

Spiritual Fellowship Journal

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The Urantia Book: Toward a Context for Theological Evaluation

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Jesus, Man and Myth

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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

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Editorials

The Great Theological Challenge of our Day

We are living in a time of one of the greatest upsurges in spiritual interest and activity in history. People are searching for spiritual authenticity in many and diverse sources. Melton's *Encyclopedic Handbook of Cults in America* only touches the surface of this movement. According to Wade C. Roof in *A Generation of Seekers* (Harper, San Francisco), there is a quiet revolution taking place which is changing the religious attitudes and practices of millions of Americans.

At the same time, an unprecedented decline in mainline Protestant Church membership and influence is taking place. There is a general recognition among the baby boomer generation that something is missing in our traditional religious institutions, and they have an enormous hunger for something more. Theologians are responding to this hunger largely with more of the same—an increasingly sterile intellectualism that fails to nourish our spiritually hungry society.

Every major historical upsurge in spiritual seeking has prepared the way for significant spiritual events on our planet. The present world-wide spiritual stirring and groping, in my judgment, is no exception. After thirty-five years of critical examination and evaluation, I believe *The Urantia Book* is a revelatory breakthrough. Thousands of people with capable minds and balanced personalities have come to the same conclusion.

Many ministers have discovered *The Urantia Book* and consider it the most creative resource available in stimulating their teaching, preaching, and personal spiritual living. Various theologians have been introduced to the book, but none, to my knowledge, have made a serious attempt to read and evaluate the entire book. There have been comments like: "Much of the material strikes me as Gnostic." or "I've taken several running jumps at the book, but don't understand much of what I read."

After years of attempting to understand why theologians are so reluctant to seriously examine *The Urantia Book*, I have come to a number of observations:

1) The thought of taking time out of a busy schedule to read a 2097 page book distributed by an unknown publisher does not seem worth while. (This was my own first reaction to the book.)

2) The table of contents gives one the impression that it is "esoteric" material that would contain few helpful insights.

3) The possibility of a new "source" is a threat to their professional careers.

4) Finally, I detect an underlying conscious or unconscious fear of getting involved with anything that claims to be "new revelation."

In spite of these understandable reservations, and because of the tremendous potential for good in the church—as well as the entire planet—I believe that a serious evaluation of *The Urantia Book* is the great theological challenge of our times. David Kantor's article "*The Urantia Book: Toward a Context for Theological Evaluation*" in this issue of the Journal outlines some of the parameters of such a theological project.

-MJS

The Search for Truth

The Importance of Multiple Inputs and Balance

Last fall Dr. Richard L. Hamm, the new president of the Disciples of Christ, delivered a sermon at the First Christian Church in Fort Wayne, where he was formerly pastor. I wish every church member in America could have heard it. Dr. Hamm referred to an early Disciple minister, Walter Scott, whose sermon, "A Five Finger Exercise," helped structure the church's message. If I remember correctly, the "five fingers" were: Faith, the Bible, Repentance, Baptism, and the Holy Spirit.

In his sermon, Dick proposed "A New Five Finger Exercise." The new criteria of truth he advanced was: the Bible, Reason, Experience, Tradition, and the Holy Spirit. He eloquently pointed out that using any single criterion alone can result in erroneous conclusions, such as the doctrine of the inerrancy of scripture or the dominance of outmoded traditions. The church, he emphasized, must use all of these criteria in creative tension and balance to seek out the creative path of spiritual truth.

We need the foundational guidance of revelation at the base of our endeavors. Unless we use the highest standards of reason in shaping our faith, it is likely to become a sloppy mishmash of euphemisms, otherworldly mysticism, or even irrational dogmatism. Sound religious practices must always be guided by and responsive to experience. Although there is a tendency for liberal religionists to reject tradition, the wisdom of historic group experience has authentic contributions to make to the present. Finally, the most important and most difficult criterion to ascertain in determining the will of God is the leading and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

In this spiritually perceptive sermon, Dr. Hamm emphasized in large measure, unknowingly no doubt, the basic philosophic-theologic message of *The Urantia Book*. I wish all ministers had this unparalleled source of spiritual wisdom as a resource in their teaching and preaching. I believe that in time, this will happen.

-MJS

The Metamorphosis of the Church

"...this church is only the larval stage of the thwarted spiritual kingdom"...p. 1866

Human institutions advance and thrive as the result of new and enlarged visions of spiritual reality. History is replete with examples of such transformations. Cycles of culture start with such new visions of reality. They develop with the flowering of all social institutions and decline when the spiritual dynamic of their empowerment is lost or depleted. These historical events are closely associated with revelation—a significant breakthrough in the conceptualization of truth and a broadening actualization of beauty and goodness.

For decades the philosophers of history in Western Civilization have pointed to signs of decline in our culture. In the July-August 1993 issue of *The Futurist*, Richard D. Lamm, director of the Center for Public Policy and Contemporary Issues at the University of Denver, and former governor of Colorado, discusses the indicators of decline in our culture. "Decline, like fog," he says, "creeps up on civilizations on little cat's feet, and America's decline began in the recent past. Tomorrow's futurist will wonder how we were so myopic."

Prophetic voices in the church during recent years have expressed similar concerns. Professor Leander E. Keck and the Rev. James L. Killen, Jr., in the April issue of *Circuit Rider*, speak of the critical need for theological renewal and reform. The church, they assert, needs a new era of theological creativity.

Some day historians will look back and see that this concern over cultural decline and hunger for new spiritual creativity was a part of a larger picture. Our planet is being prepared for a new vision of reality. A growing number of people are recognizing the revelatory authenticity of the message of *The Urantia Book*. Our ministerial network seeks to bring this enlarged vision of truth to the church.

The time is coming when theologians and church administrators will seriously examine the book's message and recognize its mission of upstepping our comprehension of reality and deepening our awareness of spiritual ministry. In that day, the larval stage of the church will begin its thrilling metamorphosis toward the beautiful, dynamic, caring, and empowering creation of the spiritual kingdom it is destined to become, and brilliantly mirror, the universe reality that Christ is Lord!

-MJS

Interface:

The Church in the Next Century

As we approach the beginning of another century—as well as the next millennium—many denominations are trying to forecast the changes that might occur. Many are looking for a new direction, for some new insight that will help rejuvenate the church.

Leaders are exploring new models of growth, new models of worship, and new models of authority. Some of these have proved "successful" in a given setting, but few show the promise of widespread acceptance across a diverse spectrum. All carry their own theological assumptions that help or hinder them, depending on the environment. We seem locked in the current malaise without any clear cut way out.

The church has discovered the language and importance of paradigms, but that does not always help us to see outside the ones that now shape our perspectives and actions. By and large, we continue to tinker with programs that are the outgrowth of the present ones.

It seems increasingly obvious that there is no institutional fix for a lack of empowering vision. Vision is not something we create as much as something that we discover, something that first shapes us. It is empowering to the degree that it reflects the underlying truth of things—timeless truth as it impinges on current time and space.

The empowerment of a new vision, I believe, will not likely happen until a new coherent philosophical and theological paradigm is in place. Until such a vision emerges, churches will likely continue to polarize between a dogmatic fundamentalism and a sterile liberalism, with both sides drawing energy from its own social agendas. We will also likely continue to move toward the privatization of religion, with religious identities less defined by denominational loyalties.

It may well be that we will face increasing aridity and restlessness in the church just when the world at large increasingly hungers for meaning beyond its abundant material resources.

I'm convinced, however, that this stagnation and malaise will eventually give way to a new vision of life, one more adequate to empower us for graceful, grateful, and hopeful living, one in which the ultimate realities will again be more discernable in the commonplace.

Such an empowering vision is available now in the *The Urantia Book*, and I cannot help but believe that over the next several generations, its leaven will increasingly work its way into the life and thought of more and more people, providing the foundation for a truly new world—and universe—understanding.

-Merlyn Cox

The Urantia Book: Toward a Context For Theological Evaluation

David A. Kantor

"If we so understood that we no longer had to seek, it would not be the God of revelation that we had found." —Avery Dulles

A Problem for Contemporary Theology

The twentieth century has brought with it challenges and dilemmas for fundamental and systematic theology unlike anything encountered by Christians in previous centuries. The explosion of knowledge and education, the extension of communication to all corners of the globe, and the mixing of disparate cultures and religious groups, are just a few of the elements which challenge us in our efforts to grasp the spiritual dimensions of the reality in which we live and to present a relevant view of Jesus' gospel to a morally and spiritually distracted world.

Karl Rahner describes this situation in his essay, "Reflections on a new Task for Fundamental Theology,"¹ as well as in the introduction to his *Foundations of Christian Faith*.² He points out that in today's world, the mass of philosophical problems, range of methods, variety of starting points and goals, the constant increase in knowledge, methods of analysis, and increasing influence of studies in such fields as psychology, sociology, and the history of religion, all combine to create a formidable challenge to theology. He states that

"The present situation is basically new. The goal of creating a comprehensive and well-grounded system of fundamental theology through direct work is no longer feasible."³

He goes on to decry the lack of comprehensive expositions of fundamental theology and makes the observation that

"...a sober assessment forces one to conclude that this science with its established methods has ceased to be a practical possibility and has become a limit case, a remote ideal which may be aimed at but can never be fully realized."⁴

The idea that a comprehensively integrated view of the human situation is impossible to achieve in the contemporary world implies a fundamental shift in the nature of the epistemological ground from which theology has traditionally formulated its positions. It also underscores the difficulty of formulating a meaningful and relevant theology amidst rapidly developing complexity and plurality.

It is relative to this legitimate and serious concern voiced by contemporary theology that we should consider the claims

being made within the pages of *The Urantia Book*⁵ and the question of whether or not we are standing at a crossroads wherein revelation may once again clearly state to a struggling humanity the direction in which salvation may be found.

The Urantia Book

In his introduction to H. Richard Niebuhr's book, *The Kingdom of God in America*, Martin Marty describes a "classic" text as "the kind of work from which one cannot again break free once the work has made its statement."⁶ He goes on to mention the work of Freud and Marx as examples of texts which, regardless of the view of the reader towards their contents, inform and influence all subsequent thinking on their respective subjects. The depth and scope of the narrative explication of Christian theology presented in *The Urantia Book* similarly impacts all subsequent consideration of the elements of our religious heritage.

With over a quarter of a million copies now in print, distributed world-wide in a growing number of languages, and with an estimated 20,000 seriously dedicated readers who publish dozens of newsletters and hold international conferences, the day cannot be far off when responsible theologians and clergy will be called upon to offer an informed opinion on the content and nature of this text. A readership is fairly well established in North America and Western Europe and has begun to develop in many other countries from Australia to Zaire. The first Spanish edition is presently being shipped to locations throughout Latin America and a Finnish edition recently entered distribution, each of these translations going to regions where groups of readers have struggled with the English and French editions for many years.

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When one considers the spiritual vacuum which exists today in much of our culture alongside a well-documented growing hunger for meaningful spiritual encounter, it appears inevitable that this text will rapidly find its way into diverse communities of religionists and into the lives of many individuals. But does it really provide a valid fundamental basis, consistent with the traditional gospel and responsible scholarship, upon which we may apprehend the elements of our faith in ways relevant to late 20th century scientific and intellectual understanding? Does it provide significant assistance in the task of conserving and expanding the essential meanings,

values, and ideals of the Christian gospel in a rapidly changing world?

Perhaps a more relevant question is posed by University of Oxford Professor Richard Swinburne. He asks, if we believe in an all-powerful and all-good God, "do we then have reason to suppose that he would intervene in human history to reveal things to us?"⁷ Swinburne asks whether or not we have reason to expect a revelation and how we would know if we had actually received one.

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I would rephrase his questions and relate them to our present context in the late twentieth century by asking, "Is a century which has seen two world wars, continuing economic upheaval, social change, and political transformation on a scale unprecedented in human history, a degree of technological mastery undreamed of even a century ago, human deprivation, and environmental degradation on a global scale—is such a period of time any less in need of God's intervention and guidance than the period represented by the flight from Egypt and the subsequent transformation of the early Hebrew tribes from Bedouin hunter-gatherers into a settled agricultural people, or the period following Alexander's world-opening conquests, dominated by the Hellenistic cultural expansion and Roman political development in which Jesus appeared?

It is the purpose of the present article to consider a framework within which such questions might be considered. This framework will consist of two components. The first is a review of ideas about the topic of revelation. The second is a brief overview of the Urantia Papers.

A Brief Overview of the Idea of Revelation in Christian Thought

The Old Testament itself is permeated with stories of God's intervention in the affairs of His people and with the idea that God participates with us in our struggles to realize His presence in our communities and in our world.

Within the Judeo-Christian tradition, revelatory texts go back to at least the sixth century B. C. with the development of Apocalyptic as a literary genre derived from ideas based upon earlier prophetic eschatology.⁸ Apocalyptic became a well-established form of religious expression over the following centuries up through the inter-testamental period, the

Revelation of John contained in the New Testament canon providing perhaps the best known example.

Christian tradition has generally recognized two distinct forms of revelation, general and special. Psalm 19 reflects the attitude of general revelation while the opening of John's gospel provides an introduction to the special revelation embodied in Jesus of Nazareth.

In addition, we can identify two distinct trends in the apprehension of revelation—personal and communal. The former can be seen in the ideals of Christian monastic mysticism and the latter in the development of ideas regarding the work of the Holy Spirit within communities of believers.

Ernest Troeltsch has gone so far as to describe the religious significance of the history of Christianity as an on-going development of the revelation begun with Jesus.⁹ In his view, transferring the concept of the Holy Spirit from its embodiment in the authority of the church into the experiential Christian life-world and its context is a significant achievement of modern thought.

Many questions are raised by such expanding views of the locus of spiritual activity in the domain of on-going Christian life. From a process view Benjamin Reist asks

"How do we understand our confessional conviction that the God of Jesus of Nazareth confessed to be the Christ is still creatively involved in the emergence of all that is becoming? How, that is, do we grasp and become grasped by the fact that the relating and liberating God is relating and liberating only in terms of a creativity that is still creating?"¹⁰

Reist describes significant dimensions of Christian faith which could not have possibly become explicit outside the context of modern thought and the reality of a "creating God."

In his *Foundations of Christian Faith*,¹¹ Karl Rahner treats the categories of general and special revelation as "transcendental" and "historical," where any historically conditioned revelation of God's presence is a locally qualified presentation of an existential, unchanging transcendent revelation of God. Such historical presentations are necessary in order to make an understanding of God's presence relevant and available within a variety of local time/space constraints. Says Rahner,

"The whole history of salvation and revelation as we understand it in the categorical and particular terms of time and space does not seem to be able to be anything else but the process of limiting...something which was already present in its fullness from the outset."¹²

Rahner goes on to remark how we handicap ourselves when we limit our understanding of revelation to the explicit history of salvation contained in the Old Testament. He points out that the Old Testament itself bears witness to the activity of God outside the history of the old covenant. He also

reminds us of New Testament witness to the fact of the continuous activity of God's Grace and the Holy Spirit outside the boundaries of special revelation. He makes the important point that the purpose of historical revelation is not simply to pass on narratives, but to keep alive the transcendental experience of God.

Avery Dulles offers a well-developed overview of thinking about the topic of revelation. In his history published in 1969¹³ as well as in his more recent effort to present distinct models of revelation,¹⁴ Dulles not only outlines the changes in thinking about revelation over time, but he also identifies key issues related to verification and examines some of the implications for fundamental theology.

Dulles points out that prior to the sixteenth century, revelation was rarely considered a component of the theological exposition. Not until Christians had to defend themselves against the claims of the Deists in the seventeenth century did ideas about revelation begin to be articulated.

Dulles points out that prior to the sixteenth century, revelation was rarely considered a component of the theological exposition. Not until Christians had to defend themselves against the claims of the Deists in the seventeenth century did ideas about revelation begin to be articulated. The amount of thought given to the topic has increased to the point that in our own century there is hardly a recognized theologian who has not written at least a chapter on the topic, and the range of complete books devoted to revelation alone covers the spectrum from the traditional position of the Roman church¹⁵ to the personal insights offered by H. R. Niebuhr.¹⁶

Dulles describes the development of nine historically conditioned views of revelation in Christian thought:¹⁷

1. Old Testament: The "Word of God," addressed to Israel through his chosen messengers, reveals a covenant between Yahweh and his chosen people.
2. New Testament: The covenant-notion of revelation is extended and transformed. Revelation now takes the form of the manifestation of the new and definitive covenant in Jesus as Messiah and Lord.
3. Patristic era and Medieval Monasticism: Revelation is primarily envisaged as the action of God inwardly enlightening the soul
4. Medieval Scholasticism: Revelation takes the form of a body of divine doctrine furnishing answers to important questions about God, man, and the universe.
5. Protestant Reformation: With a certain collapse of confidence in medieval forms and structures, revelation is seen as the response to man's anxious quest for a gracious God, the good news that God offers salvation to sinners through the merits of Jesus Christ.

6. Catholic Counter Reformation: The medieval view of revelation as a body of doctrine is reinforced with redoubled insistence on the role of the Church as authoritative teacher.

7. Evolutionary Idealism of the nineteenth century: Revelation is identified with the emergence of the Absolute Spirit in history. Theologically concerned Idealists tend to look upon the appearance of Jesus Christ, the God-man, as the crucial moment of this emergence.

8. Liberal-Modernist view: Religious experience is viewed as a substitute for authoritative doctrine. Revelation and faith are telescoped in such a way that both are equated with a vivid interior sense of the loving Fatherhood of God and an ethical commitment to the brotherhood of all men.

9. In the early twentieth century, the doctrine of revelation was powerfully affected by existentialism and the atrocities of the first world war. In an intellectual climate of growing absurdity and despair, as well as in recognition of how naively optimistic theology had become, neo-orthodoxy signaled a return to scripture as revelation out of a need to find an authoritative center of meaning and value.

In addition to these nine forms, Dulles lists some basic views of revelation:¹⁸

1. The positive or factual view—Revelation is a concrete event, generally meaning the crucial events of Biblical history.
2. The conceptual or abstractive view—Revelation is a body of doctrine.
3. The intuitive or mystical view—Revelation is an ineffable encounter with the divine.
4. The eschatological view—A fuller revelation is yet to come associated with the eschaton.

From the foregoing one can see that the concept of revelation not only has a dynamic history of meaning from within the Christian tradition, but is seen in substantially different ways within Christian communities today. Perhaps the most notable contrast is that between the increasing claims to ecclesiastical authority over revelation exhibited by the Roman church, particularly in the pronouncements of Vatican II contained in *Dei Verbum*, and the more open view in Protestant theology towards the revelatory action of God's grace within the experience of individuals and their communities.

But what do the Urantia Papers say about themselves in terms of being revelatory? How do we place them in this array of views? Let us attempt to answer these questions by considering some of the statements about revelation contained within them.

Consider the following:

"Let it be made clear that revelations are not necessarily inspired. The cosmology of these revelations is *not inspired*. It is limited by our permission for the co-ordination and sorting of present-day knowledge. While divine or spiritual insight is a gift, human wisdom must evolve."¹⁹

"...we shall, in all our efforts to reveal truth and co-ordinate essential knowledge, give preference to the highest existing human concepts pertaining to the subjects to be presented. We may resort to pure revelation only when the concept of presentation has had no adequate previous expression by the human mind."²⁰

"Successive planetary revelations of divine truth invariably embrace the highest existing concepts of spiritual values as a part of the new and enhanced co-ordination of planetary knowledge. Accordingly, in making these presentations about God and his universe associates, we have selected as the basis of these papers more than one thousand human concepts representing the highest and most advanced planetary knowledge of spiritual values and universe meanings. Wherein these human concepts, assembled from the God-knowing mortals of the past and the present, are inadequate to portray the truth as we are directed to reveal it, we will unhesitatingly supplement them, for this purpose drawing upon our own superior knowledge of the reality and divinity of the Paradise Deities and their transcendent residential universe."²¹

The foregoing suggests a view of revelation which includes a significant coordination and sorting of existing collective knowledge for the purpose of illuminating meanings and enhancing the grasp of values by the individual. Truly new material is provided only as needed for clarification of fact and expansion of meanings. Consider this in light of one of H. R. Niebuhr's views of revelation:

"Revelation is that which illuminates our history and makes it intelligible. Revelation is the discovery of rational pattern in the factors of our existence and our history."²²

This concept of "discovery" seems to play an important role in the view expressed in the *Urantia Papers* related to the personal apprehension of revelation.

"Religion lives and prospers, then, not by sight and feeling, but rather by faith and insight. It consists not in the discovery of new facts or in the finding of a unique experience, but rather in the discovery of new and spiritual meanings in facts already well known to mankind."²³

This process of discovery has been well articulated by Michael Buckley, Professor of Systematic Theology at the University of Notre Dame.

"Discovery can only light upon what is hidden within the given, while a tradition can possess significance...only if that which is past is continually made present, changed,

reinterpreted, and transposed. Discovery is the grasp of new meaning; tradition is its mediation, posing the elements and the problematic situation which enables new disclosures. Discovery and tradition are not opposed; they are coordinated. They constitute the rhythm and the unity of inquiry. Tradition embodies an evolving history, symbolic continuities and resonances with varied human experiences. Discovery seizes upon a newness of meaning or a retrieval of significance, but the matter of discovery is tradition."²⁴

The Urantia Book papers, an authoritative sorting and coordination of over 2,000 years of the primary theological, philosophical, and scientific ideas of Western Civilization, provide the means for a rediscovery of essential meanings. They also provide a conceptual basis for a grasp of higher moral and spiritual values and lead to a revitalization of the fundamental Christian symbols within the experience of the individual.

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Criteria for Validation

In any consideration of the claims of a text to be revelatory in nature, the question of validation of this claim quickly becomes an issue. Let's review some of the criteria for such validation which have been set forth by contemporary theologians.

Avery Dulles provides the following criteria:²⁵

1. Continuity—Does it stand in continuity with what believers of previous generations have recognized as leading them into a richer experience of God's presence?
2. Internal coherence—Is it capable of being conceptually formulated in an intelligible manner free from internal self-contradiction?
3. Plausibility—Does it run counter to what is generally thought to be true in other areas of life? If so, is it capable of providing an alternative explanation of the phenomena responsible for the general state of opinion?
4. Adequacy of experience—Does it illuminate the deeper dimensions of secular and religious experience both within and beyond the Christian community?
5. Practical fruitfulness—If once accepted, will it help its adherents to sustain moral effort, reinforce Christian commitment and enhance the life of the community?

6. Theoretical fruitfulness—Will it satisfy the quest for religious understanding and thus be of assistance to the theological enterprise?

7. Value for dialog—Will it assist in the exchange of insights with Christians of other schools and traditions, with adherents of other religions, and with adherents of the great secular faiths?

Richard Swinburne lists some additional criteria:²⁶

1. The content must be relevant for the deepest levels of human well-being.

2. It should include details of life beyond this one, to the end that we be encouraged in our pursuit of the good and to help us in our character formation.

3. While we may be unable to directly prove the truth of what is given, the content must, as far as we can tell, be incapable of being proven false.

4. Evidence for or against the truth claims of the revelation must be weighed in the same way as evidence for and against the truth of any other body of claims.

H. R. Niebuhr gives us some additional criteria:²⁷

"Revelation proves itself to be revelation of reality by its ability to guide us to many other truths."

"A revelation which furnishes us with a starting point for the interpretation of past, present and future history is inherently subject to progressive validation."

Karl Rahner points us to our experience with Christ as a means of validating supposed revelation. He says,

"...it is only in Christ that we Christians have the possibility of making a radical distinction between the categorical history of revelation in the full sense and in its purity, and the formation of human substitutes for it and misinterpretations of it."²⁸

Indeed, it is the presentation of the life and teachings of Jesus in *The Urantia Book* which seems to be driving the growth of readership. The intimate details of Jesus' life which are portrayed in this narrative in addition to the restatement of his actual discourses and conversations, bring the reader into a deeper personal relationship with the Master. It is this enhancement of Christian spiritual life which virtually guarantees that this text will be a significant element in the Christianity of the next century. As Rahner points out, it is through the spiritual aspect of our relationship with Christ that real validation of revelation occurs.

Rahner summarizes his ideas of historical revelation by making the point that whenever and wherever an expression of revelation is accomplished for a community of people; when it is directed in such a way that it remains pure (although it may mediate only partial aspects of the transcendental revelation); when this purity of revelation in its objectification

is shown to be legitimate, then we have what we are accustomed to call "revelation" in an absolute sense.²⁹

The Urantia Book: A Brief Overview

The Urantia Book provides a unique synthesis of the highest ideas, ideals and values found in Christian thought with an authoritative presentation of fundamental concepts of the universe into which we are being born. The text itself indicates that its expression is derived from the best thought of over one thousand human beings. A focus of current scholarship is the attempt to locate the sources of these ideas. This search has turned up authors which include Charles Hartshorne, Auguste Sabatier, Rufus Jones, E. Washburn Hopkins and other thinkers from the first half of the twentieth century.³⁰

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The text is divided into four distinct parts. The first two provide an explication of Trinitarian cosmology, describing in considerable detail the functional relationship of the Trinity to the finite, as well as the derivation of the finite from Trinity sources and its response to Trinity overcontrol. The resultant cosmology describes a universe consisting of matter, mind and spirit which, on the level of the developing finite, are progressively integrating under the dominance of spirit.

It expands the Old Testament witness to the development of monotheism amongst the Hebrew peoples. The activity of divine agency in human history is made relevant to the contemporary mind by juxtaposing a twentieth century understanding of history and evolutionary anthropology with revealed concepts of spiritual overcontrol. Its portrayal of human destiny expands the horizon of Christian eschatological hopes.

Perhaps the most ambitious theological reach in the *Urantia Papers* is the integration of emergent twentieth century process theology with traditional Trinitarian thought. A representation of the mechanism of process is developed, with similarities to the philosophical theology of Charles Hartshorne, and A. N. Whitehead's metaphysics. The integration with Trinitarian theology is further developed in the portrayal of the Son of God functioning as the human Jesus of Nazareth.

Rather than constructing a definitive Christology in the traditional sense, the authors have provided, as the fourth and final part of the book, a detailed account of the life and teaching of Jesus, and a description of the cosmological context in which his mission to our world has been undertaken. As it was mentioned earlier, this presentation of the life and

teachings of Jesus may be the single most significant aspect of the text in terms of its acceptance and spread throughout the Christian world.

The concluding paper contains a significant challenge to contemporary Christianity. Consider the following:

"If Christianity could only grasp more of Jesus' teachings, it could do so much more in helping modern man to solve his new and increasingly complex problems.

"Christianity suffers under a great handicap because it has become identified in the minds of all the world as a part of the social system, the industrial life, and the moral standards of Western Civilization; and thus has Christianity unwittingly seemed to sponsor a society which staggers under the guilt of tolerating science without idealism, politics without principles, wealth without work, pleasure without restraint, knowledge without character, power without conscience, and industry without morality.

"The hope of modern Christianity is that it should cease to sponsor the social systems and industrial policies of Western Civilization while it humbly bows itself before the cross it so valiantly extols, there to learn anew from Jesus of Nazareth the greatest truths mortal man can ever hear—the living gospel of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man."¹

It has been my purpose only to outline a context in which *The Urantia Book* may be considered as an important contribution to Christian literature and a significant event in the history of God's self-disclosure to humanity. I have done so by attempting to relate *The Urantia Book* to contemporary thought on the topic of revelation. The reader of this article is strongly encouraged to investigate the book for her/himself and to consider not only the probability of its validity but its potential for enhancing the spiritual life of individuals and Christian communities. It is only then that the reader will perhaps be able to begin formulating some personal answers to the questions initially posed herein.

¹ Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, vol. XVI (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1983), 156.

² Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith; An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1992).

³ Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, vol. XVI, 158.

⁴ Ibid., pg. 159.

⁵ *The Urantia Book* (Chicago: Urantia Foundation, 1955).

⁶ H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1988), vii.

⁷ Richard Swinburne, *Revelation, From Metaphor to Analogy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

⁸ D. S. Russell, *Divine Disclosure; An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992).

⁹ Ernest Troeltsch, *The Christian Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).

¹⁰ Benjamin A. Reist, *Processive Revelation* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992).

¹¹ Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Co., 1992).

¹² Ibid., 139.

¹³ Avery Dulles, *Revelation Theology: A History* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969).

¹⁴ Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (New York: Doubleday, 1983).

¹⁵ Rene Latourelle, S.J. *Theology of Revelation* (New York: Alba House, 1987).

¹⁶ H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1941).

¹⁷ Dulles, *Revelation Theology*.

¹⁸ Dulles, *Revelation Theology*.

¹⁹ *The Urantia Book*, 1109.

²⁰ *The Urantia Book*, 16.

²¹ *The Urantia Book*, 17.

²² H. R. Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation*, 68.

²³ *The Urantia Book*, 1105.

²⁴ Michael J. Buckley, S. J., *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* (London: Yale University Press, 1987), 35.

²⁵ Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (New York: Doubleday, 1983).

²⁶ Swinburne, *Revelation, From Metaphor to Analogy*.

²⁷ Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation*.

²⁸ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 157.

²⁹ Ibid., 173.

³⁰ Matthew Block, "Some Human Sources of *The Urantia Book*," *The Spiritual Fellowship Journal* (Spring 1993): 9-13. Significant possibilities for critical textual and literary analysis exist for future students.

³¹ *The Urantia Book*, 2086.

David Kantor is a computer software designer for managing corporate voice and data communication networks. He has been a student of *The Urantia Book* for nearly thirty years.

Jesus, Man and Myth

Richard Bain

Jesus once asked his apostles this question: "Who do men say that I am?" The apostles told him that he had been identified as Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, or even John the Baptist raised from the dead. Then Jesus confronted them with an even more startling question: "But who say you that I am?" The impetuous Simon Peter jumped up and said, "The deliverer, the Son of God!" Many of those who knew Jesus only by reputation assumed that he was the reincarnation of some well known prophet. Some of his enemies seemed to think that he was a person in league with the prince of devils. But the apostles, who had lived with him for more than a year, believed he was the Son of God and in some way the Messiah expected by the Jews. That certainly didn't settle the matter; the search for Jesus' identity has continued for over 1900 years and hasn't ended yet.

The Evolution of Christianity's Jesus Concept

Gnosticism was a 2nd century movement whose name comes from the Greek *gnosis*, or "secret knowledge." The Gnostics held that Jesus was a spiritual being whose appearance as a mortal was only an illusion. Another group of early Christians known as the Adoptionists believed that God adopted Jesus at the moment of his baptism or at the time of his resurrection. A later group known as the Modalists taught that Jesus was only a manifestation or mode of God. Yet another later group, the Subordinationists, saw Jesus as a person divine, but subordinate to God. The church fathers were no doubt a bit distressed by all this theological disorder. It was the Jesus concepts taught by Arius that motivated the church hierarchy to call the Council of Nicea. Arius taught that Jesus was God's first born creature, an agent who made all things. He taught that Christ was divine, less than God, but more than man. The matter was partly settled for the orthodox Christian church at the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. They adopted the ideas of Athanasius: "Christ begotten, not made. He is not creature, but creator, the same essence as the Father." The council was also forced to clarify the Trinity doctrine to show Jesus' relationship to the Father. But it was at the Council of Constantinople in 381 that the three persons of the Trinity were declared equal, which of course made Christ equal to the Father. The Council of Ephesus in 431 dealt with the relationship of the human and divine natures of Jesus, but didn't resolve the issue. It was finally resolved at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D. Regarding Jesus' two natures they stated in part, "...in two natures without being mixed, transmuted, divided or separated...the identity of each nature is preserved and concurs into one person or being." This has ever since been the standard doctrine about the person of Christ for the Christian church. Attempts to enforce such standard doctrines yielded some ominous repercussions.

Since the church had gained considerable political power, expressing opinions that differed from the party line could prove hazardous to one's health. Things didn't change a great deal until that upstart priest, Luther, told the Pope what he could do with his indulgences and touched off the Protestant reformation. When the church finally got out of the government business, thus losing the power to barbecue a person for expressing contrary beliefs, and when science and the Rationalists began to look at the world, the church's dogmas began to lose authority. Critical scholarship began to ferret out inconsistencies and conflicts in the scriptures. Increasingly, starting at the end of the 18th century, scholars began the search for the historical Jesus. Some of them concluded that not only was it not possible to come up with a historical Jesus, but that he was only a mythological figure, a composite of people's Messianic hopes.

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Critical Scholarship and the Historical Jesus

Albert Schweitzer, in his 1906 book, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, examined the work of some of the Jesus investigators who preceded him. The conclusion reached by many of these scholars was that the historical Jesus cannot be found in the scriptures. Schweitzer agrees with this conclusion, but he doesn't feel that this means we cannot find Jesus at all. On the last page of his book he writes, "He comes to us as One unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lakeside, He came to those men who knew him not. He speaks to us the same word: 'Follow thou me!' and sets us to the task which He has to fulfill for our time. He commands. And to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple, He will reveal Himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they pass through in His fellowship, and as ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience who He is." Schweitzer accepts the idea that Jesus existed, but feels that we cannot know Him just by studying scriptures. Unlike Schweitzer, other investigators question the very existence of Jesus.

In a book titled *Jesus Son of Man*, Rudolf Augstein goes to great lengths to totally discredit the scriptures. He sees Jesus as a mythological figure like Mithras. While he makes many excellent points about the inconsistencies and problems within the scriptures, he seems to go overboard in rejecting even the few non-scriptural references to Jesus. In its section about Jesus, *The Encyclopedia Britannica* lists three non-scriptural historical references that are represented as credible. First, Jesus' execution was mentioned in the annals of the Roman

historian Tacitus about 110 A.D. The second reference comes from Josephus, the Jewish historian at the court of Neronian. Josephus mentions the stoning of "James, the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ." Josephus also mentions the death of John the Baptist. The third historical reference to Jesus is in the Talmud, a collection of Jewish writings. In here, Jesus is identified as the "possibly illegitimate son of a man named Panther. Jesus worked magic, ridiculed the wise, seduced and stirred up the people, gathered five disciples about him, was hanged (crucified) on the eve of Passover." And recently archaeologists discovered the tomb of Caiaphas, the high priest who helped engineer the death of Jesus. But accepting Jesus' historical existence does nothing to explain who he was.

Jesus has been characterized as an uneducated peasant by some groups. In an article titled "Sepphoris" in the May/June 1992 issue of *Biblical Archaeology Review*, Richard Batey proposes that Jesus probably had been in the city of Sepphoris often, and may have even worked there as a carpenter since Sepphoris is only about an hour's walk from Nazareth. Batey says that archaeologists have determined that Sepphoris was a "Greco-Roman metropolis boasting upwards of 30,000 inhabitants..." and for three decades was the capitol of Galilee and Perea. In a footnote to this article Batey mentions that many scholars now accept that Jesus spoke Greek as well as Aramaic, and that some of the parables may have been composed originally in Greek. These ideas are in harmony with the account of Jesus' life in *The Urantia Book*. The evidence points to a Jesus who was multi-lingual and well educated for a man of his time, not an illiterate peasant. The ideas about Jesus seem as numerous and varied as pebbles on the beach.

A Jesus for Everyone

To the Christian fundamentalist, Jesus is God allowing himself to be crucified to save unworthy and sinful humanity from everlasting punishment. While most Christians of main-line Protestant churches would accept that Jesus is a divine being, they would be likely to see him as a bridge to God, rather than a sacrificial lamb. To the liberal Christian, Jesus may be only a great moralist and teacher. To the Moslem, Jesus is a prophet, an equal of Mohammed but not the Son of God. To the Hindu, Jesus may be an Avatar, a Hindu deity who incarnated on earth. To the Buddhist, Jesus might be a Bodhisattva, one who in mercy forsakes the release of Nirvana to return to earth and minister to humankind. To the Jew, Jesus might be either one of a group of false messiahs who worked the crowds around the time Jesus lived, or a good Jewish teacher who got in trouble with the authorities. To the agnostic, Jesus is a possibility; to the atheist, much ado about nothing. Rev. Bill Hammond, a Unitarian minister, in his sermon "Jesus, What Manner of Man?" sees Jesus as a man who started out as a magician but who later came to be seen as the

Messiah by his followers. In a recent book, *The Historical Jesus*, John Dominic Crossman portrays Jesus as a teacher of peasant equalitarianism. He asserts that the Last Supper, Jesus' resurrection, and ascension weren't real events but "dramatic visualizations." So many books! So many pictures of Jesus! As I read all this, I am reminded of an old saying: What Peter says about Paul tells more about Peter than it does about Paul. Likewise, perhaps what is written about Jesus tells more about the writer than about Jesus. Why is this so?

So many books! So many pictures of Jesus! As I read all this, I am reminded of an old saying: What Peter says about Paul tells more about Peter than it does about Paul. Likewise, perhaps what is written about Jesus tells more about the writer than about Jesus.

There are several things that make research of Jesus' life so difficult. First, except for one incident at the age of 12, the life of Jesus as depicted in the Bible is a blank from the time he was a few years old until he started his public ministry at 30. There have been many speculations as to what he did during this time, but none are provable. Another problem is that unless you agree that the scriptures are infallible, you have a hard time separating what Jesus really said from the words that were put into Jesus' mouth by the writers and revisors of the scriptures. There is a group of scholars who have been trying for years to determine what Jesus really said. They feel that Jesus said less than a third of the words attributed to him. Their work uses the techniques of critical scholarship to winnow the words of Jesus from the added material. Unfortunately, the sayings of Jesus thought to be genuine form a very small part of the New Testament, hardly enough material with which to resurrect the historical Jesus. Another problem scholars have in putting together a picture of Jesus is that he did not reveal what he believed about himself except by his reaction to others. He simply called himself the Son of Man. He apparently accepted the title of Messiah rather reluctantly. It seems that he had a different notion of himself, but he couldn't overcome the preconceived Messianic expectations of his Jewish apostles. Scholars have therefore been free to put all sorts of notions into the mind of Jesus, some profound, some foolish, and all perhaps in error. So what are we to make of this Jesus if the experts can't agree?

What Did Jesus Really Say?

While we can't always be certain what he *did* say, there are some things we can be sure are *not* found among his words in the Bible. He never taught that humankind once lived in a state of innocence in some garden paradise until they erred and God threw them out. He never taught that we inherited the sins of Adam and Eve. He never taught that he was born of a virgin. He never taught that his mother, the Apostles or some priest could be an intercessor between us and God. He never taught

that he was God. He did say, "I and the Father are one," but this can be interpreted in any number of ways. He never taught that his purpose in coming here was to die on a cross to satisfy the justice of a stern God-judge. While he didn't condemn the concept of a church, he didn't require that we should gather once a week in large ornate buildings to repeat words and sing songs written hundreds of years ago, and listen to someone give a half-hour talk. It was Paul, not Jesus, who taught the doctrine of the depravity of man. Jesus condemned the sin, not the sinner. There is much in Christian theology and practice that is not found in the Biblical teachings of Jesus.

Despite the distortions and additions in the New Testament, enough of the spirit of Jesus leaks through to give us an idea of the nature of this profound person. Unfortunately, Christian theology has sometimes been more of a hindrance than a help in understanding Jesus. *The Urantia Book* and other sources characterize traditional Christianity more as a religion about Jesus than the religion of Jesus. I believe that Jesus came not to be revered, but to help us find God for ourselves by listening to his teachings and living our lives in the same spirit that he lived his.

Jesus and Women

From reading the Bible, but especially *The Urantia Book*, I perceive that Jesus was light years ahead of the people of his culture in his attitude towards women. There have been numerous speculations about Jesus and women, such as: he might have been gay; perhaps he had a wife that he kept hidden; or maybe he had an affair with Mary Magdalene. Or perhaps he was a priest in an obscure celibate Jewish cult. All idle speculation. The Catholic Church claims that Jesus and all of his apostles were male; so therefore, priests should be male. On the other hand, *The Urantia Book* says that Jesus ordained a corps of women disciples to minister to the physical and spiritual needs of other women. After all, Jewish men could hardly do this sort of work; men and women were very restricted in their contacts with each other. These women are mentioned in the New Testament, but only once (Luke 8:2-3). You aren't surprised at that, are you?

There is an incident mentioned in the Bible that sheds some light on Jesus' attitude toward women. As I understand it, a Jewish man wasn't supposed to talk to a woman in public, even his wife. Consider the incident of the woman at the well. We are told that she was there drawing water from Jacob's well in Samaria. Jesus was there without his apostles. He asked the woman for a drink of water. She mistook his friendliness for a pass at her, but Jesus quickly set her straight and led her into a spiritual discussion. Now consider the reaction of the apostles. They came upon their Master not only talking to a woman, but a Samaritan woman at that. They must have been astounded! But then, perhaps the apostles were frequently astounded at the things Jesus said and did.

We know that women played a significant part in the early church; perhaps this was due to the lingering influence of Jesus. But unfortunately, cultures evolve slowly. The male hierarchy eventually organized the church like their armies and governments thus excluding women. There is no doubt in my mind that if Christians had been true to the spirit of Jesus' life and teachings, women would have played a more prominent part in the later church.

Jesus as Hero

There is another group who could profit if our culture had a less distorted picture of the human Jesus. It is sad that the heroes of many young people are rock stars and TV characters. It is unfortunate that the majesty of the glorified and risen Christ has obscured the heroism of the human Jesus in Christian teaching, and that so much of his life on Earth has been unknown to us. If young people could only hear the story of the young Jesus, bravely sustaining his family after the untimely death of his father, wouldn't they admire such courage, and wouldn't they be willing to follow such an admirable leader? The authors of the Jesus papers of *The Urantia Book* tell us, "If the Christian church would only dare to espouse the Master's program, thousands of apparently indifferent youths would rush forward to enlist in such a spiritual undertaking..." (p.2085) How excellent it will be when religious teachers someday use stories from *The Urantia Book* to inspire young people to live their lives in the spirit Jesus exemplified in his life.

The authors of the Jesus papers of The Urantia Book tell us, "If the Christian church would only dare to espouse the Master's program, thousands of apparently indifferent youths would rush forward to enlist in such a spiritual undertaking..." (p.2085)

Whatever we think about Jesus, most of us would agree that no individual has had a greater impact on the history of our planet than this spiritual teacher from Galilee. Through the means of the Christian church, his teachings have penetrated every corner of our planet. Where receptive minds and hearts are found, Jesus' ethical and moral teachings leaven home life, the laws and institutions of government, and even the conduct of business. And as the expanded and clarified story of the life and teachings of Jesus in *The Urantia Book* slowly penetrate the world's cultures, we can anticipate still greater advances in all human endeavors. Even after 2000 years, his words still encourage us to spiritual growth and will do so throughout the ages to come.

Dick Bain is an electrical engineer and editor of Cosmic Reflections. He is a long time student of The Urantia Book.

Days and Dates in The Urantia Book

Matt Neibaur

In 1572, a former professor of law from Bologna named Ugo Buoncompagni became Pope Gregory XIII; ten years later the Gregorian calendar was introduced. The Julian calendar, founded sixteen centuries earlier by Julius Caesar, was inaccurate and the need for reform was widely recognized. Its principal failure was the discrepancy between the mean length of its year, 365.25 days, and the tropical year, the average interval between successive transits of the apparent sun through the vernal equinox. By the time of the Gregorian reform, the error had grown to eleven days. Understandably, this was of concern to the Pope; if the calendar had continued unchanged, Easter would eventually be celebrated in the summer.

The attempts at reform set off a wide range of debates, both academic and religious. At one point excommunication was threatened by the Pope against anyone who refused to accept the new calendar. Protestants were understandably leery since Gregory the XIII was a vigorous, if not ruthless, promoter of the Counter Reformation. He accepted the head of the leader of the French Huguenots after the infamous St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre, a blood bath that the pope celebrated as a Catholic victory, ordering a medal struck in its commemoration. In essence the calendar reform was accomplished by deleting 10 days and suppressing three leap years for every 400 years. The reform was put into effect by following Thursday, October 4, 1582 by Friday, October 15, and the suppression of all centurial years not evenly divided by 400. This simple alteration of the Julian Calendar is so effective that not a single day will be lost in over 2000 years. The details and controversies created by the reform are presented beautifully by Gordon Moyer in, "The Gregorian Calendar," *Scientific American*, May 1982.

Dates and weekdays are listed unequivocally. Is there any way to check on these dates? Was April 14, A.D. 2 really a Friday as stated? Would it make any difference if the dates and weekdays did not correlate? Will The Urantia Book have the same impact if major discrepancies are discovered?

Readers of *The Urantia Book* should find the calendar reform and methods of measuring time interesting. In part IV, The Life and Teachings of Jesus, many references to dates are given. Dates and weekdays are listed unequivocally. Is there any way to check on these dates? Was April 14, A.D. 2 really a Friday as stated? Would it make any difference if the dates and weekdays did not correlate? Will *The Urantia Book* have the same impact if major discrepancies are discovered?

Sometime in the fall of 1987 I set out to check these dates. Using information obtained from the book, *Astronomical Formulae for Calculators* by Jean Meeus, a program was written to calculate dates and weekdays. The program takes into account the Gregorian calendar reform. All dates are first converted to Julian Day numbers, and the results are divided by seven to obtain weekdays from the remainder. In this way a calendar was generated.

I remember entering the first set of numbers, 4/14/2, into my computer. The machine went to work as I stared at the blank screen. Would I be disappointed? Would my religious experience still be valid if the dates didn't work out? Should my belief in God be based on a mathematical function? Maybe the equation is wrong? All of these thoughts racing through my mind vanished in a flash—FRIDAY—popped up on the screen. Elation! It was right! I found another date and entered it. Ditto! The right day popped up. I repeated it several more times. They all checked out - all eight of them. Relieved, I turned off my computer; the order of my little universe was still secure.

Acknowledging the difficulty of guessing several hundred dates, skeptics would likely argue fraud and deceit. But how does such a conspiracy of fraud remain concealed? Why would such conspirators wish such a hoax on their own children or spouse? And on a philosophical level, how could such a foundation of fraud and deceit give birth to the lofty ideals and values encountered in The Urantia Book?

But how secure should I feel? What did I prove? Could someone have gotten those dates and plugged them into the book? Of course, it was possible. Martin Gardner, of *Skeptical Inquirer*, argues that this is precisely how they got there. After doing my first computer search, I later discovered various algorithms to generate these dates. The 1911 Scholars edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* shows such an algorithm. I've even seen one in *The Farmer's Almanac*, though I'm not sure how accurate it was. I've also heard of certain gifted people that have unusual abilities that include the ability to calculate a weekday for any given date.

Upon reflection, knowing that these dates check out is useful information. It puts certain constraints on what we can say concerning the origins of *The Urantia Book*. Could a counterfeit channeler have made so many lucky guesses? Acknowledging the difficulty of guessing several hundred dates, skeptics would likely argue fraud and deceit. But how does such a conspiracy of fraud remain concealed? Why would such conspirators wish such a hoax on their own children or spouse? And on a philosophical level, how could such a foundation of fraud and deceit give birth to the lofty ideals and values encountered in *The Urantia Book*?

So what did I prove? I simply verified a static fact in *The Urantia Book*. Nothing more, nothing less. There are implications to be sure. *The Urantia Book* is internally consistent, at least from the perspective of the calendar. All of the verifiable weekdays and dates have now been checked and found to be accurate.

So what did I prove? I simply verified a static fact in The Urantia Book. Nothing more, nothing less. There are implications to be sure. The Urantia Book is internally consistent, at least from the perspective of the calendar. All of the verifiable weekdays and dates have now been checked and found to be accurate

Does this prove the truth of *The Urantia Book*? Emphatically, No! In the words of Jesus, "Truth cannot be defined with words, only by living." Just as scientific facts should be poked and tested on the touchstone of our external, intellectual experience, the spiritual truths must be explored on the touchstone of our inner religious experience.

[Addendum: Dr. Neibaur has done further research on the Star of Bethlehem. The major assumption is that it was the planetary conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter. Johannes Kepler, after discovering the Jupiter-Saturn conjunction in Pisces a few days before Christmas in 1603, calculated backward and discovered a similar conjunction(s) in 7 B.C. Kepler was not the first to describe this. In 1977, David H. Clark described a similar assertion in English church annals dating from A.D. 1285.

Various scholars and scientists have been involved in this research. Among them are Bryant Tuckerman (1962), the scientists at California's Jet Propulsion Laboratory (1976), and Roger W. Sinnott (1986). The most accurate calculations recognized today date these Jupiter-Saturn conjunctions as occurring on May 29, September 29, and December 5. *The Urantia Book* dates are May 29, September 30, and December 5.

Although *The Urantia Book* record predates this modern research, it should be observed that C. Pritchard, in 1856, refined the work of Kepler and produced dates which were later used in planetariums for Christmas programs. These dates, including the crucifixion date, were almost identical to those in *The Urantia Book* text, and were available at the Chicago planetarium in 1949.]

Dr. Matthew Neibaur is an Internal Medicine physician and long time student of The Urantia Book.

The Urantia Book and Spiritual Renewal

Meeting The Urantia Book

Ben LeMay

My life has been a marvelous sequence of impossible dreams that have come true. Discovering *The Urantia Book* is one of these impossible dreams. The book appeared in my life at a moment when I was desperately searching for satisfactory answers to crucial questions concerning my Christian faith.

One day, as I was visiting my home town, a good friend asked me to have a look at a strange book decorating her bookshelves which she could not decipher. It was the French edition of *The Urantia Book*. She loaned me the volume containing the "Life and Teachings of Jesus." Later, with my mind well rested, I started to read this mysterious work. My first reaction was to throw it aside, as it appeared to be outside of the parameters of orthodox theology. But I continued reading and discovered expanding concepts which enhanced the basic tenants of my faith, and brought life and vitality to the historic realities of the life and teachings of Jesus.

I became so interested in the book's marvelous insights that I felt the need to underline certain passages and make notes in the margins, as I do with all my books. My friend would not permit me to do this; but after some hesitation, she allowed me to purchase the entire French edition from her. I avidly devoured this French edition and then the English text. Since this thrilling discovery in 1976, I have read both editions many, many times and will continue reading this great book all of my life.

I soon became anxious to meet with other ministers who were also readers of the book to discuss its teachings, and to prove to myself that I was not the only preacher engaged in this new adventure. The Chicago office of the Fellowship of Students of *The Urantia Book* informed me that on my next trip to Florida, I would have an opportunity to meet with a minister who had been reading the book for a long time, as he would be attending a conference in St. Petersburg. I had the great joy of discussing at length the many truth insights of *The Urantia Book* with this pastor and many other seasoned readers of the book.

Over the years, *The Urantia Book* has enhanced and clarified my faith in many ways. Even more, it has transformed my mind and life to new levels of effectiveness and service. I sometimes call it my "third rebirth."

My dear friends, if you have not yet read this unique book, you should make every effort to do so. Do not be hesitant at its high price or be afraid of the great store of information in its 2097 pages. It will bring new meaning and joy to your life and revitalize your ministry!

Ben LeMay is a Roman Catholic whose conversion experience led him into many years of a bilingual evangelical ministry in Quebec. He is now retired.

The Vengeance of God

C. Bud Bromley

"Vengeance is Mine¹," saith the Lord. (Deut. 32:35a.)² Interestingly, however, when Jesus chose to read from Isaiah 61:1-2, He chose to stop in the middle of a sentence, not continuing on to, "and the day of vengeance of our God." (Luke 4:18-20) He not only stopped reading, He "closed the scroll," as if to emphasize His stopping place. Was Jesus countermanding Deuteronomy and Isaiah? *What are the Bible's most authoritative statements about the character of God?*

At Jesus' transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-8, Mark 9:2-8, Luke 9:28-35), we are told by Scripture that Moses, the great law-giver, and Elijah, the greatest of the prophets, appeared with Jesus. Yet the voice from heaven set Jesus above both of them, saying, "This is My beloved Son; listen to Him." This must have been deeply shocking to devout Jews. Listen to this Galilean carpenter's son? Listen to this "new kid on the block" above the long-revered Moses and Elijah? Many of that day could not bring themselves to do so. Yet if we believe that voice from heaven, the teachings of Jesus supersede the mandates of the Pentateuch, and override any human concept of law and any human belief about prophesy. *Jesus' authority exceeds anything in the Old Testament.*

In the New Testament, John the Baptist said, referring to Jesus, "He must increase, but I must decrease." (John 3:30) Paul more ornately said, "I planted, Apollos watered, but the Lord gave the increase. So neither he who plants is anything nor he who waters, but only God Who makes it grow." (I Cor. 3:6-7) *Jesus' authority is thus established over anyone else in the New Testament.*

Jesus said of Himself, "Whoever has seen Me hath seen the Father." (John 12:45; 14:8-9) This is such a remarkable claim that there is no possible middle ground. Either this is an utterly outrageous lie by a most arrogant confidence man, or else it is an absolute truth about a supernally high spirit personality. Inasmuch as no confidence man has ever been able to impress very many people for such a length of time, I must reject that theory. Jesus does indeed speak with the authority of God Almighty. He also said, "I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but to do the will of Him who sent Me." (John 6:38), and presumably also to speak the words of the Father Who sent Him.

Jesus is the supreme authority in the Bible, sent directly from God. He alone is qualified to make the most authoritative statements about God. So what did Jesus have to say about God? Jesus asserted that *God's most important requests are that we love Him, and love our neighbors as ourselves.* Matthew (22:36-39) records Jesus saying that upon these two commandments depend all of the law and the prophets. This was a very strong endorsement, since, to the Jews, all moral obligation was encompassed by the law and the prophets.

(Roman law was a hated imposition, not a moral obligation.) Mark (12:29-31) records Jesus saying that there are no other commandments greater than these, an equally strong commendation. Luke (10:25-28) recorded a Jewish lawyer asking how to inherit eternal life. When the lawyer quoted these two commandments as the answer from the law, Jesus told him, "You have answered rightly; these do and you will live." If these be the necessary and sufficient conditions to gain eternal life, what more importance could they have? Clearly, then, these are the most important two commandments in the Bible—and they make it clear that love is supremely important to God.

Jesus said, "I give you a new commandment, that you should love one another as I have loved you." (John 13:34) If Jesus loves us, and if He is showing God to us, then God Himself loves us.

The Urantia Book portrays God as a God of love. "We (Divine Counselors) are nonplused by the increasing unfolding of the endless panorama of the truth of his (God's) infinite goodness, endless mercy, matchless wisdom, and superb character. (U. B. 26:6)³ "...you equally well know that the Universal Father cannot possibly be anything less than an eternal, infinite, true, good, and beautiful personality." (U. B. 27:4) "...his (Jesus') life of achieving the Father's will becomes man's most real and ideal revelation of the personality of God." (U. B. 30:7) "God is inherently kind, naturally compassionate, and everlastingly merciful." (U. B. 38:2) "*God is never wrathful, vengeful, or angry.*" (italics mine) (U. B. 41:4) "God is love"; therefore his only personal attitude towards the affairs of the universe is always a reaction of divine affection." (U. B. 38:6) "God is divinely kind to sinners. When rebels return to righteousness, they are mercifully received." (U. B. 39:3) These statements well represent God, as portrayed in *The Urantia Book*. (And we are but into the first 1.96 percent of the whole book!)⁴

God is a loving heavenly Father. The prodigal son, in Jesus' parable, when "he came to himself," was received by his father with love. (Luke 15:11-24) Paul wrote, "There remain faith, hope, and love; and the greatest of these is love." (I Cor. 13:13) But vengeance is: counterattack, punishment, reprisal, retaliation, retribution, revenge.⁵ (Note that "corrective action" is not listed as a synonym for "vengeance.") On the very cross itself, did Jesus call for vengeance? No! Rather, He said, "Father, forgive them; they know not what they do." (Luke 23:34) Could there ever be any stronger repudiation of vengeance? Remember, He was still showing us what the Father is. If Jesus was right, then *there is no vengeance in God in the all-too-human understanding of that word.*

Is there, then, no kind of justice in heaven? Of course there is. Jesus said that if someone misled little children, it were better that he had a large millstone hung about his neck, and he be dropped into the depth of the sea! (Matt. 18:6, Mark 9:42, Luke 17:2) Note well, however, that Jesus was not saying that

we should do this to anyone, nor that God would do it; but he was clearly implying that for sins, there will be an answering.

But does God's justice require vengeance? Over a century ago, Frederick Faber wrote, in his great hymn, "There's a kindness in his justice which is more than liberty." *The Urantia Book* says that, "Only the discernment of infinite wisdom enables a righteous God to minister justice and mercy at the same time, and in any given universe situation." (U. B. 38:3) Nevertheless, we mortals can speculate about how God's combined love and justice might work. There is a beautiful phrase in the Masonic Bible Lecture which would encourage all good men to study the Bible in order to "guide their steps through life by the light they there shall find, and as they there shall find it."⁶ Thus, in our speculating, we should accept the fact that, "'Tis with our judgments as our watches; none go just alike, yet each believes his own."⁷

With this admission, that the light which one may find may differ from the light which another may find, let me start my conjecture about how God might combine love with justice by using another statement from *The Urantia Book*, "The better man understands his neighbor, the easier it will be to forgive him, even to love him." (U. B. 38:2) Since God is a God of love, my basic postulate is that, in order to progress spiritually in the Hereafter, we must so grow in loving understanding that we become able to truly love each other. "The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love." (1 John 4:8)

Is there anyone in your life who has, as you presently perceive it, done you a gross injustice? Could you ever learn "to forgive him, even to love him?" There is a striking illustration of this kind of possibility. Visualize, at the mouth of a cave, "...a short, misshapen, filthy, snarling hulk of a man standing, legs spread, club upraised, breathing hate and animosity as he looks fiercely just ahead." What a brutal savage! Our civilized sensibilities are ready to be offended. But wait; let us learn more. "In front of this animated human crouches a saber-toothed tiger; behind him, a woman and two children."⁸ (U. B. 1098:2) That enlarged picture should indeed change our whole understanding. Here is a father courageously defending his family. This makes it easy to rescind our hasty judgment, and "even to love him."

I know not just what we will be doing in the Hereafter. But if I have offended someone (and who has not?), I aver that I must sooner or later learn to live so nobly that he can become able to forgive me, even to love me. And if I have been offended by someone, then, while he is learning to be lovable, I must learn to be so understanding that I can come to forgive and even to love him. The concept is not new; in his most remarkable story, Dickens tells us of Scrooge, who, when miraculously shown his behavior and its consequences, so changed that he loved, and became loved by, those whom he had earlier wronged.

To expand on this basic postulate, I suggest that at some level in our spiritual growth in the next life, we will reach a point at which we must become able to love everyone, and become so lovable as to be loved by everyone, in order to continue to progress. We cannot hope to fully know the God of love until we learn to fully love.

If Hitler wishes to survive in the next life,⁹ he must therein become willing to learn to live and serve so admirably that each and every one of the six million Jews who were murdered under his rule will become able to forgive him, and even to love him, no matter how long it takes. What an awesomely heavy assignment! And he must learn to truly love each one of them whom he once hated unto death. I suggest that this is God's combined mercy and justice; this is God's "vengeance." Further, if I have wronged someone, and I eventually become so understanding, and he becomes so praiseworthy, that I come to truly love him deeply, then surely I will greatly regret the wrong I once did him. This, too, is God's "vengeance." Hitler will have six million such bitter regrets.

No wonder Jesus taught us to pray, "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us." (Matt. 6:9-13, Luke 11:2-4) No wonder He admonished us if we have a falling out with someone, to try to settle it quickly. (Matt. 5:23-24) And how wise it was of Lincoln to perceive that "The best way to destroy an enemy is to make a friend of him."

This concept of God's vengeance does not satisfy the primitive human urge to "get even," an urge which is probably one "mark of the beast" within us which we should seek to eradicate. It does allow us to love the Father less fearfully, and, thus, challenge us to love Him more unreservedly.

¹ The author chooses to capitalize all references of Deity, regardless of the current custom.

² References are given that the context may be examined. "Text without context is pretext."

³ The notation, (U. B. 26:6), means page 26 in *The Urantia Book*, and the 6th full paragraph down the page, starting with the first new paragraph.

⁴ See Clyde Bedell's *Concordex* for many dozens of further references to "love."

⁵ Condensed from several dictionaries

⁶ This Bible lecture is not secret; indeed, much of Masonry is more open than many outsiders realize.

⁷ Alexander Pope

⁸ Neanderthal Man, in Field Museum in Chicago, Illinois

⁹ "Are ye able to remember, when a thief lifts up his eyes, That his pardoned soul is worthy of a place in Paradise?" From the hymn, "Are Ye Able," by Earl Marlatt

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Significant Books

The Five Gospels

Robert W. Funk, Roy W. Hoover, and The
Jesus Seminar
Macmillan, 1993, pp. 553

The Five Gospels is a collective report of New Testament scholars working closely together for six years on a common question: What did Jesus say? The Scholars Version is a translation of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and the Gospel of Thomas in a readable form of the common street language used in the original Greek text. Since the Scholars Version is free of ecclesiastical and institutional control, its content and organization vary from traditional bibles. It is authorized by the Jesus Seminar scholars.

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Since the Enlightenment biblical scholars and theologians have attempted to distinguish between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. During the decades of the oral tradition information about Jesus circulated largely by word of mouth. Transmitters of these stories do not ordinarily remember the exact wording of Jesus' teaching. So, in a sense, they creatively invented speech for Jesus. Various people, in time, preserved these teachings in writing. Scholars currently know of approximately twenty gospels.

"The level of public knowledge of the Bible borders on the illiterate. The church and synagogue have failed in their historic mission to educate the public in the fourth 'R,' religion." (p. 34) Over the years, New Testament scholars have hesitated to correct or contradict TV evangelists, pulp religious authors, and conservative Christian groups for fear of political reprisal and public controversy. "At least one Fellow of the Jesus Seminar lost his academic post as a result of his membership in the group. Others have been forced to withdraw as a consequence of institutional pressure. Latter-day inquisitors among Southern Baptist and Lutheran groups have gone witch-hunting for scholars who did not pass their litmus tests." (p. 35)

Critical biblical scholars use empirical, factual evidence as the controlling factor in making historical judgments. They rely heavily on the seven pillars of scholarly wisdom: (1) The distinction between the historical Jesus and the Christ of history. (2) The conviction that the synoptic gospels are much
Spring, 1994

closer to the historical Jesus than the Fourth Gospel. (3) The recognition of the Gospel of Mark as prior to Matthew and Luke, and the basis for both. (4) The identification of a hypothetical source Q to explain the material which Matthew and Luke have in common beyond their dependence on Mark. (5) The liberation of the non-eschatological Jesus of the aphorisms and parables from Schweitzer's eschatological (belief in a cataclysmic "end event") Jesus. (6) The fundamental contrast between the oral culture (in which Jesus lived) and a print culture (like our own). (7) The gospels are assumed to be narratives in which the memory of Jesus is embellished by mythic elements that express the church's faith in him.

Over 200 professionally trained specialists, called Fellows, joined the Jesus Seminar; however, only 74 are listed in "Roster of Fellows" on pages 533-537. Each Fellow voted on all of the gospel statements of Jesus and weighted averages were used to print the Scholars Version of Jesus' statements in four colors:

Red: Jesus undoubtedly said this or something very like it.

Pink: Jesus probably said something like this.

Gray: Jesus did not say this, but the ideas contained in it are close to his own.

Black: Jesus did not say this; it represents the perspective or content of a later or different tradition

Reasons for the Fellow's decisions are given in the text, and additional comments are presented that make *The Five Gospels* a rich source of scholarly information. Votes, of course, even by scholarly people, do not determine truth. It is possible to be correct in fact but wrong in truth, and vice versa. The faith assumptions of the early Christian community may be a more reliable guide to truth than many of the intellectual-historical judgments of critical scholars. Usually, however, empirical research and reason help us in discerning truth. Certainly studies of this kind can be helpful in leading us to the religion of Jesus which is the essence of the Christian faith rather than stagnating in the doctrinaire religion about Jesus.

-MJS

Christianity has indeed done a great service for this world, but what is now most needed is Jesus. The world needs to see Jesus living again on earth in the experience of spirit-born mortals who effectively reveal the Master to all men. It is futile to talk about a revival of primitive Christianity; you must go forward from where you find yourselves. Modern culture must become spiritually baptized with a new revelation of Jesus' life and illuminated with a new understanding of his gospel of eternal salvation. (U.B. p. 2084)

Significant Books

JESUS—A NEW VISION

by Marcus J. Borg
Harper Collins, 1989, 1991, pp. 207

"This book attempts in a scholarly and nondogmatic way to say, 'This is what the historical Jesus was like, this is what he taught, and this is what his mission was about.' It seeks, in short, to sketch a portrait of what Jesus was like as a figure of history before his death."¹ Huston Smith in commenting on *Jesus, a New Vision*, says, "The book about Jesus I have been waiting for."

Borg is a professor of religious studies at Oregon State University and the author of several academic studies relating to Jesus. This book is written for a wider readership and has some quite startling research discoveries. Borg announces that the doctrine of the risen Christ who came to die for the sins of the world was an invention of the early church and was never preached by Jesus himself. He believes this popular image of Jesus, still preached in the mainstream churches, is seriously misleading.

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That this image is inaccurate, Borg says, is a bedrock conclusion arrived at by mainstream New Testament scholarship. "Mainstream biblical scholarship," he states, "is the approach to Scripture taught in the seminaries of the mainstream churches. It is the product of using a historical method on the books of the New Testament, treating them as human documents rather than as divine documents guaranteed to be infallible by God."²

The fact that ministers have not passed this scholarly message on to the laity appears to be because they could find no satisfactory substitute for the popular image of the sacrificial Christ who died to pay for our sins. When mainstream clergy do preach about Jesus, Borg says, they tend to emphasize the "kerygma," the message of the early church about Jesus, and not the message of Jesus himself.

Borg makes no attempt to prove the divinity of Jesus but concentrates on Jesus, the man, and what Jesus believed about God. In doing so, he presents a vision of Jesus that could be acceptable to mainstream Christians and the vast number of people who are searching for spiritual reality. To Jesus, Borg

says, reality was ultimately Spirit, a gracious, nurturing, and compassionate God, Creator of all things, by whom and in whom everything exists.

Jesus is described by Borg as a remarkably free person, free from fear and anxious preoccupation, thus able to see clearly and to love. This freedom was grounded in his deep personal relationship with God, from which flowed the other central qualities of his life: courage, insight, joy, and compassion.

Borg says that what we can know about Jesus invites us to see "life in the Spirit" as a striking alternative to the way we typically live our lives. He states that as an epiphany of God, Jesus was a "disclosure" or "revelation" of God. Jesus did not reveal God only in his teaching but in his way of being.

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This book contains a multitude of references that indicate a new movement is emerging in the world of religious scholarship that has the potential to turn the Christian world upside down. Its approach is reasonable and rational. The understanding of God it presents is one that carries within itself an automatic correcting mechanism for most of the inconsistencies of conventional Christianity. *Jesus, A New Vision* underscores the relevancy of a statement on page 2090 of *The Urantia 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!"

-Ken Glasziou

¹ Preface, p. 1

² p. 17

Ken Glasziou is a research scientist, retired, and active in church work in Australia. He is author of Science and Religion: The New Age Beyond 2000 A.D. and Christ or Chaos: The Evolution of a Revelation.

Church and Culture

A New Beginning For World Religious Unity

The 1993 Parliament of the World's Religions Part I

This is the first of a two part report on the 1993 Parliament of World Religions held in Chicago.

Byron Belitsos

For anyone interested in the future of religion, the Parliament of the World's Religions, held in Chicago last September, was a central event of our times, a jubilee for interreligious dialogue. It also marked the centennial of the world-historic 1893 Parliament of World Religion, now recognized as the founding event in the interfaith movement. The 1993 Parliament heralded a new beginning for the movement toward religious unity in a postmodern world.

I attended the Parliament as a member of the press corps, but I was gladly swept up in the spontaneous religious fervor of the event. It was indeed a watershed in my own religious growth. My concepts of unity were so deepened, my inspiration from the event was so powerful, that in certain moments the ground on which we stood became sacred, became for me a mythic world center, an *axis mundi*. Through this place—the mundane Palmer House Hotel in downtown Chicago—was poured a unifying spirit manifesting itself in a dazzling array of forms of human expression of the divine.

Beauty is a matter of "the harmonic unification of contrasts," and "variety is essential to the concept of beauty" (UB: 646). Because 125 faiths were united there, the Parliament was an epiphany of the beauty of religious unity—albeit a brief experience of sharing crowded into a week in September.

In actuality, religious unity is a distant dream for our world. We have not even achieved peace and non-violence among the religions; it is depressing to realize that many of the 40 or so wars and conflicts in the world today are religiously-motivated. The war in Bosnia, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the conflict in Northern Ireland are sad examples of the breakdowns that occur when diverse religions are not in dialogue. But the eight days of the Parliament last September were an inspiring model of where we are headed. With a few exceptions, it was marked by unity, tolerance, and loving dialogue among the myriad of faiths represented.

To adequately summarize the events of this historic week is a nearly impossible task. Consider that *each day*, the 6000 total attendees had a choice among: morning and evening interfaith meditation sessions; two plenary sessions; dozens

of major presentations in large ballrooms by some of the world's leading religious figures; more than 100 seminars and lectures on every conceivable topic; an extensive video/film festival; special symposiums on religious pluralism, science, business ethics, and media; and numerous artistic events. Choosing from this rich menu of options was in itself a religious experience!

A Profile of the Parliament

The plenary sessions were the major events of the week. These covered such topics as "Interfaith Understanding", "What Shall We Do?", "Visions of Paradise," "Voices of the Dispossessed," "The Inner Life," and "The Inner Life in the Community." Deep exchanges of religious thought and feeling occurred in these large forums, and scores of smaller sessions and panels. Many sessions, such as "What Shall We Do?" and "Voices of the Dispossessed," also provided an unprecedented encounter of the world's religious leaders with the political and ethical issues raised by science and technology, the global environment, and problems of overpopulation, war (including religiously-motivated violence), politics, media, and economics.

An innovative forum called "The Parliament of the People" provided a vehicle for lay religionists to communicate their concerns about critical global and religious issues to the formal "Assembly of Religious and Spiritual Leaders." The Assembly was comprised of 150 of the most important religious and spiritual leaders in the world. It met on the last three days of the week at the Art Institute of Chicago, site of the original Parliament.

A "Concert for the 21st Century" was held in Grant Park on the final day. The closing ceremony (held on the same stage) was keynoted in a speech by the Dalai Lama of Tibet, with 20,000 in attendance.

The PWR was more than an opportunity for interfaith sharing. It also produced some concrete results: foremost was probably the adoption by the Assembly of a common statement, the Declaration of a Global Ethic. It also produced an unprecedented challenge to the religionists of the world in the form of the report to the PWR from the secular/scientific community, the *Global 2000 Report Revisited: What Shall We Do?* In addition, it witnessed an encounter among specialists and theologians in the "Conference on Pluralism".

Let us hope that the many lessons of the 1993 Parliament of World's Religions take root among the peoples of the world. Can we envision a day when the progressive religionists of the world will acquire the interfaith understanding which will inspire spiritual unity amid our cultural and theological diversities? When that day comes, *The Urantia Book* will surely help lead the way. The book is studded with progressive teachings on the need for tolerance, religious unity, and interfaith dialogue. On page 1012 we read, "There is not a

(continued on pages 24)

Worship and Society

The Obsolescence Of Religious Imperialism

Jack Rogers

The Era of Ethnic Emergence

As I continue to contemplate the direction of this column, I am repeatedly amazed at current world events that affirm the basic thesis of my previous articles: the need for change in the interaction between the church and indigenous cultures which practice different religious beliefs. Though the handshake between the Prime Minister of Israel and the leader of the Palestine Liberation Organization produced as much surprise among political pundits as the fall of the Berlin Wall, it is only a part of the modern evolutionary process in international relations that will continue at an even faster rate. While the political "hot spots" of the world are conflicts centering around ancient human enmities, the traditional diplomatic method for dealing with them is becoming increasingly inadequate. It is obvious that new methods of human relations on an international scale must be developed.

While the political "hot spots" of the world are conflicts centering around ancient human enmities, the traditional diplomatic method for dealing with them is becoming increasingly inadequate. It is obvious that new methods of human relations on an international scale must be developed.

The most serious question of the modern era is finding the source of instruction for this new method of human relations. American democratic theory and practice have profoundly affected a worldwide understanding of such concepts as human rights, political freedom, free speech and press, legal due process, representative government, market economy, and many other political and civil concepts. But without a fundamental change in direct interpersonal relationships on an international scale, many of these lofty ideals may remain nothing but theoretical concepts around the world—practiced in name only.

In this age of ethnic liberation, the need for respect among peoples of differing cultures and religions is paramount as the nuclear world is simply too dangerous for an imperialistic approach to international relations. With our lengthy history of genocide among Native Americans and enslavement of African Americans—both events having profound consequences to this day—and with the fractured state of the American culture, the political system of the United States is little prepared to teach a new concept of interpersonal relations.

What social entity is capable of this task on a worldwide scale? Perhaps the growing edge of the church is best suited to this innovative task.

Finding International Teachers

In previous articles I have examined the past history of missionary imperialism and the cultural destruction of indigenous religions, music, and learning. In a recent book by Dr. Mark Plotkin, entitled *Tales of the Shaman's Apprentice* (Viking Press), it is clearly demonstrated that we may lose more than just culture if we insist on an imperialistic approach to missions and science in the jungles of Brazil; we may well lose important opportunities in the cure of cancer and AIDS. In our egocentric effort to convert the "underdeveloped" peoples of the world, we stand at risk of losing the aural wisdom of the ages. Even our sciences are guilty of this imperialistic method. Knowledge that has been understood for centuries by the shamans of many native tribes living in the rain forests are repeatedly ignored by Western medical researchers as superstitious hocus pocus. Dr. Plotkin warns us that we may be within ten years of losing 50,000 years of pragmatic wisdom simply because it does not conform with our way of doing things.

I am convinced that of all of the institutions of the world, the church is one of the better suited candidates to be a teacher of this new interhuman morality.

I am convinced that of all of the institutions of the world, the church is one of the better suited candidates to be a teacher of this new interhuman morality. It has the institutional foundation, a long history of outreach, and a tradition of moral teachings. The difficulty is in defining a message that will be free of religious imperialism.

At the heart of this human spiritual growth issue is our understanding of the nature of life itself. For too long, religions and cultures around the world have lived in the context of a myopic view of human destiny and universe spiritual realities. Although there is widespread belief in eternal life, many live as if death terminates our personality development and spiritual growth. The church has virtually nothing to say about this most important aspect of human destiny. We have preached a belief in eternal life and ignored the reality and dynamics of eternal living.

Eternal Life vs. Eternal Living

In recent years I have become increasingly aware of the disparity between the understanding of eternal life held in the contemporary church and the empowering vision of life after death depicted in *The Urantia Book*. Many Christians have a deficient view of events relating to our post-resurrection life. For example, my grandmother, after 75 years of marriage to a highly successful evangelical minister, was truly convinced that she would be resurrected from death to a city with streets

of gold and sit at the feet of Christ where all of her problems would be transformed into a life of perfection and ease! Such a magical view is an illusion of spiritual immaturity.

"The Gods cannot—at least they do not—transform a creature of gross animal nature into a perfected spirit by some mysterious act of creative magic. When the Creators desire to produce perfect beings, they do so by direct and original creation, but they never undertake to convert animal-origin and material creatures into beings of perfection in a single step." (U. B. p. 541)

Living in an age of scientific discovery where the material astronomical universe is measured in light years, the Christian faith languishes under the burden of an obsolete, flat-earth spiritual cosmology with heaven above and hell beneath. This outdated view of spiritual reality and ambiguity of human destiny is a basic reason why the "Star Trek" generation is leaving the church.

Living in an age of scientific discovery where the material astronomical universe is measured in light years, the Christian faith languishes under the burden of an obsolete, flat-earth spiritual cosmology with heaven above and hell beneath. This outdated view of spiritual reality and ambiguity of human destiny is a basic reason why the "Star Trek" generation is leaving the church. The historic reason for this confusion, of course, is that the apostles and early church fathers did not understand the nature of the universe. *The Urantia Book* indicates that Jesus attempted to explain something of the organization of the universe, but the apostles simply could not grasp these more advanced cosmological concepts.

Before humankind can effectively progress and evolve spiritually, it is not only necessary to know something about universe spiritual cosmology, but also we must understand the basic requirements for attaining eternal life.

Eternal survival of personality is wholly dependent on the choosing of the mortal mind, whose decisions determine the survival potential of the immortal soul. When the mind believes God and the soul knows God, and when, with the fostering Adjuster [Indwelling Spirit], they all *desire* God, then survival is assured. Limitations of intellect, curtailment of education, deprivation of culture, impoverishment of social status, even inferiority of the human standards of morality resulting from the unfortunate lack of educational, cultural, and social advantages, cannot invalidate the presence of the divine spirit in such unfortunate and humanly handicapped but believing individuals. (U. B. p. 69)

Any religious institution that has fallen into the trap of daring to proclaim that it holds the key to eternal life through embracing a certain set of beliefs and rituals has, unwittingly, transgressed basic spiritual freedom. Again and again has the

church and Western civilization gone into indigenous cultures with less sophisticated materialistic trappings and actively endeavored to destroy the indigenous system of religious beliefs. It has become an increasingly serious matter that missionary efforts are "converting" the people to the dogmas of Western Christian institutions with little or no regard for the spiritual truths of these indigenous peoples. These efforts are often more political than theological, carrying a well defined political and social agenda. An enlightened religious philosophy for the 21st century needs to be based on true religious freedom, which may require a change in the organization and theology of many churches.

The visible church should refuse longer to handicap the progress of the invisible and spiritual brotherhood of the kingdom of God. And this brotherhood is destined to become a *living organism* in contrast to an institutionalized social organization. It may well utilize such social organizations, but it must not be supplanted by them....And the genuine lovers of truth will be slow to forget that this powerful institutionalized church has often dared to smother newborn faith and persecute truth bearers who chanced to appear in unorthodox raiment.

It is all too true that such a church would not have survived unless there had been men in the world who preferred such a style of worship. Many spiritually indolent souls crave an ancient and authoritative religion of ritual and sacred traditions. Human evolution and spiritual progress are hardly sufficient to enable all men to dispense with religious authority. And the invisible brotherhood of the kingdom may well include these family groups of various social and temperamental classes if they are only willing to become truly spirit-led sons of God. But in this brotherhood of Jesus there is no place for sectarian rivalry, group bitterness, nor assertions of moral superiority and spiritual infallibility. (U. B. p. 2085)

The Lure of Eternal Living

One of the exciting and intriguing aspects of the mortal ascension plan pictured in *The Urantia Book* is that each person will have an opportunity to actualize all of their potentialities. There are, however, no easy paths or short cuts to Paradise. We must master each phase of spiritual growth in the universe.

The mortal-survival plan has a practical and serviceable objective; you are not the recipients of all this divine labor and painstaking training only that you may survive just to enjoy endless bliss and eternal ease. There is a goal of transcendent service concealed beyond the horizon of the present universe age. If the Gods designed merely to take you on one long and eternal joy excursion, they certainly would not so largely turn the whole universe into one vast and intricate training school, requisition a substantial part of the celestial creation as teachers and instructors, and then spend ages upon ages

piloting you, one by one, through this gigantic universe school of experiential training. The furtherance of the scheme of mortal progression seems to be one of the chief businesses of the present organized universe.... (U. B. p. 558)

Conclusion

The Urantia Book presents a vision of life that moves far beyond the constraints of this planet.

"You humans have begun an endless unfolding of an almost infinite panorama, a limitless expanding of never ending, ever-widening spheres of opportunity for exhilarating service, matchless adventure, sublime uncertainty, and boundless attainment." (U. B. p. 1194)

This liberating message of The Urantia Book will eventually catch the attention and imagination of our entire world. When people on an international scale internalize this vision of human destiny, it will change the world more dramatically than the printing press or computer.

The spiritual freedom which is ours—to follow truth, create beauty, and actualize goodness according to our unique endowments—is the beginning of eternal living. This liberating message of *The Urantia Book* will eventually catch the attention and imagination of our entire world. When people on

an international scale internalize this vision of human destiny, it will change the world more dramatically than the printing press or computer. It will take many types of institutions to enable this enlarged conceptualization of reality to become a part of the world consciousness, but I am confident that the church can play a key role in sharing this message of hope with the peoples of the world without perpetuating the old forms of religious imperialism.

Jack Rogers is a minister, church musician, and college teacher. He has been a student of The Urantia Book for many years.

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Urantia religion that could not profitably study and assimilate the best of the truths in every other faith, for they all contain truth..." In the Urmia lectures, Jesus himself advocates that all religions "...completely divest themselves of all ecclesiastical authority and fully surrender all concept of spiritual sovereignty." (U.B. p. 1487) The Parliament was an historic step in this direction.

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

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." The *Concordex* and *Paramony* can be purchased from The Good Cheer Press, P. O. Box 18764, Boulder, CO 80303.

An exhaustive *Urantia Book Concordance* was published by the Urantia Foundation in 1993. If your local bookstore does not carry *The Urantia Book* or *The Urantia Book Concordance*, they can be ordered from the Urantia Foundation, 533 Diversey Parkway, Chicago, IL 60614. The Urantia Foundation also publishes French, Spanish, and Finnish editions of *The Urantia Book*.