study groups in existence. Someday we will have thousands of study groups worldwide. Study groups socialize religion but they are partial and incomplete. These groups spring up, have an up and down history, are limited in the number of people they attract, and sometimes die out. At best the study group is a contemporary yet limited social-historical phenomenon.

Every serious person engaged in outreach ministry in *The Urantia Book* faces the limitations of individual and study group evangelism. Instinctively, we long for the permanence and cultural depth of institutional wholeness and stability. To satisfy this hunger for a deeper relationship with society, we take the *fifth* step in outreach ministry, participation in institutional activities. These range from forming Urantia Societies, placing books in libraries, introducing the study of *The Urantia Book* in educational institutions and professional societies, or getting involved in growing edge movements.

The Need for Religious Institutions

Outreach experience, reinforced by religious history, proves that these five steps in missionary activity are preliminary and partial phases. The only abiding form of the socialization of religion exists in the forming or reforming of religious institutions. Paradoxically, religious history teaches that institutional religion increases the potential for evil and hampers growth. Yet it is a necessary requisite for religious enculturation and survival. (1083)

The solution to this paradox, as the authors of *The Urantia Book* point out (1076), is not the eradication of religious institutions but in creating more perfect, spiritually attuned religious organizations. Outreach activity of survival value must culminate in some form of institutionalization. Religion must have an appealing symbolism which enhances group worship, glorifies the values of the family, and provides fellowship and spiritual care from birth to death. Outreach ministry based on revelatory and historical wisdom must come to grips with creating progressive religious institutions.

Leavening Traditional Religions

There are two ways this can be done. The first takes us to step *six*: the study and incorporation of the teachings of *The Urantia Book* in the religions of the world. In Western Civilization this means interfacing with Christianity. Christianity has tremendous latent potentials. The authors of *The Urantia Book* regard it as "...the best of the religions of the twentieth century..." (2083) but it "...is only the larval stage of the thwarted spiritual kingdom..." (1866)

The highly organized Christian Church contains great reserves of evolutionary strength. No one knows to what spiritual heights it may rise when transformed by the Fifth Epochal Revelation. It is imperative that we exercise the courage and wisdom to interface with Christianity and the other world religions.

A New Religious Movement

The authors of *The Urantia Book* visualize one more step. They say that every new revelation has caused a new religious movement (966) and that the enlarged "...restatement of the religion of Jesus must develop a new and appropriate symbolism." This prophetic insight brings us to step *seven*: the formation of a new social expression of religion.

Many suggestions are given for the development of this new religious fellowship predicated on the Fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man. Such a religious institution needs appealing symbolism which embodies a masterful mystery, encourages diversity and growth, and provides fellowship. This structure stimulates and supports personal spiritual experience—true religion. Missionary work at this level, I believe, has the greatest promise. It has the advantage of experiential wisdom from the world religions as well as the spiritual insights and universal view of the Fifth Epochal Revelation. Religious organizations working on the seventh level of outreach ministry will eventually establish spiritual fellowships throughout the world. These groups will inevitably become the newest world religion, exercising a mighty force in ecumenical relationships, facilitating fellowship, brotherhood, and unity among all religions.

Call to Courageous Service

I challenge and encourage you to dedicate yourself to outreach ministry for the Fifth Epochal Revelation. This is the most important spiritual objective of the twentieth century and it may be the most significant project now in process on the planet.

This is a many-faceted and diverse ministry which needs to be carried out on all seven levels of outreach service. Determine where your abilities and callings direct you to work. Then serve wholeheartedly and dynamically in the spiritual kingdom of Christ Michael and the Universal Father. This ministry is not and will not be easy. "The religion of the spirit means effort, struggle, conflict, faith, determination, love, loyalty, and progress." (1729) Even as Jesus spoke to his

apostles of the first century, he is speaking to his contemporary disciples, "Are you afraid to trust your future in the hands of the God of truth whose sons you are?...Will you go back to the easy path of the certainty and intellectual settledness of the religion of traditional authority, or will you gird yourselves to go forward with me into that uncertain and troublous future of proclaiming the new truths of the religion of the spirit, the kingdom of heaven in the hearts of men?" (1730)

Each of you must find the answer to this question in the quietness of your own soul. And then you must act on this guidance.

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The Jesusonian® Foundation
P.O. Box 18764 • Boulder, CO 80308
Phone: (303) 581-0456

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About Dr. Meredith J. Sprunger

Dr. Meredith J. Sprunger, a retired minister in the United Church of Christ, served congregations in Ohio, Indiana and Illinois. Dr. Sprunger was President of Indiana Institute of Technology. During his tenure, he served as a professor, head of the Department of Psychology and chairman of the Division of Liberal Arts. He also taught at Elmhurst College where he headed the Psychology Department.

Dr. Sprunger has been President of THE FELLOWSHIP®, chairman of the Education and Fraternal Relations Committee and a Field Representative. Today, Meredith is the Executive Director of Ministry of the Jesusonian Foundation while serving on the Board of Directors. He also founded and directed the Christian Fellowship of Students of *The Urantia Book*.