



THE CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP JOURNAL

Vol. 1, No. 1

January, 1982

Christian Fellowship Ministry

The Christian Fellowship of Students of The URANTIA Book was initiated to evolve an interface between Christianity and the URANTIA movement. Its basic concern is to introduce The URANTIA Book to our Christian churches and culture through contact with specific individuals and groups. We are primarily interested in outreach ministry.

There are numerous forms of outreach ministry associated with The URANTIA Book. Individuals tell their friends, relatives, and acquaintances about the book. The Foundation publishes The URANTIA Book and makes it available to the general public. The Brotherhood, societies, and individuals place books in libraries. The Asoka Foundation contacts people and makes books available to bookstores on a consignment basis. The Family of God Foundation, various ministers, and many Sunday School teachers present the teachings of The URANTIA Book in talks, discussions, sermons, books, and other media. When individuals respond in a manner which suggests they might be ready for The URANTIA Book, such persons are introduced to it. Others have or are developing materials to aid in the study and understanding of The URANTIA Book such as Clyde Bedell's Concordex and Duane Faw's Paramony. All of these forms of ministry are excellent and should be encouraged by all of us.

The Christian Fellowship is the first systematic attempt to conduct an outreach ministry by introducing The URANTIA Book directly to specific individuals and groups of the general public. It is an experimental project and we are proceeding very slowly and conservatively. We hope to make this an indigenous program which will take root in many areas. Already individuals and groups are involved in this direct introduction of The URANTIA Book to our society in Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Oklahoma, Michigan, Texas and other places. We hope to serve as a resource center and co-ordinating agency for people and groups interested in introducing The URANTIA Book to specific individuals and groups in our Christian culture.

Some twenty-five years ago I made a study of the origin and development of philosophic-religious movements and came to the conclusion the URANTIA movement would probably enter the domain of public knowledge in the 1980's. This projection still appears to be realistic. Already we have had The URANTIA Book reviewed in the SCP Newsletter which has a nation-wide circulation and the book has been mentioned in national TV programs like the Phil Donahue Show. I believe the time has come to introduce our culture to The URANTIA Book not only because it is the only spiritual resource available to our society which is powerful enough to give us the stability and guidance needed to energize the new age which is struggling to be born, but because the evolutionary situation demands it. It is a ministry whose time has come.

Origin of the Christian Fellowship

After reading The URANTIA Book twenty-five years ago, a deep conviction came over me that my whole life had been prepared to receive this new revelatory vision of the universe. Along with it came a noetic insight that our task was to bring this enlarged revelation to the attention of the Christian Church and culture as the first step in a world-wide mission. In discussing this sense of calling with Dr. William S. Sadler, he reminded me that callings need preparation and I fully agreed. Jesus carefully

trained his apostles. Paul following his conversion spent a number of years preparing himself for his outreach ministry.

During the following twenty-five years this preparation was the focus of my attention and the integrator of all my activities. Finally, on April 17, 1979 The Christian Fellowship of Students of The URANTIA Book was organized in Fort Wayne with nine persons serving on the Board of Trustees! We were registered as a not-for-profit corporation in the State of Indiana on February 1, 1980. The Internal Revenue Service gave us a temporary non-profit status on April 4, 1980 and in the next month or so we expect to be granted full recognition as a non-profit organization. It was good after so many years of preparation to experience that inner peace and joy which comes when one actualizes the mission for which one's entire life has been prepared.

Initial Action

The leaders of historic religious institutions are the most resistant barriers to the acceptance of larger truth or new revelation. I realized we faced an almost impossible task. But observing that Jesus at the beginning of his outreach ministry went directly to Annas, the most powerful spokesman of Judaism in his day, I decided to use the same approach. For ethical reasons I thought it proper to contact the most influential theologians in contemporary Christianity. We wrote letters to around ninety theologians who teach in seminaries belonging to the American Association of Theological Schools. A pamphlet, The Church and The URANTIA Book, was enclosed and a biographical sheet listing my education and experience was stapled to the letter. Although I knew they could have the library order any book they wanted, we offered to send them a loan book.

Obviously, I did not expect these theologians to show interest in The URANTIA Book. But knowing the general kind and humane nature of these people, I expected to receive quite a number of acknowledgement letters indicating "not interested." To my amazement only two of these polite and sensitive people responded. Dr. Herman C. Waetjen of the San Francisco Theological Seminary wrote from South Africa where he was on sabbatical saying in a cordial way, "My priorities simply do not relate to The URANTIA Book." Dr. Martin E. Marty of the Chicago Divinity School wrote, "Through the years different folk have sent me the Urantia Book, I've taken a few running jumps at it, found my understanding thin and my curiosity quickly waning. Thank you for the offer."

After thinking about this definitive silence from these very verbal people, it suddenly dawned on me that this uncharacteristic silence was motivated by fear! These scholarly people, with the Jim Jones massacre and cult extremism fresh in their minds and possibly recalling how their colleagues of another generation were persecuted for having had correspondence with individuals later discovered to be associated with communism, decided that silence was the safest response! Nevertheless, we accomplished our purpose. We informed the highest authorities of mainline Christianity about the book before approaching lower level religious and cultural leaders.

Target Areas

Early in our planning we decided to contact religious and academic leaders in an area before approaching teachers, professional, and business people. We also assumed it wise to work in the local community and centers within a one hundred fifty mile radius before considering more distant areas.

Which denominations are best prepared by evolutionary growth to consider larger truth? Which churches are reasonably open and flexible? It seems obvious that those groups espousing fundamentalistic positions are not evolutionally or intellectually prepared to spiritually evaluate The URANTIA Book. Many of the leaders of mainline Christianity, however, have already arrived at insights which parallel the teachings of The URANTIA Book.

Those mainline churches which appear to be most open to new truth are: United Church of Christ, United Methodist Church, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), United Presbyterian Church, and Church of the Brethren. Other mainline churches which we plan to approach but which are more resistant to literature not coming through ecclesiastical or specific theological channels are: Episcopal Church, Roman Catholic Church, American Baptist Church in USA, American Lutheran Church, Lutheran Church in America, and Reformed Church in America. Some traditional denominations such as Baptist groups, Wesleyan Methodist Church, Missouri Lutheran Church and others either embrace fundamentalism or are so ultra conservative they would be disturbed by The URANTIA Book. There are exceptions, of course, to all of these generalizations. But such broad judgments are useful in economizing time, energy, and effectiveness. Liberal religious groups such as Unity are usually more receptive to new truth than mainline Christianity.

Experimental Methodologies

Although we had a reasonably good estimate of the effectiveness of different outreach techniques, we wanted empirical data to confirm or refute these assumptions. So early in 1981 we made plans to experiment with three approaches.

First, we sent letters to eighty-three mainline ministers in Muncie and three hundred fifty mainline ministers in Indianapolis and invited them to a review of The URANTIA Book at Ball State University and the Indiana Interchurch Center. These letters included a slip listing my education and experience and a pamphlet, The Church and The URANTIA Book. The results were even worse than we expected. Two people attended the Muncie review and six ministers showed up at Indianapolis! All of the ministers attending these talks were interested and wanted loan books. Nevertheless this, clearly, is not the method of choice to introduce ministers to the book.

Ministers have so many meetings to attend they seldom have a free evening. They will not attend this sort of presentation unless there is some special reason for them to do so - such as the reputation of the speaker or the controversy of the topic. There was an additional objective we wished to accomplish by experimenting with this method. We wanted to inform a reasonable number of mainline ministers in our area of The URANTIA Book before fundamentalists poisoned the waters of communication by distorting and denouncing its message. Our timing was better than we knew as the nationally circulated Spiritual Counterfeits Project Newsletter exposing the "heresies" of The URANTIA Book was published in August of 1981.

Second, we sent letters to around forty mainline ministers enclosing biographical data and The URANTIA Book and Our Christian Heritage. The letter stated that I would call to see if we could set up an appointment. Approximately sixty percent of the ministers called did set up appointments and almost all on whom I called asked for a loan book. This fall I called on the twenty-five ministers who had loan books. None were disturbed and most of them found the book interesting and intriguing. All complained about not having the time to read as they would like. Eleven ministers asked to keep the book or purchased personal copies in order to continue their reading. This method appears to be the best way to introduce people to The URANTIA Book, as we

had assumed; however, we were much more successful than we had anticipated. Further experience will no doubt bring down this very high "success rate" to a more realistic figure. If one person in ten or even one in twenty-five asked for a loan book, this would be a good "interested reader" ratio.

Our third experiment involves eighty-three mainline local ministers and ninety Campus Ministers in the State of Indiana. Each received a letter in which we enclosed biographical data, The URANTIA Book and Our Christian Heritage, a check card, and a self-addressed return envelope. The check card has three alternatives and is enclosed. This project is just beginning; so we have no results to report. My guess is that the card return percentage will be very low but this method has the advantage of ease of contact, alternative response options, a minimum of pressure, and a reference card which can be kept for future possible use.

Academic Contacts

We have called on philosophy professors at I.U.-P.U. in Fort Wayne and Indianapolis and at Ball State University. Two professors here in Fort Wayne have shown interest in The URANTIA Book and have asked me to review the book for one or more of their classes. Campus Ministers in Muncie and Fort Wayne have or are reading the life and teachings of Jesus in The URANTIA Book. A half-dozen I.U.-P.U. students started a URANTIA Study Group last winter but when Irene and I left for a trip to the southern states the group discontinued meeting because of a lack of leadership. We have hardly scratched the surface in this whole field of higher education. This is a very important area in which we plan to work in the future. Dick Prince and I seriously considered the possibility of establishing research grants for higher education and religious leaders but we both came to the conclusion that this approach was inappropriate under present conditions.

Prof. Jacques Reaume of Laval University is writing his Ph. D. thesis in religious studies at the University of Ottawa on The URANTIA Book. His thesis will not undertake any evaluation of the value content of the book but analyze the book from the standpoint of form effectiveness - sort of a linguistic and design analysis. He will use analytical tools designed by Roland Barthes. Jacques said that the design methodology of the book is excellent.

Prof. Reaume spent a day with us in August. He is a former Roman Catholic priest and homiletics professor who married and now teaches in the area of Instructional Technology and Media. His thesis will be rather long and will be written in French. Jacques is analyzing The URANTIA Book because it was suggested by his major professor at the University of Ottawa. I'm not sure what Jacques thinks about the content of The URANTIA Book. When I asked him about it he remarked, "Its definitely Protestant and American."

Critical research is the key to respectability in the academic and professional communities. Scholarly evaluation is the necessary procedure for acceptance in ecclesiastical and educational circles. Once The URANTIA Book becomes a legitimate source of research, knowledge of its existence and teachings will filter down to students, religious leaders, and the general public. Historically the resistance to new truth by the "experts" has resulted in its acceptance by pioneering leaders and large sections of the general public before the authorities condescended to seriously consider it! It will be interesting to see how knowledge of The URANTIA Book enters our culture.

Literature Available

We have a few pieces of literature available which may help you in your outreach activities. You are welcome to any of this material.

How to Start Reading The URANTIA Book - ten suggestions are given for people of different interests and purposes which may be helpful when they start reading The URANTIA Book.

The URANTIA Book and Our Christian Heritage - this is probably the best pamphlet to introduce people to The URANTIA Book who come from a Christian background.

The Church and The URANTIA Book - this pamphlet is similar to the one above but was written specifically for ministers and theologians.

The Origin of The URANTIA Book - one of the first things people ask about when hearing of The URANTIA Book is related to the origin of the book. This pamphlet is an open and honest attempt to speak objectively to the question.

From time to time I have been asked for copies of my response to Harold Sherman's criticism of The URANTIA Book and movement, my letter to the editor of the SCP Newsletter following their issue castigating The URANTIA Book, and various papers I have written on fundamentalistic topics such as the atonement doctrine, the virgin birth question, etc. Recently we have had so many fundamentalists writing the Brotherhood that I am contemplating writing a pamphlet entitled, The URANTIA Book and Christian Fundamentalism.

Your Ministry

Movements become a social reality when new ideas and visions of a better way become indigenous in the lives of people in local communities. Pioneering ministry is never easy. It demands vision, courage, wisdom, and perseverance. Each of us have an unusual opportunity to shape the future of this planet by helping introduce a new revelation to our culture. This opportunity comes to a generation only once in thousands of years! You can make a difference in your community in your lifetime. If we can help you in your ministry, please let us know. We are standing at the beginning of one of the most exciting and promising eras of human history! The historian Beard observed that it is often darkest just before the dawn. May you find meaning and joy in this darkness by bringing light into the lives of your fellow-men, in sharing with them the best Good News of this century!

This Journal is being sent to only a few people - mainly those who have expressed an interest in outreach ministry. Feel free to share it. At this point in time the Journal will be published infrequently - probably once a year. We send you our warm best wishes.