

Spiritual Fellowship Journal

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The Unique Function of Religion

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Tuning the Inner and Outer Life

Confirming a Spiritual Pilgrimage

A New Revelation? Who Needs It?

Throwing the Spiritual Baby Out With the Sexist Bathwater

Book Review: *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New Ethic* by Hans Kuhn

The Spiritual Fellowship of Students of The Urantia Book

A Spiritual Leadership Network Interested in *The Urantia Book* as a Resource in Living,
Creative Service, Teaching, Preaching, and Writing.

Guiding Network Principles

1. We believe *The Urantia Book* can make a significant contribution to the stimulation of spiritual creativity in churches, synagogues, and other religious institutions and their people.
2. We believe that at the present stage of spiritual development it is wise for ministers, priests, and rabbis to use *The Urantia Book* as a resource for preaching and teaching rather than referring to the book itself or directing attention to it. Almost every concept in *The Urantia Book* can be associated with some theologian, philosopher, or scientist in the past or present.
3. We believe that, although one should not be secretive about interest in *The Urantia Book*, one should use discretion in recommending it to people. The light of enhanced truth can frighten and blind as well as guide and illuminate.
4. We believe *The Urantia Book's* claim to a revelatory source and status is not germane to its usefulness in the presentation of spiritual truth. Truth has an inherent appeal, regardless of its source, and can be used to enrich one's preaching, teaching, and living.
5. We believe the Spirit of God works among us in a differential and evolutionary manner; therefore, we recognize that for whatever reason some clergy may not wish to read and critically evaluate *The Urantia Book*. This diversity should in no way stand as a barrier to our mutual respect, fellowship, and love.
6. We believe the leavening process of creativity stimulated by *The Urantia Book* should be ecumenical in nature.
7. We believe *The Urantia Book* will eventually be recognized by the great majority of the world's religious leaders as one of the most constructive spiritual messages our world has received since Jesus' ministry on earth.

Network Recommendations

1. Read the entire *Urantia Book* to get its sweeping universe view of reality. Many of us started reading the book at Part IV, The Life and Teachings of Jesus. If you should like to get a quick overall view of the book you might read "The Gift of Revelation," a twenty-two page summary of the basic facts and truths of *The Urantia Book*.
2. Have the *Concordex* of *The Urantia Book* available to help in researching topics on which you are preaching or teaching.
3. Use the *Paramony*, which is a parallel and harmony of the Bible and *The Urantia Book*, to locate *Urantia Book* material on the Biblical text you are using in sermon preparation.

The Spiritual Fellowship Journal

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About the Editors

Meredith Sprunger is a United Church of Christ minister, and college teacher, retired. He served pastorates in the Midwest and taught at Elmhurst College and Indiana Institute of Technology. Merlyn Cox is a United Methodist minister serving in the North Indiana Conference.

The Unique Function of Religion

Mainline churches have lost almost five million members since 1965. There is a widespread concern about this loss and a worried recognition that mainline churches no longer speak as the "central voice" of our culture. Many individuals and groups within the churches have recommended strategies for spiritual renewal. In the December, 1990 *Reader's Digest* ("Look What They've Done with My Songs") John S. Tompkins, a Presbyterian layperson, suggests that professional minister-bureaucrats have emphasized a theology which downplays the spiritual and have substituted social, economic, and political action for the real function of religion—spiritual enlightenment and nurturance.

The Presbyterian Lay Committee, which publishes *The Presbyterian Layman*, agrees with this indictment. Its editor, J. Robert Campbell, says that the church should stay out of politics and stick to its unique mission: "the proclamation of the Gospel and making of disciples." A survey taken of the church-at-large by a special committee of the denomination found that sixty percent of those responding considered these criticisms "a valuable voice of dissent in the church."

Those of us among the clergy in mainline Christianity tend to be sensitive about such criticism and believe it is not a balanced evaluation of our leadership. Nevertheless, we do recognize that the church has traditionally been involved with secular society. Many of us have promoted this relationship.

This secular involvement of the church was inherent in its development in Western Civilization. Christianity furnished the dynamic for the new culture. Theology was the mother of all of our intellectual and scientific disciplines. Ministers in past generations were often the most educated people in local communities. It was a common practice to select ministers as administrators of hospitals and other social agencies. Clergy served as college presidents, professors, and teachers. They were elected to the board of directors of the most prestigious local and national organizations. The Church became deeply involved in our secular culture and evolved social, economic, and political working alliances. As our increasingly secular society lost its spiritual foundations, the church shared this spiritual deterioration.

The church will not regain its ability to minister creatively and bring spiritual renewal to humankind until it understands the unique function of religion in society. Religious institutions, i.e. religionists in groups, must concern themselves exclusively with religion—spiritual enlightenment, nurturance, and prophetic insight. The church's central ministry must be the spiritual transformation and growth of individuals.

These spiritually transformed individuals will, in turn, transform society and its institutions. Religionists must engage in social, economic, and political activities *as individuals*, not as institutions or parties. As the church devotes itself single-mindedly to religion, it will enable its members to find spiritual empowerment and guidance to become leaders and supporters in social, economic, and political reformation and growth. The church, as an institution, should be free from secular alliances.

The church must evolve creative, comforting, and love-expanding fellowships which promote progressive spiritual insight and foster the appreciation of and dedication to supreme values. Let the church be the church, not a hybrid religious-secular organization. Only as the church brings spiritual ministry to individuals will it be able to renew itself and its members, who will, in turn, transform society. Religion achieves its most effective social ministry when it is not functionally connected with the secular institutions of society.

But since the church as an institution is so deeply involved in secular activities, how can it find spiritual renewal and function as a truly religious institution which can give direction and spiritually undergird our entire society? I have been contemplating this question for over thirty years, and am convinced that *The Urantia Book* has the greatest potential of any contemporary resource for facilitating this transition. It has the revelatory depth and breadth to restructure our conception of Reality, to give the church a clear picture of its mission, and to bring spiritual inspiration to empower us for transforming ministry.

Bible Appreciation Enhanced

Many years ago a friend who was the senior minister of a prominent city church asked me, "How do you view the Bible after reading *The Urantia Book*?" He had briefly examined the book and assumed it would have a negative effect on my evaluation of the Bible. He was, therefore, a bit surprised when I answered, "I have a much greater appreciation of the Bible since I have been studying *The Urantia Book*."

The authors of *The Urantia Book* place Biblical writings in a holistic picture of progressive revelation on our world. They impart a new appreciation for our courageous forebears and their historic witness to truth. Much that modern scholarship has regarded as myth in the Biblical narrative we learn has an actual historical basis and validity. The stories of Adam and Eve, the tower of Babel, Noah and the ark, and other events are examples of Biblical accounts which have a solid historical base but have been reshaped by tradition for religious purposes.

The Urantia Book presents a background and setting for many Biblical statements and events which today seem farfetched or "deus ex machina" happenings and makes them

understandable and reasonable when seen in context. I have observed that some pastors whose scholarly inclinations have led them to take a rather liberal position regarding Biblical material have, after reading *The Urantia Book*, started using Biblical references in their preaching with new conviction and power.

Authentic new revelation always builds on the best of the old. The New Testament is continuous with the highest truths of the Old Testament. In the same way, *The Urantia Book* confirms the essential truths of the Biblical message. The place of Jesus' role in revelation and salvation is affirmed and enlarged. The primary effect of reading *The Urantia Book* for most Christians is a new and expanded appreciation of the stature and wisdom of Jesus and an enlightened gratitude for the effectiveness of his saving ministry to our world and universe. This, along with an expanded view of universe reality, we believe is destined to bring an enhanced spiritual authenticity to the proclamation of the gospel in our contemporary society.

Mainline Destiny

The Lilly Endowment publication, *Progressions* (January, 1990), gives an eloquent account of major research efforts to understand the decline of mainline Christianity over the past 25 years. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), which celebrated the 200th anniversary of its first General Assembly last year, has lost one-third of its membership since 1965.

Dr. Robert H. Bullock, Jr., editor of *Presbyterian Outlook*, recalls the prophetic words of the moderator of the Southern Presbyterian Church in 1961: "Our greatest concern...should not be the rising or falling of statistics but whether...we are an instrument of God's purpose for these times." And Dr. Dorothy C. Bass, associate professor of church history in Chicago Theological Seminary, insightfully comments: "The decline of mainstream Protestantism's ability to address American culture in a clear and authentic voice is a much more serious matter than the declining size of its membership."

The most important factor in the resurgence of mainline Christianity is being an instrument of God's purpose for these times and confirming the authenticity and power of its spiritual message. We believe *The Urantia Book*, which claims to be a new epochal revelation to our planet, has the conceptual view of reality and the spiritual dynamic to generate a spiritual renaissance in the church.

This is why our Clergy Network recommends a critical study of *The Urantia Book* by church leaders and scholars. The church historically has depended on consensus to guide its pathway. It is, therefore, important for many minds to evaluate this unusual book. If it survives this rigorous test, as we believe it will, the church will have a tremendous resource which will inspire humankind for centuries to come. -MJS

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Interface:

A New Revelation? Who needs it?

One of the most pervasive and inhibiting initial reactions to *The Urantia Book*, I believe, aside from its seemingly gnostic elements, comes from our assumptions about revelation itself, namely that a truly contemporary revelation to our world is neither expected nor needed.

With the formation of a canon of authoritative writings taking shape, Tertullian remarked that "the Holy Spirit has been chased into a book," implying that revelation would be considered a thing of the past, and the Spirit would, by our reckoning, be limited to working through these records of God's past actions in human history.

Whatever the wisdom of the early church in fixing the canon of scriptures, that implication has indeed been carried and strengthened over the past two millennia, until in minds of even the most devout Christians today, both scholarly and lay, no more revelation is expected—at least until the second coming. Even that has been largely abandoned to the more conservative of the faith, being considered too embarrassing for most mainline Christians to take literally and therefore relegated to a mythical and never quite achievable eschatological hope.

That one should be cautious and even downright skeptical of revelatory claims seems healthy enough. Every age has provided evidence that religious fanaticism needs little outward encouragement; it needs only the inner medium of its own fervent hope and spiritual longing in which to grow.

But I suspect our skepticism about *even the possibility of revelation* is grounded in more than historical perspective. It comes from *a priori* assumptions we carry, assumptions not necessarily in harmony with our conscious beliefs.

Why would we assume that further revelation is neither possible nor necessary? First of all, there is the finality, the once-and-for-allness, of the incarnation itself. One does not add to the perfection of such divine revelation. Secondly, we have the scriptures, with all things necessary for our salvation contained therein. What more could there be?

The answer I believe is *understanding*: a fuller, richer understanding of Jesus' life on earth, without the inevitable distortions of human memory and perception, and a larger universal framework in which to understand the incarnation itself.

Whether the scriptures, or even the church for that matter, were intended by Jesus, they appear to us today to be the inevitable by-products of his teaching and revelation. But our

knowledge is shadowy, imperfect and contentious, notwithstanding the power of the image of Christ to shine through those imperfections.

Scholars continue an on-again, off-again quest for the historical Jesus, and poll themselves on which sayings of Jesus in the New Testament, if any, can be regarded as authentic. The results are meager.

Is a new revelation necessary? If one means is our salvation at stake—no. But if one assumes that God IS the God of the living, whose desire is always to reveal as much as each individual *andeachage* is ready and able to receive, then why, given the poverty of our understanding, would we no longer expect it, hope for it, even long for it?

If God so fully disclosed himself in the Incarnation that anyone who has seen the Son has seen the Father, would he not desire for us all a clearer, fuller understanding of the same?

God is not arbitrarily hidden—he is intentionally revealed. If we have finally achieved a point in the history of the world that represents a readiness for an up-stepping of our understanding of the eternal plan for all of us, who would wish to say, "No thanks, we have enough."

-Merlyn Cox

Empowering the Church

This feature is written by laypersons active in their churches.

How the Urantia Book Can Contribute to the Church

Polls and opinions indicate that there is a surge of religious interest in the country, yet the support for some churches is faltering. Many that are thriving have found that constructive self-examination can lead to more satisfying experience for individuals and more effective service to the faith community. *The Urantia Book* offers a relevant evaluative tool, as well as an intriguing and credible approach to new frontiers of spiritual understanding.

The role of the church can be defined in different ways. If religion is a personal experience and if the mission of any religious group is to nurture the unique spiritual journey of each individual within it, then valid self-evaluation first asks how effective that nurturance is. There is nothing unusual about doubt and confusion regarding God and the universe; there is nothing new in personal struggles with death, loneliness, fear, wounded self-esteem, and moral and ethical pressures, although these may be especially difficult in a materialistic, secular society with a fast and impersonal life style. What is new is a resource which reasonably and effectively addresses all of these!

In its remarkable diversity, *The Urantia Book* helps to bring ageless truths into a contemporary setting. Its insights cover many areas vital to the church, among them:

- Tradition may either strengthen or strangle, and non-emotional reasoning can help distinguish one from the other.
- Ritual and ceremony, modified over centuries, become more meaningful when their origins are understood.
- Evolution—creation in time—is a law of the universe, basic in physical, mental, and spiritual development, both personal and planetary.
- Sound religion is the foundation upon which progressive civilizations evolve, through the inspired creativity of individual cooperating minds.
- Evil is the inevitable concomitant of the gift of free will. As immature creatures, molded by biology, chemistry, culture, economics, and child rearing, we make some poor choices; but not to have such freedom is to be enslaved.
- Unity among religious faiths will come only with acceptance of God's sovereignty over all diverse religious beliefs.
- Political peace requires the sovereignty of a world government over militant nationalism.
- We are learning that our planet is a speck in space. The countless numbers of galaxies becoming visible in our scientific age are consistent with the vast inhabited universe superbly described in *The Urantia Book*.

The earnest seeker asks: "How can I know God? What is spirit? Are angels real? Who is Jesus for me? What am I doing here? Where am I going? If there is eternal life, what survives?" The Bible's priceless guidance for these concerns is broad in application and relatively brief. *The Urantia Book* addresses them in detail and in a manner which is consistent with late 20th century developments in science, philosophy, and religion.

Jesus skillfully taught at the level of his listeners, who were newcomers to the idea that the "spirit within" is the spark of God residing in each human mind—eternal, close, non-coercive, loving. *Urantia Book* readers often say that, after the life and teachings of the Son of Man, the description of the origin, nature, function, and destiny of this God-fragment within us is the most valuable section.

The book recounts the "ordinary" experience of Jesus' "hidden years," his family, education, friendships, and work. These specifics bring inspiration and comfort by describing how he faced struggles, disappointments, and death with forgiveness and the overriding joy of complete faith in his Father.

Herman Fiefel in *New Meanings of Death* remarks, "...one wonders whether, in the last analysis, it is only a compelling

vision of man and his role in the universe which can prepare us to face the certainty of death and its sequelae." Readers of *The Urantia Book* who declare, "It has changed my life," will most often mention its clear, logical, and compelling vision of death as a transition to another level of reality, a step in the experience of an enduring human personality finding God. We elect this journey through our lifelong choices, free will decisions to seek to do his will; we take along our values and relationships. God accompanies us with his spirit and surrounds each of us with forces and celestial personalities to teach, guide, and comfort. As a truly loving parent, he does not indulge or punish, but envelopes us all with affection as we grow in our grasp of his teachings and the strength of our faith.

The church is reminded that its mission can be crippled by rigidity and over emphasis on organization. The kingdom of heaven that Jesus taught is the unseen, within-the-heart, borderless fellowship of all believers in the Fatherhood of God, the kinship of humankind, and the survival of personality in a friendly universe. A religious organization is a visible, social community of believers. Within it Jesus "would teach how to perfect your inner spiritual life so as to render you manyfold more competent to attack the solution of your purely human problems." (p. 1581)

The Urantia Book demonstrates that genuine revelation is possible in these times without ecclesiastical authority, ego, publicity, power, profit or "proof" in phenomena. It makes understandable much which has been abstract, elusive, and mysterious; it fills gaps in the records and offers reasonable cause to reinterpret or discard some of them. There is practical guidance for living with the problems of rich and poor, self-aggrandizement, family and parenting, personal and political violence. There are plausible explanations of humankind's origin, the role of this planet and our ultimate destiny, and the world's present disorder and confusion. The incarnation of a Son of God is set within a cosmic context consistent with our space age, comforting each person by bringing a new intimacy with Jesus as a divine being who lived a fully human life.

How ministers may choose to open the way for *The Urantia Book* to contribute to the church depends on the readiness of the congregation. They could adapt concepts into sermons and counseling, mention the book as a reference, suggest it as an aid to Bible study, lend it, encourage groups to read and discuss it, and welcome the readers who arrive with it. (There are many who are active in their churches.)

While disclaiming infallibility or finality, *The Urantia Book* presents a milestone in the intellectual and spiritual evolution of the planet. This remarkable resource can help to deepen our personal faith in the degree to which it is woven into our lives by solitary search, in study groups, or in any church which earnestly and flexibly undertakes to nurture faith as a developmental task.

-Helena E. Sprague

Issues and Answers: Issues for thought and debate

Clergy Evaluate the Urantia Book

Meredith J. Sprunger

Many of us as we read the Gospels marvel that the Pharisees and Sadducees did not perceive the high spiritual quality and wisdom of the teachings of Jesus. We tend to forget the great influence of tradition and the power of authority in institutional religion. Prophetic messages are usually opposed by institutional power structures for decades before the truth of their insights is generally recognized. This is the nature of religious growth. All individual and social development has a basic evolutionary component.

Some thirty-five years ago while serving as vice-president of what was then the Indiana-Michigan Conference of the United Church of Christ, Judge Louis Hammerschmidt, the lay member of our conference board, gave me a copy of *The Urantia Book*. My life has not been the same since. After several years of critical study and thought, I became convinced that it had an authentic revelatory message. It seemed that my entire existence and experience had been prepared for its transcendent spiritual vision.

I knew that my life must be dedicated to building an interface between this amazing book, which claims to be the Fifth Epochal Revelation in the history of our planet, and mainline Christianity. I spent years thinking about how this could be done wisely and effectively. After decades of bootlegging *Urantia Book* concepts in my preaching and teaching, it became clear to me that no amount of evolutionary eloquence or insight is an adequate substitute for the revelation itself. Through experience I became convinced that only the Fifth Epochal Revelation has the integrated spiritual dynamics to bring a spiritual renaissance in our society. Therefore, in 1979 we organized and incorporated the Christian Fellowship of Students of *The Urantia Book* to serve as an aegis for such a ministry.

Starting in 1983, we sent letters along with a pamphlet and an offer of a loan book to all of the United Church of Christ ministers in the United States and the United Methodist ministers in the North Indiana Conference. From the 8,000 personal letters sent, there were 330 ministers who asked for loan books. This 4% request for loan books was greater than the 1% which we hypothesized would ask for books. Around 25% of those who examined the book have purchased their own personal copy. As anticipated, we received both positive and negative comments on the book. The following is a representative sample of each.

"Thank you for introducing me to *The Urantia Book*. I noticed it in a bookstore years ago, but passed it by...I already feel the need to find a forum for some discussion about this book. Even within the political restrictions of the professional ministry, there are some persons I can speak to regarding this work...reading it has invigorated my preaching and restored much of my faith in Jesus as the Son of God rather than just a wise speaker and just man. While I am at liberty to refer to *The Urantia Book* with my secretary and friends here (at church), I still feel stifled as the urge moves me to use the book as a source document!"

"Having examined in considerable detail *The Urantia Book*, I am now returning it to you under separate cover. The process of evaluating the book was challenging and interesting and there is much therein to commend this mysterious work. However, I have come to the tentative conclusion that this is a product of human reasoning and imagination, not divine, extraterrestrial revelation. Given that the book came into being in the mid-1930's I see a number of concepts that reflect the paradigms of that period, not necessarily what we know today, especially in terms of scientific concepts...Finally, the organization of the universe follows hierarchical patterns reminiscent of the centralized 1930's. Using Occam's Razor, this explanation seems to me to be overly-complex and bureaucratic. Based on these criteria, I find it difficult to accept the authenticity of *The Urantia Book*. Thank you so much for sharing it with me."

"Even as a neophyte student of *The Urantia Book* it is clear to me that this book can at the very least be classified as first class wisdom literature. One major theme appears to be that of understanding all change as some form of evolutionary process. While this is a thesis I have long held *The Urantia Book* carries it out in a grand and convincing scale. Thanks for introducing us."

"It's a fascinating book. I've read large parts of it and the other materials you sent me but I must admit I don't know what to make of it. I am a liberal thinker, well read in biblical criticism, ancient mythology, Jungian Psychology, World religions, the history and theology of the Christian faith and the history of art, ritual and culture. I have an open mind. But I find it very difficult to relate the Urantia material to my world view of reality and my faith perspective. It seems to be a literal projection of the inner 'spiritual' realm of the Psyche on to the outer historical world. This is very dangerous...If you have other material which might help me understand the origin and intent of the book (right now I am very suspicious of its esoteric nature and doubtful of its authorship and 'revelation') I would still be interested (even purchasing) in further reading."

"The book has made a tremendous impact on the thought life of a number of faculty at the University of _____ when I recently introduced it to them. I'm completing my doctoral

studies this year...Since the book is making the 'rounds' at present could you possibly send another copy as well, since my wife and I are making a 4th reading of it."

"I already have a copy of *The Urantia Book*. But I am so excited to find a group of kindred souls within the church who want to take it seriously. Please send me more information about becoming a part of your Fellowship, and about any interpretive literature you may have. Praise God and thanks."

"Thank you for your letter regarding *The Urantia Book*; it helped give additional credibility to my frequent use of the guidance and revelation the book has provided me since I acquired it over three years ago. I showed it to another retired U.C.C. minister a couple of years ago and his response was something like 'although parts of it seem far-fetched, the well written book seems to offer some truthful insight.' Thank you for the work you are doing."

*Even as a neophyte student of *The Urantia Book* it is clear to me that this book can at the very least be classified as first class wisdom literature.*

"Thank you very much for sending me *The Urantia Book*...I was glad to get a look at it, as it is an extraordinary book indeed, though I had never heard of it before your brochure came in the mail. Whoever wrote it had an incredible imagination and also a complex and beautifully structured mind, since as your brochures indicate, even a brief reading of parts of it give the impression of a highly unusual consistency amidst all the exuberant imagination."

"It reminds me a little of Emmanuel Swedenborg, yet without Swedenborg's concern for virtue and the ethical life. It strikes me that the author could have made a tremendous career in modern science fiction. I don't say that disparagingly. We need people and literature which widen our horizons spiritually, and let us know that there are more things in heaven and on earth than dreamt of in our philosophy."

"Where I find the book unsatisfying is first, the lack of relationship to the concrete realities of our world, the obstacles and difficulties which we actually face in living. It is like 'Dungeons and Dragons,' seductively capable of drawing someone off into the higher spheres and losing all touch with earth. Second, the fact that the author or authors chose to conceal themselves is very unsatisfying. That again bespeaks the minimizing of history and of historical connections which the book presupposes. It's a kind of mammoth 'Gnostic' document for our time, attractive, I'm sure, to those who need to feel that they have some kind of superior esoteric knowledge not available to most poor mortals. Finally, for all its claim to represent entirely new, indeed infinite levels of knowledge, there are already aspects of its language which sound quaint, passe, as in the references to the 'Fatherhood of

God and the brotherhood of man.' At least in the U.C.C., such one-sidedly sexist language is no longer acceptable."

"I am finding the book interesting and thought-provoking, and thank you for making it available to me." "I am absolutely intrigued with *The Urantia Book*. My only regret is that I have less time to read and think than I would like." "Didn't get finished with the book. Super piece of work." "Thank you for loaning me a copy of *The Urantia Book*. It was fascinating reading!" "It's a great book. Thank you for sharing it with me." "This book was very enjoyable. Thanks."

We received many more comments but all pretty much reflecting these same positive and negative observations. Most of these ministers had the book for only three months and obviously did not have the time for an in depth, critical evaluation. The Christian Fellowship of Students of *The Urantia Book* is interested in stimulating knowledgeable people in all fields of learning, especially those with backgrounds in theology, philosophy, and science, to undertake critical evaluations of the book. This is the way revelation is validated or invalidated in our society and culture. We believe *The Urantia Book* will hold up under such examination. In any case this is the acid test of truth which determines whether spiritual teachings live and nourish humankind or are passing phenomena on the human scene.

I should like to close this brief paper by quoting from a letter we received from a Professor of Philosophy who teaches in one of the well known universities of the country. He first heard of *The Urantia Book* in the early 70's and was unimpressed. Some time ago a former student suggested that he read the book. Since he respected the student's judgment, he got a copy of *The Urantia Book* and started reading it. Although this professor has not finished reading the book and therefore does not want his name attached to any recommendation, he is amazed at its substantive content. He comments:

We believe The Urantia Book will hold up under such examination. In any case this is the acid test of truth which determines whether spiritual teachings live and nourish humankind or are passing phenomena on the human scene.

It is, in my judgment, an amazingly sophisticated, spiritually moving, and metaphysically insightful document, this *Urantia Book*! I have been reading philosophical and theological tracts (my major work has been in Heidegger and German philosophy) for many years, and I have never come across a work that is both so philosophically satisfying in its depiction of the Divine, as well as so uplifting, reassuring, and spiritually profound. Clearly, the appearance of this book is an important event in world history. Its description of and justification of the existence of a truly personal, although infinite, Divinity is simply beautiful. I'm not sure what else

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I need to say to you, except that I am interested in becoming somehow involved in a network of people who have encountered this text and who have been moved by it in a way similar to the way in which it is effecting me...

What is it about this book that makes it, for me and for so many other people, such a compelling, persuasive, and moving work? I've read a great many spiritual tracts from a great many religious traditions, but none of them has had the penetrating power of this book. I really am a loss of what to make of it, except to conclude that it really is what it purports to be. Of course, the very idea that—in effect—angelic entities communicated this work through a human being is absurd to the contemporary secular mind, but such a mind is very limited. We humans are barely evolved beyond the level of animals, so it is not surprising that we have difficulty imagining and taking seriously levels of reality that transcend our own.

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This professor voices the reaction which most of us "religious professionals" have when we first look at *The Urantia Book*—"gnostic," "esoteric," "absurd." Then those of us who take the time to actually read the book find something quite different than we anticipated. It has substance, balance, spiritual insight, and an amazingly coherent universe picture of Reality. Because of its great potential to contribute to the spiritual enhancement and well being of humanity, we think it is important for ministers, theologians, philosophers, and others to engage in a scholarly study, criticism, and evaluation of the book.

"The time is ripe to witness the figurative resurrection of the human Jesus from his burial tomb amidst the theological traditions and the religious dogmas of nineteen centuries. Jesus of Nazareth must not be longer sacrificed to even the splendid concept of the glorified Christ. What a transcendent service if, through this revelation, the Son of Man should be recovered from the tomb of traditional theology and be presented as the living Jesus to the church that bears his name, and to all other religions!" (2090:3)

Science, Religion and *The Urantia Book*

Kenneth T. Glasziou

Materialism and atheism are modern diseases—or phenomena, depending on one's point of view—that had their roots among the empiricists of the 16th, 17th, and 18th century. Prominent in this group were Francis Bacon, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and David Hume. Perhaps the best known statement originating from their work is that of Hume who, in his *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, said: "When we run over our libraries, persuaded of these principles, what havoc we must make. If we take in our hand any volume of divinity or school metaphysics for instance, let us ask, does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity and number? No. Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matters of fact or existence? No. Commit it then to the flames for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion." Presumably art, literature, poetry, and music also would have contributed to Hume's bonfire.

The present dying stages of the age of materialism present both a challenge and an opportunity to prepare the way for a new era of religious revival. The age of materialism should really have terminated in 1909 when Geiger and Marsden, working under Rutherford in England, bombarded a thin sheet of metallic foil with alpha particles and, to their amazement, found that most of the particles went straight through the metal foil without touching anything. A few of these particles, however, rebounded as if they had collided with something solid.

At that time, when we thought about the nature of matter, our minds would be likely to picture some solid object such as a brick whose micro structure was packed with billions of atoms with their electrons embedded like currants in a Christmas pudding. The new atomic model that emerged from Rutherford's laboratory was composed of a tiny nucleus, only a thousand billionth of a centimeter in size, surrounded by a cloud of electrons that extended out to a distance of about one hundred millionth of a centimeter. This tiny nucleus occupies one-one hundred thousand billionth of the volume of the atom. To date it has not been possible to show that an electron has any measurable dimensions. Thus, in terms of its nucleus "matter" component, a brick is almost entirely empty space.

Few of us have the ability to grasp the full meaning of this discovery. Our bodies, the material houses we live in, are made up of atoms. It may help to picture what the result would be if all of the "matter" of our bodies were squeezed together. Something similar to this occurs during the dying phases of a large star when it collapses to become a neutron star. In such circumstances our body volume would be very much less than the head of a pin. But even the final nature of this matter

component is in doubt. Each of the nucleons that make up the atomic nucleus is itself thought to be made up of three unimaginably smaller point particles called quarks, and these in turn may only be the expression of some kind of force field. Thus the "concrete" world that is signaled to our brains via the medium of our senses, and translated by our minds as "material reality," is really only the nebulous interplay of the force fields. Realistically, the physical world is empty space and very little else. Perhaps Bultmann, the great German theologian, intuitively grasped this truth when, in his book *Existence and Faith*, he said, "God's creation is out of nothing; and to be God's creature means absolutely and in every moment to have one's source in him, and in such a way that were he to withhold his creative will, the creature would fall back into nothingness."

Our understanding of the nebulous nature of matter was further fortified as a result of the work of Dirac which vividly exemplified the true meaning of Einstein's famous equation equating energy and matter. Dirac's theories were explicable if all particles had an anti-particle, their mirror image in all respects. The coming together of two such particles was expected to result in their mutual annihilation during which they would be converted to pure energy. This expectation was soon realized experimentally. Nowadays, the production and annihilation of such particle pairs in physics laboratories is routine.

The present dying stages of the age of materialism present both a challenge and an opportunity to prepare the way for a new era of religious revival.

Modern physics has many such bizarre findings to tantalize our minds but we will deal with only one more—the pairs of virtual particles, particle and anti-particle, that flash in and out of existence as a result of borrowing energy from a vacuum. This would indeed be an "Alice in Wonderland" fantasy if it were not for the fact that the experiments of Hendrick Casimir and others have established excellent confirmatory evidence for this phenomena. Other predicted outcomes of virtual particle effects such as the Lamb effect on the hydrogen spectrum have also been confirmed. This is but a tiny sample of the extraordinary behavior of the minute particles that make up the micro world of physics. But it is not just the micro world that contradicts the materialist concept of "what I see is what there is." Einstein's relativity theory, as well as telling us that matter and energy are interconvertible, has also forced us to revise our ideas of time and space and to accept that time can stand still and distance can shrink to nothingness.

It is worth noticing at this point that both real and virtual particles have a common feature—both may be derived from and converted into energy. But what is this energy? We cannot see it, touch it, smell it, weigh it, or locate it in time and

space. We cannot even imagine it. Pure energy is an abstraction to which we can attribute no properties other than to assure ourselves that somehow or other it exists, and that it is the source of all matter. The modern educated materialist has no option but to admit that these statements are factual and have been demonstrated by empirical means. But there is an unbridgeable gap in this knowledge—the materialist has no explanation for how the abstract becomes “real” or vice versa. How foolish humans are when they deny the reality of God and their own soul as being irrelevant and wishful abstractions, while at the same time blinding themselves to the fact that the source of supposedly material reality is also an abstraction! Neither should the materialist scientist discount religious experience on the grounds of credulity so long as they persist with the assumption that man’s self-awareness, his intellectual and philosophical endowments, and his innate sense of morality, emerged spontaneously from some lifeless primordial ooze!

Neither should the materialist scientist discount religious experience on the grounds of credulity so long as they persist with the assumption that man’s self-awareness, his intellectual and philosophical endowments, and his innate sense of morality, emerged spontaneously from some lifeless primordial ooze!

It is true that the materialistic, mechanistic concept of time, space, and matter still persists among most of our population. Even secondary schoolchildren, however, are now aware that our scientists can accelerate particles to near the speed of light and directly observe the attenuation of time and distance. Clocks are available that are sufficiently accurate to measure the differences in the lapse of time between the top and the bottom of a city building due to gravitational effects (the clock at the top of the building runs faster). We can shoot a rocket into space and demonstrate that, because of its velocity, a clock there runs more slowly than one on the ground. Materialism is indeed on borrowed time.

Still to penetrate into the knowledge sphere of general society is the significance of the work of mathematicians such as Godel, Church, Turing, Shannon, and many others upon our concepts of the limitations of human knowledge. Godel’s incompleteness theorem, paraphrased, states that all consistent axiomatic formulations of number theory include undecidable propositions. Algorithmic information theory tells us that incompleteness and randomness are natural and pervasive in mathematics. If uncertainty pervades mathematics, and mathematics is the basis of all science, how then can any scientist claim that one day we will know all of the secrets of creation?

In these days of enormously rapid advance in the technology of computer systems and the growth of the concepts of “clever” machines and artificial intelligence, many of us are

inclined to believe that there is nothing unusual about the human mind, that it too can be described in terms of the laws of physics and may even be outstripped by computers. But thirty years of research in these fields have really only led to a growing awareness of the incredible complexity and abilities of the human mind. Ignoring the fact that computers are programmed by human minds (even a self-programming computer is the work of the human mind), the work of Turing tells us that the bounds of computability must remain more limited than human thinking, if for no other reason than that many mathematical problems are not susceptible to algorithmic analysis. Roger Penrose, a British mathematician and theoretical physicist, suggests that these bounds of computability are related to Godel’s theorem, in that the undecidable propositions inherent in axiomatic systems may be self-evident truths to the human mind, but must remain forever undecidable to the computer. This suggestion has far-reaching implications for our concept of the nature of mind.

Our concept of values has taken an enormous beating from the pronouncements of the empiricists that only things that can be measured or counted have meaning and value. This philosophy led directly to the conclusion that there is no basis for morality, beauty, or goodness and to the pessimistic viewpoint that the fact of existence is a cruel absurdity. We now know that the axioms of the empiricists were quite wrong, but are we ready to fill the gap left by these discredited assumptions?

Contrary to its effects upon religion, philosophy, ethics, and morality, the philosophy of empiricism has had many beneficial and remarkable results because it gave rise to the scientific method of thinking that has brought us into the age of technology. Certainly there have been negative effects because of too rapid advance, nevertheless modern technology has brought enormous benefits in that it has liberated the majority of humankind from the fetters of a lifetime of continuous struggle to obtain the barest essentials of subsistence. But not without exacting a price.

Our concept of values has taken an enormous beating from the pronouncements of the empiricists that only things that can be measured or counted have meaning and value. . . . We now know that the axioms of the empiricists were quite wrong, but are we ready to fill the gap left by these discredited assumptions?

Obviously enormous stresses on human society develop during times of dynamic change which then require rapid readjustments to compensate for any adverse effects. For all complex systems where a large number of factors interact, stability is favored when automatic compensatory effects are built into the system—often known as negative feedback control. In free market economic systems, for example, stability tends to be generated by compensatory adjustments

of supply, demand, and prices. All such systems are inherently oscillatory and good design is required to minimize the amplitude of oscillations. Human society is a vast and exceedingly complex system, largely self-regulatory because of negative feedback control. Such systems adjust satisfactorily when those inputs that produce oscillations change by only small amounts or else change slowly. Large and rapid changes tend to produce very large oscillations which, if uncorrected, may destroy the system. We are living in a period of history in which society is undergoing rapid change. For the foreseeable future, human society will go from crisis to crisis and will indeed be fortunate not to collapse. *The Urantia Book* indicates that we can expect continuing instability for the next one thousand years during which period religion will be presented with unique opportunities as a stabilizing influence. One of the major contributing factors to instability will be the rapid exhaustion of non-renewable resources. Others will be our inability to regulate population growth, and genetic deterioration due to removal of natural selection pressures. Both are problems with challenging religious overtones.

I do not believe that human intelligence, human wisdom, and human compassion are in any way adequate to compensate for the dominating self-assertive and self-preservation tendencies inherent in human nature. It appears that we are heading for disaster. Perhaps this is why the Urantia papers have appeared on earth at this time. It may be that these papers were never meant to usher in a new Christian or even Jesusonian religion. They may have been given so that farseeing and forward looking men and women will utilize the superior knowledge and wisdom contained in these papers to construct new and appealing philosophies of living, specifically adapted to the needs of all communities that have the common bond of belief in a God whose dominant relationship with all people is love. Traditional religions may not be able to fill the gap that has developed since the logic of science challenged the dogmatism of religious authoritarianism. Although we now know that there can be no empirical test that will reveal absolute truth, the doctrines of both science and religion must be able to withstand the rigors of rational examination; increasingly an educated population will not accept assertions that are an affront to personal intellectual honesty and integrity. From the viewpoint of all responsible religionists, these new philosophies of living must be evolutionary and progressive so that men and women from all nations, races, and religions, and from all levels of intellectual, social and spiritual advancement will have a common goal—the Fatherhood of God and the kinship of all people. Unity of purpose is desirable, indeed essential, but uniformity of means is neither practical or necessarily desirable.

Whether or not the Urantia papers are accepted as revelation or whether they are utilized because of the quality of their content is not as important as the pragmatic necessity that

these concepts help to guide the religious and spiritual growth of humankind. Nor is it important that the Urantia papers be acknowledged as a contributing factor in any new revival as long as the teachings they contain that bear upon the universality of the Fatherhood of God and the kinship of all people are introduced into current religious thinking.

The teachings of the Urantia papers have the potential to markedly enhance the quality of thought and effectiveness of the work of those farseeing men and women who are destined to create our new philosophies of living. It may be helpful to some to know of my own experiences as a scientist in coming to accept the Urantia papers as genuine revelation. I was born in 1923, the second son of lower middle class parents who were moderately dedicated members of the low Anglican Church. There were no fundamentalist overtones, no over-emphasis of the importance of communion or any other sacrament or creed in our church. The acceptance of the concept of a Father-God and the sonship of Jesus Christ was not in doubt, and the essence of all religious instruction centered on the gospel teachings. My early years were dominated by depression and war. At the age of 16, I gave my life to Jesus, and except for a few years during and after World War II, this commitment has guided my life.

Traditional religions may not be able to fill the gap that has developed since the logic of science challenged the dogmatism of religious authoritarianism.

I was a late starter at the university—26 years of age when I entered the Faculty of Science at the University of Sydney. My religious faith was then in tatters and one of the contributing factors to my entering higher education was that a friend, who had just completed his Bachelor of Arts degree, assured me that the faculty at the University knew that there was no God. My desire to enter the university was partly motivated by curiosity as to how such knowledge could be obtained.

I commenced at the university with a firm belief that a prominent principle of university education was an inalienable dedication to the pursuit of truth. By my second year, I had lost this illusion but had also rediscovered my earlier faith. The years rolled by, I entered upon a research career, took my family overseas to the California Institute of Technology, and later built a research institute at Brisbane, Australia, where I remained until spinal injuries received in war-time forced an early retirement. During all these years I was a regular member of the Anglican Church and a conscientious reader of the Bible. In retrospect, I realize that my Bible readings took an unusual course. While in the United States we had acquired a King James translation that had the spoken word of Jesus printed in red ink. Gradually my Bible reading became confined to those words in red, and eventually I knew most of Jesus' spoken word by rote. Some of the words attributed to

Jesus seemed out of character and were set aside. From the remainder, I developed a concept of a Father-God that was quite different from that preached by many religious sects, but nevertheless in line with much of the great Christian literature.

In about 1974, one of my sons brought home *The Urantia Book* and asked me to look at it and give an opinion. I read Part IV, the Life of Jesus, and in it met the Jesus whom I had come to know and love from the red ink words in my King James Bible. I read casually in other parts of *The Urantia Book*, but was not overly impressed except that I noticed the superlative quality of the writing and a remarkable consistency in the text of the book. Only slowly did I appreciate that this book was seriously claiming to be a revelation. My acquired skepticism, bred of a long career in research science, led me to mentally reject such a claim.

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Soon I started to notice odd statements in the science content of the book that I knew would have to have been wild guesses at the date of its publication in 1955. I thought that including such statements was a quite extraordinary thing to do, for my attitude was that if just one of them proved to be untrue, the claims of the book would be invalidated. I asked myself why such an obviously clever and well informed group of authors would write a 2000 page book with such enormous dedication and care, then risk having it falsified by just one wrong and totally unnecessary prophetic statement.

I came to assume that the authors must be attempting to upgrade our planetary religious outlook in an effort to counteract the awful threat of atomic warfare incumbent upon the world at that time. I assumed that the authors were an altruistic, God-playing committee of academics on a save-the-world mission. Since I had participated in the production of several books in various areas of biological science that were put together as individual contributions by a number of authors, I was fully aware that such books usually turn out to be inconsistent and disjointed. So there was a difficulty. The consistency of *The Urantia Book* seemed to be too high to have been the product of a committee of even exceptional human beings; on the other hand both the quality of its content and the extent of knowledge that it demonstrated seemed to be well beyond the capacity of any single person.

Gradually I accumulated a number of statements from *The Urantia Book* that I knew would have been sheer guesswork in 1955. As their number grew, I readjusted my assessment of the likelihood that the book really was what it claimed to be. By this time I had read the book from cover to cover and

become familiar with the mandate given to the authors, and thus realized that much of its science content would be of the early 1930's vintage.

One requirement of the mandate was that the authors were not permitted to provide us with unearned knowledge. In discussing matters with a science component, the authors were instructed to utilize the best available concepts of the day, which was around 1934. However there was one clause that allowed the supplying of information which could fill in vital missing gaps in otherwise earned knowledge. Presumably the prophetic statements that I had noticed were considered to be in this category. In all, I collected more than twenty items of information that would have been guesswork in the early 1950's and which had since been accepted as correct by the science community.

I finally accepted the book without reservation in the early 1980's. This acceptance has been strengthened by contact with like-minded readers of *The Urantia Book* who have noted other information in this book that could not have been obtained with certainty prior to its publication. One of these is the dates assigned to a triple conjunction of the planets, Jupiter and Saturn which *The Urantia Book* tells us gave rise to the story of the three wise men from the east who were guided to the birthplace of Jesus by the star of Bethlehem. These dates were not known with any high degree of accuracy prior to the writing of a computer program in 1976 in a cooperative venture by California's Jet Propulsion Laboratory and the U.S. Naval Observatory. Although still not in perfect agreement, the estimates for these conjunctions calculated with the best of today's technology are within a day of those given in *The Urantia Book*, which was in print before computers that could perform such a task became available. The chances of predicting these dates through guesswork are incredibly small.

The consistency of The Urantia Book seemed to be too high to have been the product of a committee of even exceptional human beings; on the other hand both the quality of its content and the extent of knowledge that it demonstrated seemed to be well beyond the capacity of any single person.

We have seen that materialist science can provide no direct proof for the existence of "pure energy"—that which is conjectured to be the ultimate source of matter and motion. Science offers the idea of pure energy as a rational explanation for empirical experience. Similarly the existence of God can never be proved by scientific experiment or by the pure reason of logical deduction. The only proof that one human being can offer to another for the existence of God is also experience—in this case their own personal experience of the presence of the spirit of God within themselves. For those who have not

had this experience, to observe true goodness and spirituality in a God-knowing person may provide the window through which the faintest glimpse of the glory and wonder of God may be grasped, and thus provide the motivation for such observers to discover that same God within themselves.

For me, acceptance of the revelatory authority of *The Urantia Book* has many connotations. It is refreshing and confidence building when even such exalted personages as a Divine Counselor can state: "I portray the reality and truth of the Father's nature and attributes with unchallengeable authority; I know whereof I speak"; but in other sections of the book disclaim authoritarianism by use of terms such as "probably" and "possibly" and statements such as: "I cannot presume to speak with perfection of understanding concerning the infinity of many of the divine attributes. Infinity of mind alone can fully comprehend infinity of existence and eternity of action." Undoubtedly the spoken word of Jesus, Creator-Son of God, must be accepted in total faith by his followers, but in the main *The Urantia Book* regards truth as being dynamic and evolutionary, progressing ever upwards and onwards in step with our own individual spiritual and intellectual growth. It really leaves no room for crippling adherence to the out-of-date static proclamations of fundamentalists or the failed dogmatic conservatism of mainline religious institutions. We are encouraged as freewill sons and daughters in the ever-expanding family of our Father-God, to courageously undertake the thrilling adventure of being guided by the spirit in our own individual pathway to eternity. *The Urantia Book* tells us that Jesus founded a religion of personal experience in doing the will of God and serving the human brotherhood. It is as simple as that, but nevertheless profound in its simplicity. The message of Jesus, as presented in the book, is not specifically Christian; it is for all people of all races, nations, and religions who worship our Father-God, no matter how rudimentary their understanding is of this God. *The Urantia Book* has the potential to remold world destiny.

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"The modern age will refuse to accept a religion which is inconsistent with facts and out of harmony with its highest conceptions of truth, beauty, and goodness. The hour is striking for a rediscovery of the true and original foundations of present-day distorted and compromised Christianity—the real life and teachings of Jesus." (2083:2)

The Urantia Book as a Sermon Resource

Duane L. Faw, JD

While teaching law in London in 1982, I learned that the Vicar of a nearby Anglican church was a "closet reader" of *The Urantia Book*. He was reluctant to see me in his church office or rectory, so we agreed to meet in a convenient neighborhood pub. I explained to him that I was attracted to the book because over 98% of its quotations were from the Bible, the Apocrypha and the Pseudepigrapha. As an adult Bible class teacher and certified lay speaker, I wanted to know what both the Bible and *The Urantia Book* said about a text or concept before I used it. The margins of my *Urantia Book* contained all the Bible references I could find for each quotation and concept, and I could go from *The Urantia Book* to the Bible with ease; but without marginal notes in a Bible referring to the page and line of relevant passages in *The Urantia Book*, it was impossible to go from the Bible to *The Urantia Book* using this same technique. Therefore, I used a computer program to rearrange my marginal notes into a format which facilitated going in either direction. I showed him the latest printout of this material which I brought to England for my own personal use.

The Vicar expressed interest in examining the printout and borrowed it. This was the last I saw of it. He reported that it proved most useful in helping him prepare his talks and asked to keep it a while. After selecting a Biblical text or texts on which to base his sermon, he checked the appropriate part of the printout to determine if any such text were treated in *The Urantia Book*. If so, he also read *The Urantia Book* version. If he liked it, he would use it; if not, he would disregard it. He volunteered that he was surprised that so many of his texts, particularly from the Gospels, were found in *The Urantia Book* and that he had used far more *Urantia Book* materials than he had ignored.

I asked him if his congregation knew that he was using the book in preparing his sermons. He replied, "No, they are not ready for that yet. Whenever appropriate I incorporate teachings of the book not only in my talks, but in my public and private conversations, but the source of the teachings—no." He pointed out that there was very little difference between the Bible and *The Urantia Book* concerning the incidents that happened during the lifetime of Jesus, and that he found *The Urantia Book* interpretation to be the more acceptable, even without accrediting the source. The same was true of many Old Testament stories—they made more sense in *The Urantia Book's* historical perspective.

When I was preparing to leave England, the Vicar still had the printout. He asked that I leave it with him because he found

it useful and, since I had the original disks, I could duplicate the printout. There was no indication as to whether or not it improved the quality of his homilies, but it certainly facilitated the preparation process.

Ministers who have personal reservations about the authenticity of the book, or feel that their congregations are not ready for it, may wish to expand their exposition of Biblical themes with illustrations and concepts inspired by *The Urantia Book*. Its Christology reflects some lofty concepts only dimly presented in the Bible. In my judgment, the Jesus depicted in Part IV of the book is both more "human" and more "divine" than the Jesus shown in the pages of the Bible. Furthermore, the Foreword and first ten papers of *The Urantia Book* present the most highly developed and succinctly presented concepts of Deity it has been my privilege to find in all other sources combined. A full understanding of these papers cannot help but provide a new paradigm against which to see and understand God.

The late Clyde Bedell compiled a combination concordance and topical index which is published under the coined name *Concordex*. It is the most comprehensive instrument available through which one can find any specific item or general concept in *The Urantia Book*. Any serious researcher is handicapped without it.

The computer printout referred to above has now been published under the coined name *Paramony*. It is an extensive cross-reference between *The Urantia Book* and the Bible through which the user can go in either direction between similar passages of the two books. It is also useful as either a parallel or a harmony.

Those who love the Bible will find the *Paramony* to be a most useful tool. It can be used to deepen one's understanding and love for either book by becoming aware of their similarities and differences; or it can be used to point out the shortcomings or limitations of either book. The *Paramony* is not a commentary on either book, but rather a tool for discovering if a matter covered in one is also included in the other and, if so, where it is located. Comparisons are left to the reader.

Ministers who have personal reservations about the authenticity of the book, or feel that their congregations are not ready for it, may wish to expand their exposition of Biblical themes with illustrations and concepts inspired by The Urantia Book.

Those formerly apathetic to Christianity, or even turned off by it, who have found a personal relationship with God through *The Urantia Book* often develop a curiosity about the Bible. The *Paramony* offers them an easy access to parallel Biblical teachings. It is surprising how many people have developed a new respect for the Bible through this process.

No one should be afraid of truth; indeed, we should all welcome it. Yet, Pilate's perennial question, "What is truth?" still challenges humankind. Readers of the Bible and/or *The Urantia Book* are confronted with this problem of truth evaluation. One person's "truth" is another person's "heresy," and still another person's "superstition." Although the Bible and *The Urantia Book* are in basic agreement concerning the nature of God and spiritual reality, each person must rely on his or her inner spiritual guidance in making their own truth affirmations.

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Ministers, by the nature of their training and practical needs, are usually interested in commentaries on the relationship between God and humankind. It makes little difference whether such commentaries confirm, challenge, or contradict their beliefs. In any case their thinking is stimulated. Hopefully, the end result of this intellectual and spiritual grappling is growth. The Vicar in the above story is a case in point. He is still a closet reader. He accepts, or puts on a shelf, much of *Urantia Book* theology for himself; but he is not ready to ask his parishioners to do so. Yet he is subconsciously preparing a way for their acceptance of the book by using its teachings in his sermons.

Upon my return from England, I found my home church had a minister who was extremely personable and reflected a deep love of God, but whose sermons were not very inspiring. As chairman of the Parish-Pastor Relations Committee, this concerned me. One day I took him aside and asked him to do me a personal favor. I handed him a copy of *The Urantia Book*, and a copy of the paperback "Experimental Edition" of the *Paramony* which was hot off the press. I told him I had printed 200 copies of a prototype of the *Paramony* as an experiment to determine whether or not illustrations from *The Urantia Book* would be useful to ministers in the preparation of their sermons. I asked him to not read *The Urantia Book* until he had determined the scripture which he was to use as a text, and then to look up the passage in the *Paramony*. If it referred to a passage in *The Urantia Book*, he was to read it for possible use in his sermon. The next few Sundays several members of the congregation commented to me on how good his sermons were. Each Sunday I checked his text with the *Paramony* and found at least one reference to it in *The Urantia Book*. On no Sunday did his approach to his subject conflict with the approach of *The Urantia Book*. It was not until the fifth

(Continued on page 17)

The Urantia Book and Spiritual Renewal: **Confirming a Spiritual Pilgrimage**

This feature is written by ministers. Since The Urantia Book at this point in time is potentially controversial, the name of the author is sometimes withheld so as not to interfere with his or her rapport in ministry.

Spiritual renewal is primarily an experiential process. I doubt if *The Urantia Book* or any other "outside" source can bring about spiritual renewal unless experience has prepared the ground for spiritual growth and there is an active longing and search for more encompassing truth and a larger vision of Reality.

Before true spiritual growth is possible, one must have graduated from the second hand religion of one's family and culture, and evolved a strong and living personal faith. Those who are prepared for significant spiritual renewal have transcended the limited authoritarian view of scripture, and developed the courage to think critically and fearlessly. They are comfortable with the latest science, and have cultivated perceptive intelligence and acquired spiritual insight. These liberated souls hunger for truth and are willing to follow wherever it leads.

The above description is a summation of my own intellectual-spiritual pilgrimage before I was introduced to *The Urantia Book*. To my surprise, I discovered this strange and somewhat audacious book synchronized with my own experience of God and truth. It not only confirmed my own spiritual experience, it opened a vision of Reality that was beyond my highest philosophical and theological expectation. This 2000 page book confirmed, renewed, and revitalized the basic tenants of my faith. This unparalleled vision of spiritual Reality enlarged and enhanced the tried and tested truths by which I lived. Its unique weaving of science, philosophy, and religion into an integrated and unified picture of Reality inspired my imagination and confirmed my faith as nothing had ever done. It filled me with enthusiasm and joy and a desire to share this impossible-possible discovery with my fellows.

The Urantia Book's portrayal of the essence of religion as a personal relationship with God, the expanded description of the life and teachings of Jesus, and its awe-inspiring spiritual cosmology presents the most promising source of spiritual renewal to appear in the last 2000 years. I believe *The Urantia Book* will be a key factor in the resurgence of mainline Christianity and other progressive religious movements, and establish them as the cutting edge of a new spiritual renaissance on our planet. ♦

Significant Books

Global Responsibility: In Search of a New Ethic

By Hans Kung
Crossroad, 1991, 158pp.

"No survival without a world ethic. No world peace without peace between (sic) the religions.

No peace between the religions without dialogue between the religions. That is what this book is about."

Kung begins his introduction with these words and they do, in fact, summarize the message of this book. Starting with the identification of 1918 as a turning point in history, he calls our attention to the significance of the collapse of bourgeois society and the Eurocentric world, leading to the time of polycentrism, a desire for peace, a criticism of industrialism, an emphasis on human rights, and the beginnings of ecumenism. This process has required a dramatic paradigm shift in values:

- From an ethic-free society to an ethically responsible society;
- From a technocracy which dominates people to a technology which serves the humanity of men and women;
- From an industry which destroys the environment to an industry which furthers the true interests and needs of men and women in accord with nature;
- From the legal form of a democracy to a democracy which is lived out and in which freedom and justice are reconciled."

These values now must become globalized in the same way that other aspects of human life have become globalized. As Kung points out, "The key concept for our strategy for the future must be: human responsibility for this planet, a planetary responsibility." Responsibility is the essential foundation for a new global ethic. The human race must become responsible for our society and the environment in which we live—and we must do this not just for ourselves but for the generations to follow.

In order to accomplish this we need a coalition of believers and non-believers. "Even believers," he says, "would have to concede that a moral life is possible without religion." Secularism by itself, however, is not capable of producing the paradigm shift that is necessary. "In particular, scientists and technologists stress today that while scientific and technological thought is capable of destroying a traditional ethic which has become alien to reality, much of the immorality which has been disseminated in the modern period is not the result of ill will but an unintended 'by-product' of industrialization, ur-

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banization, secularization and organized irresponsibility. But modern scientific and technological thought has from the beginning proved incapable of providing the foundations for universal values, human rights and ethical criteria."

Therefore the religions of the world are needed to bring about a new global ethic. "...who would be better suited today than the world religions to mobilize millions of people for a world ethic? To mobilize them by formulating ethical aims, presenting key moral ideas and motivating them both rationally and emotionally, so that the ethical norms can also be lived out in practice?"

The world's religions carry with them common streams of ethical teachings. Through careful study and dialogue, such streams can be identified and restated in a common set of guidelines for human responsibility. "According to the ethics of the world religions are there not something like universal sins, something like 'world vices', and happily also virtues which are called for universally, something like 'world virtues'? If this is the case, why should not the world religions find themselves in the fight against world vices and in the encouragement of world virtues?"

Kung, speaking from his own Christian perspective, describes the Christian contributions that mark a beginning toward a world ethic, and calls upon the leaders of all of the world's religions to join in the search for a common view. "What would it mean for tomorrow's world if the religious leaders of all religions, great and indeed small, decided today to give resolute expression to their responsibility for peace, love of neighbor and non-violence, for reconciliation and forgiveness?"

The strategy that can lead to a coalition for a world ethic is dialogue. "...loyalty to one's own tradition and faith community does not exclude a sensitivity towards those of other faiths that is oriented on dialogue." Dialogue implies a willingness to be open to the other even while still being rooted in one's own particular convictions. A prerequisite, however, is that one must be willing to be self-critical, not to arrive at a new syncretic expression, but to overcome historic antagonisms among the religions. "The final goal of all our efforts cannot be a unitary religion; it must be an authentic peacemaking between religions."

This, Kung says, has already begun. "...a new post-colonial, post-imperialistic, postmodern world constellation is in the making, and thus a polycentric world which is being bound ever closer together by new communication technologies. But at the same time this polycentric world must be a transcultural and multireligious world." "The slogan of the hour is therefore, 'We must begin on global religious understanding here and now!' We must advance inter-religious understanding energetically in the local, regional, national and international spheres. We must seek ecumenical understanding with all groups and at all levels."

Fall, 1991

And Kung ends his book as he began, with

- "• no human life together without a world ethic for the nations;
- no peace among the nations without peace among the religions;
- no peace among the religions without dialogue among the religions."

The importance of Kung's contribution toward creating a climate for dialogue should not be underestimated. For, while the paradigm shift he describes is truly taking place, the inevitable backlash retreat into the security of circumscribed belief systems has taken hold of many individuals and institutions. The risk of reaching out to one's historic enemy, or to a startling new religious phenomenon, is more than many can bear.

The Urantia Book tells us that a mature planet enjoys the congenial atmosphere of one race, one language, and one religion. But in our present multiracial, multilingual, and multireligious world, only dialogue seems to be the acceptable channel for reconciliation among the religions. Kung's astute reading of the current situation and his vision of the immediate future should provide a foundation for action in the years to come as a meaningful step toward the more distant horizon illustrated by *The Urantia Book*.

Peter Laurence, Executive Director of The Temple of Understanding, a global interfaith association located at The Cathedral of St. John the Divine.

(The Urantia Book as Sermon Resource, cont).

Sunday, when he was preaching on "The Woman at the Well," that I had proof positive that he was using *The Urantia Book* as a reference source: he called the woman "Nalda." Not a soul in the congregation except me and my wife noticed it.

Since publication of the first hardback edition of the *Paramony* in 1986, I have received many letters from ministers, Sunday School teachers, and others telling me how useful it has been in helping them to prepare for their public presentations. The real surprise is how many have written to say it has helped them with their private studies of the two books. Only one letter contained a criticism, and even that letter was more positive than negative. Several pointed out typographical errors, which will be corrected in the 2nd edition. Letters indicating both errors and omissions are invited.

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Media and Values

Tuning the Inner and Outer Life

In our last Media & Values column, I advocated the rather unusual view that television and the new forms of electronic media can and should favorably affect the inner spiritual life of the individual. Let's explore how this might occur as the media revolution of the 1990's unfolds.

To create the right context, let's turn first for guidance to *The Urantia Book* and to the general history of Christianity.

In Part III of *The Urantia Book*, in papers 85-98, the authors present in great detail a chronicle of the growth of the inner life of humankind, the spiritual advancement of the peoples of the earth. In my reading, this history is the thrilling story of how the average individual gets *increasingly more direct access to the source of truth*.

The Biblical view of Jesus' inner life is beautiful and anecdotal, but the authors of The Urantia Book present Jesus' inner spiritual life as astoundingly rich and varied.

At first, divine truth was the exclusive province of a designated charismatic individual or privileged group: in tribal societies it was the shaman; in Egypt the Pharaoh; in India the Brahman priesthood. These auto-revelations (insights derived from association with the indwelling spirit of God) eventually became sacred texts, from which rituals and myths were derived, and later imposed on passive populations.

A new chapter was written in Israel. Here we witness an ongoing tension between the fresh voices of the prophets, whose auto-revelations sprang from new sources, and the rigid Pharisaic tradition of texts and rituals. Jesus was the first Jewish prophet to teach the Father's love for the individual, that the Father is directly contactable in highly personal modes of thought and attitude. The Biblical view of Jesus' inner life is beautiful and anecdotal, but the authors of *The Urantia Book* present Jesus' inner spiritual life as astoundingly rich and varied. "...To him prayer was a sincere expression of spiritual attitude, a declaration of soul loyalty, a recital of personal devotion, an expression of thanksgiving, an avoidance of emotional tension, a prevention of conflict, an exaltation of intellection..." (p. 2089) plus an additional list of 12 other truth-attitudes that seem to exhaust the whole range of inner responses to possible spiritual stimulus.

Jesus was spiritually attuned to his Heavenly Father. His mind was highly refined and well attuned to receiving the

most specific inner cues from his Adjuster (indwelling spirit) for handling a highly diverse set of situations in Palestine and around the Mediterranean.

Although Jesus taught a religion of the individual, the early Christians fell back into earlier forms, allowing the inner life of the believer to be mediated by an "inspired text," and later by rites, traditions, and a clerical hierarchy. Martin Luther and the Protestant reformation removed much of these mediating factors, replacing the burdensome superstructure of the medieval church with the single text, the Bible, and replacing the tyranny of the church hierarchy with the "priesthood of all believers."

Historians have observed that Luther's reforms would not have been possible without the wide dissemination of printed Bibles in the language of the people.

Luther, a reformer whose teaching was launched by a new medium—the invention of printing—made possible a new inner life for the peoples of Western Europe, and especially for the pioneering Christians who settled the New World in the context of expanded religious freedom.

It is no surprise to see *The Urantia Book*, a 2000-page text, take root first in the land of religious freedom, but it is ironic that this is occurring at a time when traditional printing is being superseded by more flexible forms of communication. This is certainly not to say that the printed book as such will become passe. Rather, print publishing as an industry is converging with computers, and computers are converging with telecommunications. New electronic media are emerging, and with this, new possibilities for attuning the individual to inner and outer realities. A new chapter is being written in the story of the means for growth of the inner life of humankind.

New electronic media, with its access to new forms of knowledge and information, provides more than a metaphor for the inner life. These tools are extensions of our mind and senses, our psyche and even our soul, into the outer world.

New electronic media, with its access to new forms of knowledge and information, provides more than a metaphor for the inner life. These tools are extensions of our mind and senses, our psyche and even our soul, into the outer world. Communications technology mechanizes our *innate* abilities to communicate with self, with others, and with the universe. The more refined our media technologies become, the more they will emulate the way our minds access inner sources of imagination, memory and inspiration, and outer sources of knowledge.

Recall the versatility of Jesus' inner life, and the resulting richness of his teaching, its adaptability to the setting in which he taught. Can electronic media provide tools that help ordinary mortals become better attuned to their inner lives,

and thereby improve their ability to teach, preach, heal, and minister?

Authorship of any kind of media programming *comes* from the inner life of the author. In the end, media will serve some value system that arises from the inner life of its creators. Media technologies simply amplify, extend, and deliver these packaged versions of the inner life of its authors. In the final analysis, our inner attunement determines the medium, form, and the content of our media products; the quality of these products will, in turn, deeply affect the inner lives of the audiences that consume them.

Inner Attunement

If this is true, if media is an extension and amplification of our inner lives, a study of the inner life should yield new insights about our media technologies. How can the inner life be viewed in this light?

I believe that as we progress, our inner tuning evolves the following attributes: it becomes increasingly *selective*, *specific*, *interactive*, and *creative*, and is always "*elusive*" and *synergistic*.

Our worship and prayer life is *selective* of both its medium and object. We are endowed with creative free will in our spiritual life. The medium may be, as in the case of Jesus, a "sincere expression," a "declaration," an "exaltation," a "consecration," or a "confession," and its object may be any single divine personality or group of personalities as revealed in Part I of *The Urantia Book*.

Like Jesus, our attunement is *specific* to a situation, either our own, or another's. Our best prayers are for the specific needs of brothers or sisters in a concrete situation of need. The insights that result move us forward to the next step in our ministry.

The inner life is most real when it is creative. The highest products of the soul/spirit are surprises to the mind, often transcending what education, culture or mores would have predicted.

Our attunement is *interactive* in the sense that a questioning, petitioning self encounters the divine source, prays for insight or aid, and listens to the response. In worship, the two interact to become one.

The inner life is most real when it is *creative*. The highest products of the soul/spirit are surprises to the mind, often transcending what education, culture or mores would have predicted. Auto-revelation may be contrary to the current beliefs of the medium, as was the case with the person who acted as the channel for the highly creative text, *The Course of Miracles*. This person was an avowed agnostic.

Spiritual attunement involves a tuning in to the most *elusive* currents of the mind. The Thought Adjuster's leadings

are never imposed, and these impulses are easily lost in the material currents of the mind. Our first contacts may be sensational experiences, that can even "...blind the creature..." (p. 1207), but these currents are always admixed with lower emotions and intellectual tendencies, much as the Adjuster content of the dream life is contaminated with "...the pressure of unexpressed emotions..." and "...unexpressed desires." (p. 1208)

Finally, the inner life is *synergistic*. Imagination is essential to the development of faith; faith deploys all of the faculties and all of the senses. Faith is a condition of the whole person.

Outer Tuning

Tuning in to broadcasts or interpersonal electronic communications in the outer world works much like inner turning, and shares many of its attributes. Because of new technologies, viewers will experience increasing freedom to tune into electronic sources of religious and scientific truth in the outer world that will correlate with and affirm their inner quest for higher values. In the distant future we may even find that these inner and outer activities become highly synchronized. Like inner tuning, outer tuning increases in quality as it becomes more *specific*. We dial a number or we tune a specific channel. We exercise choice according to needs and desires of the moment.

Of course, broadcast television and radio still get mixed reviews as far as diversity. Given the banality and commercialization of broadcast media today, we can say that the range of choices of mediocre quality programming is becoming unlimited, while the choices for quality programming are slowly growing. How many times have you sat down in front of your TV for twenty minutes and spent the whole time switching channels with your remote control unit? A whole population is searching for better programming, and VCRs, cable, fiber optics, new kinds of computers and databases, and computer networks have arrived just in time to supply it.

With new means of delivery, quality programming will expand as we begin to understand the inner life and especially the social and spiritual impact of programming on the inner life. At least, this is the idealistic source of ideas that may lead media entrepreneurs of the future to invent new approaches to programming and the delivery of programming.

The great hope for such entrepreneurs is the *selectivity* that the new technologies give the audience. This results from three factors. First, computer databases in their myriad forms are becoming very easy to search, and can now store virtually anything at very low cost. Second, computers are now converging with television, and the result is multimedia devices that can play back text, image, sound, and video. And third, the new media technologies let you inexpensively

access multimedia sources of programming and information directly from your living room or desktop device.

The most sensational example of all this is video-on-demand (VOD)—or the ability to select and “download” movies or television programs that are stored in computer databases. VOD is expected to become available in the mid-to late 1990’s. Around this time, copper telephone wires to your home or business will have been replaced by a fiber optic cable or a satellite dish. And by this time, your viewing mechanism will not be a television or a computer, but a “telecomputer.” The telecomputer with its resident software, is the epitome of an *interactive* device.

Using a telecomputer, it will be possible, within the decade, to dial the Louvre Museum in Paris, and order an electronic color facsimile of the El Greco painting of the crucifixion that will appear in a split second on your six-foot high-resolution television screen mounted on the wall in your study. Or, browse the international movie database, and select that memorable scene in *The Robe* where the camera does a close-up on the face of Victor Mature, just as, standing near the cross, he looks up at the crucified Christ with that exquisite look of faith, sorrow, and worship. Now, store these images on your telecomputer, and create an interactive videodisk program for your congregation on the subject of “Images of the Crucifixion.” Pass out the disks to those who want to play it at home on their multimedia computers, or play it back to the accompaniment of a sermon.

As the playback and delivery mechanisms for such services as VOD (and many other less spectacular services) become ubiquitous, programmers will quickly find that all kinds of specialized tastes are now far easier to satisfy. This means that the kinds of programming that were once *elusive*, real works of beauty or spiritual truth, will be directly accessible to the average individual.

As this scenario becomes better understood, it is my view that the 1990’s will witness an explosion of *creative* activity in media programming, a media renaissance that will deepen the inner lives of both creators and viewers. Programming for the least common denominator accompanied by banal advertising will fade in importance. Broadcasting will be replaced by “narrowcasting,” and a plethora of videos, compact disks, and other multimedia products on every conceivable topic will come available.

Most encouraging is the fact that these educational, informational, and entertainment programs will be multimedia in nature, or, like the inner life, *synergistic*. The format can be addressed to the whole person, and, hopefully, programmers will create content that increasingly reflects the values of truth, beauty, and goodness.

—Byron Belitsos

Byron has been a journalist and television producer and is now a consultant in the telecommunications industry.

MUSIC IN WORSHIP

This column addresses the concern for contemporary aids to worship. We welcome material which you may be inspired to write and share.

Throwing the Spiritual Baby out with the Sexist Bath Water

In the ongoing debate over the use of nonsexist language in hymnals a recently published article in a popular magazine has made the issue of gender prominent in our thinking. Is the discussion about inclusive language a basic theological issue or is it merely the symptom of a deeper change taking place in religion and culture? Upon reflection, I believe the basic issue is the reluctance of the rank and file in religious institutions to evolve with the expanding orientations of culture and society.

Many of our more conservative brethren would have us believe that it is inappropriate for the church to change with the “fashions of the time.” Certainly there is wisdom in such caution. But this tends to be an oversimplification of what is happening in the latter decades of this century.

Music has from the beginning of time been both a litmus test of important social changes and a catalyst facilitating those changes. It has often fallen to the artist to take a leadership role in the development of social attitudes. Any one living through the rock revolution of the 1960’s would attest to the powerful influence of an art on society. It is ironic that in many conservative churches, where rock and roll was actively condemned during the sixties, that same form of music is now used in worship services on a regular basis, complete with traps, guitars, P. A. systems, and applause! Is this an example of evolutionary change, theological modification, or simple social expediency?

In the face of our rapidly changing society we are not surprised that the pressures for change enter into our expressions of worship. But it is difficult to determine just how far or fast the church should accommodate social change. There are two significant contemporary examples of this dilemma.

First, the Holy Mass of the Roman Catholic Church has experienced centuries of musical development with contributions from thousands of fine composers. But an analysis of the musical developments since Vatican II has led many musicians to bemoan the fact that this fine musical heritage has lost out to a popular folk style that reduces the laity to observers, the musicians to guitar hacks, and the priests to coffee house singers. In contrast to that experience, there are many main-line churches that are unable to change their musical traditions

and often find it difficult to raise a choir for regular Sunday morning worship. The issue at the heart of both of these examples is the ability of the church to change in a reasonable and organized manner.

In the light of these observations, it seems clear that inclusive language in our hymns is not the central problem. The more basic condition fueling this issue is the impact of changing cultural attitudes toward women. The underlying dynamic here is social evolution. This is a concept that has produced much fear and controversy in our churches. Perhaps the primary reason for this confusion is that the concept of social evolution is so entangled with those of the physical sciences that many lay people are confused as to its meaning for the church. The Christian message is, after all, a message of hope for the weak and downtrodden, and not of the "survival of the fittest."

Every minister knows that one of the most difficult challenges of the ministry is to balance the forces of evolutionary change with the "traditions of the church." At the center of this struggle is the attitude of many parishioners that we must keep that special "old" hymn, even if the hymn was written in the 1920's while the "new" hymn may have been penned by Martin Luther. The issue is not one of old or new, but of familiar or unfamiliar. Because of this demand for familiarity, many of our finest traditions are lost and creative expressions of contemporary worship are never experienced.

...it seems clear that inclusive language in our hymns is not the central problem. The more basic condition fueling this issue is the impact of changing cultural attitudes toward women.

How do ministers deal with this phenomena? *The Urantia Book* advocates a unique perspective on the issue of evolution in spiritual matters. It declares that spiritual evolution is at the very heart of our eternal pilgrimage with God. We are sojourners on an eternal adventure and must constantly change and adapt to a multiplicity of environments. Eternal life will not be simpler, but ever more challenging and exciting as we grow in spiritual maturity.

The authors of *The Urantia Book* suggest that religious leaders cannot call present-day people to spiritual battle with "the trumpet blasts of the Middle Ages." We need to discover relevant and stirring ideals that give rise to new forms in worship. Furthermore, *The Urantia Book* writers remind us that the church has a long history of social evolution. Jesus' teachings have survived the mystery cults of the early church, "the superstition of the dark ages, and are even now slowly triumphing over the materialism, mechanism and secularism of the twentieth century." In the final analysis, such great times of testing are times of great revelation and spiritual growth.

The spirit of God is active in the process of change, at the very heart of evolution in the church, through the participation of men and women in the work of God on earth. In fact, this is the very essence of the word "liturgy." Through our effort to include nonsexist language in our music and liturgy we affirm what is gradually becoming universally accepted: the true spiritual and personal equality of men and women.

The authors of The Urantia Book suggest that religious leaders cannot call present-day people to spiritual battle with "the trumpet blasts of the Middle Ages." We need to discover relevant and stirring ideals that give rise to new forms in worship.

Our hymns are undergoing a gradual change of text. We are using inclusive language, omitting outmoded theology, and addressing major spiritual and social issues of the day (the environment and poverty for example). Even more exciting is the introduction of new hymns from around the world and from different cultures. All of these changes, most of us would agree, will make a stronger and more sensitive church in the future.

But evolutionary growth usually takes place slowly in the church and in society. We need to be concerned about the pace of change so as not to destroy that which is good, beautiful, and of enduring value for reasons of social expediency. The modern world will simply refuse to accept any religion that is out of harmony with "its highest conceptions of truth, beauty, and goodness." As the Psalmist reminds us, we need to "wait on the Lord" and "be of good courage" as we struggle with evolutionary change. Hopefully, we can find a middle ground which safeguards the truths and loyalties of the past while enlarging our understanding of their insights for the present and future.

Indeed, great truth resides in hymns of former generations. Let us not lose their message in our rush to endorse new trends. We should be careful not to throw out the spiritual baby with the sexist bath water!

Jack Rogers

The religion of Jesus is the most dynamic influence ever to activate the human race. Jesus shattered tradition, destroyed dogma, and called mankind to the achievement of its highest ideals in time and eternity—to be perfect, even as the Father in heaven is perfect. (1091:3)

"A Teacher Sent From God"

Sermon by Rev. Merlyn Cox, 5/26/91

Scripture: John 3: 12

Is it really possible to know God in ways we have read of men and women of ages past? Were the seers and prophets and apostles of the Old and New Testaments such extraordinary people that we ought not expect to see their likes again? Or could it be that the assumptions of the modern world have so dulled our sensitivities that we are no longer able to respond to the deep things of the Spirit? Is it that God no longer speaks in such a fashion, or is it that fewer listen?

As a young person I remember being struck by the story of the vision of Isaiah in the Temple. I was instinctively drawn to it and wondered what it must have been like, what he really experienced: "In the year King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord high and lifted up, and his robe filled the whole temple. Seraphim attended him and constantly called to one another, 'Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.' And as each called, the threshold shook to its foundations at the sound, and the whole house began to fill with clouds of smoke."

Had we been there, what would we have seen? I doubt if we would have seen with the visible eye what he describes, but would we deny the reality of what he saw with the inner eye? How is it possible for some to have such a grand vision of the holiness of God, and others seemingly little or nothing? If it's possible for some, why not for all?

The Old Testament is filled with stories of men and women who had such visions, who encountered the divine and whose lives were forever changed, and through them the lives of countless others who came after them, including you and I.

Some years ago a book was written by Rudolph Otto that became a religious classic. It was entitled, "The Idea of the Holy." It is an exploration of what he believed is the non-rational experience that is at the very core of religion. It is marked by what he called the *mysterium tremendum*—a sense of great awe and mystery. It is the sense of being in the presence of a "wholly other," an overwhelming power and majesty and presence that leaves one filled with wonder and astonishment, and feeling very small in comparison. Isaiah felt compelled to say in response to his vision of the Holy, "Woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the presence of a people of unclean lips."

Do people really have that kind of experience any more? Well, apparently some do. Surveys have shown that many people have had what they would classify as a significant religious experience of this nature at some time in their life—an experience of the mysterious *tremendum*, the holy. It doesn't always come in temple or church, although it sometimes still does.

Not long ago I was sitting in the chapel at Oklahoma City University where I attended a symposium on science and religion. It is a large sanctuary shaped like a diamond. Its massive brick walls support a high ceiling that points upwards and seems to carry you with it. In each of the four walls were huge stain glass windows, each shaped the same, with panels of many colors. Someone suggested that they looked like a large bird in flight. The clear outline of the cross was, at least to me, also clearly visible.

We attended sessions there throughout the day. In the morning the sun came through the east window, radiating a soft glow of red and gold upon all of us, like a morning blessing. In the afternoon, as the sun shined through the south window, the colors changed and the room brightened. Then in the evening, just before sunset, it would flood through the west windows behind us, and play upon the huge walnut encased organ pipes and down upon the worship center below, giving to everything it touched a kind of graceful benediction. The speakers, I could not help but notice, were somehow dwarfed by this spectacle of beauty and color. It was truly awesome—even a touch of the holy.

It was designed to be that way, of course, to elicit just those feelings, and it succeeded in a way I have rarely experienced. It was meant to do what the great cathedrals of the past were meant to do: to stretch our minds and spirits beyond the confines of earth and connect us to the "wholly other," to the numinous, the *mysterium tremendum* that surrounds us and transcends us.

If you spend time sitting in the great cathedrals of Europe you'll get some of that same feeling, albeit, perhaps, not quite as warmly. The wood and brick of a modern cathedral speak differently than the massive stone of earlier times. It speaks of a presence more intimate and knowable, a voice more gentle, but none the less, still infinitely majestic and holy.

We use our stone and wood and glass, the things of the earth, as pointers to what is holy and wholly beyond us. It fascinates us, draws us to it, and somehow sanctifies our common life.

The early cave men of Europe are called such, not just because they used caves to live in, but because these were also their cathedrals. They traveled far back into the bowels of the earth, as it were, far beyond the needs of reasonable safety, and turned large rooms into cathedrals, sacred places where they painted stories of life and death, places where they expected to come to terms with the mysterious and awesome power underlying all of life.

Long before Moses met God on top of a mountain and took his shoes off in response to his encounter with the Divine, Jacob met him on lower ground. After Jacob had stolen his father's blessing from Esau, he set out to find wives among his fellow tribesmen. Along the way he came upon a certain

shrine. It doesn't say who made it or to whom it was dedicated. It was just another shrine, the nomads equivalent of a cathedral in the midst of the wilderness. It was, no doubt, just a pile of rocks; but everyone who passed by would know its purpose—to identify a place dedicated to the worship of the holy.

Since it was late in the evening, Jacob rested there for the night. He took one of the stones from the shrine and used it as a pillow. And during the night he had his now famous dream (the one we all sang about as children). In the dream he saw a great ladder. The bottom rested on the ground, but the top reached all the way to heaven, and on it he could see the angels of God ascending and descending from heaven.

When Jacob arose in the morning he said, "Truly the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it." The New English version says, "He was awestruck and said, 'How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; it is the gateway to heaven.'" He took the stone he had used as a pillow, and anointed it with oil, and set it up as a sacred pillar. And he called the place "Bethel," which means the "house of God."

We still use stone and brick and wood and mortar to mark the places of divine encounters, or at least the places where we hope for, if not anticipate, some kind of holy meeting.

Do people today still hunger for such a thing? I do indeed think so. If not in the church or temple, then in nature, in science, in meditation, in music, in all kinds of ways and places. I would call it a pervasive hunger for the holy. It is as fundamental as anything in our nature, although we often seem intent on ignoring it, at the suggestion of a secular society that pretends to have outgrown it. Wouldn't it be refreshing to see the day in which our spiritual needs are as naturally acknowledged by society as a whole as are our physical needs, but without the superstitions of the past so often attached.

Jacob's rock was no different from the one in our back yard. Jacob's encounter didn't change his "science," but neither does our science change the reality of the Almighty, or the way we are made. Jacob's vision is no less real. In order to be whole, we need to have all of our needs acknowledged and addressed, including our need to be in touch with the holy.

Are there any signs that such a thing could happen, that there will ever have more than an embarrassed acknowledgment of spiritual realities in the public domain? Perhaps. It's interesting to note that there will soon be a show on television that tries to do just that. It comes from a quarter that might surprise you. The leading television producer of our time, Norman Lear, will soon air a program entitled "Sunday Dinner." It is a sitcom, but don't let that fool you. He is quite serious. When asked why he was doing the series, he replied,

"We have got to be willing to talk about God in this country. *We've got to be willing to talk of awe, mystery, love.*"

His purpose, he says, is to "provoke conversation about our deep hunger and our deep need for truth." He says that "after so many years of moving in a totally secular direction, there's a hunger in America resulting from our neglect of the spirit." In a recent address to a National Education Association, he identified the spiritual as the most important area in this country that needs to be addressed. He has said, in fact, "I don't want to talk about anything else ever again."

To what degree he will succeed, I don't know. I don't know if such a thing can be done. I've often wondered. But I have no doubt that he is very serious about trying it. It is already controversial and being condemned by those who suspect it to be irreligious.

I do hope for its success. I am so tired of the caricatures of religiosity, of the media's condescending wink to what is assumed to be the province of only the desperate and ignorant, with no hint as to the depth of hunger in the human soul of the common man and woman, or the depth of experience of the spirit in so many of the same. It is like a great secret few are willing to talk about in the open, so we carry the hunger and the pain and the glory alone, or in private enclaves called the church, where such talk is sanctioned, at least by the preacher. We are a nation desperately hungering for more than the riches we enjoy. *We need more than a softer pillow; we need a vision of the holy that makes all of life holy.* We need some glimpse of a connection that reaches all the way to heaven.

We are not the first age to hunger for spiritual truth and not know where to look for answers—or to not accept them when they are available. Jesus' day was one of tremendous ferment in religious matters. People all over the known world were searching and longing for something deeper and more hopeful than the old religions could provide. The old gods of the Romans and Greeks were no longer taken seriously. Mystery cults and new movements were springing up everywhere.

It is not surprising that the Greeks and gentiles were gladly hearing Jesus gracious words of a heavenly kingdom, encompassing, but far surpassing the things of earth. What is surprising is that the Jews, who of all the people on earth should have been the first to understand and accept the message of heavenly realities, were rejecting it. It is precisely because they had Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Moses and the prophets that they should have understood; but instead, they said, in effect, "Since we are the children of Abraham and Moses, we need nothing more."

This is illustrated in part, I think, by the story of Nicodemus we heard earlier. Nicodemus was a wealthy and influential man, a member of the Sanhedrin, the governing body of the Jews. He apparently was also a well known teacher. He came

"A Teacher Come from God", cont.

to Jesus during the night, probably to avoid the embarrassment of being seen asking Jesus questions in public.

He was drawn to Jesus' teachings concerning the kingdom of God and came to ask more about them. "I know you are a teacher sent from God," he said, "for no one could do the things you do if God were not with him." Jesus replied, "No one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of the Spirit. Flesh gives birth only to flesh and spirit gives birth to spirit."

"But how is that possible?" asked Nicodemus. "Can an old man enter again into his mother's womb?" "How is it that you, a teacher of Israel," Jesus replied, "can be ignorant of such things? ...If you don't believe me when I talk to you about earthly things, how are you to believe if I should talk about the things of heaven?"

I used to feel a bit of disdain for Nicodemus, or at least superior, because he seemed so dull. But I have since come to believe that there is a great deal of Nicodemus in all of us, a great deal of the time—more than we would like to acknowledge. We listen to the teachings of Jesus and nod approval, but remain mystified as to what they might really mean. Can we really take seriously all this talk about spiritual realities? Do we not wonder sometimes if this man who spoke so knowingly of heavenly things was actually quite beside himself, as many accused him of being? We are drawn to his gracious words, but reluctant to let them hold sway in our lives. We wouldn't want to be embarrassed if such idealistic notions proved false.

Jesus said if our eyes were anointed we would indeed be able to see the angels ascending and descending from heaven. Could Reality possibly be that gracious and divine? Are we really a part of something far larger and more holy than just this life suggests?

We need not see angels in order to know the truth of what Jesus says. We need only listen to his words and allow them to find a home in our hearts—and his message *will* find a home in the hearts of those who truly desire the truth.

We hunger for spiritual truth because it is written into the nature of our beings. To ignore it or deny it is to ignore and deny the greatest truth we can possibly know.

We are indeed living in an age that hungers for truth, but still largely seeks it under the cover of darkness. What a glorious new age it would indeed be to see it acknowledged in the open and brought again to the Sunday dinner table.

We are so like Nicodemus: proud, materialistic, cautious. May we also in the end be found as he was found. For as you may recall, following the crucifixion, when even Jesus' own disciples ran away in fear, two wealthy and well known men proclaimed their faith by stepping forward to claim the body, and therefore also the disdain and hatred of the world around them. One was Joseph of Arimathea—and the other was Nicodemus.

The birthing of our lives in the Spirit may take time, but we have a teacher sent from God who will show us the way: *if we let him, if we let him.*

Urantia Book Resources

The rich mine of universe knowledge and spiritual wisdom found in the 2097 pages of *The Urantia Book* tends to overwhelm the reader with its encyclopedic profusion. A detailed table of contents helps make the book manageable, but one soon realizes that reference tools are needed to find information hidden in its pages.

Clyde Bedell (1898-1985), a widely recognized author and speaker in the field of advertising, over many years compiled an index-concordance of words, concepts, ideas, topics, and themes found in *The Urantia Book*. He published the first edition of the *Concordex* in 1971. The third edition came out in 1986 and has over 110,000 references. The *Concordex* is an indispensable research tool for finding passages and studying topics in *The Urantia Book*.

The Urantia Book reader also discovers information in many sections of the book which parallels Biblical material. Numerous young friends of the editor did not become interested in the Bible until they read *The Urantia Book*. The two books are mutually enhancing. Recognizing this close relationship, Dr. Duane L. Faw, Professor of Law emeritus of Pepperdine University School of Law, spent six years compiling a parallel and harmony of *The Urantia Book* and the Bible. The *Paramony* was published in 1986 and contains 25,000 cross-references revealing the similarities and differences between the facts and concepts of these two great books. Dr. Faw has been a teacher of adult Bible classes for 40 years and a certified lay speaker in the United Methodist Church for over 25 years. The *Paramony* is an essential reference tool for studying relationships between *The Urantia Book* and the Bible. A long time scholarly reader of *The Urantia Book* describes the *Paramony* as, "a well-structured volume, indispensable for those engaged in serious hermeneutics, particularly of the gospels."

If your local bookstore does not carry *The Urantia Book*, it can be ordered from The Urantia Foundation, 533 Diversey Parkway, Chicago, IL 60614. The *Concordex* and *Paramony* can be purchased from the Good Cheer Press, 1790 30th Street, #400, Boulder, CO 80301.