

Spiritual Fellowship Journal

Volume 7, Number 2

Fall, 1997

To Be Wise as Serpents, Harmless as Doves

Rebecca Kantor

The Ambiguities of *The Urantia Book*

Ken Glasziou

Our Major Responsibility:

Disseminating the Fifth Epochal Revelation

Meredith Sprunger

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Sermon: Behold, I Am Doing a New Thing!

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***Reclaiming the Church*, by John B. Cobb**

The Spiritual Fellowship of Students of *The Urantia Book*

A Journal Established to Promote Theological, Philosophical, and Polity Discussions Germane to An Appropriate Symbolism and Socioreligious Expression of the Fifth Epochal Revelation.

Guiding Principles¹

An Appropriate Symbolism and Socioreligious Expression of the Fifth Epochal Revelation Should:

1. Be based on the Fatherhood of God and the brother-sisterhood of humankind.
2. Be the outgrowth of love.
3. Foster sentiment, satisfy emotions, and promote loyalty.
4. Facilitate spiritual progress through cosmic meanings, moral values, social development, and personal living.
5. Provide supreme goals of living that are both temporal and eternal.
6. Be based on the biologic, social, and religious significance of the family.
7. Symbolize the permanent in the midst of unceasing change.
8. Glorify that which respects and unifies the diversities of society.
9. Promote higher meanings, beautiful relationships, and the highest values.
10. Embody some masterful mystery and connote some worthful unattainable.
11. Be meaningful and serviceable to both the individual and the group.
12. Serve as the skeletal structure for dynamic personal experience.

The Purpose of Religious Institutions is to:

1. Dramatize the loyalties of spiritual experience.
2. Magnify the lures of truth, beauty, and goodness—supreme values.
3. Enhance the service of unselfish fellowship.
4. Glorify the potentials of family life.
5. Promote religious education.
6. Provide wise counsel and spiritual guidance.
7. Furnish and promote group worship.
8. Encourage friendship, neighborhood welfare, and moral values.
9. Spread the gospel of eternal salvation.

Religious Institutions Should Avoid Dangers, Such As:

1. Fixation of ritual and theology.
2. Developing vested interests and secular involvement.
3. Serving the institution instead of serving God and ministering to people.
4. Forming competitive sects and developing a "chosen people" attitude.
5. Developing authoritarianism, dogmatism, and false ideas of sacredness.
6. Venerating the past while ignoring present needs and timely spiritual interpretations.
7. Failing to hold the interest of youth and grow with the times.
8. Losing sight of spiritual ministry and the saving message of salvation.

Central Objective

The central objective of a group of people interested in initiating a new religious organization based on the teachings of the Fifth Epochal Revelation should be to create a polity with maximum flexibility that would function with small groups or large congregations, utilize lay leadership and/or ordained clergy, have cross-cultural adaptability, and broad theological inclusiveness.

Such an institution would be "a gathering of persons who have accepted a common purpose, and a common discipline to guide the pursuit of that purpose, to the end that each involved person reaches higher fulfillment as a person, through *serving and being served* by the common venture, than would be achieved alone or in a less committed relationship."²

¹ See U. B. p. 966

² Robert K. Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership*, Paulist Press, New York, 1977, p. 237.

The Spiritual Fellowship Journal

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The Spiritual Fellowship Journal is an ecumenical publication published twice yearly by The Christian Fellowship of Students of *The Urantia Book* of Fort Wayne, Indiana.

Subscription orders, changes of address, and editorial correspondence should be sent to:

The Spiritual Fellowship Journal
4109 Plaza Dr.,
Fort Wayne, IN 46806
(219-745-4363)

Suggested Annual donation—\$10.

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Charting a New Course

For the past six years *The Spiritual Fellowship Journal* has promoted an interface between mainline Christian clergy and the teachings of *The Urantia Book*. Although this dialogue has been positive, it is obvious that most of the leaders of the Christian Church have too much at stake to seriously examine and evaluate a new spiritual paradigm. It will probably be generations before the Christian Church will recognize *The Urantia Book* as an acceptable resource for teaching and preaching.

We are now directing the Journal in a new direction with students of *The Urantia Book* as our main audience. Our new mission is to: "Promote Theological, Philosophical, and Polity Discussions Germane to an Appropriate Symbolism and Socioreligious Expression of the Fifth Epochal Revelation." The rationale for this new mission is given in the article in this issue of the Journal entitled, "Our Major Responsibility: Disseminating the Fifth Epochal Revelation."

Call for Papers

At the Flagstaff Conference a number of us got together and initiated "The Theological and Philosophical Working Group" to stimulate discussion and encourage the writing of papers on topics inspired by *The Urantia Book*. The Editors of *The Spiritual Fellowship Journal* should like to invite the submission of papers, pro and con, related to evolving an appropriate symbolism and socioreligious expression of the Fifth Epochal Revelation, or any topic germane to a critical study of *The Urantia Book*.

-MJS

A New Spiritual Paradigm Needed

Facing the reality that our culture is no longer Christian, Brian K. Smith in an article in the January, 1997 issue of *Theology Today* entitled "Christianity As a Second Language" says, "In attempting to think about the situation we face, it is at once obvious that mere tinkering with existing patterns is insufficient. A more radical approach is needed." (p. 439) He expresses dissatisfaction with current theories of religion and cites George Lindbeck's¹ cultural-linguistic approach to shed light on our contemporary situation. This view sees religion as a comprehensive, interpretive frame of reference that structures human experience and the understanding of self and the world.

The basic problem of evangelism today is that the Christian cultural-linguistic framework of the church is no longer the

cultural-linguistic orientation of society. Shouting louder, Smith points out, is of little value in a society that no longer views the world from the Christian frame of reference. Neither is mainline Christianity's preoccupation with social action the answer to our dilemma. Translating the gospel answers into currently understandable concepts and slogans "is a broad way that leads to destruction, the destruction of the gospel." (p. 444)

To become a Christian, one must learn the language and culture of Christianity. There are no shortcuts to this objective. We must take our cue from the early centuries of the church and initiate a comprehensive process of instruction or catechesis. It will take time for people to learn the Christian culture and dialect as a second language.

Smith is correct in his analysis of the contemporary religious problem. The methodology of his solution is also sound. The achievement of his objective, however, is seriously limited because the cultural-linguistic framework of traditional Christianity is rooted in a prescientific, outdated cultural-religious orientation. People searching for spiritual truth in our secular society will not be inspired by the battle cries of the Middle Ages. Religious institutions are in desperate need of a new paradigm of spiritual reality. Fortunately, this need has been supplied in *The Urantia Book*, which purports to be the Fifth Epochal Revelation. It is solidly rooted in the truths of historic Christianity and enlarges our spiritual vision with a view that is relevant to the 21st century and beyond.

But as Brian Smith and Yale's Dr. Lindbeck remind us, any new or unfamiliar conceptual-linguistic paradigm will only become indigenous and dynamic in the lives of individuals and society through a period of comprehensive instruction and learning or catechesis. There are currently hundreds of study groups absorbing the cultural-linguistic teachings of *The Urantia Book*. Thousands of such study groups are needed in the church and society to finally bring about a spiritual renaissance in the 21st century. We are indeed "now quivering on the very brink of one of [our] most amazing and enthralling epochs of social readjustment, moral quickening, and spiritual enlightenment." (U. B. p. 2082)

-MJS

¹ George Lindbeck. *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984.

New Dimensions of Theology

In the 1997 Spring issue of *Voices of United*, Dr. Wilson Yates, President of United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities, has observations entitled "Ruminations on Theology." "Theology is the articulation of faith in a logical and coherent fashion" (p. 2) Yates says, and admits that theology is a human

undertaking that has limits of wisdom. He envisions theology as an attempt to shape a prophetic view of the world. To achieve this construct we need to have the frames of reference of the historian, the social scientist, the humanist, and the artist along with communication abilities. "To construct theology is finally a human endeavor whose end is to help create a world that will be well-pleasing in the eyes of God." (p. 3)

Theology was the primary intellectual discipline of the Middle Ages. Today it is recognized as a branch of philosophy. In the Renaissance Period theology was sometimes referred to as "the mother of the sciences." The distinction between theology and religion is sometimes blurred. Theology is a function of the mind; religion is a spiritual experience. Because of the limitations of language, it is impossible to adequately describe religious experience. In fact, when theology masters religion, religion dies. It is impossible to imprison truth in theological statements or creeds. Living truth is dynamic and can only be engaged as a noetic experience in the human mind. Theology is actually an admixture of the psychology and philosophy of religion.

Those who construct theology based on the Fifth Epochal Revelation need the intellectual abilities referred to by Yates, but in addition are challenged by vastly expanded dimensions of reality as compared with traditional theological perimeters. The enlarged views of Deity and Reality, universe cosmology, the ascension plan of human destiny, along with a new presentation of the pre-incarnation and post-resurrection personality of Jesus will stretch the potentials of theological thinking to their limits over the next thousand years. These enlarged dimensions in theological thinking are so extensive that they will create a new theological-religious paradigm and a new period of cultural creativity.

-MJS

On Theological Transitions

Dr. Thomas W. Gillespie, President of Princeton Theological Seminary, gave a Convocation Address to the incoming class of seminary students in September of 1996 entitled, "Becoming Theologians." Gillespie quoted from Donald Light's book *Becoming Psychiatrists: The Professional Transformation of Self*¹ in which Light points out that the process of becoming a psychiatrist, theologian, or almost any other professional person is very difficult. Individuals in training feel anxiety and stress not only because there is a great deal to learn but because *their sense of self is being shaken*. Light observes that the student in training must go through five stages of "moral transition." These stages are: (1) feeling different and being discredited, (2) experiencing moral confusion, (3) going through a period of numbness and exhaustion, (4) undergoing a moral transition, and (5) finally

arriving at a stage of self-affirmation when the new frames of reference are internalized and integrated.

Most theological students discover that what they had learned at home and in their local churches is challenged and threatened. They feel that their faith is being undermined and taken away from them. In their moral and theological confusion they may question their decision to enter the ministry. The introduction to new and complex frames of reference, course after course, weighs down on the mind and the soul producing a sense of psychological-spiritual numbness and exhaustion. Those who have the courage and intellectual-spiritual toughness to struggle through these periods of ambiguity and doubt finally experience "the moment of truth" in which they recognize that their naive childhood faith is affirmed and transformed into a higher level of moral and theological understanding. Then they are free and inspired to internalize and integrate this higher level of self-affirmation.

This process of educational-theological transition continues throughout life for those who have the motivation and courage to grow spiritually. With the advent of *The Urantia Book*, our society faces the same stages of educational-theological transition in order to discover and adopt a new and inspiring paradigm of spiritual reality. At first it may appear to undermine our traditional theological frames of reference. As we are introduced to the complex spiritual cosmology of the universe, the enlarged view of Deity and Reality, we experience intellectual and spiritual confusion. At this point many people intimidated by fear and the immensity of the universe picture simply give up and take refuge in the traditional theological frames of reference. For those who have the courage to contemplate the enlarged vision of spiritual reality and experience the inspiring expanded revelation of the life and teachings of Jesus, "the moment of truth" takes place. They realize that their traditional theological beliefs are affirmed and expanded. A new level of self-affirmation and identity is experienced and the new paradigm of spiritual reality becomes the dynamic center of their lives. Since such transitions are evolutionary in nature, it will take generations for the Fifth Epochal Revelation to work its transforming power in our world. For those who wish to be in the vanguard of the renaissance of religious institutions in our post-modern society, we would invite to involve themselves in this theological-spiritual transition.

-MJS

¹ New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1980.

Arguing with Nicodemus

It is a curious thing. One of the ongoing struggles I face as a pastor of a church is to get people within its fellowship to believe in the Good News. The church is often viewed as a colony of faith in the midst of a sea of doubt and skepticism. But I keep asking myself, why is it so hard for people within the church community to really believe the great Good News we profess, that we are children of a Creator-Father, a Divine Parent who loves us with an infinite love, a love that casts out all fear?

I suppose one could answer, because we are all imperfect, and our lives are not impervious to doubt. We are all on a journey and none of us have reached the point of perfect assurance. True enough. But there is another aspect of the issue that I believe lies deeply imbedded in our culture. It has to do with a specific assumption about the nature of reality—namely, materialism. It is the underlying assumption, championed by so many scientists for so long that it has become almost synonymous with science, that the material world is what is real, and all else is artifact. Everything else is, by definition, mere psychological construct and speculation, with no basis in factual reality.

Despite the absurdity and self-contradiction of such a position—and *arguing* against the existence of free will and whether or not we are more than material *is* the ultimate absurdity and self contradiction—I'm convinced that vast numbers of church goers, if not the majority, have accepted this assumption. The result is a kind of philosophical and religious schizophrenia. We hold contradictory beliefs at the same time: namely, that God exists, but there can be no transcendent realities. So on the one hand we long for assurances that God talk is not all illusory, and on the other hand we believe that all such talk is by nature suspect. Since we can't prove—scientifically—the basis of our faith, and wish not to be considered quaint and out of touch with current scientific wisdom, we reluctantly relegate all such matters to myth and metaphor.

Without going into the question of whether materialism really best represents science in the postmodern world, the residue of such an understanding is still dominant. So the church continues to limp along, tending to be either timid or fanatical in seeking to resolve the conflict.

What does this have to do with *The Urantia Book* community? For one thing, it represents the mindset of a vast number of people we are seeking to address, inside and outside of the church. Those we hope might be most open to

such a revelation are often hostile, suspicious, or indifferent, in large part because of these assumptions. I doubt if there will be a general openness to the book until the current reigning philosophical-emperor that has been leading our parade (materialism) has been shown to have no clothes on. Only then can a more natural and widespread conversation take place about the infinite range of spiritual realities—and their material manifestations in the cosmos.

Until then we will often find ourselves arguing with Nicodemus, someone who knows the language, affirms the premise, but utterly misses the underlying fundamental realities. To him we can only bear witness to those realities, and patiently wait. We *can*, however, take heart in realizing the manner in which the message ultimately bore fruit in his life.

-Merlyn Cox

Significant Books

The Good Book

Peter J. Gomes

Morrow, 1996, 375 pp.

Peter Gomes, preacher to Harvard University and Plummer Professor of Christian Morals at Harvard College, addresses contemporary issues from the point of view of the Bible. The Bible, according to Gomes, is an American icon that intelligent people know less and less about from first hand acquaintance. Peter Gomes is an interesting writer with a lively sense of humor. This is a good book to read, especially for those who are not well acquainted with the Bible.

In the introduction, Gomes says, "My *apologia* is an argument in favor of taking the Bible seriously, and it is addressed in part at least to those who either trivialize it or idolize it, and who thereby miss its dynamic, living, and transforming quality. It is an argument addressed as well to those who are in search of spiritual and moral grounding in their chaotic lives, and who may have heard of the Bible but know little and want to know more." (p.xi)

Gomes observes that people use the Bible to affirm their own theological convictions and he is a prime example of this fact. One must read the Bible with both head and heart and "to be biblical may well mean to move beyond the Bible itself to the larger principles that can be derived from the Christian faith of which the Bible is a part, but for which the Bible cannot possibly be a substitute." (p. 82)

The triple danger of bibliolatry, literalism, and culturism (defending the status-quo) are to be avoided, and Gomes

applies this observation in disagreeing with some Biblical interpretations as he asserts the Biblical position condemns racism, anti-Semitism, the exclusion of women, and the rejection of homosexuality—"the last prejudice." For those who may disagree with Gomes' interpretations of scripture, he says, "Arguments about scripture generally are unprofitable, and no one has ever been persuaded from his or her position in a biblical argument by the weight of superior scholarship." (p. 184)

In the last section of the book, Gomes shows what his interpretation of the Bible has to say about our contemporary human condition including suffering, joy, evil, temptation, wealth, science, and mystery. The difficulty Professor Gomes has in squaring the literalism of the Bible with our present day moral and ethical standards demonstrates that much in the Bible was tailored to a prescientific, outdated culture.

Our society stands in critical need of the reorienting and rejuvenating power of the Fifth Epochal Revelation. *The Urantia Book* in our time stands in relation to the Bible much as the New Testament stood in relationship with the Old Testament in the first century A. D.

-MJS

Reclaiming the Church

John B. Cobb, Jr.

Westminster John Knox Press, 1997, 110 pp.

John B. Cobb, Jr., is Professor Emeritus at the School of Theology at Claremont. He is the author of *Matters of Life and Death* and coauthor of *Process Theology*. Prof. Cobb, a United Methodist, diagnoses the decline of mainline churches as a spiritual sickness of lukewarmness that is the result of an inability of the church to think theologically.

This small book gives a succinct analysis of the history and dynamics of Protestantism leading to the dispirited condition of mainline churches. Preoccupation with social action has sidelined the central importance of spiritual nurturance and theological thinking in the church. The contemporary church is struggling with the scriptural basis of anti-Judaism, the innovations of feminism, the ecological crisis, and the professionalization of theology. The church has turned the study of theology over to the university, and the university has transformed spiritual thinking into academic disciplines. Theology is no longer a vital concern of the church.

Added to these concerns, we are experiencing the end of an era in Western Civilization. We are seeing the passing of Eurocentrism, Western hegemony, and the decline of nationalism. The dominance of Enlightenment rationalism has been undermined in the field of physics and this has

undercut its credibility in other fields as well. Our culture is also witnessing a sexual revolution and the ending of patriarchy. We are now living in the post-modern era.

Cobb discusses two approaches for reforming the church: renewal and transformation. Renewal is the more conservative attempt to breath new life into the church. Prof. Cobb prefers the more radical change of transformation that searches for a new way of thinking about reality. "This alternative response is giving rise to a more organic, ecological, relational, communal, nondualist, nonsubstantialist, and nonanthropocentric way of thinking of human beings and their world." (p. 46)

This fresh view of the kingdom (Greek, "Basileia") of God will recognize that the Spirit of God is at work in all of the religions and peoples of the world, and it suggests that we can find a common ethic and purpose. Just as the three great branches of the Christian Church—Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant—have established ecumenical relations during the last hundred years, there is hope that the Pentecostals and the Fundamentalists may be brought into the dialogue in the future. There is even hope that we can bring an end to Christian arrogance and we can learn much from the other religions of the world. Perhaps the peoples of the world will begin to see God as an active participant in an open-ended creative process.

It is possible that the renewal of the church can come about without a transforming change, but Cobb doubts it. "We have been trying that for half a century—just that half century in which we have moved from being mainline churches with some confidence in our message to being oldline churches or, perhaps better, sideline churches, unclear about our calling. Simply doing better what has not been effective in the past does not seem to be the answer." (p. 110)

Professor Cobb's greatest problem is trying to explain how one recognizes "Christ as Lord" and at the same time view other religions as authentic pathways to God. The cosmology of *The Urantia Book* solves this problem in a unique and beautiful way. Unfortunately, the experience of the last forty years suggests that even such open-minded theologians as Professor Cobb are hardly ready for the transformation of a new spiritual paradigm, the Fifth Epochal Revelation, that would bring a real renaissance in the Christian Church.

-MJS

"The acid test for any religious philosophy consists in whether or not it distinguishes between the realities of the material and the spiritual worlds while at the same moment recognizing their unification in intellectual striving and in social serving." (1114:4)

To Be Wise As Serpents, Harmless as Doves

The Challenges of Paid Leadership Within Organized Religious Communities

Rebecca Kantor

Vancouver Summer Session, 1997

This talk was written to inform Fellowship members of some of the many challenges which face religious groups when they employ a salaried leader. Information has been gathered over the years from graduate studies in the psychology of ministry, with an emphasis on pastoral care and counseling. Therefore, much of the information below comes from the literature of psychology and studies of Christian ministry. Readers who, for whatever reason, do not identify with Christianity and the Christian Church may find the language troubling. I hope, however, that all who read this material will make an attempt to separate the underlying ideas about leadership and group dynamics from the terminology.

In this talk I neither condone nor condemn the building of religious organizations within the Urantia community. My desire is merely that those who wish to do so will have access to the wisdom gleaned over time by religionists who also have desired to foster their own organized religious groups.

Until recently, the Urantia community has been characterized by a general disinterest in anything that resembles organized religion.

This disinterest has helped to shape the current Fellowship into an organization without authorized teachers, leaders, or church-like religious groups.

Until recently, the Urantia community has been characterized by a general disinterest in anything that resembles organized religion.

Some forty years ago, the first Brotherhood constitution instructed the Education Committee to "find, prepare, train, and ordain teachers of the Urantia Book." But the resulting Brotherhood School was relatively unsuccessful, and in 1976 the Education Committee specifically oriented itself toward the fostering of Study Groups and periodic, regional, national, and international conferences while recommending an amendment to the Brotherhood constitution which would remove an earlier provision for the ordination of Teachers.

Historically there have been few attempts to organize Urantia-based churches, and up to the present moment these attempts have met with little enduring success.

As a result, the Fellowship lacks significant experience with the dynamics of organized religion, a religious style of expression which possesses a great potential for magnificent service and an equal amount of potential for great evil.

Except for the important contributions of professional clergy such as retired United Church of Christ minister Meredith Sprunger, there appears to be relatively little information and collective understanding of the pros and cons of organizing and managing religious groups.

In his 1981 paper titled, "Problems and Potentials: The Role of Religious Institutions in Society," Dr. Sprunger reviewed the 1976 position taken by Urantia Brotherhood toward organized religion.

Let me share parts of his summary with you in order to help place in context the present call for Fellowship assistance in building Urantia religious groups and an engagement in evangelistic activities:

1. Urantia Brotherhood has chosen to limit its institutional-religious functions primarily to organizational and educational activities. It does not aspire to become a church, to train or ordain ministers, or to promote typical religious services in which regular public worship and rituals are designed to minister to all phases of human life.

2. This means that students of *The Urantia Book* who desire religious services and spiritual ministrations for themselves and their families must find them in traditional religious institutions or some new form of religious organization.

3. Following Urantia Brotherhood's policy not to become a church or other typical religious institution, it does not engage in traditional forms of missionary activity or evangelistic endeavors.

4. This means that traditional forms of organizational outreach programs or evangelistic activities must be carried out by individuals or associated organizations.

5. Urantia Brotherhood's decision not to become a church or other typical religious institution appears to be far-sighted and wise.

a. The Brotherhood can, thereby, largely avoid the narrow identifications, mistakes, and excesses of characteristic religious activities in confronting and responding to the existential realities and pressures of contemporary society. In this way the Brotherhood can, hopefully, escape most of the sectarian and institutional evils which tend to befall religious organizations.

b. The Brotherhood can relate positively with all of the religions of the world and thus act as a leaven to stimulate spiritual growth among all religious groups.

c. The Brotherhood can serve as an ecumenical agency to encourage and facilitate harmony, good will,

co-operation, and unity among all the religions of the world.

Any comparison of the wisdom of the Brotherhood's 1976 position and that of the Fellowship today is complicated by numerous sociological and organizational changes.

What we **do** know is that good decisions about Fellowship policy require an abundance of *knowledge, experiential insight, and wise judgment*.

The revelators tell us that "as the self matures, it reaches further and further back into the past for experience, while its wisdom forecasts seek to penetrate deeper and deeper into the unknown future. And as the conceiving self extends this reach ever further into both the past and future, so does judgment become less and less dependent on the momentary present." (p. 1295)

We can apply this concept to the group process as well. Because we desire to make good decisions based on experience from the past, adequate knowledge of the present, and with concern for the future, it behooves us to examine with great care the underlying reasons for the Brotherhood's 1976 reversal in attitude as we contemplate any changes in Fellowship policy today.

And we must do even more to develop our decision-making process.

There is a wealth of wisdom and advice available to assist you in your efforts to build a strong and vital religious organization. Among your resources are leaders from other religious communities who are trained and experienced in religious group dynamics and in the tasks of religious leadership.

If you inherited half a million dollars from your Aunt Ruth's estate, and if you want to invest the money but have no knowledge or experience in investing, would you undertake this project without expert advice concerning the strengths, risks, and appropriateness of your various options?

How many of you would hand your half million dollars over to a broker who displayed great enthusiasm but who lacked experience or a sound track record? Or would you attempt to make your own decisions without a significant self-study of investment opportunities, procedures, and policies?

Let me ask the same question to those of you who want to start a religious organization. Are you willing to invest the spiritual, intellectual, and emotional wealth of your local community without taking the time to gather as much information and experiential wisdom as you can find?

There is a wealth of wisdom and advice available to assist you in your efforts to build a strong and vital religious organization. Among your resources are leaders from other

religious communities who are trained and experienced in religious group dynamics and in the tasks of religious leadership.

For example, liberal Christian seminaries have libraries and faculty who can provide invaluable information on both the opportunities and the challenges of religious organizations. We must not assume that all Christian organizations will reject us or our requests for assistance, even if we propose a model of religious community far different from the Christian Church. From personal experience I can confirm that there is at least one outstanding seminary which welcomes students of *The Urantia Book* and has expressed a willingness to enter into conversation about the book and its organizations.

I am not suggesting that Urantia groups mimic the models of the Christian Church. I am saying that it would be naive to think that the Urantia movement is exempt from the challenges and pitfalls of religious leadership and group dynamics, of which there are many.

Nor can we afford to assume that, as readers of the Fifth Epochal Revelation, we do not need the advice and counsel of wise and experienced religious leaders. I personally have experienced an event within the Urantia community which, despite spiritual idealism and a wholehearted desire to be of service, devastated the lives of many persons (including innocent children) because of a combination of wholly unqualified leadership and group naivete.

I am not suggesting that Urantia groups mimic the models of the Christian Church. I am saying that it would be naive to think that the Urantia movement is exempt from the challenges and pitfalls of religious leadership and group dynamics, of which there are many. We may be students of the Fifth Epochal Revelation, but we are also ordinary human beings. As individuals and as a social group, we share the same frailties and social challenges as everyone else, with few exceptions. Unless we educate ourselves about group dynamics, we will be in danger of repeating, at least to some extent, some of the same group pathologies which led to the demise of the Family of God Foundation in 1985.

In spite of the formal position assumed by the Brotherhood in 1976, and the opposition of many *Urantia Book* readers who abhor the idea of the Fellowship becoming involved in organized religion, there is a growing interest in forming religious communities in the Fellowship. It seems no longer relevant to ask, "Shall we have religious groups within the Fellowship?"

The fact is that organized religious communities are happening within the Urantia community because a growing number of readers yearn for a more formalized way of worshiping and living in community. So, instead of asking,

"Shall we have religious groups," the question is rapidly becoming, "What kind of religious groups shall we have?"

Dr. Sprunger's 1981 paper forecasts the current situation when he makes the following observations:

Followers of the Fifth Epochal Revelation have two basic options in the cult evolving process:

1. **We can create something new.** The history of religion demonstrates that man periodically does initiate new cults and new religious institutions. It is highly probable that individuals and groups will take this path in the future as the result of inspiration received from reading *The Urantia Book*.

2. **We can reform or revise existing religious institutions.** Most of the religionists of the world, after reading and recognizing the superior teachings of *The Urantia Book*, are likely to take this path, at least initially.

Where possible, it is usually best to build on historic foundations and traditions. The authors of *The Urantia Book* seem to imply that the best approach to evolving a relevant religion on our planet harmonious with the Fifth Epochal Revelation is to work toward a revision of Christianity. The following statements are made by the revelators:

- Christianity is the best of the religions of the twentieth century. (p.2083)

- Jesus fostered the church as the best exponent of his life-work on earth. (p. 2085)

- The Christian Church is the larval stage of the spiritual kingdom, the cocoon in which Jesus' concept of the kingdom of heaven now slumbers. (p. 1866)

- The hour is striking for a rediscovery of the true and original Foundations of present-day distorted and compromised Christianity—the real life and teachings of Jesus." (p. 2083)

- The kingdom of heaven which Jesus taught will someday be proclaimed to the Christian Church—and all other religions. (p. 1864)

- In the paper on "The Faith of Jesus" the authors express the hope that someday a reformation of the Christian Church will bring it back to the unadulterated teachings of Jesus. (p. 2091)

- We are called to build a new and transformed human society by means of the spiritual rebirth of Jesus' brotherhood of the kingdom. (p. 2084)

- *The Urantia Book* spends more time commenting on Christianity and making suggestions or its improvement than on any other religion. It is one of the greatest powers for good on earth and we should take it seriously. (p. 2085)

- There is great hope for the church which worships the

living God and dares to remove all creedal conformity from its members. (p. 1135)

- The greatest hope of our world lies in the possibility of a new revelation of Jesus to unite in loving service the numerous families of his present day professed followers. (p. 2086)

And I would add one more comment, this by a Brilliant Evening Star of Nebadon: "The early Christian cult was the most effective, appealing, and enduring of any ritual ever conceived or devised, but much of its value has been destroyed in a scientific age by the destruction of so many of its original underlying tenants. The Christian cult has been devitalized by the loss of many fundamental ideas." (p. 965)

So, *Urantia Book* readers have at least two choices before them when they contemplate the formation of a religious community: 1. the creation of an entirely new cult, or 2. a revision of one of the evolutionary religions, with a revelatory bias toward Christianity.

...Urantia Book readers have at least two choices before them when they contemplate the formation of a religious community: 1. the creation of an entirely new cult, or 2. a revision of one of the evolutionary religions, with a revelatory bias toward Christianity.

Regardless of which choice is made, however, another kind of choice must be made by those wishing to start a religious organization. Do we want a minister to lead our religious organization? And if we want a minister, what kind of minister do we want? There are many kinds of ministry:

1. We are all in volunteer, every-day type of ministry as we attempt to act out our understanding that God wants us to be of service to our fellows.

2. There is the volunteer, extraordinary type of ministry, exemplified by many of you here today, in which material, intellectual, and spiritual gifts are bestowed upon the community in uncommon quantities.

3. And then there is the so-called "professional" ministry. In organized religions this is called the clergy. These are individuals who are paid to be in the service of a congregation, or community of religionists.

Until recently, it has been the volunteer ministries which have occupied our time and resources. But that is changing now with the decision of at least two groups to create religious organizations designed to facilitate group worship and foster religious community.

By looking more closely at the nature of paid, professional leadership, I want to address some of the issues our community must face when it moves from being an organization with strictly volunteer ministry to an organization which has full-time, professional ministers in its midst.

For those of you who want to participate in a Urantia-based religious group with a paid leader, let me ask you the following questions:

1. What is your image of a professional religious leader? Do you think that everyone shares this image?

2. How will you relate to her, personally and as a member of the group?

3. Will he be an equal? Or will you feel a bit distanced from him because of his title and your image of him as a professional leader?

4. Will you expect him to offer wise psychological and spiritual counsel, or at least engage in significant dialogue about spiritual, emotional, and social issues which concern us individually, as family, as members of our religious community, and as participants in the broader community?

5. What will you expect of her? What role, or roles will you expect her to play in your organization? If you have several roles in mind, what are they, and which is the most important to you? Will others agree?

As to the first four questions, let me offer this perspective from a well-known Christian minister and psychologist: "Every *genuine* pastoral relationship ought to be therapeutic or healing; that is it should contribute to the wholeness of the person."¹

As to the last question, about what roles do you expect your minister to play, let me give you a list of nine types of roles and responsibilities delegated to a typical minister in a small church:²

1. **Liturgical**—in this role the minister is priest and preacher. He presides over religious services, ceremonies such as weddings and funerals, and religious rituals.

2. As **Teacher** she takes the responsibility for bringing information into the community and addressing that information from a religious viewpoint. This role includes, but is not limited to, religious information and interpretation.

3. As **Pastoral Care Giver**, he counsels individuals, couples, and families with problems and he ministers to families in times of sickness, accidents, and death.

4. **Administrator**—in this role she coordinates groups and activities within the congregation.

5. The minister as **Businessman** is responsible for, or at least actively involved in, fund-raising and financial reports.

6. As the **Voice of the Congregation** he officially represents the congregation to the larger community.

7. As a **Service Supervisor**, she supervises community service efforts, and layperson participation in church services.

8. In the **Odd-Jobber** role the minister performs a variety of miscellaneous tasks, many of which are ambiguously defined.

9. The last role designation is that of **Person**—she is an individual person who relates to other individuals and as a member of the group.

As group leader and group member, as preacher, teacher, administrator, care-giver, counselor, and personal friend, the minister is expected to react professionally to all persons in a great variety of circumstances and social environments.

Adding to the stress of this on-going situation is the fact that the persons whom the leader meets in these various circumstances will represent a broad range of intellectual and emotional maturities. And each person brings with him a variety of behavioral expectations and role demands which are delegated, consciously or unconsciously, to the minister. No wonder one overworked minister of a parish said, "90% of church ministry is invisible to 90% of the people involved in the church."

Another problem which frequently arises for the inexperienced or emotionally immature group leader is the unconscious, but common, inclination of the community to place the leader on what may be called a "pedestal of perfection" because professional religious leaders are expected by their group to "practice what they preach."

And herein lies one of the greatest dangers of religious leadership: unless the professional religious leader is both well-trained and exceptionally mature, he is in danger of reacting to the pressure to perform flawlessly by constructing a false professional persona, a social mask, which may differ greatly from his private thoughts, feelings, and desires.

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Unless he is aware of this danger and is equipped, through training and experience, to deal with the various pressures to perform, he is on the road to professional burnout. And the community will suffer because it gradually loses a sense of contact with the minister as a person. This is because the leader's relationships, behaviors, and roles become increasingly identified with the professional persona and not with the authentic person, whose true feelings and thoughts are hidden.

But how does a person acquire the skills needed to succeed at paid religious leadership, given the number of roles and responsibilities required of him. What is skill? Skill emerges when *knowledge* is tempered by *wisdom* and shaped by *experiential insight*. But professional ministerial skill requires

all of these factors plus a *healthy, active spiritual life consisting of private prayer and worship of the living God.*

Rodan, the Greek philosopher said, "Even though you are effectively armed to meet the difficult situations of life, you can hardly expect success unless you are equipped with that wisdom of mind and charm of personality which enable you to win the hearty support and co-operation of your fellows. You cannot hope for a large measure of success in either secular or religious work unless you can learn how to persuade your fellows, to prevail with men. You simply must have tact and tolerance." (p. 1774)

What will supply the necessary wisdom of mind and charm of personality which enables your leader to prioritize and successfully perform his numerous delegated roles while winning the hearty support and cooperation of your religious groups?

It cannot happen through spiritual idealism.

It cannot happen through a sense of being called.

It cannot happen through the experience of being chosen.

It **can** happen, however, when these factors—spiritual idealism, an inner sense of calling, and the experience of being chosen—are combined with sufficient education and training for the many tasks of professional leadership. This, as I see it, is the minimum requirement for effective leadership in any religious group. The importance of these basic requirements have been demonstrated time and time again in the documented experiences of institutional religions that have paid, professional ministers.

*Again, let me admonish all of you who desire to bring a professional religious leader amongst you: If you think that the Urantia movement is exempt from the challenges and pitfalls of other organized religions, let me tell you, **WE ARE NOT!***

Again, let me admonish all of you who desire to bring a professional religious leader amongst you: If you think that the Urantia movement is exempt from the challenges and pitfalls of other organized religions, let me tell you, **WE ARE NOT!**

We must not let idealism and willingness to serve be the main criteria for selecting our leader. The roles of professional ministry are highly complex and special training and exceptional emotional maturity are required in order to manage them successfully.

To acknowledge the truth of this is vitally important, not only for the health of the church and its leader, but there may well be legal ramifications as well. A religious organization that hires an incompetent minister is at risk of legal liability. In many states the church and its ministers are subject to an

employment law called, "Vicarious Employer Liability." Under this law, religious employers and religious organizations may be held responsible for employment decisions and employee conduct. It allows the victim to sue the employer of the perpetrator as well as the perpetrator himself.

Your group and its leader must be very conscious and very clear about what is appropriate professional behavior in the differing tasks of religious leadership. If she is not trained in pastoral care and counseling, or if he is not aware of the potentially dangerous imbalance of power which exists in most care-giving relationships, great harm can be done to unsuspecting church members and their families.

As long as I'm on the subject of leadership liabilities, let me add two more cautionary notes:

1. Among the helping professions, the professional ministry suffers from one of the highest rates of emotional burnout. The sheer number of roles delegated to the minister, coupled with the stress produced by attempting to meet the impossible demands of the "pedestal of perfection" may burn out even a well qualified and popular minister.

2. A second problem in ministry has been identified through the clinical work of a psychologist who specializes in counseling pastors and their families. In his article titled, "Identity, the Pastor, and the Pastor's Spouse", he reports that one of the most common reasons for choosing the ministry as a profession is to project a persona of "the self-that-wants-to-be" rather than face the "self-that-is." These persons choose to hide behind the clergy's ready-made "persona of perfection," being shielded from exposure by the pedestal effect.

Because church members tend to distance themselves from ministers and their immediate families in all but strictly pastoral relationships, this type of person can hide, at least for a while, behind a mask of professional competency while wreaking havoc in the lives of church members and community. I wish I could say that type of person doesn't last long in the ministry, but often he can and will if he can keep the attention of the membership focused on the pedestal persona instead of his true, emotionally immature character.

Well, I've been focused on some of the down-sides and dangers of professional ministry. Let me lighten up a bit by sharing what may be some food for thought for those of you who want to create a religious community. While I was working on the rough draft of this talk, I found myself wondering if *The Urantia Book* might offer some advice or instruction in managing the many tasks of religious leadership. So I decided to examine Jesus' model of role management against the nine roles typically delegated to today's professional minister. And what I found was quite surprising!

Let me explain.

Jesus chose six men to be a part of his team. They, in turn, chose six additional teammates. Later, he expanded his teaching

and ministering group to include seventy more evangelists and ten women, an act that was scandalous in his culture. In other words, Jesus, like his Father in heaven, was a *delegator*. He delegated every conceivable aspect of group management to his twelve apostles. And although they initially lacked training in Jesus' particular methods of teaching and preaching, they were collectively well versed in the knowledge of the day. The midwayers tell us:

Do not make the mistake of regarding the apostles as being altogether ignorant and unlearned. All of them, except the Alpheus twins, were graduates of the synagogue schools, having been thoroughly trained in the Hebrew Scriptures and in much of the current knowledge of the day. Seven were graduates of the Capernaum synagogue schools, and there were no better Jewish schools in all Galilee. (p. 1548)

Let's look a little closer at the roles delegated to the apostles, keeping in mind the nine tasks of ministry I described earlier:

1. Jesus chose Andrew to be the chairman of the apostolic corps. Andrew was a good organizer but a better administrator. He was an understanding executive and an efficient administrator. Of all the apostles, he was the best judge of people. And he had a great gift for discovering the hidden resources and latent talents of young people. So Andrew took on the role of *administrator* and chief decision-maker.

2. Peter was an outstanding *preacher*, fluent, eloquent, and dramatic. He was a quick-thinking, natural and inspirational leader. Although this was before the times of formal liturgy, both Jesus and Peter took responsibility for preaching before the multitudes.

3. John Zebedee, aside from being a personal assistant to Jesus, was placed in charge of Jesus' earth family, which he did until the death of Mary. In his attention and care of Mary we can describe John Zebedee as a *pastoral care giver*.

4. Philip was designated steward of the apostolic organization. It was his duty to see that there was always sufficient food on hand to feed the group. Philip was essentially another *administrator*.

5. Nathaniel was given the responsibility of caring for the families of the apostles. He was often absent from the apostolic councils, for when he heard that sickness or anything out of the ordinary had happened to one of his charges, he lost no time in getting to that home. Nathaniel was another *pastoral care giver*.

6. Andrew appointed Matthew the financial representative of the group. In a way he was the fiscal agent and publicity spokesman for the apostolic organization. Like Philip, Matthew had to be absent from many of the most precious seasons of instruction as it was his duty to keep the treasury replenished. So Matthew was primarily a *businessman*.

7. Thomas was assigned to arrange and manage the itinerary. He was the director, the choreographer, of the work and movements of the apostolic corps. Thomas was the *service supervisor*.

8. James and Judas Alpheus were assigned to a variety of jobs. They were chief ushers, general helpers, and errand boys of the twelve. They helped Philip with the supplies and carried money to the families for Nathaniel. The Alpheus twins were the *odd-jobbers* of the group.

9. Simon Zelotes was given charge of the diversions and relaxation of the group. He organized the play life and recreational activities of the twelve. This role isn't included in the nine tasks of professional ministry, but it's an important aspect of Jesus' management model. It deserves to be considered for its possible benefits to your organization.

10. Judas Iscariot acted as *treasurer* of the group. He held the purse and dispensed funds.

11. Everyone shouldered the role of being an individual *person*. Whether that was an easy role for the apostles to fill is a question for another time.

12. Finally, Jesus himself took on a variety of roles, most notably those of *teacher, preacher, pastoral care giver, and authentic person*.

What became very clear to me as I did this comparison was that Jesus utilized 13 individuals to accomplish the leadership tasks which today are typically thrust upon one person. What can we learn from this? Is there reason to consider Jesus' model of group management as a model for our religious organizations? It may be a model worth exploring.

What became very clear to me as I did this comparison was that Jesus utilized 13 individuals to accomplish the leadership tasks which today are typically thrust upon one person. What can we learn from this?

In closing I want to suggest a model for the training and education of every candidate for paid leadership in Urantia religious groups. Let me emphasize: This preparation is vital to the health and well-being of everyone in your group, and even to the Urantia Fellowship as a whole. So I call these the "non-negotiable's" of religious leadership training.

First, your candidate should participate in a minimum of two years study at a high quality, liberal seminary or other type of religious leadership training school. There are several reasons why this is non-negotiable. One is that seminary experience provides basic training in the various roles your minister will be expected to perform in your church. A good seminary expects their students to become *skilled* at what they do.

But just as important, a high quality religious training school will test the personal and social maturity of your

candidate, forcing her to achieve a new understanding and appreciation for not only her "gifts and graces" but also her psychological weaknesses and vulnerabilities. A good school is not judgmental; instead it encourages the spiritual idealism of its students while it fleshes out her particular immaturities and provides opportunities for appropriate self-examination and personal growth in those areas which need further development.

Course work at the school should include the following:

1. A study of the Old and New Testaments and the various methods of interpretation. Your leader needs to have a basic understanding of the Bible, and a liberal school will offer several ways to study and interpret the stories upon which the Judeo-Christian religion, and much of *The Urantia Book*, are based. A good understanding of the history and evolution of the many Bible-based Urantia Book stories is essential to mine the gold of spiritual understanding from them. (We may like to think that the overall story given in *The Urantia Book* is new and shockingly revelatory, but in reality it is a spectacular retelling of the old Judeo-Christian story, with a new cosmology, some important corrections, a few entirely new ideas, and a lot of creative interpretation of ideas already on the planet.)

(We may like to think that the overall story given in The Urantia Book is new and shockingly revelatory, but in reality it is a spectacular retelling of the old Judeo-Christian story, with a new cosmology, some important corrections, a few entirely new ideas, and a lot of creative interpretation of ideas already on the planet.)

Another reason for acquiring such knowledge may seem subtle, but it is nonetheless important. Your religious leader will interact not only with your community, but inevitably with other ministers and members of religious organizations in your neighborhood. A religious spokesperson who does not have a working knowledge of traditional religious scripture will not be taken seriously by the ministers and rabbis in his community, and those relationships will be vital to the ongoing health of your religious group as it interacts with the larger community.

2. Your minister needs course work in Pastoral Care and Counseling. These are highly complex tasks of religious leadership. The unprepared minister can be harmful, or at best ineffective, to individuals when they come to him for help. On the other hand, the skilled caregiver can bring genuine compassion and spiritual healing to individuals when they are suffering from the vicissitudes of life on Urantia.

3. For preaching and other liturgical duties, your leader should take courses in public speaking and religious ritual.

4. For administrative skills he should have course work in organizational management.

5. Finally, given the admonition in *The Urantia Book* about the need to study other religions, your leader should become knowledgeable about other religious traditions, including Islam and the religions of the East.

There is so much more to say about the challenges and opportunities of organized religion, but that will have to wait for another time. Let me close with this perception of the minister's role contained in a prayer of Martin Luther, who as you know, was a key figure in the Protestant Reformation:

I do not worship my pastor, but he tells me of a Lord whose name is Christ, and makes him known to me. I will be attentive and listen to his words as long as he will lead me to the Master and Teacher who is the Son of God.

¹ Carol Wise, *Pastoral Psychology* (New York: Jason Aronson, 1983), p. 197.

² Barbara Hargrove, *The Sociology of Religion*, (Arlington Heights: Harlan Davidson, Inc. 1979), pp. 266-267.

³ Bruce M. Hartung, "Identity, the Pastor, and the Pastor's Spouse," *Currents in Theology and Mission*, 3, no. 5 (October, 1976): pp. 307-308.

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"The call to the adventure of building a new and transformed human society by means of the spiritual rebirth of Jesus' brotherhood of the kingdom should thrill all who believe in him as men have not been stirred since the days when they walked about on earth as his companions in the flesh." (2084:6)

Our Major Responsibility: Disseminating the Fifth Epochal Revelation

A rational for the revised Journal direction

Meredith J. Sprunger

Our major responsibility in the Urantia movement, in my judgment, is disseminating the Fifth Epochal Revelation throughout our world. The authors of *The Urantia Book* project two venues in which this will take place:

1. *By establishing new religious groups.* "Regardless of the drawbacks and handicaps, every new revelation of truth has given rise to a new cult, and even the restatement of the religion of Jesus must develop a new and appropriate symbolism.... The new cult must, like the old, foster sentiment, satisfy emotion, and promote loyalty; but it must do more: It must facilitate spiritual progress, enhance cosmic meanings, augment moral values, encourage social development, and stimulate a high type of personal religious living." (U. B. p. 966)

2. *By leavening traditional religions, special attention is directed toward Christianity.* "All Urantia is waiting for the proclamation of the ennobling message of Michael, unencumbered by the accumulated doctrines and dogmas of nineteen 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)

"But paganized and socialized Christianity stands in need of new contact with the uncompromised teachings of Jesus; it languishes for lack of a new vision of the Master's life on earth. 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." (U. B. p. 2082)

The Historic Resistance to New Revelation

The first thing that converts of a new revelation do is to try to share it with traditional religions, especially with the religion out of which these converts came to the new spiritual paradigm. The history of religion shows that this new spiritual vision is never able to "win over" or reform the older religion. Spiritual reformation, when it comes, is the product of later evolutionary development.

My own experience confirms this historic observation. When I first read *The Urantia Book* over forty years ago, I immediately recognized that its superior teachings were very close to the theological positions of the leading thinkers on the

growing edge of Christianity. I saw the Fifth Epochal Revelation as the great hope of a revitalization of the Christian faith. Leading theologians, I assumed, would give the book a careful and critical examination—and, if they did, they would recognize its high quality. They would be the leaven that would start a renaissance in the Christian Church.

I intentionally followed the pattern of Jesus' ministry. Early in his public ministry he went to the most prominent leader of Judaism, Annas, in the hope of interfacing with the leaders of Judaism. Even though he met with coldness, Jesus continued his ministry, when possible, in the synagogues of Judaism. The unreceptiveness of the power structure of Judaism made it necessary to conduct an independent ministry to disseminate the Fourth Epochal Revelation.

For more than forty years I have conducted an interface ministry with the leaders of mainline Christianity. This ministry is detailed in a paper entitled "A Personal History of Interface Ministry" that includes contacting theological professors in 85 seminaries belonging to the American Association of Theological Schools, sending 8,000 personal letters to ministers in the United Church of Christ offering a loan book, contacting 5,000 members of the American Philosophical Association inviting critical research on *The Urantia Book*, presenting the paper "*The Urantia Book* and Religious Studies" at the national meeting of the American Academy of Religion in 1985, publishing *The Spiritual Fellowship Journal* for six years that interfaced between *The Urantia Book* and mainstream Christian clergy and was circulated to all of the ministers in the United Church of Christ, the Disciples of Christ, Unity ministers, and the United Methodist clergy in Indiana.

Even the most progressive leaders of the Christian Church have too much at stake to seriously consider becoming involved with the Fifth Epochal Revelation. It will probably be generations before The Urantia Book will be recognized as an acceptable resource for preaching and teaching in the Christian Church.

Although results of this ministry have been positive, they are very modest. Even the most progressive leaders of the Christian Church have too much at stake to seriously consider becoming involved with the Fifth Epochal Revelation. It will probably be generations before *The Urantia Book* will be recognized as an acceptable resource for preaching and teaching in the Christian Church. After forty years of testing the relevance of the experience of new spiritual paradigms in the history of religion and finding its confirmation regarding the Fifth Epochal Revelation, I believe it is time to change our direction and mission. We may be slow learners, but our love and concern for the Christian Church seemed to require this patient but essentially futile attempt to stimulate a renaissance in the Christian Church.

The Necessity of New Religious Groups

The viability of the Fifth Epochal Revelation must be established through indigenous religious social institutions. Although the authors of *The Urantia Book* recognize the difficulties and problems of religious institutions, they are germane to the survival of religion in society. The Brilliant Evening Star who authored the paper "The Ghost Cults" and the Melchizedek who authored the paper "Social Problems of Religion" speak of the necessity of a new cult being formed around the Fifth Epochal Revelation and give us guidelines for its creation. This new spiritual paradigm must evolve social religious groups to carry its message to the world.

The first step in evolving indigenous religious structures at the grass roots of society is the formation of study groups. This we have done for over forty years. But study groups at best are transitory groups. Only bona fide religious groups minister to individuals and families from birth to death and establish value orientations from generation to generation. In my discussions with Dr. Sadler I saw that he recognized this, and that is why he structured the Brotherhood/Fellowship Constitution denominating the leaders of the Urantia movement as ordained teachers and started a school to train and ordain such teachers. This is also why I have advocated and encouraged the formation of such religious groups during the past forty years.

The next step that a significant segment of the Urantia movement needs to take, in my judgment, is to intentionally recognize the basic importance of religious institutions in the dissemination of the Fifth Epochal Revelation throughout the world and structure resources to encourage and promote *An Appropriate Symbolism and Socioreligious Expression of the Fifth Epochal Revelation*.

Those who have a sense of calling to this venue through which the Fifth Epochal Revelation will make its way throughout the world, need to intentionally shift the vision and policy that has characterized the dominant view of the Brotherhood/Fellowship identity during the past forty years:

1. First, we need to recognize that the overriding negative attitude toward institutional religion that characterized most of the early students of *The Urantia Book* and the deletion of the term "ordained teacher" from the Brotherhood/Fellowship Constitution is counter productive to the highest purposes of Jesusonian (Urantia Book) evangelism.

2. We need to structure a philosophy and policy within the Urantia movement that encourages and promotes the establishment of religious groups within the movement. Such an outreach mission will eventually encompass the following activities:

- a. Drawing up constitution guidelines.
- b. Creating alternative rituals.
- c. Revising and composing hymns.

- d. Training for ministry.

- e. Composing a manual for ministry.

- f. Outlining legal procedures for incorporation and nonprofit status.

- g. Developing procedures for initiating and organizing new congregations.

3. We need to publish a theological-religious journal that will serve as a platform for theological, philosophical, and polity discussions and the encouragement of the development of Jesusonian groups throughout the world.

The Spiritual Fellowship Journal of which I am currently the editor, with the approval of our Board of Trustees, plans to restructure its format and redirect its mission from an interface with mainline Christian ministers to the promotion and discussion of theological, philosophical, and polity ideas within the Urantia movement. We believe this new Journal has great potential for augmenting religious developments in the Urantia movement.

An Evolutionary View of the Fifth Epochal Revelation

The form of the Fifth Epochal Revelation is different than all previous epochal revelations—it is a book. Its format, I think, is particularly designed to cope with the series of misfortunes that our world has experienced. Its design is ideally suited to the long term educational process of presenting an integrated picture of planetary and universe history and cosmology appropriate to our era of evolutionary development. It encourages an appreciation of all of the religions of the world and will be a powerful inspiration toward worldwide ecumenical fellowship and worship.

Just as it took nearly 1800 years of evolutionary development to precipitate Reformed Judaism that is very close to the reforms that Jesus sought to contribute to the spiritual understanding of the Judaism of his day, so there will come a time when the Fifth Epochal Revelation will contribute the same type of up-stepping contribution within Christianity. Hopefully, it will not take 1800 years. Scholars will then look back and marvel that the Christian leaders of today did not recognize the significance of the Fifth Epochal Revelation, just as we today look back and wonder that the leaders of Judaism did not recognize the quality of Jesus' teachings. The Fifth Epochal Revelation will eventually contribute the same up-stepping influence to all of the religions of the world. On an evolutionary world it takes a great deal of time for a new spiritual paradigm to make its way into the culture. Fortunately, however, new religious institutions need not be handicapped by this lack of spiritual insight.

Meredith Sprunger is a college teacher and minister of the United Church of Christ, now retired, and editor of The Spiritual Fellowship Journal.

Ambiguities of *The Urantia Book*

Kenneth T. Glasziou

The Urantia Book contains some remarkable scientific, archaeological, and anthropological material that is indicative of extraordinary knowledge on the part of its authors. I'm quite sure that if some of these pronouncements were evaluated by experts in this particular field, such authorities would be forced to admit that the odds against it having been composed correctly by a human author at the time of the publication of the book are of astronomical proportions. A considerable number of new readers of *The Urantia Book* have perceived this "prophetic" science as an adequate reason for them to undertake a serious study of the book. Much later, as they are inspired by its enlarged vision of spiritual reality, the importance of this scientific material may decline to almost zero.

Textual Anomalies

If most or all of the science material in the book had been of the quality of its prophetic science, it seems likely that the book would have been quickly accepted in academia and from there penetrated widely into Christian churches. But this is not the case.

Besides its prophetic material, this strange book contains portions having the potential of being utilized for its ridicule. Thinking this over, I came to a rough estimate that if about 3% of its content had been removed before the first printing, perhaps it would have turned the book into the sensation that many of the original Forum members had hoped for or expected. Given the removal of that material and some attention-drawing mechanism to its prophetic components (italics for example), then it seems likely that this revelation could now have been well on its way to catalyze a revolution as expressed in:

What a transcendent service if, through this revelation, the Son of Man should be recovered from the tomb of traditional theology and be presented as the living Jesus to the church that bears his name, and to all other religions! (p. 2090)

Assuming that these difficult bits and pieces had been edited out of the book and some emphasis given to the prophetic materials, let me quote from the book on what might have come to pass—and, hopefully, may still take place—had its prophetic science been leading the way.

The philosophic elimination of religious fear and the steady progress of science add greatly to the mortality of false gods; and even though these casualties of man-made deities may momentarily befog the spiritual vision, they eventually destroy that ignorance and superstition which so long obscured the living God of eternal love. (p.1124)

Ancient magic was the cocoon of modern science, indispensable in its time but now no longer useful. And so the phantasms of ignorant superstition agitated the primitive minds of men until the concepts of science could be born. Today, Urantia is in the twilight zone of this intellectual evolution. One half the world is grasping eagerly for the light of truth and the facts of scientific discovery, while the other half languishes in the arms of ancient superstition and but thinly disguised magic. (p. 973)

Science teaches man to speak the new language of mathematics and trains his thoughts along lines of exacting precision. And science also stabilizes philosophy through the elimination of error, while it purifies religion by the destruction of superstition. (p. 907)

So you see, if we scientists had been in the driver's seat, the false gods would all be dead, philosophic elimination of religious fear would have been achieved, and religion would have been purified by the destruction of superstition. Reality, however, is different. The revelators themselves scuttled us. Some readers may not have noticed the sections of the book (I call it the "funny stuff") that have the potential to cause embarrassment if we were called upon to defend them at some public meeting like a TV host show. Stories like the existence of large passenger birds—the fandors—carrying Adam and Eve on inspection trips about the Garden challenge our credulity. Or describing the origin of secondary midwayers (beings just above human beings) who are invisible to human vision as the unique product of material human beings (who were descendants of supermortal personalities) seems a bit strange.

Demise of the Dictation Theory

The way these "strange" stories are told in the book is leading some readers who recognize the extraordinary spiritual quality of most of the book to wonder whether the revelators have used some technique akin to allegory in order to present us with a deeper overview of the cosmology of the universe than could otherwise be given if they are to stay within the rules governing revelation. If so, this means that this "funny stuff" is told using symbolism, allegory, or mythology that hides much deeper realities—or that reality may sometimes be "stranger than fiction."

The extensive and scholarly research of Matthew Block has confirmed the long overlooked fact by some readers of *The Urantia Book* that the revelators have drawn extensively upon human sources—just as stated on pages 17 and 1343. As this is more generally realized by students of *The Urantia Book* they will be more inclined to regard the Fifth Epochal Revelation, not as divine dictation, but as the word of God in the words of freewill celestial beings, some only a little higher than ourselves on the scale of intellectual ability and others

Ambiguities..., cont.

many orders of magnitude above our level of knowledge, comprehension, and intellectual ability. These authors have combined together in providing us with what they believe is a reasonably comprehensible overview of the hierarchical structure among universe personalities, a new cosmology that is light years ahead of anything we have had previously, and authoritative insights into the natures of the Universal Father, the Eternal Son, the Infinite Spirit, the role of the Trinity, together with an expanded version of Jesus' living revelation of God-likeness—and much, much more. In doing so they have chosen whatever means they, as individuals, considered were suitable to achieve the goals that were set for them.

It is also possible that a restraint was set on this revelation—that it had to be presented in a way that would not unduly upset the normal progress of the planet. It should be obvious from reading the revelation that the goal of mortal life on inhabited planets is not a competition to attain “light and life” status in record time nor that our journey to Paradise is a race to see who can get there first. On our life journey it is the experiences accumulated and the adversities overcome that appear to be of enormous value for the fulfillment of whatever is eventually in store for us.

The inclusion of “funny stuff” was surely the deliberate act of the revelators and may have slowed up the acceptance of the revelation. If so we have to bow to their superior wisdom, accept what is, and get on with the job at hand.

The inclusion of “funny stuff” was surely the deliberate act of the revelators and may have slowed up the acceptance of the revelation. If so we have to bow to their superior wisdom, accept what is, and get on with the job at hand. A part of that job may be to explain the nature of the book to the world at large. Many have attempted to foist it on others, as an errorless (except for typos) divine revelation, in concept not very different from the divine dictation doctrine regarding the Bible. Mainline Christian theologians (and many others) have long since rejected this doctrine of the literal inspiration of scriptures. The best description of the Bible among scholars is that the Bible contains the word of God in the words of men (Good News Bible, Catholic Study Edition, Thomas Nelson, N.Y. 1979). This more accurate view of the Bible has helped those in the Christian faith to get a more meaningful understanding and experience with the Universal Father and Christ Jesus.

Some students of *The Urantia Book* coming out of the scholarly disciplines of Christian theology have always viewed the book in this light. A new era for many readers of *The Urantia Book* appears to be dawning—one in which scholarly research, followed by explanation, exposition, and exegesis—that will bring a greater understanding of this great book. Certainly we must get past the divine dictation theory of its origin.

Summary

In summary, we see that some readers such as myself firmly believe that *The Urantia Book* does contain material of a scientific nature that could only have been guessed at by a hypothetical human author both at the time of the receipt of the Papers and also at the time of the publication of the book. Much of the scientific material in the book reflects the science of the 1930's to the 1950's. The revelators clearly state in the description of their mandate that they have included scientific material (for the purpose of showing the integration of science, philosophy, and religion) that will “soon be outdated.”

I believe that many *Urantia Book* readers, myself included, have made an error more or less identical to that made by Christian fundamentalists in that we were so impressed with the high quality of the Fifth Epochal Revelation that we assumed that it was the word of God in the words of God himself. Hence we skipped over all of the denials of such a view in the book itself in the hope that here at last we were in possession of absolute truth—and no longer would we have to live in uncertainty or struggle with evaluating truth. A careful reading of *The Urantia Book* will reveal that such is not the character of divine revelation nor the way of the Universal Father.

We now have to reread *The Urantia Book* in a more scholarly manner, recognizing its revelatory status but also recognizing that the revelators may have retained the techniques of the ages in bringing this revelation to humankind. Truth is sometimes best communicated to lowly mortals in parables and myths—which theological scholars have long recognized. The revelators did not relieve us of the task of thinking for ourselves. In *The Urantia Book* we have, I believe, the most authentic and detailed cosmological overview of reality available to humankind from which we have to struggle, as always, to discover our own personal truth. A God who loves us could do no other:

The proof that revelation is revelation is this same fact of human experience: the fact that revelation does synthesize the apparently divergent sciences of nature and the theology of religion into a consistent and logical universe philosophy, a co-ordinated and unbroken explanation of both science and religion, thus creating a harmony of mind and satisfaction of spirit which answers in human experience those questionings of the mortal mind which craves to know how the Infinite works out his will and plans in matter, with minds, and on spirit. (p. 1106)

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The Urantia Book and Spiritual Renewal

My Acceptance of The Urantia Book

Bud Bromley

A Christian reading *The Urantia Book* comes across a number of ways in which it agrees entirely with the teachings of Jesus as recorded in the Bible. But it also disagrees in several ways with orthodox theology, particularly with some points of Pauline theology. Since both orthodox Christians and students of *The Urantia Book* uphold Jesus of Nazareth, God's Son, as the world's savior, it seems reasonable that we should try to understand each others' viewpoints for the purposes of working together, as much as possible, against the worldwide breakdown of intelligent morality.

The Blood Atonement Theory

One of the irreconcilable differences between the teachings of *The Urantia Book* and some Pauline theology is the belief in the blood atonement theory of salvation. I know that there are people who can look back at some particular point in their lives and say, with the hymn, "How could he love me so (enough to shed his blood for me)?" They can testify that when the majestic power of Jesus' love took a hold of them, it made them into wondrously better people from there on. I certainly do not deny the saving power of Jesus' love, *whatever theory it took* to make them inescapably aware of that love. I would never wish to take away from them the precious memories of that time when they firmly chose to follow Jesus.

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In equal honesty, however, I have to say that while the awesome power of God's love and Jesus' love has captured me too, it did not come to me by way of that particular theory.

In equal honesty, however, I have to say that while the awesome power of God's love and Jesus' love has captured me too, it did *not* come to me by way of that particular theory. My Dad was a minister, a missionary, and a Professor who taught biblical exegesis. He read the Old Testament in Hebrew, and the New Testament in Greek every year. I was raised on what I consider to be an intelligent understanding of the Bible. But Dad never asked me to assent to anything that I could not truly believe. Long before I encountered *The Urantia Book*, I felt that I *must* discard the theory that a loving heavenly Father would demand the cruel death of his perfect Son. Jesus said, "God is a spirit, and they who would worship him must

worship in spirit and in truth." I could not see, and cannot yet see, anything spiritual in the shedding of material blood. I know the argument that, God being perfect, his justice must also be perfect. I agree that God's justice is perfect, but I seriously question whether or not we can comprehend God's idea of perfect justice. Jesus said, "You have heard it said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth,' but I say unto you....", and he went on to talk about going the second mile and turning the other cheek. So, whatever God's perfect justice is, it is not an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, which is what some of the blood atonement adherents seem to think it has to be.

When I became 21, my earthly father did not present me with a bill for all the things I had broken as a baby and as a child. Nor did I so treat my children; nor will they theirs. That would be an "eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth" justice which some still ascribe to our heavenly Father.

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.

Further supporting this premise, Jesus tells us (John 15:12), "Love one another as I have loved you." (italics mine) Since Jesus shows us the Father, we may be sure that the Father also loves us. Therefore, I cannot see the need to postulate that we must procure God's love by being "washed in the blood."

When I was first introduced to *The Urantia Book* I was extremely skeptical. A new revelation? I had looked into Islam. I had examined Bahai beliefs. I had investigated Mormonism. I had inspected the Oahspi Bible. Although each had some good points, all were, in my opinion, clearly inferior to the teachings of Jesus found in the Bible. So much for new revelations; they come, they go; so what? But then I read in *The Urantia Book*:

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. (U. B. p. 60)

I was deeply moved—I had been yearning for someone to dare to say that! This book was talking about no small God! And I've been reading it with increasing acceptance ever since. I do not think that I have ever let *The Urantia Book* coerce my thinking. However, I have often been excited to find that

concepts in it either parallel ideas which I have been considering, or, more often, are better than what I had conceived, which is both thrilling and humbling.

For example, *The Urantia Book* says that babies who die will be held in "sleep" until one or both parents arrive on the mansion worlds. Babies are the wards of a certain group of angels, but their parents will be allowed to spend time with them, and to help raise them. That is so much more reasonable, more kindly and loving, than the Calvinistic conviction that, as we are all born "totally depraved" (Calvin's term), unsaved babies might go to some limbo, blocked from heaven where their parents reside. I could not worship a god who would do that.

Most people have some basic proposition or criterion by which they judge all other statements or positions. For some it is, "The Bible is right, all the time." For me it is, "God is good, all the time."

Most people have some basic proposition or criterion by which they judge all other statements or positions. For some it is, "The Bible is right, all the time." For me it is, "God is good, all the time." I believe that an infinitely wise God can surely find a way to be just without having to be cruel. I can not see that material bloodshed has anything to do with spiritual righteousness. I do not see that punishing an innocent person has anything to do with justice. And I will not accept any such theory which makes God less than a good person. Such a god would be too small to be true.

When Jesus said, "Seek you first the Kingdom of Heaven," he also added, "and all these other things shall be added unto you." I believe that "all these other things" includes salvation. When, in Luke, the two great commandments had been quoted by the Jewish lawyer, who had asked Jesus how to obtain eternal life, Jesus said to him, "These do, and you shall have life." To those who have done good deeds unto one of these, his brethren, he said, "Come unto me, you blessed of the Lord." These are clearly invitations to eternal life. *In none of these promises is the shedding of blood required.*

How is one saved, according to *The Urantia Book*? One is saved by sincerely desiring to find God, and to become as much like him as it is possible for a finite being to do. Jesus shows us "the way" better than any human religious teacher ever could. And Jesus, as seen in *The Urantia Book*, shows us the way more completely than does the Jesus seen in the Bible.

None of this is to detract from the enormous significance of Jesus' death on the cross. First: Jesus said by what he did, and by what he refused to do, that staying alive on this earth is less important than staying in God's will and standing by the primacy of God's message to us, namely, the Fatherhood of God, and the sisterhood/brotherhood of all humankind. The

superb dignity and self-confidence with which he carried himself throughout his ordeal showed his love and forbearance for humankind. Second: It means that God, having chosen of his free will to give to us an arena of free will, counted that free will so important that he did not choose to coerce the minds of the Pharisees and Sadducees who were determined to have Jesus killed, as I'm sure he could have done. Thus my God-given right to free will is no light thing. When I exercise it, particularly in choices having any moral import, I should do so prayerfully and carefully. Third: Jesus said, while on the cross itself, "Father, forgive them. They know not what they do." Since this was the very opposite of a call for retribution, and Jesus was still showing us what God is like, I cannot believe that God demands to be "paid back" by a retributive blood sacrifice. Here is where I became totally overcome by the immensity of divine love for us mortals.

While I would not take away the theory of blood atonement from anyone to whom it is a bedrock of faith, neither will I give up my conviction that God is good, all the time; nor can I give up my related conviction, developed slowly, even reluctantly at first, that *The Urantia Book* supersedes the Bible, as the New Testament (or at least the Gospels) supersede the Old Testament. I have been thus led because the God of *The Urantia Book* is good, all the time!

While I would not take away the theory of blood atonement from anyone to whom it is a bedrock of faith, neither will I give up my conviction that God is good, all the time; nor can I give up my related conviction, developed slowly, even reluctantly at first, that The Urantia Book supersedes the Bible, as the New Testament (or at least the Gospels) supersede the Old Testament.

Jesus, the Incarnate Son

Another inescapable difference between *Urantia Book* teachings and orthodox Christianity is that Christians are taught that Jesus of Nazareth was also the second person of the Trinity, despite the fact that this teaching cannot be found explicitly in the Bible. Some Christians believe that it is implied in the Bible, but I do not find this implication as clearly as do those who feel impelled to find it.

The Urantia Book teaches that the Universal Father and the Eternal Son unite to create Paradise Creator Sons, spiritual beings of such high perfection that each one has the right to say, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father," and they are of such high standing that they may quite correctly be worshiped. These Creator Sons are each unique, and each is known, in his local universe, as "the only begotten Son." Whenever the Father and the Son bring forth a Creator Son, then does the Infinite Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, also bring forth a daughter Spirit. This Creator Son and associated Spirit are given a volume of space in which to create a local

universe. Despite the term, "local," such a universe is no small thing. A completed local universe has *ten million* inhabited worlds along with many more uninhabited ones.

As well as supervising the creation of a local universe, a Creator Son also bestows himself seven times upon the creatures of his creation; that is, he becomes for a time, one of them. His first bestowal is upon a high order of angels, and he works his way down. His last bestowal is upon the mortal beings of an inhabited world, the lowest creatures having the potential for eternal survival. Our Jesus was a Paradise Creator Son on his seventh bestowal. By completing his bestowals he earned the right to be given "all power in heaven and on earth." I know of nothing in the Bible that either confirms or denies these earlier bestowals.

This seeming demotion from the second person of the Trinity to one of many Creator Sons may appear, at first, to diminish the significance of Jesus. Actually, The Urantia Book magnifies the importance of Jesus. The Jesus of scriptural revelation is understood to be the ruler of a single world, and a few cubic miles of a heaven immediately surrounding this world. The Jesus of The Urantia Book is the ruler of ten million inhabited worlds, and of a huge space spanning many light years¹ between them.

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There is another difference between the two pictures of Jesus. The Gospels mention several incidents in which Jesus is aware of what a few other people around him are thinking, without needing to hear them speak. How this takes place is not explained in the Bible. *The Urantia Book* tells us that God the Father is able to give "fragments" of himself to every mortal being with survival potential, and he is in constant and immediate touch with every one of these fragments, and hence, with every mortal being. Further, Paradise Creator Sons are always in touch with God. And there are yet other circuits by which a Creator Son is able to be in touch with each and every one of his created beings, mortal and angel.

To grasp the import of this, imagine, for a moment, that you are able to read clearly the minds of a thousand other people, and you have enough additional units of attention to handle all of this data without confusion. You can share their experiences,

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know what decisions they make—good or bad, and know what the consequences were of each of these decisions. Can you get some feeling for how tremendously capable such a mind would be?

Jesus, our Paradise Creator Son, is in touch with, not just thousands of people, but rather, with thousands of whole worlds of mortal beings. Further, he is equally in touch with millions of high angelic beings. We cannot comprehend such conceptual capacity and accumulated wisdom; we can only gasp in awe of it. This, then, is the Jesus of *The Urantia Book*!

We Have Much in Common

So then, have we who accept *The Urantia Book* anything in common with people who place the Bible above all else? Yes, much! We both believe in God, the Universal Father. We both believe in Jesus, a Son of God of such high spiritual standing and sterling perfection that he could truthfully say, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father." We both believe that we should "seek first the Kingdom of Heaven," and we both believe that Jesus defined the Kingdom of Heaven in the Lord's Prayer as "Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven." We both believe that we should love the Lord our God with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind, and all our strength; and that we should love our neighbors as ourselves. We both believe that as we do it unto one of these, his brethren, we do it to him. We both believe that, "If, with all your heart, you truly seek me, you shall surely sometime find me!" We both believe that God is able to save us unto eternal life.

What is important is that human beings should be captured by God's love; if, for some, by the theory of blood sacrifice and no other way, then so be it, although to me this theory seems to degrade God the Father. But if by the significance of Jesus' life, his teachings, and his death, so much the better, for this glorifies both the Father and the Son.

In conclusion, it seems to me that unity in Christ should be more important than uniformity of theology. Mature Christians, whether students of *The Urantia Book* or not, should agree to disagree agreeably, and should be able to work together for that in which we all believe, the universal Fatherhood of God, and the consequent universal sister/brotherhood of humankind.

¹ To envision a light year, consider a meter stick, with its 1000 millimeters, to represent a light year. If you could drive a car at 65 miles per hour day and night, year after year, nonstop, for 10,317 years, then you would have driven just the first tiny millimeter of that light year.

C. Bud Bromley is a computer programmer and college teacher, now retired. Bud has been a student of The Urantia Book for many years.

Behold, I Am Doing a New Thing!

Rev. Gregory Young

Some years ago when the Denver zoo was going through a major renovation, there was a polar bear that had arrived at the zoo before a large naturalistic environment being constructed was ready for it. The cage that the bear was put into temporarily was just big enough so that the polar bear could take three nice swinging steps in one direction, whirl around and take three steps in the other direction, back and forth. The polar bear spent many months in that particular cage that restricted its behavior. Eventually the naturalistic environment was completed and the bear was released from his cage...and guess what? The polar bear still paced back and forth as if the cage was still there.

How many of us live our lives as if we were in a similar cage? We continue our repetitive, often negative, behavior over and over again. Like that polar bear, many of us are prisoners of an invisible cage. Many people are prisoners of their own lack of self respect. Our anger, our guilt, or our shame confine us and keep us from growing into the person that God intends for us to be.

Most of us have been frustrated in our efforts to change something about our lives. How many of us feel that change is just not possible for me, that even though I gave it a good effort, I just couldn't let go of the things which bother me and seem to get in the way? Always, we need to remind ourselves that faith and persistence brings new life. Just as Nicodemus in his meeting with Jesus was dumbfounded when Jesus said, "You must be born again," so too we must face the potential of living a new life with faith and courage and letting go of the things of the past. In partnership with God the impossible becomes possible.

As a people of faith, I sometimes wonder if we haven't forgotten the spiritual power of the resurrection to new life? Sometimes we live as if the power of God in our lives does not exist. We must remind ourselves that the stone in front of the tomb holding us captive has been rolled away. The cage, the cell, the prison that prevents us from stepping forth in spiritual growth toward a new life is actually of our own making. Christ, our Lord, stands before these tombs that confine us and invites us to come forth, saying, "Behold, I make all things new!" He invites us to a new life and his love will sustain us as we grow in spiritual stature and resurrection power in the here and now.

Those of you who know me, know that one of my "pet-peeves" is triggered when I hear someone say, "I can't

change," "They'll never change," or "They'll never amount to anything." In statements like that, where is our faith in human beings who are indwelt with the spirit of God? That kind of talk flies in the face of the message of the Gospel, and that which the spirit of God is constantly doing in the lives of people. It seems that the world is full of Good Friday cynics who will tell you that you can't do this, or become that. They are perpetually on the prowl pointing out what people cannot do.

I believe that most of us like to see others rise up victorious from the ashes of defeat and despair. We love to see people turn a wasted life around because they show us that we have more potential than we have realized. They are reminders of what God can do with our lives. The indwelling spirit of God is eager to work miracles in our minds and hearts when we deeply desire to follow God's leading. Friends, never underestimate the power of faith and the strength of the spirit to fashion miracles of love within you. Never, for a moment, doubt your self-worth. You are loved by God and the Heavenly Father longs to work miracles in your life as he has in countless individuals in the past and present.

Think of the wondrous things that God's love has done to bring renewal to countless lives of people who seemingly were buried beneath disastrous and impossible circumstances but looked deeply within themselves and reached for the outstretched hand of God to give them the guidance and strength to rise above their calamities. They show us that it can be done and these pioneering souls give us inspiration to renew our own lives. This newness of life is at the heart of the Alcoholics Anonymous program. There are literally hundreds of people in this metropolitan area who have been in this program who could tell you and show you that with the help of God, one can turn one's life around. New life is possible. We can transcend the things that imprison us, and be free to grow into the person that God intended us to be.

Consider Ben: While Ben was in grade school his mother and father went through a divorce, and he moved with his mother from Boston back to Detroit. His mother did the best she could, and she continually stressed the importance of doing well in school, which he did. But Ben had a crippling flaw; he had a terrible temper. When he was fourteen years of age he got into an argument with a friend named Bob. Ben pulled out a camping knife and lunged at his friend. The steel blade struck Bob's metal belt buckle and snapped.

Realizing that he could have killed his friend, Ben raced home, locked himself in the bathroom, and sat on the edge of the tub, his heart filled with shame and remorse over what he had done. He prayed that God would give him strength to overcome his temper. Ben stayed in the bathroom for over two hours that day, and he tells us that a quiet miracle—a new life—began to take place. It revolutionized his life. Ben still uses knives today, but to save lives rather than in attempts to

take them away. The Ben I've been telling you about is Dr. Ben Carson, who is the Director of Pediatric Neurosurgery at Johns Hopkins University Hospital in Baltimore, Maryland. When a human being goes into partnership with God great things can and do happen.

God is closer to you than your own breathing. God knows you inside out—your imperfections as well as your enormous potential. God understands and God loves you. It is this unwavering love that transforms. In the musical, "The Man of La Mancha," Don Quixote meets a woman of the streets, a wild and wanton woman named Aldonza. The man of La Mancha stops short, looks at her intently, and announces that she is his lady. He will call her "Dulcinea." She responds with mocking laughter, knowing that she is hardly a lady.

Still Don Quixote sees in her the seed of a new life, a potential greatness, and tries desperately to give her a new self-image of the person she really is—if she can believe it. He insists that she is his lady. Angered and hurt, with wild hair flying over nearly naked breasts, she screams that she is only a kitchen maid! She is Aldonza, not Dulcinea! She runs from the stage as the man of La Mancha affirms again and again that she is his lady.

At the close of the play Don Quixote is dying. He feels that he has failed. The good he has tried to give has been rejected. The love he has offered has been shunned. But then to his side comes a changed Aldonza. She is now lovely with a new gentleness. Confused, he does not recognize this lovely stranger until in a warm voice she tells him that she is his Dulcinea. His love was victorious. In like manner, God sees the Dulcinea in each and every one of us.

In closing, I share with you a poem entitled "The Master's Touch," by Myra Brooks Welch, that tries to tell us of the transforming effect of God's love.

'Twas battered and scarred, and the auctioneer
Thought it scarcely worth his while
To waste much time on the old violin,
But he held it up with a smile;
"What am I bidden, good folks," he cried,
"Who'll start the bidding for me?"
"A dollar, a dollar," then, "Two." Only two?"
"Two dollars and who'll make it three?"
"Three dollars once, three dollars twice;
Going for three,..." But no.
From the room far back, a gray haired man
Came forward and picked up the bow;
Then wiping the dust from the old violin
and tightening the loose strings,

He played a melody pure and sweet
As a caroling angel sings.

The music ceased, and the auctioneer,
With a voice that was quiet and low,
Said, "What am I bid for the old violin?"
And he held it up with the bow.
"A thousand dollars." "And who'll make it two?"
Two thousand. Who'll make it three?"
"Three thousand once, three thousand twice,
and going and gone," said he.
The people cheered, but some of them cried,
"We do not quite understand
What changed its worth?" Swift came the reply:
"The touch of the Master's hand."

And many a man with life out of tune,
And battered and scarred with sin,
Is auctioned cheap to the thoughtless crowd,
Much like the old violin.
A "mess of potage, a glass of wine,"
A game—and he travels on.
He is "going" once and "going" twice.
He's "going" and almost "gone."
But the Master comes, and the foolish crowd
Can never quite understand
The worth of a soul and the change that's wrought
By the touch of the Master's hand.

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"Urantia society can never hope to settle down as in past ages. The social ship has steamed out of the sheltered bays of established tradition and has begun its cruise upon the high seas of evolutionary destiny; and the soul of man, as never before in the world's history, needs carefully to scrutinize its charts of morality and painstakingly to observe the compass of religious guidance. The paramount mission of religion as a social influence is to stabilize the ideals of mankind during these dangerous times of transition from one phase of civilization to another, from one level of culture to another." (1086:6)

Suggestive Preamble for the Constitution of a Religious Organization Based on the Fifth Epochal Revelation

1. The Father/Motherhood of God and the brother/sisterhood of all people is the guiding principle of the Fellowship. We acknowledge as kindred spirits all individuals and traditions, past and present, who recognize this principle. Recognition of the religion of Jesus as the ultimate ideal of living is central in our teaching, but we seek to avoid all forms of coercive literalism and legalism. The scriptures used for worship and education in the Fellowship shall be *The Urantia Book* and the Bible as well as passages of scripture from the varied religions of the world which portray spiritual wisdom.

2. The Fellowship is ecumenical and nonsectarian in orientation. We accept into membership people from all backgrounds who recognize the Parenthood of God and the kinship of humankind as interpreted by the teachings of Jesus. The Fellowship seeks to relate to all people in love and recognizes this kindred fellowship of all humanity.

3. The Fellowship seeks to develop ritual and ceremony which symbolize the highest values of truth, beauty, and goodness, the supreme value of love, along with the values of family and of social communion found in group life. We recognize the freedom of each local group to evolve its own ritual and symbolism, which shall include the sacrament of the Remembrance Supper, as well as such other rites as the local group may desire.

4. The Fellowship recognizes the key role of evolution and growth in the process of the life of each individual and religious group.

5. The Fellowship seeks to foster the most inspiring intellectual, emotional, and service sentiments of humanity and promote loyalty to such values and activities and to the groups and individuals who strive to actualize them.

6. The Fellowship strives to facilitate spiritual progress, enhance cosmic insight, augment moral values, encourage social development, and stimulate the highest expression of personal religious living.

7. The Fellowship assists its members to visualize and articulate supreme purposes and goals of living for both time and eternity. It seeks to stimulate and support them in the actualization of these objectives.

8. The Fellowship seeks to support, honor, and enhance the values associated with the biologic, sociologic, and religious significance of the home.

9. The Fellowship acknowledges and affirms the mystery of personal and epochal revelation. We stand in awe at the incomprehensible love which God has for his imperfect finite children in bestowing upon us a fragment of his own Spirit essence to live with us and guide us toward reality and eternal life. We are confronted by the inexplicable efficacy of intercessory prayer and the mysterious integration and coordination of persons and events. We are challenged by the impossible-possible potential of the spirit mastery of our animal drives and urges and the reality of spiritual transformation.

10. The Fellowship believes that most of its spiritual practices and symbolism should be so designed that it can be participated in by the individual, the family, and the entire religious group.

11. The Fellowship believes that ceremonies, rituals, and spiritual symbols should be relatively simple, filled with beauty and meaning. We seek to create a structure in which this symbolism and its related ceremonies may evolve.

12. The Fellowship recommends that each religious group provide in their local program opportunities for religious education, personal counseling, spiritual guidance, and group worship. These religious ministrations should dramatize spiritual loyalties, illuminate the lures of truth, beauty, and goodness, glorify the potential of family life, stimulate unselfish service and great friendship, conserve enlightened morality, support human welfare, and promote a wise outreach ministry to the world.

The Spiritual Fellowship Journal

4109 Plaza Drive

Ft. Wayne, IN 46806

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