

not doing this alone. Each of our children has or will have his/her own Thought Adjuster. The Universe Mother Spirit encircuits each one with the seven powerful adjutants; the Spirit of Truth is pervasive, and there are millions of angels

of all types who stand by willing and ready to help bring us and our children into the everlasting community of our Father's eternal worlds of love and service. All we have to do is live the truth!

PITFALLS OF SPIRITUAL COMMUNITY

Let me set the stage, the props of which many of you are well familiar. There was an enthusiastic organization established in the late 1960s for the purpose of spreading the teachings of Jesus on worldwide radio. It began as a small group of dedicated students of *The Urantia Book* under the leadership of Vern and Nancy Grimsley. It grew to be an organization of more than 40 or so people who ended up in a shelter together waiting for a nuclear war to happen, based on channeled messages which Vern, myself and another co-worker had received. It was a powerful experience in spiritual community for better and for worse, but at this point in my life, the learnings and understandings which have been gleaned from that experience have made my life so rich, that I don't think I would want to miss it, if I had to do it over again.

I would like to clearly state that the following is strictly my own perceptions; another person who was involved could have entirely different things to say about his/her experience. There were many, many wonderful things which were experienced in this community of up to 40 people. We felt much like a family as we ate together, worshipped together, played together, studied together. We felt we shared the common goals of sharing God with the world. Many of us have become lifelong friends and will probably still be working together on the mansion worlds. Twenty-five years ago, The Family of God Foundation was about the only spiritual community of readers of *The Urantia Book* around, aside from a few large study groups. So what went wrong with this experiment in spiritual community that many of us felt we were committed to for life?

The following discussion of what seems to be the more obvious *pitfalls* of this particular community is not meant to be a scholarly work by any means. It is, as I said, a sharing of my personal understandings. I have talked with many, many people over the last seven years, and I think that many of the ideas and opinions in these conversations have become incorporated into what I present now.

The purpose of my desire to share this now fits into the context of our Wrightwood Series on the topic of Community. I believe that one must look at the problems and pitfalls of spiritual community, as well as the wonderful things, if one is to give the topic a full and honest examination.

The little vignette I am going to share with you came literally at the very end of this experiment with spiritual community. You may or may not remember that day about 7 years ago in March of 1985, when about 40 of us almost literally disappeared into our own fog—down into a shelter which we had spent more than a year preparing based on messages which Vern Grimsley, myself and another FOG member had received predicting a nuclear war.

At this time my grandmother, who was about 98, had been living with me, my husband and son for about a year and during that time she had the opportunity to have dinner

with many of the people who were involved in FOG. She enjoyed them and they her. Well, on this beautiful spring day in March 7 years ago, Bob and I rented a U-Haul truck and loaded up most of our belongings which would be useful during a nuclear war. This included all of the paraphernalia which Grandma would need—her special bed, her commode, her wheelchair, her screen for privacy, her medications. When we arrived at the shelter (we just made it under the midnight deadline—the gate was to be locked—for we were all supposed to be there by that time), we unloaded Grandma, took her down into the shelter with great ceremony, set up her bed, her commode, the screen for privacy, and put her to bed.

Of course, the sun rose the next morning instead of a nuclear cloud and about noon, I awakened Grandma and told her that everything was alright and we were going home. She said she knew it would be alright and that she had one of the best night's sleep she'd had in years. When we got everything back home Grandma was very quiet and she just sat and rocked and rocked for days. You could see her trying to put this all together to make some sense of the happenings, as were our neighbors, I imagine. About three days later when I was able to say several words without breaking down and crying, I asked what she thought about all of this. As she sat there rocking, she slowly muttered, "And they all seemed so normal."

Unknowingly, Grandma Lou summed up some aspects of the Family of God spiritual community experience: We all seemed so normal. Except that we weren't really—things were askew in some basic ways. I will call these deviations PITFALLS.

PITFALL #1

The group was following an ideal as a "shell" because many did not have the foundation within their own lives. Instead of making the ideal of the family of God a reality in their own lives with their own families, some of the co-workers even chose to skip this essential experience. This produced a hollow echo of words as they went over the air waves.

The strangest thing was that this organization was based on the family model from *The Urantia Book*—God is our Father; we are all brothers and sisters on this planet, and yet the two people involved had chosen NOT to have a family because of their total devotion to this ideal of sharing something with the rest of the planet about which they had not had actual experience—the family unit. It went from there—several other couples decided that they were so devoted to telling the world about God, that they decided they didn't have time to have a family. Many people put off further college education or left promising jobs on the "outside" world in order to pursue this ideal.

ANTIDOTE FOR PITFALL #1

Participants in a spiritual community must put their primary attention on the building of foundational ideals within their own lives first. Then they will have the experiential ticket to go from there.

"Future religionists must live out their religion, dedicate themselves to the wholehearted service of the brotherhood of man. It is high time that man had a religious experience so personal and so sublime that it could be realized and expressed only by 'feelings that lie too deep for words.'" (p. 1091D)

Participants in spiritual community must get their priorities straight. It is NOT to first go out and tell the world about God; it is to first live it in one's own personal life.

"But do not make the mistake of trying to prove to other men that you have found God; you cannot consciously produce such valid proof, albeit there are two positive and powerful demonstrations of the fact that you are God-knowing and they are:

1. The fruits of the spirit of God showing forth in your daily routine life.
2. The fact that your entire life plan furnishes positive proof that you have unreservedly risked everything you are and have on the adventure of survival after death in the pursuit of the hope of finding the God of eternity, whose presence you have foretasted in time." page 1733B

PITFALL #2

Ignorance of the leadership and membership regarding

- (1) basic cult phenomena;
- (2) channeling phenomena;
- (3) psychological processes.

The phenomena we experienced as a group were not uncommon for religious groups to experience:

- a. Predictions of great catastrophe, destruction, or crisis, leading to a "D day."
- b. Strong charismatic leader who claims special contact with superhuman beings.
- c. Sincere but needy people committed to great religious ideals seeking to fulfill themselves by doing "great things."

d. Channeling from superhuman contacts giving instructions to the rest of the group.

ANTIDOTE FOR PITFALL #2

1. The education of individuals and groups about what has been experienced by other religious groups who have made special claims about their experiences. This responsibility for education could be taken on by community leadership, family leadership, or individual seeking. There is much information out there about cult phenomena and channeling. One recently published book (1990) is *With the Tongues of Men and Angels—a Study of Channeling*, by Arthur Hastings, which examines most of the commonly known channeling phenomena from the Tibetan Oracles to *The Urantia Book*, showing how common the phenomenon is, although *The Urantia Book* is not considered channeled information in the sense that these other phenomena are. Unfortunately there is not a distinction made and *The Urantia Book* is given a rather superficial examination by Hastings. The point is that even back in 1984 when Vern Grimsley began to get his "messages," channeling had been around for a long time, and yet we were told in one group meeting, that this was a phenomenon unlike any other which had been heard of.

2. Individuals and groups must take the responsibility for gaining basic education regarding psychological principles in order to understand and perhaps be able to recognize such psychological concepts as projection and inflation. An example of community taking on this kind of education was shown in the theme chosen by the Golden Gate Circle Society of the San Francisco Bay Area for a recent weekend conference: "The Connection Between the Psychology of Carl Jung and *The Urantia Book*." Three different presentations were given on this topic during the conference, and at the least the participants came away with some basic concepts with which to help understand what goes on in others.

PITFALL #3

THE "CHOSEN-PEOPLE" ATTITUDE: this is in a list of the dangers of formalized religion found on page 1092:

"But as religion becomes institutionalized, its power for good is curtailed, while the possibilities for evil are greatly multiplied. The dangers of formalized religion are: "...creation of the aristocratic "chosen-people" attitude..."

It was not something that most of the co-workers at FOG would have been willing to admit, but this attitude of specialness was certainly there. We were "called" to do "special" work of telling the world about the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. After talking with people over the years who interfaced with FOG, it became obvious (after the fact) that many felt strongly that we put forth this attitude. It was also strengthened by the leadership claiming to be a member of the reserve corps of destiny, and then proceeding to get special messages, and being called to save the revelation and to spread it. I do not

doubt that the motivations were sincere, but we know that sincerity can lead into dangerous ways. Talking about the default of Eve in the Garden, Solonia, the seraphic "voice in the Garden," says of sincerity,

"Even though this project of modifying the divine plan had been conceived and executed with entire sincerity and with only the highest motives concerning the welfare of the world, it constituted evil because it represented the wrong way to achieve righteous ends, because it departed from the right way, the divine plan." (p. 842D)

ANTIDOTE FOR PITFALL #3

To live a normal, ordinary life; and to establish the kingdom by such methods:

"Jesus chose to establish the kingdom of heaven in the hearts of mankind by natural, ordinary, difficult, and trying methods, just such procedures as his earth children must subsequently follow in their work of enlarging and extending that heavenly kingdom." (p. 1521A)

One doesn't have to be in a special organization doing special and great things to be doing God's will:

"And fail not to remember that the will of God can be done in any earthly occupation. Some callings are not holy and others secular. All things are sacred in the lives of those who are spirit led; that is, subordinated to truth, ennobled by love, dominated by mercy, and restrained by fairness—justice." (p. 1732D)

PITFALL #4

LACK OF ABILITY TO BE SELF-CRITICAL AS AN ORGANIZATION:

Obviously, the Family of God Foundation departed from the state of facts. It perhaps was a fact that there was a serious threat of nuclear war in the world in the 1980's. But it was not a fact that there was going to be a nuclear war on March 25, 1985. Sticking carrots in sand and carrying Grandma down into the shelter and allowing our 13-year-old son to buy a camouflage outfit and a dirt bike to be a messenger boy during the war, and looking for landing spots to land an airplane show how reason abdicated rapidly and consorted with false logic.

Channeling is also not a FACT. It is a personal experience that an individual is having in their mind. It may be a qualitative experience that one is having in their own mind. "Quantity may be identified as a fact, thus becoming a scientific uniformity. Quality, being a matter of mind interpretation, represents an estimate of values, and must,

therefore, remain an experience of the individual" (p. 1477). It appears that great mischievousness can come when an individual forces his/her personal experience on others.

ANTIDOTE FOR PITFALL #4

The Urantia Book tells us:

"What both developing science and religion need is more searching and fearless self-criticism, a greater awareness of incompleteness in evolutionary status. The teachers of both science and religion are often altogether too self-confident and dogmatic. Science and religion can only be self-critical of the facts. The moment departure is made from the state of facts, reason abdicates or else rapidly degenerates into a consort of false logic." (p.1131)

How we become more searching and fearless in our self-criticism requires more discussion, for I am not sure how this looks, except to be willing to be honest with self and others; not to hide things behind "specialness"; and to share fears and doubts with each other.

PITFALL #5

TURNING OVER PERSONAL DECISION MAKING TO ANOTHER OR OTHERS

This is probably one of the more elusive and difficult ones to analyze because each one of us thought that we were asking the Father what His will was, and each of us thought that we were following that will to one degree or another. We really felt that we were willing to go anywhere, do anything to serve God. It did appear that we participated in making our own decisions within the context of the group. I don't think that at the time we felt we were being controlled. At least I should speak for myself. Although I guess it could be said perhaps we were being controlled by our own unconscious desires to be great or do great things, or that we were responding to archetypes of leadership or importance.

ANTIDOTE FOR PITFALL #5

"Sometimes the planting of a seed necessitates its death, the death of your fondest hopes, before it can be reborn to bear the fruits of new life and new opportunity. And from them [the ministering reserve seraphim] you will learn to suffer less through sorrow and disappointment, first, by making fewer personal plans concerning other personalities, and then, by accepting your lot when you have faithfully performed your duty" (p. 555).