

Spiritual Fellowship Journal

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Preston Thomas

READER/LETTER.HTM

How Christian is *The Urantia Book*?

Richard Bain and Meredith Sprunger

Poor in Spirit

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Semantics and the Lord's Supper

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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

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

Spiritual Decadence and Rebirth

During the last half century philosophers of history have been pointing to the decline of Western Civilization. The cultural foundations of the Modern Age are deteriorating. And it appears that our planet is being prepared for a major transition in our understanding of Reality and the nature of the cosmos. Such a basic change would require a new spiritual paradigm.

We are experiencing a decline in the relevancy of traditional religious institutions along with an unprecedented increase in spiritual hunger that parallels the cultural atmosphere of the century before the advent of Jesus of Nazareth.

We are experiencing a decline in the relevancy of traditional religious institutions along with an unprecedented increase in spiritual hunger that parallels the cultural atmosphere of the century before the advent of Jesus of Nazareth. The decline of the tribal and national religions of the Levant and the rise of the mystery religions in the first century B.C. are analogous to the malaise of contemporary religious institutions and the arrival of New Age spiritual movements in our day. Mainline Christian theologians are "seeing the handwriting on the wall." Douglas John Hall in his book, *Has the Church a Future?*, says that we are rapidly approaching the end of Christendom. Erling O. Duus begins his article, "Pietism and the Dying of Protestantism," in the Spring, 1996 issue of *Prism* by announcing, "Slowly, the perception grows that historic, mainline Protestantism is dying in America—a perception within the church itself." (p. 58) Duus concludes his analysis of our historical condition by commenting, "In another century or so, Protestantism as we have known it will no longer exist. What will develop out of its wreckage, nobody knows." (p. 68)

Duus concludes his analysis of our historical condition by commenting, "In another century or so, Protestantism as we have known it will no longer exist. What will develop out of its wreckage, nobody knows." (p. 68)

Leander Keck in *The Church Confident* is a bit more specific in his diagnosis: "Today, theology—broadly understood—is like a state fair without a midway: Everything is going on at the same time and there is no main exhibit." (p. 47) I think

Keck is correct. The "old Torah" has expended its creativity. Churches locked in Biblical literalism repeat the old clichés, but the souls of present day men and women hunger for something more, something that is relevant to the scientific and cultural world in which they live. There is no generally recognized "main exhibit" that catches the imagination and inspires humankind.

When I was introduced to *The Urantia Book* forty years ago and began to critically study it, I came to realize—in spite of the most rigorous intellectual and spiritual questions with which I could challenge it—that its claim to be the Fifth Epochal Revelation was authentic. I knew it was destined to bring a new spiritual paradigm to the planet. It is the only vision of Reality on the "midway" of our world that has the potential of becoming "the main exhibit," to use Keck's metaphor.

I spent years trying, in a low key approach, to introduce it to the theologians and leaders of the most progressive constituencies of mainline Christianity. I discovered what Thomas Kuhn found regarding the scientific community:¹ a new paradigm is too challenging and too professionally threatening—even though it enhanced the old Torah—to elicit serious examination. Just as it took the message of Jesus (the Fourth Epochal Revelation) several centuries to fashion a new spiritual paradigm and furnish the creative dynamics for the rise of Western Civilization, so it will require time for the Fifth Epochal Revelation to evolve a new spiritual paradigm and provide the creative power for the flowering of a new dispensation of world culture.

The message of *The Urantia Book* is the challenge and opportunity of the 21st century. It will bring our world a fresh and enlarged view of Reality and a new understanding of the cosmos!

¹ *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, Second Edition*, University of Chicago Press, 1970.

-MJS

The Quest for Immortality

The quest for immortality is one of the perennial themes of religion. All of the major religions of the world have some conceptualization of this projected future state. Life after death in the Christian faith is closely associated with the geographic location of Paradise. Byron Belitsos in his recent Journal article, "Paradise: The Recentering of Theology," shows that contemporary astrophysics and the cosmological picture of Paradise in *The Urantia Book* have some remarkably harmonious relationships. The theological historian, Jean Delumeau, has recently initiated a three-volume study of this persistent quest for immortality. The first volume, *History of Paradise: The Garden of Eden in Myth and Tradition*

(Continuum, 1995, 276 pp., \$29.50), points out the continuing power of the Garden of Eden story up to the 19th century. Volume two will chart millennial projections, and volume three will study the hope and joy of Paradise expectations.

Caroline Walker Bynum in *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336* (Columbia University Press, 1995, 368 pp., \$29.95) examines the early Christian belief in the literal resurrection of the body and the contemporary inclination to do away with such interpretations. She points out the embarrassing ambiguities in our view of life after death, and observes that if God cannot redeem the body that is so central to personal integrity, then God's victory over death is partial and feeble.

A century from now, people will look back and marvel that it took so long for the great majority of humankind to discover its unparalleled message.

Here again, as in so many other theological difficulties, *The Urantia Book* presents a view of life after death that is coherent and meaningful. It describes the growth of the soul as contingent with our decisions and dedication to the realities of truth, beauty, and goodness (God's will) and the permanence of each personality. We are resurrected with a morontia (part material, part spiritual) body that gradually evolves into a bona fide spiritual body. We continue our education and spiritual growth in the universe and eventually arrive on the Isle of Paradise, are embraced by the Universal Father and ushered into the Finaliter Corps of eternal service. For searching humanity who wonder about life after death and our relationship with loved ones who have made this transition, *The Urantia Book* description of the adventure of eternity is a rationally satisfying and emotionally comforting revelation. A century from now, people will look back and marvel that it took so long for the great majority of humankind to discover its unparalleled message.

-MJS

Semantics in the Lord's Supper

Long before I read *The Urantia Book* I realized the picture of God implied in the Pauline blood atonement doctrine was not the view of the heavenly Father that Jesus taught. Some aspects of the communion liturgy bothered me: "Eat this, for it is the body of Christ, broken for you," and "Drink this, for it is the blood of Christ, shed for you," didn't seem to harmonize with the spirit of the life and teachings of Jesus. This concern was heightened when in the church I was serving a perceptive woman, who had a transubstantiation view of the Eucharist (Roman Catholic doctrine that the elements are changed into the actual body and blood of Jesus) told me, "I refuse to participate in the communion service because it is

suggestive of cannibalism." I was shocked! But I understood the logic of her reasoning.

It was time, I decided, to take a serious look at the semantics of the communion liturgy which implied the blood atonement doctrine. I experimented with changes in the liturgy which implied a blood atonement doctrine. In partaking of the elements I used statements like: "Take this bread of remembrance, for our Lord is the true Bread of Life;" and "Take this cup of remembrance, for our Lord is the Cup of Love who is present with us through his Spirit of Truth." Various other statements can be used that do not imply a blood atonement doctrine. *The Urantia Book* version of establishing the Lord's Supper contains the following statements:

"Take this cup, all of you, and drink of it. This shall be the cup of my remembrance. This is the cup of the blessing of a new dispensation of grace and truth. This shall be to you the emblem of the bestowal and ministry of the divine Spirit of Truth....

Take this bread of remembrance and eat it. I have told you that I am the bread of life. And this bread of life is the united life of the Father and the Son in one gift. The word of the Father, as revealed in the Son, is indeed the bread of life"....

In the establishment of the only ceremony or sacrament associated with his whole life mission, Jesus took great pains to suggest his meanings rather than to commit himself to precise definitions. He did not wish to destroy the individual's concept of divine communion by establishing a precise form....Of all Jesus' teachings none have become more tradition-standardized.

This supper of remembrance, when it is partaken of by those who are Son-believing and God-knowing, does not need to have associated with its symbolism any of man's puerile misinterpretations regarding the meaning of the divine presence, for upon all such occasions the Master is really present....

"And as often as you do this, do it in remembrance of me. And when you do remember me, first look back upon my life in the flesh, recall that I was once with you, and then, by faith, discern that you shall all some time sup with me in the Father's eternal kingdom." (U. B. pp. 1941-3)

It is my hope that mainline Christian ministers will recognize the well-meaning but erroneous implications regarding the nature of God implied in the Eucharist liturgy and change it to harmonize with Jesus' teachings regarding the heavenly Father.

-MJS

Guest Editorial

The Atonement Doctrine

Letter to a Fundamentalist Friend

Preston Thomas

Dear B. J.:

At Thanksgiving our original discussion centered around the "blood of Jesus." As you know, my son and the girl he planned to marry broke up over this issue. She felt that as long as he did not believe that Jesus died for our sins they had no future. She believed this even though they shared a belief in God, Jesus, and basic Christian values. So this is an important issue and one I would like to discuss with you and make a clear presentation of my beliefs.

Historic Background

Let me begin with a short discussion of the historical beliefs and attitudes that led to the atonement doctrine. The early Hebrews believed that "without the shedding of blood there could be no remission of sin." (Heb. 9:22) They accepted the primitive idea that God could not be appeased except through blood sacrifice. Moses made a distinct advance in that he forbade human sacrifice and substituted instead the ceremonial sacrifice of animals.

This concept of ceremonial sacrifice was preserved, in principle, by the apostle Paul as the doctrine of atonement for sin through the sacrificial death of Jesus. Paul, however, went beyond Moses and the Jewish teachers in that he expounded theories of original sin, hereditary guilt, and innate evil. Paul was a great man; he more than anyone else was responsible for bringing Jesus' teachings to the world. But he also injected a number of his own ideas which were not taught by Jesus, and indeed, were at variance with the teachings of his Master.

I emphasize that human teachers such as Paul were not only fallible but made a serious blunder in promoting the atonement doctrine. I believe we need to make a fundamental distinction between the teachings of Jesus and those of the human followers of Jesus.

I emphasize that human teachers such as Paul were not only fallible but made a serious blunder in promoting the atonement doctrine. I believe we need to make a fundamental distinction between the teachings of Jesus and those of the human followers of Jesus. Jesus is the Son of God as well as the Son of Man and his life and teachings are a divine revelation. Therefore, I believe that we should look to Jesus first, and judge all other teachings by their harmony with his life and teachings.

A Loving Heavenly Father

Accordingly, the first reason I would cite in defense of my belief that the atonement doctrine is in error is that it is not

harmonious with Jesus' revelation of God as our loving heavenly Father. While the ancient Jews taught the necessity of sacrifice, Jesus, in his life and teachings, revealed a God of love, mercy, and forgiveness. The Old Testament prophets and the New Testament teachers recognized God but not with the insight, clarity, and perfection of Jesus. Although Jesus' God is just and righteous, it is love—the heavenly Father's perfect love for his human children—that is the defining characteristic of his teachings. This concept of God as our loving heavenly Father was the only concept, besides acknowledging God as a spiritual being, that Jesus ever taught. He said, "God is love," and in his teachings God's love is supreme over justice and all other divine attributes.

The ancient Jews had conceived of God as a harsh king-judge. They believed that the only approach to God was through fasting and sacrifice. They felt that racial guilt had separated them from God and that sacrifice was necessary to appease his divine wrath. Paul's atonement doctrine grew out of these beliefs.

... the conception of a father who will not forgive his erring children until an entirely innocent elder brother dies as a human sacrifice sounds barbaric. We would expect more even from a human father. This conception is a relic of ancient times and primitive beliefs, ideas, and practices which Jesus came to free us from.

But such a God sounds little like the God of Jesus. He taught that God's attitude toward us is that of a Fatherly affection—he loves us as his sons and daughters. This fatherly affection is the dominant characteristic of the God revealed by Jesus. God's loving forgiveness is always open to us; we must only seek it and be forgiving of others. Jesus revealed this in the prayer he taught his apostles: "forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." God's love is not held hostage to an inflexible justice that cannot forgive until a totally innocent Son is sacrificed in remission of sin.

This brings me to the second problem I find in the atonement doctrine. It assumes a lower conception of God than is presented by Jesus' life and teachings. Indeed, the conception of a father who will not forgive his erring children until an entirely innocent elder brother dies as a human sacrifice sounds barbaric. We would expect more even from a human father. This conception is a relic of ancient times and primitive beliefs, ideas, and practices which Jesus came to free us from. He brought a new and higher revelation of God; and in his life he sought to free believers from the Jewish system of ceremony and sacrifice.

The last argument I would advance in opposition to the atonement doctrine is that it was not taught by Jesus. Isn't it reasonable to assume that if Jesus' purpose in living his

bestowal life on our world was to die on the cross for our sins, he would have emphasized this doctrine? But Jesus did not teach the necessity of sacrificing himself for man's sins; instead he consistently focused on the Kingdom of God.

There are other problems with the atonement doctrine. In particular, it tends to mask Jesus' true teachings of the kingdom of heaven. In his message, the gospel of the kingdom, Jesus taught that God is our loving heavenly Father and we are his sons and daughters. We are called to live a life of faith in our Father's love and over-care, to trust in God as Jesus trusted God, to trust Him as a little child trusts his earthly father.

Jesus' emphasis was always on the kingdom of heaven—the rule of God in the hearts of his sons and daughters. The prayer he taught his apostles reveals this central teaching: "Your kingdom come; your will be done." He identified the kingdom of God with the will of God and taught that we enter the kingdom by the inner submission of our will to God's will. It is this teaching that Jesus held supreme; he did not teach the atonement doctrine.

The Meaning of the Cross

Paul taught the atonement doctrine to help make Jesus more acceptable to the Jews, and to try to explain the seemingly inexplicable fact that the Creator (John 1:3, Col. 1:16, Heb. 1:2) of our universe was killed by his own creatures.

Jesus' death was significant; it was the final act of a life of love and service bestowed upon mortal man. The great thing about Jesus' death was the way he died, the magnificent spirit in which he met that death. His final prayer, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do," is Jesus' final demonstration of the love and forgiveness of our heavenly Father.

In Gethsemane Jesus sought to avoid his death if this choice would be consistent with the Father's will. He prayed, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me." But his purpose was to live the full human life of his earth creatures. And in a human life we cannot usually have our death avoided or taken away. So Jesus submitted himself to death on the cross, a death brought about by men—not by God. It was God's will that Jesus finish his human bestowal, even though it included "drinking the cup" of death at the hands of his enemies.

Jesus' courage and selfless devotion to the service of man and God in his crucifixion inspires us onward. It was the final act of a life of service. "Greater love has no man than to lay down his life for his friends." Jesus lived a life of service, revealing truth to humankind, and he courageously and selflessly submitted to the death that truth teachers must often face.

After Jesus had asked if the cup might be removed, he finished the prayer with the words, "Nevertheless, not my will but yours be done." This prayer—not the atonement of Jesus—is the key to our salvation. We are saved not by Jesus'

death on the cross but by our faith submission to God's will. This is evident from the fact that believing in "the blood of Christ" will not save someone who does not faithfully choose to live in accordance with the Father's will. And such a choice of God's will over our own personal will can be made independently of the death of Jesus.

Although I believe it is incorrect to refer to Jesus as our redeemer, he is truly our savior. For even though the way to salvation was open before Jesus lived, he, in his bestowal life, did truly make the way of salvation more clear to humanity. His life and teachings are our lighthouse, our certain and infallible guide to salvation.

Although I believe it is incorrect to refer to Jesus as our redeemer, he is truly our savior. For even though the way to salvation was open before Jesus lived, he, in his bestowal life, did truly make the way of salvation more clear to humanity. His life and teachings are our lighthouse, our certain and infallible guide to salvation. Certainly we may gain much from the teaching of his well-meaning followers, but we must also recognize that they were human and fallible. Jesus is divine and his teachings are perfect; they are the *touchstone* by which all other teachings should be judged.

B. J., in this letter I have attempted to restate and organize what I said to you at Thanksgiving. I do sincerely appreciate your good hearted and sincere effort to help me better understand the apostolic teachings concerning the "blood of Christ." I am also delighted to have the opportunity to express my beliefs to you. I hope they have found some reception in your mind and heart.

Preston Thomas is a resident of Earlysville, Virginia and holds a MA degree in Philosophy from the University of Virginia. For nine years he worked as a private tutor for children with learning disabilities. In 1981 Preston founded the Einstein School that provides one to one educational instruction and emphasizes the basic teachings of Jesus. Preston is a long time student of The Urantia Book. In 1992 he published The Life and Teachings of Jesus, which arranges and sorts Biblical material dealing with Jesus in chronological harmony with the Urantia Papers.

POOR IN SPIRIT

Mark Hall

Of health and sanity man understands much, but of happiness he has truly realized very little. The highest happiness is indissolubly linked with spiritual progress. Spiritual growth yields lasting joy, peace which passes all understanding. (U. B. p. 1098)

We are at the end of one of the most extraordinary centuries in history. In just a hundred years modern Western culture has transformed our once largely agrarian world into a sophisticated, interdependent global network, linked by commerce, mass communication, and transportation, and characterized by unprecedented technological innovation. In material culture the human race has advanced in ways that only a few generations ago would have seemed miraculous. Yet for all our technological marvels—from the automobile to the moon landing and computers—as persons we hardly know ourselves, and happiness persistently eludes us. Never before have so many people been so comfortable yet inwardly so insecure. Despite the amazing achievements of this century, it is a truism that the modern individual is perpetually plagued by loneliness, anxiety, and the gnawing feeling that life is meaningless.

Why this imbalance, this paradox of brilliant material success, coupled with an underlying sense of despair that erodes the basis of well-being? Why is a century of hitherto undreamed-of comforts and conveniences also known as the Age of Anxiety? And why has a time so enlightened in some ways also unleashed the barbarism of Auschwitz, Hiroshima, the killing fields of Cambodia, and now Bosnia and Rwanda?

We Have Lost Our Spiritual Roots

According to *The Urantia Book*, we have lost touch with our spiritual roots, that most vital dimension of reality which religion attempts to preserve, and expresses in its symbols and ceremonies. Today our modern secular culture seems to have outgrown any notion of spirituality, and religion appears to be no longer capable of supplying the answers to contemporary problems. In a culture that interprets reality mainly in scientific terms, the term "spirit" has become obsolescent and is fraught with musty, medieval connotations.

In a culture that interprets reality mainly in scientific terms, the term "spirit" has become obsolescent and is fraught with musty, medieval connotations.

Nonetheless, we witness, almost daily, the elusive nature of happiness among even "well-off" people (the so-called "worried well"); the proliferation of "isms," innumerable psychological quick-fix fads, and New Age religions; and the appeal of born-again, fundamentalist, and Charismatic sects.

These unmistakable manifestations of personal and societal unrest cannot be adequately explained by psychological, sociological, or economic factors, the usual secular categories to which our culture automatically reduces all problems. In the final analysis, the lack of meaning in the twentieth century is a direct expression of a pervasive spiritual hunger—the deep longing for ultimate orientation in the universe that only religion can satisfy. "Man does not live by bread alone" (Matt. 4:4) still has a striking relevance that goes to the heart of the modern dilemma. Lacking the spiritual insight that is the fruit of true religion, humanity feels lost in a soulless universe. Sadly, this modern secular consciousness—despite its corrosive effects on our sense of well-being—is largely accepted today as the true picture of reality.

Contemporary men and women need to reawaken their dormant sense of spirituality before they can ever find lasting happiness, the "peace which passes all understanding."

Contemporary men and women need to reawaken their dormant sense of spirituality before they can ever find lasting happiness, the "peace which passes all understanding." In a materialistic age that is completely clueless regarding the spiritual component of life, it is necessary to begin with the most elementary question: What is Spirit?

What is Spirit?

Mortal man cannot possibly know the infinitude of the heavenly Father. Finite mind cannot think through such an absolute truth or fact. But this same finite human being can actually *feel*—literally experience—the full and undiminished impact of such an infinite Father's LOVE. (U. B. p. 50)

We must first understand that spirit is not so much a matter of the head as of the heart. We will not encounter God through any exercise of reason, nor will we discover him through our senses, even in an age when telescopes scan vast stretches of the universe, electron microscopes penetrate the deepest structures of matter, and mathematical reasoning has achieved unprecedented analytical ability. Despite these amazing feats, we have not found God in outer space, inner space, or any Grand Unified Theory. We will never unravel the complexity of the infinite God.

Nonetheless, as any believing person can attest, we can *feel* God's spirit, and we describe this feeling, imperfectly in human terms, as the noblest and most joyful of our experiences: love. It is another kind of knowledge, different from intellectual understanding.

Our minds are not equipped to comprehend God, but they are designed to respond to his spirit through experience. In *The Urantia Book* this is called "God-consciousness," an

awareness of God's spiritual presence, which produces a variety of feelings, including awe, wonder, love, and a sense of belonging to a larger whole. Spirit is subtle; it operates just beyond the rational grasp of mind. Hence, the mind resorts to analogy, metaphor, and various artistic forms to express it. Thus Jesus compared the spirit to the wind:

When the wind blows, you hear the rustle of the leaves, but you do not see the wind—whence it comes or whither it goes—and so it is with everyone born of the spirit. With the eyes of the flesh you can behold the manifestations of the spirit, but you cannot actually discern the spirit. (U. B. 1602)

Despite this subtlety, spirit does influence the mind in many constructive ways. According to *The Urantia Book*, it effects sudden flashes of philosophical and scientific insight in the intellect—the truth response whereby the mind intuitively knows that an idea is right. With respect to ethics, it promotes greater insight into persons, enabling us to respond to our fellow human beings on higher levels of understanding, so that we can sympathize based on our common humanity; respect and eventually love one another despite differences; and move away from the lower tribal reactions of suspicion, fear, and hostility. Spirit also initiates the impulse to worship through feelings of awe and reverence which certain natural circumstances and settings inspire. And it inclines us toward reflective wisdom, putting all events in a larger perspective and enabling us to take stock of our whole lives (where we have been and where we would like to go).

Spirit is thus the force that directs our thoughts into fruitful channels (science and philosophy), inspires us with reverence for values—truth, goodness, beauty, justice, and love, among others (ethics), and leads us to personalize the universe, conjecturing that the ultimate source of all life, values, and reality is an absolute creator personality, whom we in some small way reflect (religion).

Clearly no culture can long afford to neglect this force, the very basis of its intellectual progress, ethical growth, and ability to provide personal happiness through spiritual growth. Yet this is just what our increasingly materialistic culture has been doing for more than one hundred years.

Clearly no culture can long afford to neglect this force, the very basis of its intellectual progress, ethical growth, and ability to provide personal happiness through spiritual growth. Yet this is just what our increasingly materialistic culture has been doing for more than one hundred years. With the rise of science and the decline of traditional religions, we have been moving away from the very source of inspiration for both science and religion, the source of life itself; we have been gradually distancing ourselves from God. Hence, a dangerous imbalance has been created between our technological ability

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to change our world and our spiritual maturity to exercise our new prerogatives wisely. Without the spiritual insight to appreciate the value of life as a whole and of every individual person, as well as the place of Earth in the universe, our society will remain at an adolescent development level. Like teenagers, we play with expensive and dangerous adult toys, little realizing how close we come sometimes to destroying ourselves.

The cultural blind spots that have led to this situation are: (1) the West's distorted overemphasis on rationality, which has practically ruled out all other avenues to truth; and (2) the objectification of modern life, whereby the legitimate method of finding objective truth in science becomes an all-encompassing ideology and is falsely applied to every facet of life, thus turning everything, including persons, into mere quantifiable objects. By this essentially materialistic ideology, life is reduced to a sterile interplay of objects—both animate and inanimate—governed by impersonal forces. Within such an artificial framework, notions like free-will, ultimate meaning, and purpose disappear.

In the following I would like to examine how each of these blind spots developed and suggest how we might restore vision and a broader perspective, including spiritual reality, to our culture.

The Tyranny of Reason

Perhaps the very subtlety of spirit influence has led the pragmatic, rationally inclined (biased?) West to doubt its very existence or to conflate it with other aspects of our mental processes. For in the psychological terms that we are used to, spiritual responses are generally lumped together with other feelings as mere gut reactions, in contrast to the dispassionate "light of reason." Feelings are often undervalued as dumb animal responses that in evolutionary development preceded the later, more sophisticated ability to articulate and rationally analyze. The notion that some feelings could enlighten or be pursued as avenues to the truth is almost completely alien to the Western mind.

In this respect the West could take a lesson from the East, where the practice of cultivating certain feelings or states of mind that are receptive to higher inspiration has long been recognized as the main approach to enlightenment. For the East has wisely understood that religion at the personal level is based on certain feelings, on "God-consciousness."¹ This is the basis of faith, and religion with all its trappings functions mainly to cultivate and instill this special state of mind.

Unfortunately, the Eastern approach arouses only suspicions in many Western skeptics, first because the East is often viewed as unprogressive and mired in superstition, and second because meditation can degenerate into a reclusive and useless passivism or into unhealthy, altered states of mind. Nonetheless, it should be possible in the West to offer sound rational

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critiques of the excesses of the contemplative approach to truth and to debunk superstition without writing off the whole tradition of the inward spiritual search as self-delusion. It is time to recognize religious feelings as meaningful to the development of personality and self-understanding. The impulse to worship, to seek God in the quiet of the human heart, and to cultivate the higher feelings that arise from such a practice should not be ignored or suppressed. This is the first step in revitalizing the term "spirit" for the modern age. At the very least, we should entertain the possibility that truth can be discovered in other than purely rational means. Furthermore, psychology should make qualitative distinctions among our various emotions, distinguishing those that enhance the healthy growth of personality from those that hinder it. Whereas the personality thrives on feelings of loving acceptance, and the experience of "at-oneness" that comes from worship or meditation, it is deformed by feelings of fear and hate. The former are rightly called spiritual experiences and should be viewed as essentially different from not only the rational processes of mind but also the lower emotions.²

A culture like ours that defines reality by objective methods has little appreciation for the subjective perspective. Since spirit is inherently a subjective phenomenon, the "evidence" for its existence is completely inferential and personal, which by objective, scientific standards cannot be accepted as proof.

The dominance of the rational approach and the whole history of science in the West militate against ready acceptance of such notions. The problem the West has always had with the intuitive approach is its subjectivity. A culture like ours that defines reality by objective methods has little appreciation for the subjective perspective. Since spirit is inherently a subjective phenomenon, the "evidence" for its existence is completely inferential and personal, which by objective, scientific standards cannot be accepted as proof. The only "evidence" of spirit is in the testimony of individual persons, who bear witness to their personal experience of God. There is no way to translate such personal experience into tangible evidence or a logical deduction.³

Even in the sphere of religion, where the influence of the spirit should predominate, the Western tradition has emphasized the path of reason over the contemplative approach to God. Long before science evolved, Christianity was profoundly impressed by such thinkers as Aristotle, Anselm of Canterbury, Averroes, Aquinas, and the Jesuits, who left a distinctly rational stamp on Western Christian theology. This overemphasis on reason eventually led to a lack of appreciation for, and the complete neglect of, the spiritual roots of Christianity. Rather than allowing the spirit of God's presence to transform their lives, the best minds of Christendom, with few exceptions, spent all their energies trying to find rational

proofs for the existence of God. Dogma became more important than living by spiritual ideals, and men argued about the paradoxical nature of Jesus' human/divine identity rather than letting his life inspire their own search for God. "This path has led to a dead end in our own century, and today Christianity, a hodgepodge of competing sects, flounders and wonders how it lost its way.

In sum, the rational approach, in doing us the service of debunking superstition and enlightening us about the mechanisms of the material universe, has also, in the guise of modern philosophy, done us the disservice of falsely exalting the methodology of science to create a materialistic dogma. By this ideology, all perspectives on life that do not fit the scientific method are dismissed, true science is subverted by scientism, and the ideal of objectivity is blown so far out of proportion that purely subjective, personal insights and feelings, which are not provable by objective methods, are marginalized—what the individual feels about the meaning of life may be interesting, but it has nothing to do with establishing the truth about reality.

The Language of the Heart

By contrast, *The Urantia Book* tells us that the longings of the individual heart for ultimate meaning, the personal search for truth, and feelings of an intimate connection to a Universal Spirit have everything to do with the nature of reality. Such feelings do not arise out of a vacuum but are actually a response to indwelling spiritual reality. The subjective vision of faith is as important to comprehending the meaning of the universe as the objective method of reason. Spiritual insights have as much value in creating the foundation, context, and overall quality of life as reason has in uncovering the facts of life and their predictable interrelationships.

If science has shown that reason is a superb tool for discovering the laws and mechanisms of the universe, does it not stand to reason that other faculties of the mind—even deep religious longings and their imaginative symbolic expressions—may also be fit for discovering other kinds of truth about the universe?

Modern philosophy may dismiss such ideas as wishful thinking and point to the complete lack of scientific evidence for the existence of God or the special place of human beings in the cosmos. But modern religion should respond with the following assertions: wishful thinking is not necessarily erroneous thinking; even partially erroneous ideas may contain the germ of truth, and the rational side of the mind can provide us with only a partial view of reality. If science has shown that reason is a superb tool for discovering the laws and mechanisms of the universe, does it not stand to reason that other faculties of the mind—even deep religious longings and their imaginative symbolic expressions—may also be fit for

discovering other kinds of truth about the universe? Is it logical and objective to rule out of consideration the contributions that the human heart, with its feelings, intuitions, insights, and special awareness, make to the overall understanding of the world and the individual's place in it? It should not be surprising that if our reason can provide one set of keys for unlocking specific mysteries of life, our highest spiritual feelings can offer another set of keys for opening new doors to understanding. If the mind's objective techniques give us one perspective on life, its subjective insights should provide another, equally valid, perspective.

Scientists have sometimes wondered about the mysterious "fit" between our reasoning ability and the natural order—the fact that we are capable at all of discovering the mechanisms of nature and using them to our advantage. (The most amazing thing about science is that it works!) Because of this correspondence between rational mind and the physical universe, science can test its conjectures to ascertain their factual accuracy; nature responds to our hypotheses. We should consider whether other faculties of the mind have another kind of fit, perhaps to an unseen order which we are just beginning to glimpse, one that reveals our true relationship to one another and to the Universal Spirit that we call God. Testing the truth content, or the value, of such religious conjectures is a matter of ascertaining whether they ennoble and enrich life, contribute to the wisdom and maturity of the individual and society, satisfy the longings of the soul for meaning, and encourage peaceable, friendly, even loving relationships among human beings. "By their fruits you shall know them," said Jesus. (U. B. p. 1571-2, Matt. 7:20) Religious ideas, beliefs, and practices that meet these tests, that yield the fruits of the spirit, should be considered valuable contributions to civilization.

Personalizing the Universe

With all of its emphasis on objective evidence, Western culture has created an untenable environment for the spiritually hungry individual trying to make sense of life. Objectivity tends toward materialism and, when distorted into an ideology, eventually atomizes every facet of life, reducing even human beings to soulless automata—complex organized matter, nothing more. The current science-based view of modern philosophy reached such an extreme long ago. For according to this perspective, we are just the latest products of an ultimately meaningless evolution, our bright blue planet is merely an accident of random events, the universe is predominantly impersonal (an enormous, indifferent void), and the personal inner life of the human mind is simply an epiphenomenon of a sophisticated mechanistic substructure—a survival mechanism resulting from the impersonal forces of natural selection.

Faced with this assault on human dignity, religion should be asserting the contrary perspective—that despite material

appearances, the universe is inherently *personal* in origin, design, and ultimate destiny. For spiritual insight, which religion should foster and promote, affirms that personality is the highest manifestation of reality in the universe and that our own personalities are distant reflections of the Creator's absolute spiritual personality.⁵ According to this perspective, spirit is interpreted to be an emanation from the original pattern personality, the "First Source and Center" (U. B. p. 23)—a kind of "background radiation," to use a modern physics analogy, which pervades the universe, the far-reaching influence of God himself. It is the medium through which we find our way back to the Creator, through the longings of our souls and our responses to the supreme values of truth, goodness, beauty, justice, and love. It also helps us to realize the spiritual kinship that links all human beings together as part of the family of God. If we are receptive to spiritual influence, we eventually learn that the appropriate way for personalities to interact is love, the antidote to fear and death, and the activation of the will of God. For the spirit that we feel is the love of God, the love of the original Father personality for his children.

This is the view of reality that religion should offer society as a counterpoise to the materialistic philosophy resulting from scientific analysis. Unfortunately, as already pointed out, traditional religion has been infected by the same mistaken tendency to overemphasize rationality and objectivity, and has lost sight of its true role in society.

This is the view of reality that religion should offer society as a counterpoise to the materialistic philosophy resulting from scientific analysis. Unfortunately, as already pointed out, traditional religion has been infected by the same mistaken tendency to overemphasize rationality and objectivity, and has lost sight of its true role in society. Our religions have for too long put their emphasis on the letter at the expense of the spirit, despite Paul's warning: "The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." (II Cor. 3:6) As a result, traditional images of God have ceased to function as living, meaningful symbols, and fewer and fewer people today are inspired by old rituals and theologies, which seem not only out of step with the modern world, but irrelevant to the spiritual needs of humanity. Traditions about God are being radically deconstructed and reevaluated in light of the widespread discontent with the old forms. In this secular desert of scientism and philosophical positivism the basic religious impulse of humanity still seeks expression, and the souls of contemporary men and women continue to hunger for spiritual fulfillment.

The "soul"—another concept now considered obsolescent—needs to be rediscovered in our time, and may be defined as that part of the mind that recognizes higher, spiritual yearnings and produces its own "hunger pangs" for

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ultimate meaning and purpose (for spiritual communion) when it is deprived. Our fast-paced society affords precious few opportunities to satisfy this need; consequently, many people never understanding the cause of the emptiness they feel inside, spend their lives in a manic drive for success or in pursuit of mind-numbing diversions. Yet only the spirit can fulfill this need: "It is the presence of the divine Spirit, the water of life, that prevents the consuming thirst of mortal discontent and that indescribable hunger of the unspiritualized human mind." (U. B. p. 381)

Faith

The spiritual dimension is not apparent if we rely solely on our senses, the objective viewpoint, and rational methodology. It is the subjective, inner view that offers us a window into our spiritual potentials. The eye of faith discerns realities out of range of our physical vision and our intellectual reach. This is not delusion; it is the natural expression of a still unappreciated side of mind, which points us toward God and our spiritual destinies beyond this life.

Faith is the key attitude for the development of the spirit's influence on mind. For faith or the lack thereof determines whether initial spiritual responses will be recognized as such and pursued as revelations of another reality, or dismissed as artifacts of natural human emotions. The faith intuition is the basis of a spiritual approach to life. The skeptical-positivistic attitude is the materialistic or naturalistic approach, the pervasive attitude of Western society today. Anyone, regardless of their philosophy of life or religious orientation, can experience feelings of awe, wonder, being part of a larger whole, or can experience inner peace, joy, and love. But it is another step altogether to make the qualitative distinction that puts such impulses and feelings into the category of the spiritual and views them as reflective of a higher reality. Faith steadfastly maintains this inner guiding vision despite the natural vicissitudes of life, which, viewed objectively, more often lead one to doubt than to believe. Faith means taking religious impulses seriously as important clues to a deeper understanding of life; it sees in these inchoate feelings great potential for future development and energizes the mind for the realization of this potential. This dynamic consent of the will to the intuitions of the spirit is the chief tool of religion. It is the wholehearted conviction that these intuitions are *real* and vital that keeps religion alive and growing.⁶

Reinventing Religion

We need to invent coherent modern forms of religion which will inspire humanity and give us the means again to worship intelligently, forms that do not fly in the face of current knowledge about cosmology, history, and human nature. This new religion will respect the scientific viewpoint, while complementing it with spiritual insight, the true role of religion. It will teach men and women the art of contemplating

existence from the inside through techniques of worship that bring us in touch with spiritual reality. It will be able to demonstrate the value of the subjective approach to life through peace of mind, a renewed sense of purpose, and the joy of dedicated service to humanity. Finally, it will extol faith as the indispensable attitude of mind for achieving a balanced personality and finding happiness in this life. This faith will be motivated, not by a particular creed or dogma, not by any idea, but by the universal and timeless *ideal* of God as the spirit of love, love personified as the First Person—I AM, who relates to all other persons as a loving father to his children. The truth, goodness, and beauty of this ideal will be manifest in the growth of character experienced by those who dedicate themselves to it and in their contributions to the betterment of society.

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Once we understand what true religion can offer humanity, the centuries-old conflict between science and religion will finally be resolved. Enlightened people will come to realize (1) that the quest of science is to attain a reliable body of knowledge, which enables humanity to manipulate and to interact with the natural world coherently; and (2) that the quest of religion is to provide meaningful symbols that express humanity's highest aspirations, values, and ideals in personal terms. Science uses reason and the observations of the senses—the mind's organizing and outwardly sensing capacities—to explain the workings of the natural world. Religion uses intuition and imagination—the mind's inwardly sensing and visualizing capabilities—to create symbols expressive of spiritual values, ideals, and hopes. Through its most powerful symbol—*God*—religion represents the total sense of connectedness between the individual and the universe as a relationship between the person and the original Creator personality.⁷

Eventually we will learn to coordinate religion's inward-turning vision with science's rational analysis of the exterior universe through new philosophies, ever keeping in mind that all philosophies and theologies are provisional and subject to correction through the expansion of knowledge and spiritual insight, the ever-enlarging perspective of truth. God will be reborn in the world in the freshness of each person's unique spiritual insight. Each will add a piece to the puzzle of God in the world, and all contributions will be valued, whatever the cultural perspective. People will be united by their pursuit of common spiritual goals and will finally cease fighting over creeds and ideologies. Enlightened men and women will realize that no one can pretend to have arrived at the final and

complete truth, that all ideas are subject to change, and that the Spirit, which has given rise to the vast mosaic of religious expression over time and across boundaries, is universal.

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Notes

1. For example, see S. Radhakrishnan, *Recovery of Faith* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1956), p. 110: "All religions are founded on the personal experience of the seers who become directly aware of an Infinite Spiritual Presence beyond and within the range of the world of change and succession. The personal experience of union with Absolute Reality or God has been a common and continuous feature of all the faiths of mankind." See also, Radhakrishnan, *Occasional Speeches and Writings: May 1962-May 1964* (New Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1965), p. 392: "Religion is a transforming experience. It is not a theory of God. It is spiritual consciousness...[Religion is] the art of self-discovery and contact with the Divine."

2. The psychiatric establishment has begun to realize that it cannot simply ignore genuine spiritual needs and that they must be recognized as such. See David Lukoff, Ph.D., Francis Lu, M.D., and Robert Turner, M.D., who recommend rewriting parts of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-IV) to reflect a greater appreciation of religion and spirituality: "Toward a More Culturally Sensitive DSM-IV: Psychoreligious and Psychospiritual Problems," *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 180, No. 11 (1992): 673-682. On p. 673, they state: "The religious and spiritual dimensions of culture are among the most important factors that structure human experience, beliefs, values, behavior, and illness patterns.... Yet psychiatry, in its diagnostic classification systems as well as its theory, research, and practice, has tended to either ignore or pathologize the religious and spiritual dimensions of life." Further on p. 674: "These negative views of religion and spirituality are not warranted in light of recent studies showing no association between religiosity and psychopathology in the nonpatient population. In fact, a meta-analysis of religiosity and mental health found them to be positively related."

3. See U. B. pp. 1124-25: "Convictions about God may be arrived at through wise reasoning, but the individual becomes God-knowing only by faith, through personal experience.... The God-knowing soul dares to say, 'I know,' even when this knowledge of God is questioned by the unbeliever who denies such certitude because it is not wholly supported by intellectual logic." See also, S. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript in A Kierkegaard Anthology*, edited by R. Bretall (Princeton UP, 1946), p. 207: "Christianity proposes to endow the individual with an eternal happiness, a good which is not distributed wholesale, but only to one individual at a time.... [Christianity] desires that the subject should be infinitely

concerned about himself. It is subjectivity that Christianity is concerned with, and it is only in subjectivity that truth exists."

4. This is not to ignore the mystical/contemplative strain of Christian thought, epitomized by such noteworthy individuals as Theresa of Avila, John of the Cross, and in our own century Thomas Merton; it is only to suggest that such direct experience of the Divine was considered rare and not part of the mainstream of Western Christianity. By contrast, in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, the contemplative approach had a much more prominent role; see Byron Belitsos, "Eastern Orthodoxy and *The Urantia Book*," *Spiritual Fellowship Journal* 5, No. 1 (Spring 1995): pp. 7-14.

5. Cf. Etienne Gilson, *God and Philosophy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941), p. 22: "By far the hardest problem for philosophy and for science is to account for the existence of human wills in the world without ascribing to the first principle either a will or something which, because it virtually contains will, is actually superior to it."

"To understand this is also to reach the deeply hidden source of Greek mythology, and therefore of Greek religion. The Greek gods are the crude but telling expression of this absolute conviction that since man is somebody, and not merely something, the ultimate explanation for what happens to him should rest with somebody, and not merely with something." See also p. 34: "With Aristotle, the Greeks had gained an indisputably rational theology, but they had lost their religion."

6. See John Hick, *Faith and Knowledge* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1966), p. 24: "Faith and revelation are correlative terms, faith being the cognitive aspect of man's response to divine revelation."

7. Cf. John Dewey, "A Common Faith," in *American Philosophic Naturalism in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 482-83: "The idea that 'God' represents a unification of ideal values that is essentially imaginative in origin...is attended with verbal difficulties owing to our frequent use of the word 'imagination' to denote fantasy and doubtful reality. But the reality of ideal ends as ideals is vouched for by their undeniable power in action. An ideal is not an illusion because imagination is the organ through which it is apprehended. For all possibilities reach us through imagination." Cf. U. B. p. 1096: "To the religionist the word God becomes a symbol signifying the approach to supreme reality and the recognition of divine value."

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How Christian is *The Urantia Book*?

Richard I. Bain and Meredith J. Springer

The great majority of the teachings of The Urantia Book reinforce and enhance the insights and truths of traditional Christian theology, and the highest concepts in all of the world's religions. However, it is sometimes good to point out the most controversial aspects of a new paradigm to sharpen its distinction from a traditional paradigm and thereby stimulate critical thinking.

The Urantia Book presents a rich source of religious information and insight. In its more than 2000 pages it covers a wide spectrum of topics. But even more challenging, it projects a new vision of the cosmos. Just as Jesus brought a new paradigm to the religion of his day, while at the same time reinforcing the best spiritual insights of the Old Testament, *The Urantia Book* brings a new paradigm to the religion of our day, while simultaneously enhancing the basic spiritual concepts of contemporary Christianity and other world religions. Epochal revelation always upstages the best teachings of evolutionary religious development. Even though it enhances the old spiritual verities, considerable time is required for religious institutions and culture to critically examine and adjust to a new vision of spiritual Reality.

It may be possible to expedite this process by examining some of the major deviations of the new paradigm from the old frames of reference. Following the historic normal curve of change, some of us feel more comfortable with the traditional theological forms, while others are energized and inspired by the new vision of reality. The challenge of creatively evaluating enlarged spiritual concepts and values requires courage, balance, and open-mindedness—especially when they appear to challenge our established beliefs.

The strange names of the authors and some of the paper titles immediately suggest to most people that the book has some sort of esoteric origin. About the only thing those with a theological orientation can associate it with is the Gnosticism movement in the early Christian church.

On first exposure to *The Urantia Book* most people examine the table of contents and observe the names of the authors of the papers and read sections here and there. The strange names of the authors and some of the paper titles immediately suggest to most people that the book has some sort of esoteric origin. About the only thing those with a theological orientation can associate it with is the Gnosticism movement in the early Christian church. Gnosticism was a pre-Christian syncretistic mysticism. The Gnostics believed in "knoesis"—a special source of knowledge. They denied the real humanity and actual death of Jesus. Jesus' body only appeared to be material—a view known as *docetism*. Gnostics taught the

dichotomy of matter and spirit; matter is evil and spirit is good. Gnostics saw salvation being achieved by proper knowledge rather than through faith. When one becomes acquainted with the content of *The Urantia Book*, it soon becomes clear that it is not a Gnostic document.

Revelation

In the Christian faith, we believe that God inspired certain individuals with spiritual truth. These inspired prophets shared this message with their fellows. Over the years these teachings were edited numerous times and eventually were evaluated by church councils and made a part of the scriptural canon. *The Urantia Book* speaks of two basic types of revelation: (1) epochal revelation which is periodic, successive, and evolutionary; and (2) continuous revelation insofar as the indwelling Spirit of God reveals truth to individuals.

The authors of *The Urantia Book* acknowledge difficulty in translating spiritual realities into human concepts and language. They say that thousands of human concepts and statements have been used to facilitate comprehension and communication. The authors also tell us they are rigorously restricted, and are not allowed to anticipate developments in the future. The science and cosmology of the book, we are told, are not inspired, and will soon be in need of revision.

Knowledge must be achieved by evolutionary discovery, but it is integrated and given spiritual value by revelation. This saves much time by eliminating the errors and distortions of evolution. Revelation is never too far removed from the thought process of the age in which it is given. It is rooted solidly in evolutionary foundations. It can only be validated by experience, and is never complete until we meet the Universal Father on Paradise.

Deity and Reality

The Christian conception of Deity is centered in the doctrine of the Trinity. We have had problems understanding how three persons can exist and function as a monotheistic entity. *The Urantia Book* clarifies the concept by describing the unique functions of each person of the Trinity as well as affirming their absolute unity. This concept is further enhanced by pointing out that there is a nonpersonal Trinity reality which has universe functions.

The Urantia Book picture of Deity and Reality is a much more complex reality structure than the Christian concept of Deity. In addition to the Trinity, *The Urantia Book* describes Absolutes of potentiality and an evolutionary aspect of Deity, called God the Supreme. The Supreme grows as the personalities in the evolving universes attain Godlikeness. This evolving Deity Reality is very close to contemporary concepts in the writings of Jung, Tillich, Teilhard de Chardin, and Whitehead. Process Theology speaks of "the consequent nature of God" which is similar to the image of the Supreme in *The Urantia Book* and essentially the same as the immanence

concept of God in traditional theology. There are other aspects of Deity and Reality in *The Urantia Book* which further augment the complexity of the God-concept in the universe of universes. As humanity is beginning to learn more of the immense diversity of the microcosmos and the macrocosmos, it should not surprise us that a more mature concept of God will also reveal an expanded complexity of Reality.

Spiritual Cosmology and Universe Order

The Christian faith has lived with a rather simplistic spiritual cosmology. Heaven, supposedly, was a place of perfection with "pearly gates" and "golden streets," populated by angels and other spiritual beings. Mainline theologians have grown increasingly skeptical about angels, and have had very little to say about eschatology. In the meantime, knowledge of our material astronomical cosmology has exploded by light-years, picturing an almost unlimited cosmos. Some of us have been acutely aware of the inadequacy of our Christian spiritual cosmology. One obvious distinction between the Bible and *The Urantia Book* is that the Bible is a "prescientific" book, while *The Urantia Book* contains scientific concepts that are generally in harmony with modern scientific views. *The Urantia Book* presents an enlarged view of spiritual cosmology which is commensurate with our gigantic material creation. Along with it is given an overview of a vast array of spiritual personalities that function in a hierarchical system of ability and power. Such a universe of supermortal personalities must exist if we are to make any sense of the spiritual cosmos.

The Lucifer rebellion alluded to in Isa. 14:12 and the "war in heaven" between "Michael and his angels" and "the dragon and his angels" described in the 12th chapter of Revelation are clarified in *The Urantia Book*. The broad substantive view of these personalities in the Bible is essentially the same as in *The Urantia Book*; however, the authors of *The Urantia Book* present a spiritual cosmology and hierarchical picture of universe and planetary administration which clarifies and structures the ambiguities of the Bible. The Biblical picture of the war in heaven suggests some sort of physical battle, while *The Urantia Book* account paints a struggle just as terrible for the souls and spirits of many beings but waged between Lucifer's rebellion propaganda and Gabriel's defense of the Universal Father and his universe plan.

In the center of all things is the Isle of Paradise, the residence of the Paradise Trinity. Surrounding this enormous Isle are concentric levels of astronomical creations. The first of these universe levels is composed of the perfect pattern worlds of the Central Universe, *Havona*. This universe of perfection is in many ways similar to Plato's vision of the "perfect patterns" of Ultimate Reality and the conception of heaven in traditional Christianity—without the naive picture of golden streets and pearly gates.

Paradise and the Central Universe are encompassed by seven evolutionary universes with their countless astronom-

ical galaxies and teeming inhabited planets. Each superuniverse is composed of local universes, and the local universes are made up of constellations, systems, and inhabited planets. The basic administrative unit of the seven superuniverses is the local universe. Our planet, Urantia, resides in a local universe whose Sovereign is Christ Michael, who incarnated on our planet as Jesus of Nazareth.

Adam and Eve

The traditional Christian view of Adam and Eve as the first human beings on earth has been relegated by Biblical scholarship to the realm of folklore. Theologians now refer to the creation story as a religious myth—a narrative conveying important spiritual truth, but not actual history. The Biblical record itself reveals that a civilization existed before the advent of Adam and Eve. *The Urantia Book* presents a fascinating story of the origin of the human race and the development of civilization which is broadly harmonious with current scientific views.

The authors describe the dynamics of evolution as a process that eventually exhausts its inherent natural potentials. At this juncture in human evolution on inhabited planets, a higher order of material son and daughter, an Adam and Eve, is sent from the local universe system to upstep the human race. They are required to establish a large population of their progeny, the violet race, before any mixing with the native peoples is allowed. Because of the isolation of our planet, due to the Lucifer rebellion, the task of Adam and Eve on our world was particularly difficult. The so called "fall" of Adam and Eve was the result of their well intentioned decision to start this genetic mixing prematurely.

Christology

In common with most mainline Christian theologians, the authors of *The Urantia Book* reject the virgin birth theory and acknowledge that Jesus was conceived in the same manner as are all human children. There are many reasons why theologians do not accept the virgin birth theory. Only two of the four gospels record it and nowhere else in the New Testament is it mentioned. The earliest gospel, Mark, and the latest gospel, John, do not mention it. One would expect all of the gospel writers to mention such an important event. Furthermore, there are many instances of supernatural conception and virgin birth recorded in the annals of religious history. This was the characteristic method by which ancient peoples designated the divine origin of their prophets and leaders.

While the expanded spiritual cosmology of *The Urantia Book* is breathtaking, its Christology is the most radical deviation from Christian theology. From a planetary point of view, the life and teachings of Jesus harmonize with and enhance traditional orthodox theology: Jesus was truly human and truly divine, and the mediator between God and humankind. But from a universe frame of reference, the view is quite

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different. The authors of *The Urantia Book* tell us that because of our limited view of universe cosmology, we have assumed that Jesus of Nazareth was the incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity. This, they assure us, is an understandable misconception. The authentic historical picture, we are informed, is much more complex.

After the Trinity brought the Isle of Paradise and the Central Universe into being at the dawn of eternity, they instituted a delegated creation plan for the finite, evolutionary creation centering in local universes. The Universal Father and the Eternal Son gave origin to *Paradise Creator Sons* of the order of *Michael* who are empowered and ordained as creators of the local universes and their worlds of time and space. Our Creator Son is known as *Christ Michael* and is both the creator and savior of all in our universe. (The prologue of John, Paul in Col. 1: 15-16, and the writer of Hebrews 1:2 speak of Christ as creator, which has always puzzled Christian theologians.) Each Creator Son is accompanied by a daughter of the Infinite Spirit, designated the *Universe Mother Spirit* whose spiritual presence is known as the *Holy Spirit*.

From a planetary point of view, the life and teachings of Jesus harmonize with and enhance traditional orthodox theology; Jesus was truly human and truly divine, and the mediator between God and humankind. But from a universe frame of reference, the view is quite different.

Each Creator Son is unique in nature and personality; each is the "only begotten Son" of their universe. A Michael Son is the local universe personification of the Universal Father and the Eternal Son in his universe. All who go to the Father in his universe proceed through his benevolent ministry. Each Creator Son must earn his sovereignty by incarnating in the likeness of the various orders of created beings in his universe. Jesus of Nazareth was Christ Michael's seventh and final bestowal in which he achieved sovereignty in his universe and, in principle, terminated the Lucifer rebellion. ("I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself," (John 12:32) and "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me," (Matt. 28:18) are gospel passages suggesting this sovereignty.) Following Christ's ascension his *Spirit of Truth* was bestowed on our planet.

The Atonement Doctrine

The blood atonement theory had its origin in the conceptual language of Paul. Coming out of the Jewish tradition and writing with Jewish people in mind, Paul used the symbolic idea of Jesus as the "final sacrifice" in their sacrificial system as a missionary approach which made sense to those with a Jewish background. Mainline Christian theologians have long since abandoned this retributive concept of God. Most mainline ministers do not accept this view but many still use

the conceptual language of Paul. The Bible commentary most widely used in America today is *The Interpreter's Bible* published by Abingdon Press. In volume VIII, p. 510-11, the writer in commenting on John 3:16 says:

Some of the past explanations of the gospel are not overhelpful to us now. Most of us are not at home in the Jewish sacrificial system; and metaphors drawn from it can be confusing rather than illuminating. And some of the interpretations, popular in the Middle Ages, are to us incredible, and even monstrous.... So do many, with the Gospels in their hands, appear to see in them a lesser God giving himself to save us from the implacable fury and resentment of the great God, slow and hard to be appeased, and demanding his pound of flesh from someone. That is hideous heresy; and the blasphemy of blasphemies. It was in the eternal plan of God the Father that Jesus Christ lived out in fact: "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself" (II Cor. 5:19), not standing sullenly aside, and needing himself to be reconciled.

We should recognize that most of those who still accept a literal blood atonement theory in our day probably do so out of ignorance and misunderstanding and with no intent to deny the loving nature of God. *The Urantia Book* observes:

"The people of Urantia continue to suffer from the influence of primitive concepts of God.... The barbarous idea of appeasing an angry God, of propitiating an offended Lord, of winning the favor of Deity through sacrifices and penance and even by the shedding of blood, represents a religion wholly puerile and primitive, a philosophy unworthy of an enlightened age of science and truth. Such beliefs are utterly repulsive to the celestial beings and the divine rulers who serve and reign in the universes. It is an affront to God to believe, hold, or teach that innocent blood must be shed in order to win his favor or to divert the fictitious divine wrath." (p. 60)

Doctrine of Humanity

The Bible reflects a sharp distinction between Jesus' view of human nature and Paul's doctrine of the "depravity of man." Paul used the theory of the fall of man to justify his blood atonement theory in the Jewish sacrificial system. Jesus regarded human nature in a much more positive way, seeing human beings as the children of the Heavenly Father. *The Urantia Book* views human nature in the Jesusonian way. Human beings are mortal sons and daughters of God who have great potential for both good and evil. Each person is indwelt by a fragment (Spirit) of God which, if followed, in time will lead unerringly to the Universal Father by the way ordained by God the Son through the grace of the ministry of God the Spirit. Most Christians also believe in the indwelling presence and guidance of the Spirit of God, although this indwelling presence is not emphasized in Christian theology.

Eschatology

The traditional Christian view of life after death has been simplistic, and in the view of many, naive—we go to heaven and are received by Jesus and made perfect. Here problems and suffering are nonexistent. This instant perfection does not make sense to many thinking people and Christian theologians have had very little to say about life after death. The concept of hell evolved in early Christianity using the analogy of the punishment of sin to being in Gehenna, the burning garbage dump of Jerusalem. Few, if any, mainline Christian theologians take this concept literally. *The Urantia Book* speaks of the punishing consequences of sin, violating universe law, but there is no "eternal hell." The ultimate consequence of iniquity is self-destruction, personality extinction.

The Urantia Book describes an eminently reasonable picture of life after death. Our spiritual growth continues just where we left off in our mortal existence. We are resurrected on the "mansion worlds" of our local system with a "morontia" body, which is part material and part spiritual, and gradually acquire a more spiritual existence. The entire spiritual universe is a great educational university of learning and achievement where we are prepared for future service. On our ascending journey, even as on Urantia, we meet with many trials and frustrations.

But long before reaching Havona, these ascendant children of time have learned to feast upon uncertainty, to fatten upon disappointment, to enthuse over apparent defeat, to invigorate in the presence of difficulties, to exhibit indomitable courage in the face of immensity, and to exercise unconquerable faith when confronted with the challenge of the inexplicable. Long since, the battle cry of these pilgrims became: "In liaison with God, nothing—absolutely nothing—is impossible." (U. B. p. 291)

We proceed through the local universe, the superuniverse, the central universe, and graduate to the Isle of Paradise where we meet the Universal Father, and are conducted into the Corps of Finality in preparation for greater service in eternity.

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)

Reflections

This greatly simplified presentation of the major *Urantia Book* deviations from traditional Christian theology may help those unfamiliar with the book to focus their reading and thinking on areas most critical to the adoption of a new paradigm of spiritual reality. We might answer the topic question of this article by observing that *Urantia Book* teachings are fairly close to the positions of mainline Christian theology;

however Christian fundamentalists and some evangelical Christians would find them heretical.

Since *The Urantia Book* purports to be the Fifth Epochal Revelation authored by supermortal personalities, it is important to have a clear understanding of the philosophic criteria of truth necessary in evaluating such a claim. First of all, claim of authority is not a valid philosophical criterion of truth. Secondly, knowing the origin and/or authorship of the book may give some helpful insights, but is also not a reliable philosophical criterion. Whether supermortals or human beings wrote the book, it must be evaluated by its content, not by who may have written it.

The central objective in evaluating *The Urantia Book* should be to assess the quality of its spiritual insight. This must be done by individuals using all their resources for evaluation developed and tested through experience. Are the spiritual quality and insights of the book inferior to, equal with, or superior to our traditional sources? During this period of testing, a consensus will gradually evolve regarding its quality. If that opinion is negative, the book will fade into obscurity. If the consensus is positive, continued evaluation will eventually determine its value. Is it just another useful resource, or does it have the quality of genuine revelation? Our hypothesis is that, if it has the spiritual quality of revelation, its influence will continue to grow.

Our personal views, after many years of study and evaluation, is that the book is of superior quality in at least four categories:

1. Its comprehensive view of Deity and Reality, including the Paradise Trinity.
2. Its presentation of an enlarged spiritual cosmology which is commensurate with our newly enlarged material cosmology.
3. Its overview of a vast array of spiritual personalities that function in a hierarchical system of ability and power, which must exist if we are to make any sense of the spiritual cosmos.
4. And finally, its greatly expanded presentation of the life and teachings of Jesus, which is solidly rooted in the New Testament realities. Even if you do not think the expanded spiritual cosmology of *The Urantia Book* is reasonable, you will find the 700 page section on the Life and Teachings of Jesus, if only read as a historical novel, to be the most inspiring and spiritually uplifting account of Jesus' life and teachings in print.

Meredith Sprunger is a pastor and college teacher retired, and editor of *The Spiritual Fellowship Journal*. Richard Bain is an electrical engineer and an editor of *Interface International*.

The Urantia Book and Spiritual Renewal

ENCOUNTERING THE URANTIA BOOK

Irene L. Sprunger

A pastor's wife relates her spiritual odyssey.

Over forty years ago my husband and I saw a copy of *The Urantia Book* in the home of a pastor friend in South Bend, Indiana. As we looked through this big blue book of over 2,000 pages and read the strange names of the authors, we chuckled and put the book back on the shelf thinking that was the last we would see of it. Little did I dream that before another year passed, I would be reading the book!

Some time later a lay member of the Michigan-Indiana Conference Board of the United Church of Christ sent the book to my husband, Meredith, and asked for his opinion of the book. It lay virtually untouched for months. I was not concerned until he started sitting up into the wee hours of the morning reading the book. I thought he was delving into heresy and told him so!

After he finished reading the book, he urged me to read it, and gave me a copy of the book, along with *A Harmony of the Gospels* and a sheet that told where *Urantia Book* passages are paralleled in the Bible. Thus motivated, I started reading and read the entire book. Since that time I have read the book numerous times. For me, it makes more sense out of the Bible than anything I've ever read.

The Urantia Book is a marvelous treasure of spiritual insight and inspiration. From the description of the Trinity and an awe-inspiring spiritual cosmology to papers on religion, prayer, worship, marriage, the development of civilization, and the nature and mission of Thought Adjusters (indwelling Spirit of God), everything is excellent. The spiritual distinctions among the terms evil, sin, and iniquity are insightfully explained and, although God is a loving heavenly Father, none of us can escape the consequences of violating the laws and will of God.

But for me the most inspiring passages are in the 774 page Life and Teachings of Jesus in Part IV of the book. This section presents a chronological account of Jesus' life from pre-birth to post-ascension and his status in the universe today. This narrative reinforces and enhances the New Testament story. One of the important corrections that *The Urantia Book* account makes is in the wording of the Lord's Supper. Instead of using language like "eating the body" and "drinking the blood" of our Savior, it is more correct to use expressions like "Jesus is indeed the Bread of Life" and "Jesus is truly the Cup of Love" or "Let us remember his life among us" and "Let us rejoice in receiving his Spirit of Truth." In this

Remembrance Supper we are assured "the Master is *really present*." (U.B. p. 1942)

In *A Passion for the Possible: A Message for U.S. Churches*, William Sloane Coffin said: "So I pray that the Lord will save all of us from three things: the cowardice that dares not face new truth, the laziness content with half-truth, and the arrogance that thinks it knows all truth!" (p. 65). John Shelby Spong in *Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism* says: "Those who would freeze truth in any words, concepts, or creed will guarantee a time warp that will finally doom the truth to extinction. (p. 169)My understanding and knowledge of the history of religious systems convinces me that whenever a group of religious folk begin to believe that they possess God's truth, almost inevitably they become those who in the name of their version of that truth persecute, excommunicate, purge, burn at the stake, or justify cruel religious wars against any who will not salute their tradition or acknowledge their rightness in things religious." (p. 170) These and many other statements from contemporary theologians which could be cited urge us to keep an open mind and search for enlarged spiritual truth. The authors of *The Urantia Book* reinforce this observation:

All Urantia is waiting for the proclamation of the ennobling message of Michael (Jesus), unencumbered by the accumulated doctrines and dogmas of nineteenth centuries of contact with the religions of evolutionary origin. The hour is striking for presenting to Buddhism, to Christianity, to Hinduism, even to the peoples of all faiths, not the gospel about Jesus, but the living, spiritual reality of the gospel of Jesus." (U.B. p. 1041 emphasis added)

A new and fuller revelation of the religion of Jesus is destined to conquer an empire of materialistic secularism and to overthrow a world sway of mechanistic naturalism. Urantia is now quivering on the very brink of one of its most amazing and enthralling epochs of social readjustment, moral quickening, and spiritual enlightenment....Religion does need new leaders, spiritual men and women who will dare to depend solely on Jesus and his incomparable teachings. (U.B. p. 2082)

Some day a reformation in the Christian church may strike deep enough to get back to the unadulterated religious teachings of Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. You may *preach* a religion about Jesus, but, perforce, you must *live* the religion of Jesus. (U.B. p. 2091)

Any book that has the spiritual insights and truths of *The Urantia Book* deserves a thorough reading and evaluation by the thinking men and women of today. May you have the courage to read and study this great book.

Irene Sprunger is a long time reader of The Urantia Book. She is the wife of Meredith Sprunger, editor of The Spiritual Fellowship Journal, and serves on it's advisory board.

Sermon Series on Spiritual Growth

Part 1

Taking Responsibility for Our Lives

Rev. Gregory Young

The Creation story in Genesis 1:26 says, "Let us make man in our image and likeness..." We are created in the image of God. Our roots of being are grounded in Ultimate Reality. This, admittedly, is an astounding and challenging statement. What does it mean? It means there is far more to you than meets the eye, and far more in store for you as you journey through this life and beyond than you can possibly fathom in your wildest and most hopeful dreams. Isn't such a thought exciting and intriguing! Well, it's true, and in this series I am going to invite you on a journey with me, as together we explore how we might grow personally and as a community in spiritual stature and vision.

We Have Enormous Potential

I have often been intrigued by something Wordsworth once said: we should build up the beings that we are. You and I have enormous potential to grow. We have latent possibilities that can only be realized as we faithfully venture in commitment and bear the fruits of service. To us much has been given and from us much is required. We must give ourselves wholeheartedly to something larger than ourselves. In this way we develop our highest good, benefit our fellows, and glorify God.

We should remember that we are not marionettes on a string. We have the power to take charge over most of the circumstances in our lives, and the capacity to shape our attitudes toward those things we cannot change. So let us resolve to take responsibility for our lives, and to evolve the essence of our being with which God has endowed us.

Do You Know Who You Are?

There is a goofy story about a man who went to his doctor complaining about terrible neck pains, throbbing headaches, and recurring dizzy spells. The doctor examined him and said, "I'm afraid I have some bad news for you. You have only six months to live." The doomed man decided he would spend his remaining time on earth enjoying himself. He quit his job, bought a sports car, and a closet full of new suits and shoes.

Then he went to get himself a dozen tailored shirts. He went to the finest shirt shop he could find. The tailor measured him and wrote down among other measurements, "size 16 neck." "Wait a moment," the man interrupted, "I always wear size 14 neck, and that is what I want." "I'd be glad to do it for you sir," the tailor replied, "however, if you wear shirt size 14 neck, I

can guarantee you that you're going to have terrible neck pains, throbbing headaches, and recurring dizzy spells."

In a sense, this humorous story speaks effectively to the points that I wish to make in order for us to be able to grow in personal spiritual stature. First of all, we need to know who we are—what are our personal challenges? What are our strengths? What are our real needs? What is our sense of calling? I am convinced that many, if not most of us, are not very well acquainted with our authentic selves. I invite you to examine your inner life. Reflect on what you need to bring your highest fulfillment. Then courageously admit what your shortcomings are that stand in the way of your creative self-realization.

Our Lives Are Shaped by Our Courageous Searching

In Matthew's gospel (7:7) Jesus says, "Ask, and you will receive; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened." Ask for God's help and strength. Search and examine your life in faith; lose your life in God's purposes and you will really find it. Invest your life under God's direction and your life will increase abundantly. Spiritual growth, progress in the mastery of personal destiny, comes from a deep yearning to know God and be like God. It is a hungering for truth, beauty, and goodness to be a part of your life.

In order to achieve objective self-awareness, we must cultivate a spirit of humility. John Brodie, one time quarterback for the San Francisco 49ers, was once asked why a superstar like himself should have to hold the ball for field goals and points after touch down. "Well," said Brodie, "if I didn't, the ball would fall over." No arrogance, no obnoxious pretense. He understood his place and service in the greater scheme of things.

Cultivating a spirit of humility is not easy, and often we misunderstand what it means to be humble. To be humble in spirit means to honestly assess and admit our limitations, needs, and shortcomings. It is not an attitude of inferiority or inadequacy. In our realistic appraisal, we should be overwhelmed by an increasing awareness of just how much God loves us and can accomplish with our lives in spite of our limitations.

The flip side of humility is self-righteousness. Self-righteousness says that I have no need of God—not thy will be done, but my will be done. Those who think they have it all together, who are not aware of their need for spiritual growth, are the Pharisees of society most in need of spiritual awakening. It is only when we are honest and open that we can grow personally and as a community of faith.

Our Past Need Not Control Our Future

Norman Vincent Peale tells of spending some time on a lush tropical isle of Jamaica. In the hotel where they were staying there was a map that hung in one of the hallways. In a corner of the map there was some very faint lettering over

an almost uninhabited part of the island. Looking closely, Dr. Peale made out the words, "The Land of look behind." Intrigued, he asked the owner of the hotel what those words meant. The hotel owner said that in the days of slavery, runaways from the sugar plantation as they entered this wilderness were constantly looking over their shoulders in fear to see who was coming after them.

All too often many of us live in the land of look behind. We still live in a time of past mistakes, regrets, and painful experiences. And that looking back keeps us from looking ahead with confidence, of growing spiritually into the future. There is a tremendous relief in being able to admit our mistakes, our shortcomings, and our needs. It is refreshing to face reality, to be genuine, for this is the foundation for spiritual growth. Trusting in God's forgiveness of our past errors, we are free to forgive ourselves and face the future with fresh vision. We should realize that to acknowledge the areas in which we need to grow isn't a sign of weakness. It is a sign of strength. It is character producing. Taking responsibility for our lives is among the first and most important steps to personal growth and fulfillment.

God's Love is Your Limitless Resource

Some of us might be afraid, in our heart of hearts, that our shortcomings, the mistakes we have made in our life, are just too great for even God to bear—that God has turned his back on us. Let me categorically assure you, that is not true. God's love has no limits with his children who desire to grow spiritually. The good news of great joy which lies at the very heart of the gospel is that salvation and personal fulfillment is open to all who wish to grow in God's loving care. God patiently whispers to our souls that we are loved in ways that we have never known before. Even though we may close ourselves off from God's love, God continues to indwell our minds and knock on the door of our hearts.

Trust God, open your mind and soul to his leading. God will never forsake you and leave you desolate. God will care for you tenderly—and love you, and love you, and love you until you blossom and flourish from the experience of that love. Look at yourself and your needs, your shortcomings, and your potentials with courage. God's limitless resources are yours for the seeking. "Ask, and you will receive; seek, and you will find;" knock, and the door to the abundant life will be opened to you.

Please know that God holds you tenderly in his hand and will lead you into a spiritual career/adventure through the mansions of eternity. Praise be to God!

Gregory Young is pastor of St. John United Church of Christ in Germantown, Wisconsin.

Interface: Serving God Within the Church

To those raised in the church, and even identifying the Kingdom of God with the church, the title must seem strange. For most, serving God within the church is the norm, if not the definition, of discipleship. While many may be called to represent it on the periphery of its influence, it's assumed that even this is the church's outreach. If nothing else, one can always define the church as the mystical body of Christ which is present by definition where believers are gathered and at work in his name.

There are those who point out—correctly, I believe—the too easy identification of the church with the Kingdom of God, and feel the institution often stands in the road of serving God as much as it helps. Many people who have been raised and nourished in the fellowship of the church feel it's failings so strongly that they have largely given up on organized religion.

For those in the Urantia Movement, there is the added frustration of rejection and suspicion. Not many *Urantia Book* readers can communicate easily and openly about the book with their fellows in the church. Many discovered *The Urantia Book* after a search that led them away from the institutional church. Having discovered it, it only seemed to reinforce their bias against traditional Christianity.

Many discovered The Urantia Book after a search that led them away from the institutional church. Having discovered it, it only seemed to reinforce their bias against traditional Christianity.

As a pastor I feel the same frustrations. I would love to share openly the ideas and concepts found in *The Urantia Book* with others who are searching for a deeper and more profound understanding of the Good News, but I realize how few people are open to even examining them. I never cease to be amazed at the irony that the one people on earth who should most quickly understand and welcome it's message are often the most suspicious and hostile.

So I understand why many people in the movement are, in turn, suspicious of the church, and many have given up on it. On more than one occasion I've sensed the surprise and incomprehension on the part of readers who discover that I am a pastor actively serving a church, as if to say, "How can that be?" My response would be, "How could it not be?" I'm so convinced that the truths of *The Urantia Book* affirm and complement the witness of the church in all essentials, that having to apologize for being in the church seems ludicrous—as ludicrous as having to justify *The Urantia Book* to church members.

I do not know what the future of the institutional church will be. I'm convinced it's undergoing great changes and there may be little in the future that will be recognizable from the past. As to its shortcomings, few could catalogue them as thoroughly as a pastor. But I would also bear witness to the fact that it is still a place where the Good News is proclaimed, where reconciliation and healing take place, where great and liberating fellowship is often found—even transcendent worship.

For those in the Urantia Movement it may also seem ironic to point out that God is no respecter of persons. He is not bound by the church, but neither has he given up on it. It is still a good place to serve, a good place to experience the gifts and graces of God's people everywhere, and a good place to bear witness with patience, wisdom, and hope to the truths contained in *The Urantia Book*.

—Merlyn Cox

Psalms Today **A New Song**

O come, let us sing unto the Lord a new song, for the ancient litanies to the tribal deity envisioned by our forebears no longer speak to our minds and hearts.

We rejoice that our Sovereign Creator has blessed us with an enlarged picture of Deity and Reality. The Universal Father is not a parochial deity of wrath and anger but a God of love and infinite perfection.

He is not a humanlike being who can be persuaded or with whom we can make bargains and deals. The Primal Father is Absolute Reality, and in his personal relationships with us he conveys only that which is true, beautiful, and good.

The Father of All is no respecter of persons, groups, nations, or planets, but offers the same gifts of the spirit and potentials of eternity to all.

To each he says, "Be you just and loving, and strive for perfection even as I am perfect, for you are my mortal sons and daughters."

We thank you, Gracious Lord, for the splendor of your creation, for your patient and sure plan of salvation, and for the opportunity to be co-partners with you in eternity.

We worship you in the beauty of holiness and are renewed for the soul building struggles of experience on planet Earth. (96)

Fall, 1996

Significant Books

Science, Anthropology, and Archaeology in The Urantia Book

Brotherhood of Man Library, 1996, pp.54
by Ken. T. Glasziou

Dr. Glasziou's monograph begins by observing: "The expectations of readers about the content of *The Urantia Book* are manifold. Some may expect that the revelatory status of the book would be verified by the accuracy of its scientific content. Others may believe that if only the scientific community embraced the book, exciting new scientific discoveries would eventuate. Some are emphatic that a revelatory status carries the guarantee that all of its assertions, scientific and otherwise, will be divine truth. Many consider that even a single error nullifies any claim to be a revelation. So what does the book itself say?" (p. 1)

On page 24 of *The Urantia Book* we read: "The existence of God can never be proved by scientific experiment or by the pure reason of logical deduction. God can be realized only in the realms of human experience.... Those who know God have experienced the fact of his presence; such God-knowing mortals hold in their personal experience the only positive proof of the existence of the living God which one human being can offer to another." And on page 1106: "Reason is the proof of science, faith the proof of religion, logic the proof of philosophy, but revelation is validated only by human experience."

There are many divergent views of the science in *The Urantia Book* ranging from Martin Gardner's attempt to debunk the science content of the book to *Urantia Book* fundamentalists who believe it is without error. Dr. Glasziou, a research scientist, has, in my judgment, written the definitive treatment of this aspect of *The Urantia Book*. He has a remarkable grasp of contemporary science and the history of science and evaluates the science in *The Urantia Book* with balance and insight. It is a seminal resource for anyone making a critical study of *The Urantia Book*. The basic sections of the paper are:

Part 1. Introduction and Expectations.

Part 2. U. B. Statements that May Fill "Missing Gaps."

Part 3. Who Wrote *The Urantia Book*?

Part 4. Science Topics of Interest in the Urantia Papers.

Part 5. Contentious Materials.

Part 6. An Index of Archaeological and Historical Information in Part 4, The Urantia Papers.

Copies can be obtained by writing: David Biggs, G-4040 Beecher Road, Flint, MI 48504. Please enclose \$1.25 for postage.

—MJS

The Philosophical Scientists

David Foster
Dorset Press, 1991, 179 pp.

This perceptive book succinctly traces the relationship of science and religion in Western Civilization. Starting with the natural theology inherent in medicine, Foster observes the progressive decline of religion in our culture effected by Darwin's theory of evolution, the dominant influence of the second law of thermodynamics, and the pervasive belief in the mechanical models of scientism. He then points to new discoveries in physics and molecular biology which portend a new era of science that he calls "supernatural science."

Foster spent thirty-two years in the process of writing the book. "I started this book with the realization that the developments in modern physics had opened new doors to philosophical thought. The centre for such ideas was Cambridge University and the ideas being put forward by Eddington, James, and Whitehead in the 1930's, whose main tenet was 'The stuff of the world is mind-stuff.'" (p. vii)

After surveying the contemporary findings of science that do not fit into the old concepts of chance and determinism, David Foster makes some interesting observations:

"Darwinism was wrong....The significance of Darwin being wrong is immense, for it implies the admission of the *supernatural* into science. There is no known procedure whereby specificities such as the 10^{60} of hemoglobin (the probability that this basic protein could have evolved by chance—p. 78-84) can be explained without introducing a supernatural intelligence into science, an intelligence which can ignore statistics and create unique purpose. Furthermore, this same situation dethrones the Second Law of Thermodynamics from its preeminent position in physics, and permits the credibility that this Law can be reversed by the quiet voice of Clerk Maxwell and his 'conscious sorting demons.' Put simply, GOD EXISTS." (p. 170-1)

The book ends by asking the question, "Can science now agree with religion?" And Foster's answer is: "We have seen that up until 1900 science dealt heavy blows to religion based on 'proofs' related to chance and necessity and attributable to Darwinism, the Second Law of Thermodynamics and single-level mechanical models of reality. All these three ideologies have been progressively demolished from 1900 onwards, particularly by Planck, Einstein, and Heisenberg, and latterly by molecular biology. They are replaced by a new idea of the importance and dominance of *specificity* in the universe, with the inevitable implication that *God exists*. What implications this may hold for humanity is outside the range of our present discussion." (p. 179) If you are interested in a brief review of the philosophical-religious implications of some of the basic positions of contemporary science, *The Philosophical Scientists* is a stimulating book to read.

-MJS

More Psalms Today

The Universal Father

O people of earth and heavenly hosts, give glory and honor to the Universal Father, the First Creative Source and Divine Center of all things and beings.

Wonder and awe, dedication and worship are inspired by the Creator's fathomless presence in the cosmos.

Be led by your loving universe superiors, O mortal, that you too may give the Paradise Father first place in your life!

Happy is the person who senses the universal unity of all things.

In nature we touch the hem of the cloak of God.

My mind contemplates the wisdom of God in universe events; from the unerring path of the stars to the flower in the crannied wall, from the progressive march of nations to the expanding co-ordination of the baby's hand.

My soul perceives meaning and value in the interrelatedness of the atom and the galaxy, of the cell and the holistic functioning person.

I sense a kinship with all life, with all creation!

Being in tune with the Supreme, we are aware of our cosmic citizenship.

Such a cosmic citizen has outgrown dogma's anthropomorphic God.

How can we compare the Infinite with even nature's wonders?

The roar of thunder is silenced by the Creator's celestial harmony.

The brilliant suns are as dim candles in God's presence.

The eyes of the spirit, although obscured by the veil of mortality, behold a vision of the eternal God so vast, so infinite, so awe-inspiring that words are helpless to describe its grandeur.

Yet is this fathomless Deity truly experienced and known!

This Infinite Source of all things is our Universal Father!

What a mystery! What an incomprehensible fact of love!

(29)

Culture and Values

On Values

Larry Mullins

Plato observed that ideas such as truth, beauty, and goodness are more "real" than the actual material world in which we live. Modern philosophers have generally brushed that concept off. "Platonic" is a term that has come to mean unrealistically idealistic.

Now *The Urantia Book* gives us an astounding new perspective. Plato was closer to the truth than many of us may have thought. We read in the Urantia Papers that *fact*—material existence—is only one aspect of reality. Matter is stuff in the constant process of perfecting, of becoming more and more "real." The perfect pattern that matter is seeking to achieve is found on the Isle of Paradise. We understand divine perfection more easily as *values*—truth-beauty-goodness—all of which combine as *love*. Values are "bytes" of Divinity.

Another way of saying this is: fact is *what is*, and values (or Spirit) are what *ought to be*. Between what is, and what ought to be, is the dynamic process of becoming—living (or emerging) reality. What we call "reality" is thus always in the process of change, it must ever be redefined. That which is perfect, the Paradise pattern, is indeed more real than what we see; life is but the shadow of spirit realities.

We read in *The Urantia Book* that God the Supreme (the evolving aspect of Deity) is to the Paradise Trinity what the human soul is to the Thought Adjuster (indwelling Spirit of God). (p. 1285) Just as the Supreme is being created, the soul is also in the process of becoming. The gift of personality is the reality that makes it possible for mortals to *choose*. Between the God-endowed personality and the Thought Adjuster lies the enchanted loom upon which the mortal soul is woven by means of human choices. The mortal personality becomes more and more *real* as it chooses higher spiritual realities. These spiritual choices are recorded within the soul—the material-spirit "mind"—which the reconsciousized personality will take up after death.

What does this mean in our day to day lives?

It means that as we identify more and more with our personality essence through wise choices, we *become more and more real*. As we become more real we can better "hear" the voice of the indwelling Spirit of God, and more and more identify with, and *use* our immortal soul in day to day living. The indwelling Spirit of God is objective reality, and when we achieve union with it we bring something new, something human, something won from our struggles in experiential reality to this divine-human union. *This is our gift to God.*

In my job as a business consultant, I observe that businesses are more and more recognizing the *reality* and significance of values. Values are *reality-potentials*. Values represent what *ought to be*. By lifting high values and honoring them, businesses target a company Mission—something seemingly "unattainable," yet worth striving to achieve. Businesses can evaluate where they are—*facts*—visualize where they *ought to be*—*values*—and in striving to attain their Mission, business associates give their activities, and their business culture new meaning.

Thus, we can better understand the "new reality"—the "living truth" of Jesus. In *The Urantia Book*, fact is observed as Beauty, value as Goodness, or spiritual potential, and meanings are perceived as emerging Truth, living Truth.

Values are the ultimate measure by which we should guide our lives. Science has discovered that chaos is brought into a meaningful pattern by what they call the "strange attractor," something that configures apparently meaningless activity into a cohesive, and beautiful pattern. *This is how the supreme power of values works in the material world.*

Values are indeed more real than ordinary life, especially more real than a life that worships only material reality. A life that is merely successful is wasted. We must learn to see life as *what is becoming*, and less as what it *seems to be*. Recall the Man of La Mancha, Don Quixote. When admonished that he must come to terms with life "as it is" he replied:

I have lived nearly fifty years, and I have seen life as it is. Misery, pain, hunger—cruelty beyond belief. I have heard the singing from taverns, and the moans from filth in the streets. I have been a soldier, and have seen my comrades fall in battle or die more slowly under the lash in Africa. I have held them in my arms in the final moments. These were men who saw life as it is, and yet they died despairing. No brave words, no gallant sayings. Only in their eyes a confusion, and whimpering the question: "Why?" I do not think they asked why they were dying, but why they had lived. When life itself seems lunatic, who knows where madness lies? Too much sanity may be madness! To surrender dreams, this may be madness. To seek treasure, where there is only trash. But maddest of all, to see life as it is, and not as it ought to be!

Thus, we may understand the thrilling new truth that Jesus taught the apostles, and only James grasped at first: They were to *live life as though they were ambassadors of a glorious earth kingdom of light and life that already exists*. (U. B. p. 1582) All true members of the kingdom of God should live as such noble ambassadors, for the gospel of Jesus reveals to us that the Father's spiritual family is to be found within the eternal now.

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More Psalms Today Spirit Realities

Blessed are those who achieve God-consciousness, for
they are able to see the spirit dimension of Reality.
They have entered the fathomless depths of endless
empowerment.
They are at home in an expanding universe where they
are never alone.
They know they are in partnership with an all-wise and
loving Guide and Director.
A new world of perception is opening.
The refreshing fragrance of kindness is enriching
human relationships.
The joyful music of love is transforming attitudes and
actions.
The captivating beauty of the commonplace is
transfiguring the world about us.
An enlarged vision of truth is expanding the horizons
of our poetical.
A deepening knowledge of the Supreme gives us
unshakable assurance
as earthly securities crumble. (128)

Russian and Korean Translations

The New York Society of Students of *The Urantia Book* is fostering translations of *The Urantia Book* into Russian and Korean. The Society plans to have the first draft of the Russian translation completed by the end of 1998, and the first draft of the Korean translation of the Life and Teachings of Jesus by the fall of 1996. Information about the Russian translation may be obtained from Leela Dogim, 201-886-2243; and a report concerning the Korean translation can be gotten from Barry Clark, 201-438-3359. General information about the translation project can be obtained from Eileen Laurence, 914-273-8922.

Jesus portrayed the profound surety of the God-knowing mortal when he said: "To a God-knowing kingdom believer, what does it matter if all things earthly crash?" Temporal securities are vulnerable, but spiritual sureties are impregnable. When the flood tides to human adversity, selfishness, cruelty, hate, malice, and jealousy beat about the mortal soul, you may rest in the assurance that there is one inner bastion, the citadel of the spirit, which is absolutely unassailable; at least this is true of every human being who has dedicated the keeping of his soul to the indwelling spirit of the eternal God.
U.B. p. 1096

Urantia Book Resources

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*.

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 *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*.