

Spiritual Fellowship Journal

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The Urantia Book and the Internet

David A. Kantor

The Coming Spiritual Renaissance

Preston Thomas

Religion and the Religious Organization

Richard Bain

Crisis in Christianity

Between the Times

Does Heaven Exist?

What if Aliens Have Landed?

A Spiritual Support Group

Sermon: There is Always One More Move

Book Review: *Why Christianity Must Change or Die*, by John Shelby Spong

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 worthwhile 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.

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Editorials

Crisis in Christianity4

The Christian Church is facing a critical time in its history. The reality paradigm of the Middle Ages upon which it is based has lost credibility. There is need for a new spiritual vision.

Between the Times5

Since Christianity no longer integrates our postmodern societies, the individual must now integrate life through personal experience.

Does Heaven Exist?5

Contemporary religion has virtually nothing to say about life after death; but it is a major concern for humankind.

Articles

The Urantia Book and the Internet12

The Internet is a major avenue for disseminating the Fifth Epochal Revelation. Response to the Fellowship website is amazing!

The Coming Spiritual Renaissance15

Preston Thomas examines the present condition of our society and makes predictions for the future based on prophetic statements in *The Urantia Book*.

Religion and the Religious Organization18

Dick Bain discusses the nature of religious organizations and the possibilities involved in such organizations stemming from the Fifth Epochal Revelation.

Columns and Features

- ☐ **Interface: What if Aliens Have Landed?6**
- ☐ **Creative Outreach: A Spiritual Support Group7**
- ☐ **Book Review: Why Christianity Musts Change or Die24**
- ☐ **Sermon Series (pt. 5): There is Always One More Move22**
- ☐ **Mission Statement2**
- ☐ **Psalms Today7, 14, 23**

Crisis In Christianity

For decades the mainline (old line? sideline?) Christian Churches have been losing credibility and membership in our culture. As Mark Noll points out in *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Eerdmans, 1994) there is a lack of scholarly respectability in conservative Christian Churches resulting in their being largely ignored by our secular society; and as Bruce Bower points out in *Stealing Jesus* (Crown, 1997) they seriously distort the religion of Jesus. Thomas Reeves in *The Empty Church: The Suicide of Liberal Christianity* (New York, Free, 1996), declares that zealous, entrenched, liberal denominational elites care more about the latest political and ideological fads than the basic Christian gospel. The negative religious atmosphere has become so critical that we see articles in theological journals like "Will Our Churches Still be Churches in the Twenty-First Century?" by David R. Inglis (*Prism*, Spring 1997).

In this issue of the Journal we review John Shelby Spong's latest book, *Why Christianity Must Change or Die*. Bishop Spong gave lectures at the Plymouth Congregational Church (UCC) here in Fort Wayne, May 9-12, which I attended. I should like to thank Stephen Zandt and Jay Newbern for sending me copies of a paper Bishop Spong sent to the theological world entitled "A Call for a New Reformation," dated 5/10/98. The paper concludes:

Martin Luther ignited the Reformation of the 16th century by nailing to the door of the church in Wittenberg in 1517 the 95 Theses that he wished to debate. I will publish this challenge to Christianity in *The Voice*. I will post my theses on the Internet and send copies with invitations to debate them to the recognized Christian leaders of the world. My theses are far smaller in number than were those of Martin Luther, but they are far more threatening theologically. The issues to which I now call Christians of the world to debate are these:

1. Theism, as a way of defining God, is dead. So most theological God-talk is today meaningless. A new way to speak of God must be found.
2. Since God can no longer be conceived in theistic terms, it becomes nonsensical to seek to understand Jesus as the incarnation of the theistic deity. So the Christology of the ages is bankrupt.
3. The biblical story of the perfect and finished creation from which human beings fell into sin is pre-Darwinian mythology and post-Darwinian nonsense.

4. The virgin birth, understood as literal biology, makes Christ's divinity, as traditionally understood, impossible.

5. The miracle stories of the New Testament can no longer be interpreted in a post-Newtonian world as supernatural events performed by an incarnate deity.

6. The view of the cross as the sacrifice for the sins of the world is a barbarian idea based on primitive concepts of God and must be dismissed.

7. Resurrection is an action of God. Jesus was raised into the meaning of God. It therefore cannot be a physical resurrection occurring inside human history.

8. The story of the Ascension assumed a three-tiered universe and is therefore not capable of being translated into the concepts of a post-Copernican space age.

9. There is no external, objective, revealed standard writ in scripture or on tables of stone that will govern our ethical behavior for all time.

10. Prayer cannot be a request made to a theistic deity to act in human history in a particular way.

11. The hope for life after death must be separated forever from the behavior control mentality of reward and punishment. The Church must abandon, therefore, its reliance on guilt as a motivator of behavior.

12. All human beings bear God's image and must be respected for what each person is. Therefore, no external description of one's being, whether based on race, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation, can properly be used as the basis for either rejection or discrimination.

So I set these theses today before the Christian world and I stand ready to debate each of them as we prepare to enter the third millennium.

The implications of these twelve theses reflect the crisis in Christian theology and show how desperately Christianity is in need of the Fifth Epochal Revelation. Unless Christianity can be revitalized by this new and inspiring spiritual paradigm, it will continue to decline in credibility in our scientific, scholarly, secular culture. More and more people who think critically about religion are hungering for a meaningful spiritual view of reality.

Students of *The Urantia Book* will recognize that Bishop Spong is skirting the edges of the teachings of the Fifth Epochal Revelation. As I observed in reviewing *Why Christianity Must Change or Die*, his religious view would really soar if it had the wings of the spiritual cosmology and the vision of Deity and Reality in *The Urantia Book*. Hopefully, we are getting closer to the day in which Christian theologians will undertake a serious evaluation of the Fifth Epochal Revelation.

-MJS

Between the Times The Necessity of Spiritual Interiority

Louis Dupré, professor of the philosophy of religion at Yale University, presents an intriguing interview in the July 16-23, 1997 *Christian Century* entitled, "Seeking Christian Interiority." Dupré observes that Western Civilization has become a secular culture. Christianity has lost its creative power and can no longer integrate our culture. "We have all become atheists, not in the hostile, antireligious sense of an earlier age, but in the sense that God no longer matters *absolutely* in our closed world, if God matters at all." (p. 654)

Since Christianity no longer plays an integrating role in the life of postmodern societies, and since tradition has lost its authority, the individual must now integrate life through personal spiritual experience. The need for some coherent meaning in our lives is so strong that many turn to ultraconservative religious models from the past. Such unauthentic ways for achieving integration results in schizoid, compartmentalized living—juggling an outmoded religious theology with the contemporary scientific, secular culture.

Authentic faith must integrate all other elements of a society if it is to survive. The Fifth Epochal Revelation provides the frame of reference that makes such integrated living possible. It also makes it possible to appreciate the evidence of the Spirit of the Universal Father in other faith communities. During this period of the breakdown of the spiritual orientation of Western Civilization, like Augustine during the decline of the Roman empire, we must integrate our lives through personal spiritual dedication and commitment. The extensive information about the Thought Adjusters in *The Urantia Book* is a great help in this personal integrative pilgrimage.

Gradually new religious institutions will evolve based on the creativity of the Fifth Epochal Revelation that will, in time, create a new integrating culture throughout the world. Students of *The Urantia Book* have the unique opportunity to participate in the formation of these new religious institutions and experience the beginnings of a new age on Urantia!

-MJS

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

Does Heaven Exist?

The March 24, 1997 *Time* article "Does Heaven Exist?" broached a subject about which ministers and theologians have very little to say. David Wells, a theological professor at Grodon-Conwell Theological Seminary, observes, "I don't think heaven is even a blip on the Christian screen, from one end of the denominational spectrum to the other. The more perplexing question is, What explains this?" (p. 73)

The basic answer is that very little specific information about heaven is given in the Bible. The Book of Revelation has some episodic descriptions that make little rational sense to the contemporary mind. Many in the early church did not accept the Book of Revelation as part of the canon, and the Reformation theologians had a low opinion of the book. As a result theologians, in the main, avoid talking about heaven. Nevertheless, the question of life after death is a major concern of humankind. Is there a spiritual reality after death, and if so, what is its nature?

As we have repeatedly observed in these columns, *The Urantia Book* confirms, enhances, and enlarges the basic spiritual realities of the Christian faith. But perhaps its greatest contribution to Christianity and all other religions of the world is its revelation of universe spiritual cosmology, its eschatology—"heaven." The picture presented of the spiritual cosmos, including life after death, parallels and even surpasses the gigantic material cosmology modern astronomy is discovering. Our progressive spiritual growth through the universe to Paradise is the most inspiring description of "heaven" in religious literature. It is a view that makes rational sense and rings with spiritual authenticity. The people of the world are hungering for the expanded "Good News" of the Fifth Epochal Revelation. It is destined to transform our confused and stumbling planet into a world that understands and rejoices in the clear vision of our spiritual destiny.

-MJS

"Reason, wisdom, and faith are man's highest human attainments. Reason introduces man to the world of facts, to things; wisdom introduces him to a world of truth, to relationships; faith initiates him into a world of divinity, spiritual experience.

Faith most willingly carries reason along as far as reason can go and then goes on with wisdom to the full philosophic limit; and then it dares to launch out upon the limitless and never-ending universe journey in the sole company of truth." (1141:5,6)

Interface

What If Aliens Have Landed?

Recently, with some extra time over vacation, I read another book on UFOs. It's been a subject of interest for some time, as it apparently has been for most Americans, and it seems to be increasing. I consider myself an open skeptic on the matter. There have been enough reports to be intriguing, but none unqualifiedly convincing. That, I think, is what Carl Sagan meant when he said, in effect, that there simply wasn't a shred of evidence to prove that UFOs exist, or that we have been visited. I think it would have been more accurate to say there is a tremendous amount of evidence—tens, if not hundreds of thousand of sightings from all over the world—however, most of it is poor, and some ludicrous. Sagan is right: you can't point to a single piece of evidence, some artifact that all reasonable people can examine and affirm that it's not of this world. I can't recall how many TV documentaries and reports of suspected UFOs I've seen that began with a comment, such as, "Well, I saw this bright light in the sky and it moved like nothing I've ever seen before." I often find myself saying out loud, "Give me a break."

I'm reminded of a time recently when I attended a minor league ball game. At one point I looked up and saw a strange dark object moving slowly just above the horizon to my left. It appeared to be a huge triangular shaped craft, with bright lights, just like the ones I'd seen on the TV documentaries. But just as I was becoming intrigued, the object banked over, and the sun reflected off its top side and I could see it for what it was, a large commercial airliner that was likely heading for the airport nearby. I never heard it, although it wasn't that far away. Apparently the conditions were just right to mask the sound in my location. It reinforced my skepticism of most so called UFO reports.

However, there is a bit more to be considered. Not all the evidence is that flimsy. After throwing out all the easily explainable, the figments of over-zealous imaginations, and outright hoaxes, it still leaves a lot of sightings by credible witnesses that can't easily be written off.

Even the Roswell affair has taken on new life. Despite the latest "explanation" by the Air Force, and the conflicting reports of what happened, there is a stubborn residue of witnesses and reports that have a ring of truth to them. At least these people don't appear to be making up stories. They are convinced something "out of this world" happened. And in recent years there have been more firsthand accounts added by those who swear by their story—some civilian and some

military. Some are now deceased; others are still living. Some can be reasonably discounted; others can't.

The recent book I read was by Philip Corso, a colonel in the Army, now retired.¹ His credentials are impressive and have been verified to the satisfaction of at least some researchers. He claims that he was privy to inside information and conversations on the Roswell incident at the highest level during the administration of two presidents, Truman and Eisenhower, and was on the national security staff of President Eisenhower.

While he was not at Roswell at the time of the supposed crash, he claims to have been the post duty officer at an air field in Kansas the day that a plane transporting some the debris landed for a stopover on its way to the Air Material Command at Wright Field in Ohio. He claims to have seen an alien body as well as some of the wreckage, and was so shaken by the event that he pushed it out of his mind as something he didn't want to deal with.

A reconnection would later be made when he became Chief of the Foreign Technology Division of the Army's Research and Development Department, and was given the assignment to investigate material from the Roswell crash and seek to farm out this material to industry for "back" engineering and seeding the development of new technologies.

It reads almost too good to be true for those looking for positive evidence—and it may be. Even some UFOlogists are critical of the book. However, those in the UFO research community are spending a great deal of energy attacking each other and appear quite jealous of their own sources and theories. And Corso isn't the only military person who has come forth after all these years to claim firsthand knowledge of such events.

It does seem clear that the military, for whatever reason, has been involved in a cover-up, whether it was deliberate, or a matter of naive oversight. The documents released through the Freedom of Information Act make this one of the few certainties in the whole matter. Why this is so is uncertain. Having read Corso's book, I can better understand, I think, the reason the military might be concerned about possible Soviet involvement, even in suspected but unproven cases, as well as the impact such knowledge might have on the nation if it were proven. The impact of the recent White House scandal on the fragile psychological underpinning of the economy is a tiny ripple compared to what might have happened then, or could happen now, should "proof" come forth of extraterrestrial visitations, especially abductions.

I'm not convinced that most people, even in our supposedly more enlightened era, are ready to easily assimilate such knowledge into their understanding. It would be a profound threat to many, including many in the religious community who still hold, by and large, a pre-Copernican cosmology and

theology. For readers of *The Urantia Book*, it would not be surprising to discover that other civilizations might be looking in on us. And, although I'm convinced the more advanced a civilization is the more likely the observation would be benign, there is no guarantee. We might be a part of a local family of civilizations whose members are far beyond us technologically, but are not all that sympathetic or even paternalistic in their outlook.

If such events should prove to be true—past, present, or sometime in the future—they will most certainly force mankind to dramatically reassess its understanding of the universe. The possible dire aspects of such a visitation might help precipitate a crisis of faith, and eventually lead to a new era of religious understanding.

What *The Urantia Book* gives us, in addition to a meaningful physical cosmology in which to understand such events, is a spiritual cosmology that can assure us that we are still a part of a universe that is ultimately friendly, and in keeping with the Creator's plans for all his children. Such a visitation would not be, as is often claimed, the greatest event in the history of mankind. It could, however, help us to understand what is—namely, the Incarnation of a Creator Son, Christ Michael, as Jesus of Nazareth.

—Merlyn Cox

¹ Philip Corso, *The Day After Roswell*, Pocket Books—Simon & Shuster, Inc., New York, 1997.

Psalms Today Spiritual Guidance

Happy are those who follow the counsel of wisdom, and live by the leading of the Spirit, who find their identity as sons and daughters of the Most High, and delight in universe laws and the love of the Creator.

The divine experiential plan and educational purpose for their life gives meaning and joy to all that they do.

They are like a tree growing by a sparkling stream. Its leaves do not wither in the heat of summer and it bears good fruit in season. They are resourceful, courageous, and service oriented.

The self-centered, the pleasure seekers, and the evil doers are not so, but are like the chaff which the wind drives away. They will not withstand the supreme test of experience. Their inner self is barren and empty; in mid-life they are burned out and desolate.

The eternal cosmic order undergirds the righteous; but the ego-centric and the ungodly shall perish.

Fall, 1998

Creative Outreach

A Spiritual Support Group

Kindred Spirits Can Help Make the Journey Easier

Larry Mullins

A Urantian asked me recently what have I learned after years and years of searching, reading, and attending Urantia Study Groups.

After some thought, I have come to believe that the ultimate prize is somehow to be found within the mystery of personal peace. Not peace in the sense of a negative avoidance of conflict, but rather a dynamic kind of peace that signals the end of inhibition and tentativeness. For, although I started out many years ago in a quest for the tranquility, rest, and the healing power of peace, I did not reckon on the immense experience of love that lies beyond peace.

Unconditional love is something we experience personally (if we are fortunate) in how we love our parents. Then, we learn that the love for another person, outside of our family, is a greater love experience. Later, even this love experience will pale when we learn to love our children. Yet, as the Urantia Papers promise, the greatest of all unconditional love experiences happens when the love of God flows through us freely and unconditionally to touch other children of the Highest Power. This is love that, indeed, lies too deep for words.

I have learned that, for the briefest of intervals, peace gives us wonderful ease and repose. Then, as if from the source of peace itself, the spirit of the Highest Power will spring forth. As Rodan observed (p. 1777), this spirit flows through our souls and refreshes us, it also seeks to transit outward from us, to graciously and gracefully enlighten, uplift, and bless those around us. We thus experience the truth that the Love of the Universal Father is not to be contained. This ungoverned love becomes actualized, or real, for us to the degree we cooperate with its outward flow, and in proportion to our ability to share it with others. "And here is mystery: The more closely man approaches God through love, the greater the reality—actuality—of that man. The more man withdraws from God, the more nearly he approaches nonreality—cessation of existence." (p.1285)

I found myself confronted in my later years with the supreme commandment of Jesus, that we are to love one another as Jesus loved us. I came to understand that if I was to progress spiritually, I must progressively learn to live these words: "And when such spirit-led mortals realize the true meaning of this golden rule, they are filled to overflowing

with the assurance of citizenship in a friendly universe, and their ideals of spirit reality are satisfied only when they love their fellows as Jesus loved us all, and that is the reality of the realization of the love of God." (p.1950) More and more veteran Urantians seem to desire an actualization of this ideal. My studies of the psychological theories of Abraham Maslow and others also indicated that the process of self-actualization itself cannot take place in a vacuum.

A New Kind of Urantia Meeting One that Changes Lives

A couple of years ago my wife, Joan, began to experiment with a different kind of Urantia Study group. We had suffered a kind of burn out with the traditional study group format. We came to believe that, for some people, the intellectual and detached approach of typical Urantia meetings to the teachings of Jesus left participants untouched on the deeper levels. Some folks who know the "chapter and verse" of every page of the Urantia Papers seem to have no clue as to what a living faith in the message would mean to their lives. It is rather easy to say one "believes" the Urantia teachings, and yet another to take up our personal crosses and actually follow the Master.

So it was that Joan and I began meeting with a small group of kindred spirits who are not satisfied with their spiritual progress. The commonality of this group is simply a mutual desire to find God, and its mission is to support members in their efforts to more effectively actualize their spiritual potentials. As a member of this group, after a year or so, I noticed that something new had been set into motion within me. I began to discover what seemed to be a new and unfathomable kind of love. I began to learn that if we understand and appreciate our spiritual brothers and sisters, we will actually learn to love them. I was to discover that this love will increase over time to a degree that I could have scarcely imagined before experiencing the group.

For the group itself generates dynamics that energize and define some mysterious "missing" factor for me; one that makes the journey one of joy. This experience is what the Urantia Papers call the inescapable corollary to the fatherhood of God: the brotherhood and sisterhood of humankind.

For some people the ideas above are so sublimely simple and basic they wonder why I am writing about them. For those who express the Urantia philosophy and the teachings of Jesus with great fidelity in their lives, there may be "nothing new" in our conclusions. I know some noble Urantians who seem to have formulated their irrevocable decisions, perhaps even before they found *The Urantia Book*. In a sense, they stepped "across the river" long ago, (so to speak), when the river was only a foot wide. This column, perhaps, will be of little interest to them. We ask such Urantians to consider with patience those of us who attempt a crossing much later, when the river is a raging torrent and the other side is no longer visible. For

some of us have dallied, we did not find *The Urantia Book* until we had journeyed along the river until it seemed forbiddingly wide, and we continue to be searchers for the great place of "spiritual advantage" of which Jesus spoke.

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In Daniel J. Boorstin's newest book, *The Seekers*, he writes: "Caught between two eternities, the vanished past and the unknown future, we never cease to seek our bearings and our sense of direction—we are all seekers. We want to know why. Man is an asking animal. And while the finding, the belief that we have found the Answer, can separate us and make us forget our humanity, it is the seeking that continues to bring us together, that makes and keeps us human."

A "Living the Teachings" group may prove of value to anyone who is not satisfied with his or her ability to live at their highest level, and who sense a far greater potential within themselves than they have been able to actualize, or "realize," the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth.

However, there are difficulties in the process of starting a "Living the Teachings" group. Therefore, I will offer you the knowledge we gained, and perhaps enable you to avoid some of the mistakes we made. There is no real model to follow, it is not like Alcoholics Anonymous, nor like encounter or "psychological" process groups. The purpose of a "Living the Teachings" group is simply to provide an autonomous, safe place where a small number of Urantians can share their spiritual experiences as they cultivate the growth of their inner lives.

Experts about the Inner Life

The premise is that we are each experts in the inner life—but only in our own. Therefore, there are no suggestions or advice given in our meetings unless asked for. There are no gurus, no special leaders. The process requires no special training or skills.

Before I explain the dynamics of such a group, let's review, very briefly, what premises and purposes drive this kind of spiritual association.

[1]. SELF DEVELOPMENT. In stating the "five cardinal features of the kingdom of heaven" (p.1863), Jesus stated the first two as: 1. The pre-eminence of the individual and 2. The will as the determining factor in man's experience.

Members of a Living the Teachings group therefore seek the cultivation of the inner self, toward full use of one's spiritual powers along the lines of excellence. In pursuing the spiritual Self-Actualizing process, regular, daily meditative prayer is not only of immense value for believers in the teachings, it is a requisite. In addition, we hold that the inner experience is something that we are creative participants in. In the inner life, the human will is totally sovereign over all issues of morality, and when obedient to the spiritual allurements of the Thought-Adjuster, the human will is in alignment with the will of God. All of this leads us to validate the truth that the inner life is eternally creative, and we create our own inner experience.

As we successfully integrate our human personalities, and as we gradually assume the responsibility for our inner lives, there gradually dawns in a spiritual seeker the desire to establish or discover something larger and more important than ourselves to devote his or her energies to. This could be a worthy cause, our children, a career, or any valuable activity that we love to do, and that we are able to do well in a creative, passionate and energetic way. Thus, we are led to the next requisite of spiritual Self-Actualization: Our gifts to the Supreme.

[2]. OUR GIFTS TO THE SUPREME. All Self-Actualizers (without exception, according to Abraham Maslow) are devoted to a mission which they believe is more important than anything else, including themselves. We are told on page 1000 that selfless service activity, in and of itself, facilitates the fastest and most efficient personal progress in the spiritual actualizing process. Even so, one cannot actualize in a vacuum. We need other people.

[3]. OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS. You are the child of the Highest Power in the universe, but you are not an only child. The Urantia Papers make it clear that there is "no basis for a fictitious guilt and sense of isolation;" so we declare ourselves to be children of the Universal Father—the Highest Power in the universe. Further, the Papers declare that personality cannot integrate and unfold in isolation. Men and women are innately social creatures; they are dominated by the craving of belongingness.

A Place of Growth—Not Self-examination

Living the Teachings meetings are predicated upon the premise of the Master that our spiritual self-actualization does not require continuous and repetitive self-examination, unlike Twelve Step Programs and most psychological methods. Living the Teachings methods are not an attempt to take the place of, nor improve upon, the spiritual techniques of introspective Twelve Step programs. What we are suggesting is an initiative toward further spiritual growth, one that lies beyond healing, something that the Papers tell us has never before been tried on a large scale.

Urantians know that some of us must look within to rid ourselves of old egoistic resentments and assume personal responsibility over our inner lives. The Master did not forbid self-examination in such cases. Virtually all psychology provides for conscientious introspection. However, Jesus did not advocate character building; he taught character growth. Spiritual self-actualization is like a tiny seed, if it begins to grow it will crowd out errors and flaws of omission.

We have come to believe that actualization of our highest spiritual potentials is the personal experience of realizing the Meta-Values of spiritual living. These realities of experience are progressively translated to new and higher levels of conviction and beauty. The Meta-Values of Truth, Beauty, Goodness and Love emerge or actualize most readily not by examining our areas of non-development, but rather by embracing a vision of what we ought to be. In this light we hold the Urantia Papers depiction of a world that is to be characterized not as a black background of evil and omissions with a few spots of white on it, but rather as a white background of spiritual reality with spots of black on it. In a battle of universe realities we Urantians hold the most good to be the most real, and therefore destined to triumph.

A Living the Teachings group is dedicated to nurturing individuals who are engaged in the process of striving to live at higher and higher levels of confidence and love. To this end, those of us in the group share our inner lives, and discuss our personal progress (or lack of progress) in achieving inner successes. As previously stated, there can be no self-appointed "experts" in such a group. We do not give advice unless it is asked for. We share as spiritual equals, and we are united by our goals—not by our beliefs. A Living the Teachings group is safe, loving, nurturing, and more spiritually progressive than any group process most of us have known. The key element is a singleness of purpose, that of helping one another define and reach higher and higher levels of living. To be successful and pleasant for all, there can be no competitiveness, nor secondary agendas.

In the process of creating a Living the Teachings group we had attempted open meetings for about a year, meetings patterned after Alcoholics Anonymous step programs, with typical group formats. None of these worked well. Then, at last, we arrived at the Living the Teachings pattern that worked for us. It is a new paradigm, so be tolerant and patient as you examine it.

Get Kindred Spirits and then Close Your Group

After about a year, we discovered that we had a nucleus of a few kindred Urantian believers who were still interested in the idea of meeting regularly to engage in a spiritual dynamic of group support for the individual spiritual self-actualizing process. This is the paramount suggestion: Begin with a group that contains Urantians with compatible spiritual values and

Spiritual Support Group, cont.

goals, and who are willing to learn from one another. Establish a time frame of minimum commitment as a group, say six months or a year. Unless everyone agrees on adding a new member, maintain a closed group. You will discover that a trusting, sharing group suffers from casual drop-ins or curiosity seekers. We have discovered that seven or eight people is about maximum. We meet on Sundays, and have juggled the time from morning to evening several times to meet the needs of members.

Your Living the Teachings group will develop its own personality, and begin to have a life of its own. This group dynamic and wisdom will establish its own "rules," so to speak. A sharing of Urantian beliefs and values among the group makes things run smoothly. In fact, groups of this kind, composed solely of Urantians, could be ideal in augmenting the more openly socialized functions of Urantian activities.

We have a rule that we are not to interrupt anyone who is talking. This has required, at times, the use of a "talking stone" which is passed from member to member. Only the person with the stone can talk. Again, we do not offer advice after someone speaks unless it is specifically asked for.

We have learned it is best to begin with a moment of silence, and a prayer offered by a member. This sets the tone of the meeting. We do not read any rules or guidelines, since we are all agreed that we are committed to living at our highest and achieving great actualization of our spiritual potentials. Such a commitment must be subject to continual re-definition.

The process the group engages in is the sharing of our inner lives. After a moment of silence and a prayer, we begin sharing what we have experienced in our spiritual lives for the previous week. We may talk about our failures or successes in living at our highest, our progress in prayer and meditation, or a troublesome problem, or an individual we have difficulty with. This group sharing is casual, there are no individual time limits. Sharing takes about an hour or so of our two hour meeting. We do not rush it.

We discovered that, after a time, we did not need a leader to conduct meetings. Some may prefer to designate a different leader each week. After each member shares, the leader could establish a spiritual topic, and develop the balance of the meeting around personal experience with this topic. The structure, method, or technique does not matter so much as the atmosphere the group generates.

The important thing is to make the ambiance of the meeting loving, safe, and fun. Our meetings have spiritual goals and use spiritual methods. We found it best to avoid much Urantian theory or psychological theory, even though there happened to be two professional therapists in our group.

Guided meditations, when we use them, are lifting and fresh, and use wholesome images and symbols to stimulate the creative imagination.

We have a rule that we are not to interrupt anyone who is talking. This has required, at times, the use of a "talking stone" which is passed from member to member. Only the person with the stone can talk. Again, we do not offer advice after someone speaks unless it is specifically asked for. We do not critique the views of someone. "Cross talk" is not encouraged. (Cross talk is a give and take conversation that develops between two members while the rest look on.)

We are All Created Spiritually Equal

The principle here is that we are all spiritual equals. We are experts in only one person's inner life, our own. Each individual must feel safe to speak without fear of a subtle, judgmental response. Of all the provisional "rules" we suggest, the "no advice or evaluation of our comments unless requested" is most important. The rest of the structure of the meeting depends upon who is leading it. If you use a leader, alternate each week, unless a topic is carried forward and the group agrees to keep the same leader for two or three, or even more meetings. (We once spent six weeks on meditation, with a group leader who was especially knowledgeable about it.)

Problems and Problem Members

This kind of spiritual dialogue is not for everyone. It is not conducive to the competitive intellectual arena of some Urantia study groups, or the "old-timer" syndrome of some Twelve Step meetings. Some people don't like to share their inner lives and are embarrassed to do so. Although we Urantians all have in common certain deep spiritual hungers and longings, most of us are socially conditioned to avoid discussion about them; it is virtually a "forbidden dialogue." For this reason, if there is not a good "fit" for a member with the group, it is better to let this individual go and perhaps form his or her own group along the lines they like. We all have different perspectives, and it is advisable that those who have similar perspectives and problems form their own groups. Limited, closed groups make membership precious, and each member of a group should wholeheartedly participate, or make room for someone else.

Great care must be taken in forming the initial group, because a difficult person can virtually paralyze progress. The root cause for such an individual's behavior may be a different agenda, and harbored competitiveness or dislike for another member, different personal interpretations of the Papers, and so on. Expelling anyone from a spiritual group can be very difficult. Group solidarity is based upon loyalty, fairness, tolerance, and love. However, there is such a thing as the tyranny of the minority, and it is relatively easy for a Urantian who is less than sincere to take advantage of the group's broad

latitude. So, better to choose members very carefully than to deal with a problem member later on.

Learning to Love One Another

Meta-Values emerge as never before in an intimate, caring and supportive group. In our physical lives our senses tell us of the existence of things; our minds discover the reality of meanings, but spiritual experience reveals to us the true values of life. High levels of living are attained as a by-product of loving the Highest Power—the God of love. The most facile pathway to loving God is through loving your cosmic brothers and sisters: “In physical life the senses tell of the existence of things; mind discovers the reality of meanings; but the spiritual experience reveals to the individual the true values of life. These high levels of human living are attained in the supreme love of God and in the unselfish love of man. If you love your fellow men, you must have discovered their values.... You can best discover values in your associates by discovering their motivation.... If once you understand your neighbor, you will become tolerant, and this tolerance will grow into friendship and ripen into love.” (p.1098)

While I had understood this in an intellectual way, before our group process I had not experienced it—at least not on the level that limited social participation nurtured. The group dynamic is a socialization of the concept of personal religious experience. The group dynamic works, provided the individuals who participate are kindred spirits—that is—they share the same values. It must be stated again that there must be no intrusive personal theories that could make others in the group uncomfortable.

Purpose and Agendas for Meetings

It can be a very trying experience if you gather a group of six or seven people, and they complete “sharing” with very brief statements, and you then discover only fifteen minutes of a planned two hour meeting have passed. This experience is common in the early stages of the group’s life. Therefore, it is wise to prepare suggested Urantia Paper discussion topics.

As a broad suggestion, Living the Teachings can be divided into five easy-to-access ideas, as expressed by the Master on page 1863. You can start anywhere you wish, and easily develop a discussion around any of these concepts:

1. The pre-eminence of the individual. Subtopics: self-respect and the concept that one cannot respect oneself more than one respects others; self-forgiveness and forgiveness of others.

2. The will as the determining factor in man’s experience. Subtopics: responsibility for the quality of the inner life; resentments, anger, self-pity, and similar alternatives to assuming self-responsibility; growth choices and safety choices.

3. Spiritual fellowship with God the Father. Subtopics: meditation and prayer; a daily program of sharing the inner life with the Father.

4. The supreme satisfactions of the loving service of man. Subtopics: loving service and the actualization of one’s spiritual potentials.

5. The transcendence of the spiritual over the material in human personality. Subtopics: circle attainment and the full actualization of personality.

Each of these areas provide an abundant number of topics, some of which can be taken from the book. Keep in mind that it is not the purpose of the group to discuss theory, but rather to discuss personal experience. Try to steer discussions away from theory and into the realm of what we actually experience in our lives. You may wish to have a good reader in the group read a section of the Urantia Papers to stimulate conversation and sharing.

Encourage Other Groups

The living experience of individually sharing the inner life with the Highest Power is a cosmic means for most spiritually hungry Urantians to avoid some of the sting of the loneliness of personality isolation with its associated feelings of helplessness.

However, there is an authentic value to the socialization of personal, inner spiritual religious experience. “It is far better to have a religion without a church than a church without religion.” (p.1092) The religious turmoil of the twentieth century may be the chaos that proceeds growth in religious institutions. The purpose of a Living the Teachings group is to dramatize the loyalties of each individual Urantian to growth decisions and Meta-Value ideals in their personal lives. The group also enhances the goals of unselfish service to humankind; enriches the ideals and highest potentials of ideal family life; and provides a degree of wise group council and spiritual guidance.

However, the last thing a group like this wants to foster is a “chosen people” or elitist attitude. The important thing is the dynamic of sharing as spiritual equals with the desire to Self-Actualize along spiritual lines. We should understand that there is a great difference between personal religious experience and the “warm fuzzies” of the social Urantian experience.

If other people you know want to experience this kind of group and you are “full” or have doubts about this individual being a good fit in yours, encourage them to form their own. Regardless of a group’s general interpretation of the Urantia Papers, a Living the Teachings program can help individual members make extraordinary progress if it is composed of kindred spirits with enlightened goals.

The Urantia Book and the Internet

Emerging Potentials for Widespread Dissemination

David A. Kantor

The Internet provides a platform for missionary activities and the development of social networks of believers unique to the timing of the Fifth Epochal Revelation. The Fellowship is quietly establishing an architecture for revelation-propagation suitable for the immediate future of the accelerating global information revolution. This infrastructure will co-exist with and exploit the missionary potentials of multiple emerging communications technologies. International usage of the Fellowship's technology infrastructure approached 12,000 individual users in September. Including those who returned multiple times the total exceeded 16,000 visits for the month. Usage is currently expanding at a monthly rate of 20%. The ultimate success of this experiment in revelation dissemination will be dependent upon the quality and quantity of reader participation.

Antecedents

In the great library at Alexandria the Greeks attempted to collect copies of all the written works in the world. Scholars made perilous journeys by land and sea at great cost to gain access to this store of human knowledge and wisdom. When this library burned to the ground some 1500 years ago during the decline of Hellenistic culture, it contained an estimated 600,000 scrolls, or roughly 50,000 average books in today's terms. Adding written works known to exist at the time from China, India, Iraq and Iran, a reasonable estimate may be made that in Jesus' day the sum total of written information was contained in approximately 100,000 books. In digital terms, this translates into 100 Gigabytes of computer storage space for the representation of all human knowledge as it existed in the first century.

In our present day, medium range personal computers come with 4.5 Gigabyte hard drives as standard equipment. New technology currently being deployed in the corporate and business world equips common office networks with the ability to transmit data at a rate of one Gigabyte per second! The scrolls in the Alexandria library were hand-written on sheets of papyrus, laboriously manufactured by human labor. Hand-made inks and quill pens completed the technology infrastructure. Today, automated machines are rapidly encoding all of human knowledge into electronic symbols and storing it on the oxidized surfaces of crystal lattices.

In the days of Melchizedek and Jesus, news of epochal revelations was carried by word of mouth over perilous sea routes and dusty caravan trails to destinations throughout the known world. Today, news of another epochal revelation is being electronically converted into microscopic waveforms,

superimposed upon laser-driven light beams, and sent on its journey to the remote corners of the planet through strands of glass made from sand.

Within this rapidly metamorphosing milieu, the Fellowship has been quietly experimenting and developing a web presence designed to present *The Urantia Book* to truth seekers from around the world. At present rates of access to the Fellowship website, the number of people downloading documents over the course of six weeks exceeds the total attendance at all the conferences and study sessions held since 1955. And these individuals hail from more than eighty countries on our planet. The site is currently maintained by a group of more than 30 readers from multiple language groups and national backgrounds, linked together by a deep commitment to the propagation of the revelation and an international network of scanners, workstations, computers and servers (and E-mail!) stretching from North America to Germany, Spain, Australia, Chile, Colombia and Canada.

Who is Visiting the Fellowship Website?

The list below contains website statistics for the month of September, 1998. Shown are the number of visitors from specific internet domains. These "domains" are roughly synonymous with specific countries and provide some insight into the level of international activity. This shows a little over 16,500 visitors for September. We know that the number of unique visitors—those visiting only once during the month—was a little over 11,800. This means that some 30% visited more than once. All combined, these visitors downloaded more than 61,500 documents during the month.

Visitor Domain Listing

Number of website visitors and their domains of origin, month of September 1998

Countries and Visitors: Commercial USA - 8129; Unknown origins - 3485; USA educational institutions - 530; Mexico - 509; Spain - 372; US government agencies - 381; Colombia - 254; Argentina - 229; Canada - 217; Brazil - 133; Australia - 131; Finland - 122; Chile - 107; Non-profit organizations - 102; Sweden - 94; Peru - 91; Greece - 90; Norway - 80; United Kingdom - 77; Italy - 73; US Military - 65; Netherlands - 58; New Zealand - 54; Costa Rica - 53; Venezuela - 50; Estonia - 49; Uruguay - 47; Singapore - 43; Germany - 33; Nicaragua - 33; Ecuador - 29; Austria - 27; Belgium - 27; France - 25; Thailand - 23; Malaysia - 21; Philippines - 21; South Africa - 21; Portugal - 20; Japan - 19; Israel - 18; South Korea - 16; Bolivia - 14; El Salvador - 14; Zambia - 14; Denmark - 12; Ireland - 12; India - 10; Dominican Republic - 10; Switzerland - 10; Honduras - 9; Puerto Rico - 8; Russian Federation - 8; Slovenia - 8; Poland - 7; Turkey - 7; Egypt - 6; Paraguay - 6; Hong Kong - 5; Latvia - 5; Lithuania - 5; Czech Republic - 4; Hungary - 4; Indonesia - 4; Romania - 4; United Arab Emirates - 3; Cook Islands - 3; Guatemala - 3; Ukraine - 3;

Georgia - 2; Iceland - 2; Luxembourg - 2; Malta - 2; Oman - 2; Trinidad and Tobago - 2; Taiwan - 2; Yugoslavia - 2; Bermuda - 1; China - 1; Panama - 1.

What are These Visitors Looking At?

A list of all the documents for which more than 100 requests were received during the month of September, 1998: Fellowship Home Page - 2593; Fellowship Site Index - 1403; Spanish Home Page - 1117; Index and search engine for El libro de Urantia - 938; Index to the text of *The Urantia Book* - 872; What's New page - 609; Introduction to Taoism for readers of *The Urantia Book* - 594; What is *The Urantia Book*? - 591; About the Fellowship - 473; Overview of the text of *The Urantia Book* - 428; Introduction to Confucianism for readers of *The Urantia Book* - 425; Index to Spanish Discourses of Jesus - 397; Current Events - 309; Introduction to Shinto for readers of *The Urantia Book* - 255; El libro de Urantia paper 88 - 250; Introduction to Buddhism for Readers of *The Urantia Book* - 239; Index of articles about *The Urantia Book* - 215; Introduction to Hinduism for readers of *The Urantia Book* - 212; Introduction to Zoroastrianism for readers of *The Urantia Book* - 207; Access to International and Domestic Study Group Database - 202; Spanish introduction to El libro de Urantia - 198; Foreword to El libro de Urantia - 181; Index to Cal Feldman's Illustrated Urantia Book - 180; Index to Jesus materials - 177; Search engine for *The Urantia Book* - 176; Introduction to Islam for readers of *The Urantia Book* - 167; El libro de Urantia paper 87 - 163; Introduction to Sikhism for readers of *The Urantia Book* - 158; El libro de Urantia paper 62 - 156; Index to multi-lingual resources - 154; Links to reader's websites - 151; Introduction to Jainism for readers of *The Urantia Book* - 144; El libro de Urantia paper 53 - 141; English transcript of Bill Sadler's origins tape - 141; Index to articles on science and *The Urantia Book* - 137; El libro de Urantia paper 90 - 135; Introduction to Christianity for readers of *The Urantia Book* - 132; El libro de Urantia paper 5 - 128; El libro de Urantia paper 84 - 127; Spanish article by Nina Bravo on the family - 127; Index to historic documents and photos - 126; Comparison of the Bible to *The Urantia Book* - 124; El libro de Urantia paper 57 - 124; El libro de Urantia paper 1 - 123; *The Urantia Book* paper 1 section 2 - 123; El libro de Urantia paper 132 section 2 - 116; A study of the books of the Apocrypha for readers of *The Urantia Book* - 115; Introduction to Judaism for readers of *The Urantia Book* - 114; El libro de Urantia paper 82 - 113; El libro de Urantia paper 140 section 3 - 111; El libro de Urantia paper 69 - 104; El libro de Urantia paper 2 - 103; El libro de Urantia paper 12 - 103; El libro de Urantia paper 65 - 102; El libro de Urantia paper 15 - 100.

Religious Interest

Why, you might ask, are the introductions to the world's religions so popular? It is because people are searching the web for information about these religions. By providing these

Fall, 1998

materials, we create an introduction to *The Urantia Book* within a context created by the user's own search for knowledge. We could do much more. If we had good quality articles which related concepts from *The Urantia Book* to such topics as AIDS, genetic engineering, the end of the millennium, international economics and other topics of current popular interest, we would be able to introduce many more people to the book. If anyone reading this article is interested in creating such materials, please contact us—the opportunities for spreading awareness of the book are almost unlimited and can be done within the range of your own specialized knowledge and interests.

Where is This Leading Us?

The following list shows growth in website services over the year from September 1997 through September 1998. Not only is usage growing, but the rate of usage is growing as well, up from 7% per month a year ago, to 20% per month today. Bear in mind that these statistics are from the California server only and include usage figures from neither the secondary server located in New Jersey nor the Spanish language server located in Santiago de Chile.

Number of visitors per month: Sep. 1997 - 3,596; Oct. 1997 - 3,848; Nov. 1997 - 4,098; Dec. 1997 - 4,352; Jan. 1998 - 4,661; Feb. 1998 - 4,997; Mar. 1998 - 5,396; Apr. 1998 - 5,828; May 1998 - 6,382; Jun. 1998 - 7,048; Jul. 1998 - 7,837; Aug. 1998 - 9,462; Sep. 1998 - 11,838.

If we had good quality articles which related concepts from The Urantia Book to such topics as AIDS, genetic engineering, the end of the millennium, international economics and other topics of current popular interest, we would be able to introduce many more people to the book. If anyone reading this article is interested in creating such materials, please contact us—the opportunities for spreading awareness of the book are almost unlimited and can be done within the range of your own specialized knowledge and interests.

These are remarkable numbers and they parallel the general statistics on growing Internet usage in the world as a whole. Currently, access to the Internet is growing faster in the third world than access to clean drinking water and sanitary sewage systems. This revolution has been compared by many writers to some of the most critical junctures in human social evolution, such as the spread of agriculture, the dawn of the iron age or the development of the printing press. While we have lived with "mass communications" for the past half-century, what's different about the Internet is that it superdemocratizes communication. The publication of information is being taken out of the hands of the gatekeepers (publishers, telecommunications companies, commercial broadcasting corporations, etc.) and placed into the hands of the five billion inhabitants of the planet. Current estimates are that by the turn

The Urantia Book and the Internet, cont.

of the century more than one billion of these folks will have Internet access. All of this adds up to an unprecedented set of potentials for the propagation of the revelation. The Internet makes it possible for anyone with a computer to actively participate in a major missionary effort.

The current state of Urantia materials deployed on the web is a partial actualization of a vision nurtured by a small group of readers for nearly fifteen years. In 1985, Richard Preiss and Dave Missavage developed a service called B3—The Brotherhood of Man Bulletin Board. This service was based on a Commodore SX-64 which readers could dial into via a long distance phone call (one at a time, please!) through a 300 baud modem. The bulletin board contained a collection of conference talks, study aids, and journal articles which could be downloaded.

B3 was later turned over to George Samos and Tim Young who further developed it as a resource library in the late eighties. It ran in the closet of an apartment. In 1992, Michael Million started the original Urantia E-mail list on a server running out of the University of Arkansas where he worked. As the Internet took off in the mid 1990's, people like Mark Turrin and Lamar Zabielski took the lead with the first significant reader website and the use of IRC chat.

Today there are more than fifty independent reader-maintained websites containing information about *The Urantia Book* and the readership, ranging from study aids and artwork to stinging critiques of movement political foibles. In the San Francisco bay area Michelle Klimesh now publishes a weekly electronic newsletter to Society members and study groups, knitting together reader groups scattered across all of northern California.

On the Horizon: Coming in 1999

Additional services currently being developed include: (1) Downloadable audio archives—a new collection of Bill Sadler tapes, recordings of conference talks, regional lectures by students of *The Urantia Book* and more. (2) Enhanced tools for accessing, cross referencing and manipulating the text of *The Urantia Book* in multiple languages. (3) Tools and resources for study group leaders. (4) More translated secondary works. (5) Improved indexing and search tools. (6) Deployment of distance learning software and offering of on-line studies. (7) Development of a network providing additional data communication services, shared document publication and an internal Internet-based telephone network for administrative and committee work.

The Fellowship Internet presence may be viewed as a set of tools available to the readership for the further actualization of outreach potentials. There are opportunities ranging from the development of computer programs to the creation of study aids, transcribing of old audio and video tapes, proof-reading of published documents, creation of electronic artwork, development of learning games, responding to E-mail inquiries, assisting translators, developing resources

for children, designing and teaching on-line classes, creating web-based study aids, and much more.

Ultimately, the effectiveness of this unique dissemination opportunity depends entirely upon the quality of the work done by contributing readers. If you think your service time, interests, and efforts might be multiplied through integration with Fellowship Internet resources and partnership with other active Urantians, please contact us at ubin@ubfellowship.org.

David A. Kantor is a designer of computer software used for managing corporate voice and data communication networks. He has been a student of The Urantia Book for more than thirty years and is the manager of the Fellowship Website.

Psalms Today **The Father's Way**

I love you, Universal Father, and rejoice in your partnership in my life.

I am thankful for the lawful behavior of phenomena upon which I can depend.

I am grateful for the values of truth, beauty, and goodness that you have established to govern all human interaction.

All that is not in harmony with your perfect way will eventually perish.

Those who thwart your purposes for humanity will be vanquished.

The iniquitous find the way of the transgressor is hard, their plans do not prevail. Your Triune judgment is the arbiter of time and the template of eternity.

The mills of your divine justice turn slowly, but grind exceedingly fine!

Your Fatherly rule of love is ascendant in the worlds of space.

It will bring justice and peace to humankind.

There is an integration of spiritual influences empowering us to transcend our animal legacies.

A confederation of divine powers is directed toward freeing us from our material limitations, and finite handicaps.

We rejoice that nothing in all the universe can separate us from your Fatherly care and blessing!

The Coming Spiritual Renaissance

Preston Thomas
Present Conditions

Our world is now rapidly approaching the twenty-first century and the third millennium after Christ. What will our future be like? Specifically, how will Jesus' kingdom of spiritual living evolve in this new century and coming millennium?

Questions about the future are not easy to answer. However, *The Urantia Book* does contain many intriguing clues and clear statements regarding our future. If we approach this question with courage, the sincere desire to follow the truth wherever it leads, and dependence on spiritual guidance, we are well equipped to find trustworthy answers. The future flows from the present, and a clear knowledge of present conditions gives us the proper perspective to understand and visualize the future.

Traditional morality and religion have been weakened by the advances of a scientific age. This has left our world without moral and spiritual anchorage in a time of constant and accelerating change.

When we ask what are the present conditions of spiritual living on Urantia, we find ourselves face to face with a number of unpleasant and disturbing facts. The kingdom of spiritual living is not progressing well on earth; in fact *The Urantia Book* tells us on page 909 that "modern civilization is at a standstill in spiritual development." Why is this so? There are a number of reasons but *The Urantia Book* mentions at least five that are of overriding importance.

First, we lost our Planetary Prince to rebellion and instead of the ordered society that this mission normally brings, our world was left in spiritual darkness and chaos.

Second, we lost our Adam and Eve to default. This meant we not only lost the divine role models of marriage and of family life, but also the biological uplift that would have provided physical bodies that are more naturally spirit responsive.

Third, the Christian Church has failed in its mission to provide for the continuous spiritual transformation of individuals and society inherent in Jesus' original gospel of the kingdom. Instead of expanding Jesus' real religion the church substituted teaching about Jesus, and these doctrines now stand as very real obstacles to the immediate reception of his true gospel.

Fourth, our twentieth century world is in a state of great transition. Traditional morality and religion have been weakened by the advances of a scientific age. This has left our world without moral and spiritual anchorage in a time of

constant and accelerating change. Here is how a Melchizedek describes our situation: "Mechanical inventions and the dissemination of knowledge are modifying civilization. This new and oncoming social order will not settle down complacently for a millennium. The human race must become reconciled to a procession of changes, adjustments, and readjustments." (p. 1086)

Times of transition such as we are now experiencing are times of great danger and uncertainty. In such times the need for the moral guidance and the real religion of spiritual experience is especially acute. On page 1090 we find this amazingly accurate picture of our times and its needs:

"During the psychologically unsettled times of the twentieth century, amid the economic upheavals, the moral crosscurrents, and the sociologic rip tides of the cyclonic transitions of a scientific era, thousands upon thousands of men and women have become humanely dislocated; they are anxious, restless, fearful, uncertain, and unsettled; as never before in the world's history they need the consolation and stabilization of sound religion."

The Fifth, and in many ways the most serious challenge to spiritual living on our world, concerns the prevailing modern philosophies of materialism and secularism. *The Urantia Book* tells us that we are now living in an "age of scientific minds and materialistic tendencies." (p.2075) But while the materialism of the twentieth century disorients civilization towards the material level and away from moral and spiritual realities, it is modern secularism that poses the greatest threat to future spiritual progress. On page 2081 the revelators state, "But even after materialism and mechanism have been more or less vanquished, the devastating influence of twentieth century secularism will still blight the spiritual experience of millions of unsuspecting souls." Later on this page the revelators issue this warning: "Twentieth century secularism tends to affirm that man does not need God. But beware! This godless philosophy of human society will lead only to unrest, animosity, unhappiness, war, and world-wide disaster."

But while the materialism of the twentieth century disorients civilization towards the material level and away from moral and spiritual realities, it is modern secularism that poses the greatest threat to future spiritual progress.

Secularism, denies God and even seeks to take his place in human life. But it is an illusion to think that society can progress without God and true morality. It simply will not work. Without God and genuine religion society has no real glue that can hold it together. And we are now experiencing this fact as we witness disintegration on every level, from marriage and family life, to societies and economies, and even to nation states. As the revelators say on page 2082, "This

secularistic human society, notwithstanding its unparalleled materialistic achievement, is slowly disintegrating."

How should we react to warnings such as these? What should be our attitude when we clearly see our present civilization facing great danger and crisis? We must realize that in times of great crisis it is only our personal faith connection with God that will prove helpful. We must exercise genuine religious faith and take refuge in the heavenly kingdom. Jesus taught this to the apostles on Mt. Olivet as they faced the great crisis of their lives, and his words should guide us today. Here he said to them, "The downfall of nations, the crash of empires, the destruction of the unbelieving Jews, the end of an age, even the end of the world, what have these things to do with one who believes this gospel, who has hid his life in the surety of the eternal kingdom?" (p. 1916)

Secularism, denies God and even seeks to take his place in human life. But it is an illusion to think that society can progress without God and true morality. It simply will not work. Without God and genuine religion society has no real glue that can hold it together.

On page 1108 *The Urantia Book* specifically addresses these problems of twentieth century life by providing eleven faith reactions to the uncertainties and dangers of modern times. Here the revelators tell us that genuine spiritual faith is revealed in that it: "Generates profound courage and confidence despite natural adversity and physical calamity.... Maintains a divine trust in ultimate victory in spite of the cruelties of seemingly blind fate and the apparent utter indifference of natural forces to human welfare.... Lives and triumphs irrespective of the crushing overload of the complex and partial civilizations of modern times.... Goes right on worshipping God in spite of anything and everything. Dares to declare, 'Even though he slay me, yet will I serve him.'"

We cannot be certain as to what our future holds but we can be ready for any eventuality if we choose to put our trust in God, faithfully submit to his will and take refuge in the kingdom of heaven. This should be our first reaction to the problems resulting from past failures, the transition difficulties of modern times, and the materialism and secularism that threaten the spiritual progress of twentieth century civilization.

The Future

What of our future? Will it continue to be dominated by these non-spiritual forces that presently rule our world? When we look to the *Urantia* revelation to answer this question we find great good news. The revelators forecast a bright new age in which our present non-spiritual trends will give way to a new era of spiritual living. One of their most powerful and compelling prophecies is found on page 2087. Here the midwayers tell us that, "*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."

Viewed against the background of present world conditions this is indeed a startling prediction. It specifies three areas—the spiritual, moral, and social arenas—in which the future will differ radically from the present.

Spiritually, our world will witness a shift from our present materialistic and secular ways to a time of great spiritual advancement. No longer will our world suffer from spiritual stagnation, but rather will it experience a great new spiritual renaissance. Finally the world will really begin to live the teachings of Jesus. *Urantia* is about to move to a higher phase of his kingdom in which "the more perfect fulfillment of the will of God" (p. 1863) becomes a dominant characteristic of the age.

Morally, the new age will bring a greater adherence to moral and ethical standards of conduct. Today's world is characterized by a breakdown of morality, unbridled self-expression, lust for power, and self-gratification; but not so in the world of the future. The new age will bring the ethical awakening and enhanced moral insight that is essential to truly living the golden rule.

*When will this revival of Jesus' actual teachings take place? Is it far in the future or is it near at hand? The answer to this question may shock some, for *The Urantia Book* makes clear that the time for this new revelation of Jesus is not far in the future, it is now.*

Socially our world is in a state of great transition—of rapid and unceasing change. Such change is difficult and holds many dangers, but the final outcome will be a new and transformed human society. The revelators prophesy that our next age will witness the "dawn of a new social order in connection with improved spiritual living." (p. 1863) This will be a time of greatly enhanced human relations and "true social righteousness." (p. 1862)

This society of the next age will not only involve improved moral and spiritual relations among individuals but will also extend to the economic and political structures governing our world. An economy based more on co-operation and service is destined to replace exclusively profit motivated economics. And the political life of nations will be reorganized and subject to a representative world government. This will finally bring to earth the blessings of world peace and good will toward all men.

All these advancements involve complete departures from present world conditions. How shall they come about? What is the major force that will bring such wondrous changes? Here I must disappoint some by pointing out that the *Urantia* Revelation is not the answer, except and in so far as it contributes to a new revelation of Jesus. For it is Jesus, his

teachings, his life, and his personal religion, that is the hope of our world and the force which will lead us into a new and better future.

The Urantia Book very clearly prophesies this. For example on page 2097 the midwayer commission encourages us with this vision of the future, "Be not discouraged; human evolution is still in progress and the revelation of God to the world in and through Jesus shall not fail." And on page 2082 they further assure us that with this inspiring prophecy: "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."

How will this come about? The Christian Church has exalted Jesus for 2000 years. What is going to happen that will allow Jesus' teachings to finally come to dominate Urantia? The midwayers answer this question on page 1866. Here they predict a restatement of Jesus' teachings which will undo the work of his early followers who evolved a religion about Jesus which came to replace the religion of Jesus. Thus the midwayers make clear that it is a new revelation of Jesus' actual teachings, a revival of his true gospel, which will remake our world and lead us out of our present darkness into the great light of a better day.

When will this revival of Jesus' actual teachings take place? Is it far in the future or is it near at hand? The answer to this question may shock some, for *The Urantia Book* makes clear that the time for this new revelation of Jesus is not far in the future, it is now. Listen to what the revelators tell us: "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; my emphasis) "Modern culture must become spiritually baptized with a new revelation of Jesus' life and illuminated with a new understanding of his gospel of eternal salvation." (p. 2084; my emphasis)

True religion acts! Let us decide that we will be part of the great new spiritual renaissance that is soon coming upon this world. Let us go forward and help bring it about!

If we believe the teachings of the new revelation and accept the fact that our present dark, confused, and troubled world, is headed, through crises, into a glorious new and more spiritual age, how should we react? If we look to *The Urantia Book* for help and guidance we find most inspiring answers. The new revelation clearly calls for us to help bring this spiritual renaissance to our world. On page 2082 the midwayers issue this stirring call, "Religion does need new leaders, spiritual men and women who will dare to depend solely on Jesus and his incomparable teachings." And on page 2084 the revelators repeat this call and promise thrilling adventure to those who are moved to action. Here they declare that, "the

call to the adventure of a 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 they walked about the earth as his companions in the flesh."

For those of us who choose to heed this calling the promise is great, for we are to become participants, even leaders, in the coming of the new spiritual renaissance. On page 2082 the midwayers predict that "these new teachers of Jesus' religion" will "quickly supply the leadership and inspiration requisite for the social, moral, economic, and political reorganization of the world." Let us be uplifted and inspired by the needs of our time and the new revelation's call to action. Let us realize where we are, where we are going, and what must be done. We have a new revelation of truth in our hands and hopefully in our hearts. But we must do more than keep it safely locked up within ourselves.

True religion acts! Let us decide that we will be part of the great new spiritual renaissance that is soon coming upon this world. Let us go forward and help bring it about! If we do this we are aligning ourselves with the forces of light and needs of our time. Our ultimate victory is assured, and we will prove ourselves truly worthy of receiving the great new Fifth Epochal Revelation of truth.

Preston Thomas is the founder of the Einstein School for special education. Preston is a long time student of The Urantia Book and has published The Life and Teaching of Jesus which arranges the Biblical material dealing with Jesus in chronological harmony with the Urantia Papers.

"Mistake not! there is in the teachings of Jesus an eternal nature which will not permit them forever to remain unfruitful in the hearts of thinking men. The kingdom as Jesus conceived it has to a large extent failed on earth; for the time being, an outward church has taken its place; but you should comprehend that this church is only the larval stage of the thwarted spiritual kingdom....The kingdom of the divine brotherhood is still alive and will eventually and certainly come forth from this long submergence, just as surely as the butterfly eventually emerges as the beautiful unfolding of its less attractive creature of metamorphic development."

(866:4)

RELIGION AND THE RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATION

Richard I. Bain

There seems to be a certain amount of ferment in the Urantia community regarding the possible emergence of a Urantian religious organization. Is a portion of our community evolving into such an organization? How do you feel about this?

I observe a range of reactions from whole hearted endorsement to strong condemnation. The dialog has begun, but will we understand each other as it progresses? Too many times groups have engaged in dialog without understanding the terms used by those with opposing points of view. To forestall this sort of fruitless dialog, I feel it is desirable to define some terms before beginning a discussion of the issues. It is very difficult to discuss religion because of the multiple meanings of words. A good example is the difference between faith and belief. In Paper 101 and a number of other papers in *The Urantia Book*, the difference between faith and belief is discussed. Unfortunately, today faith and belief are used interchangeably, so it is necessary to explain to someone not familiar with the book the sense in which *The Urantia Book* uses these two terms. Other words that have multiple meanings which can cause confusion in discussions are "church," "religion," and "religious."

Some Definitions

There are those who speak of the emergence of a Urantia church (myself included), but I wonder if it wouldn't be more accurate to speak instead of the emergence of a new religion and a new religious organization. According to the Merriam Webster on-line dictionary, the term "church" in the case of Christianity can refer to either the building used for services, the clergy of the Christian religion, or the entire body of Christians. The term is applied specifically to the Christian church, so it might be less confusing to use the term "religious organization" rather than "church." For purposes of discussion, I will divide religion into three categories: internal (personal) religion, socialized religion, and institutionalized religion as embodied in a religious organization. Usually socialized religion is associated with institutional religion. So when I say religion, I shall be referring to the socialized variety; individual religion I shall call personal religion, and institutionalized religion I will call a religious organization.

Those who are students of *The Urantia Book* have been known collectively as the Urantia movement, the Urantia community or Urantians. Since Urantia is the name of our planet, then logically, the Urantia community, is everyone on planet Earth. Nevertheless, considering that "Urantia community" has already been used for some time to designate the collective body of students of *The Urantia Book*, I will so use this term. In other cases, I will use Urantian(s) as a noun

in the sense the term "Christian(s)" is so used or as a modifier in the same way "Christian" is used in "Christian church."

Socialized Religion: Form and Substance

Of the three forms of religion, personal religion is the first to appear. As this inner life is externalized and shared with our fellow mortals, then socialized, collective religion begins to appear. So, personal religion and the human urge to share and socialize are the parents of socialized, collective religion. As religion evolves, rites and rituals begin to emerge from the collective religious life. And finally, it gives rise to institutionalized religion, the religious organization.

What is the relationship between religion and a religious organization? I see the organization as the form, and religion as its content or substance. Form without substance is sterile. Substance without form is chaos. Form gives substance shape, but substance gives form life. How do form and substance function together? One analogy is that of a corporation and its constituent members. The group of members exists separate from the corporation, but is enabled to function as an entity and interact with the world in a unified fashion through the mechanism of the corporation. Religion can manifest itself socially and collectively, but the religious organization is a mechanism through which the religion can deal with the world as an organization rather than simply as a collection of religionists. The difference between an army and a mob is organization. As the individuals precede the corporation, in the case of religion the substance precedes the form, and is the reason for the form. Not only does religion precede the religious organization, but it must ever be the navigator of the organizational ship. Ideally, the organization exists to serve the religionists. When the form dominates the substance, we may find a people bound by legalisms, as the Jews of Jesus' day were bound by the over-emphasis on ritual and law. If the substance dies, the form may continue on, but it is a soulless body. Unfortunately, this is nearly the case in some Christian churches today.

What is the relationship between religion and a religious organization? I see the organization as the form, and religion as its content or substance. Form without substance is sterile. Substance without form is chaos. Form gives substance shape, but substance gives form life.

In the case of the Urantia community, we obviously have an important part of the substance, *The Urantia Book*. But *The Urantia Book* speaks of the emergence of a Jesus-centered religion. I don't regard belief in *The Urantia Book* unaccompanied by a living faith as a Jesus-centered religion. Believing is a passive act, but the teachings of Jesus are in the active voice, not the passive voice: "Follow me;" "Love your neighbor as yourself;" "Turn the other cheek;" "Do unto

others as you would have them do unto you." It is apparent to me that a Urantian religion must be an active religion if it is Jesus-centered. Some would say that only outreach is active, but remember that "prayer" and "worship" can be verbs as well as nouns. It is certain that a Jesus-centered religion must have Jesus-type activism as a part of its substance.

What is Being Born?

Is a Urantian religion evolving within our community? If by religion, we mean a group of people with a common set of beliefs, then in that sense a Urantian religion already exists. But I think that the term "religion" means more to most people in our culture than just a common set of beliefs; I think it entails the trappings and practice of religion in churches and synagogues: rites, rituals, worship and symbols. Perhaps it is more accurate to describe Urantianism as an emerging religion. It is evolving from a loose knit community into an identifiable religious entity. It is not still a plant nor yet an animal; it's sort of a "plantimal." And when the animal finally emerges, what will it look like? What do we want it to look like?

I have no doubt that whatever the fate of the present embryonic organizations, eventually Urantian religious organizations will emerge from our community. I think that the presence of dialogue regarding such organizations is a sign that some people are already open to them and that their emergence is not far in the future.

Will a religious organization evolve within our Urantia community concurrently with a Urantian religion? Is the Urantian religion sufficiently developed to benefit from a Urantian religious organization? I do not feel that the Urantia community as a whole will evolve into a religious organization; there is too much diversity and no little amount of anti-institutional sentiment in our ranks to allow the whole community to be institutionalized. However, since there are Urantian "churches" organizing now in California and elsewhere, perhaps it would be safe to say that there are embryonic Urantian religious organizations evolving within the Urantia community. Also, the idea of a Urantian religious organization is being debated within the community. I have no doubt that whatever the fate of the present embryonic organizations, eventually Urantian religious organizations will emerge from our community. I think that the presence of dialogue regarding such organizations is a sign that some people are already open to them and that their emergence is not far in the future. And when I say religious organizations, I mean something analogous to the three definitions of church previously cited, i.e., buildings, clergy, and a supporting organization. Are all of these three aspects needed? Will we follow the path of the Christian church?

The Relationship Between Emerging and Existing Religious Organizations

Just as Christianity evolved in the presence of Judaism, a Urantian religion and religious organizations are evolving in the presence of Christianity in our culture. Of course, there are other religions and organizations present in our culture, such as Islam and Judaism, but Christianity is the dominant religion and religious organization. There are two things that make the relationship between a Urantian religious organization and Christianity a particularly interesting one. The first is the close resemblance between some Christian theology and the teachings of *The Urantia Book*. The second is the fact that many Urantians are also members of one of the Christian churches. This situation has some similarities to the situation of the early Christians.

Before they were ejected from the synagogues, the Jewish followers of Jesus formed a sect within Judaism. Will there be a Urantian sect within Christianity? My experience and that of others is that *The Urantia Book* is not creating much interest in the Christian church. Because Christianity is to a large extent an authority based religion, any new religious ideas have a hard time getting a hearing from the grass roots unless it is endorsed by the hierarchy. Some would say that dual allegiance Urantians have not been vocal enough about *The Urantia Book* in their church community. My own attempts to introduce *The Urantia Book* in Christian churches have often met with either hostility or apathy. For so many people, Christianity is a comfortable and familiar religion that doesn't require much thought, only acceptance. Only a small number of people are real spiritual seekers, so I don't have much hope of ever seeing masses of Christians flocking to the bookstore for copies of *The Urantia Book*.

What about those who are Urantian Christians? Will they band together to form a sect within the Christian church? Since their presence in most churches is small, I wouldn't classify them as a sect within the church at this time. As our numbers slowly grow within the Christian church, there may come a time when our dual loyalty becomes an issue, as it did for the Jewish followers of Jesus in the synagogues. Many Urantian Christians are not pleased with the reaction to *The Urantia Book* in their churches. On the basis of some negative reactions from either the clergy or laity of their churches, they don't feel they can speak freely about it within their church. This discontent may make such people receptive to the idea of a Urantia religious organization outside of the Christian church.

Because *The Urantia Book* and Christian theology have some commonalities, perhaps after Urantian religious organizations evolve, there will develop a close relationship between the liberal Christian church and the Urantian organizations, just as Canada and the United States have a

close relationship because of a common border and similar cultures. But perhaps this relationship will be shaped as much by perceptions as by reality.

Perceptions vs. Reality

Would a new religion and religious organization based on the teachings of *The Urantia Book* be perceived as just another branch of Christianity, or is it unique enough to be identified as a new religion with religious organizations distinct from the Christian church? Would we want to be included under the Christian umbrella? Since Christianity is so pervasive in our culture, and since many concepts in *The Urantia Book* are so close to Christian theology, it may be hard to convince people that we are not just another variant of Christianity. And if we decide to accept the role of another Christian sect, then how will we include those for whom Christianity is not a part of their cultural heritage? This dilemma has been faced by other religious communities.

It seems to me that Urantian religious organizations in other cultures may not resemble such organizations that emerge from our culture, and we should not expect them to do so, any more than our art or literature necessarily resembles that of other cultures.

The majority of Unitarian Universalists choose not to be identified as Christians, yet there are a few Unitarian Universalist churches that call themselves Unitarian Universalist Christian churches, and their nature is closer to traditional Christian churches than are the majority of Unitarian Universalist congregations. Is this a portent for the future of Urantia churches? Will there be Urantian worship centers, Christian Urantia Churches, Buddhist Urantia Temples, Moslem Urantia Mosques, etc.? Or will we have a grand potpourri of traditions, having communion one day, whirling with the Dervishes another, dancing with the Sufi's another, and chanting like Buddhist monks on yet another day? One thing is certain; the authors of *The Urantia Book* picture the evolving religion as Jesus-centered. Is it possible to have this as a core concept yet allow for varied cultural expressions?

Urantian Religious Organizations in Other Cultures

It seems to me that Urantian religious organizations in other cultures may not resemble such organizations that emerge from our culture, and we should not expect them to do so, any more than our art or literature necessarily resembles that of other cultures. However, if Urantian religious organizations and religion embody the teachings of Jesus and follow his example rather than being a religion about Jesus, I believe that the resultant religion and organizations will be much more acceptable to Urantians of other cultures than is Christianity. Unity rather than uniformity should be our watch word

Some may take the view that the theology of a Urantia religion is simply the content of *The Urantia Book*, but I doubt that this will be the case as time goes on. Consider Christianity. It certainly contains the teachings of Jesus, but much of Christian theology is not the teachings of Jesus. As Christianity evolved, it absorbed not only rituals but also concepts from other religions. Can we avoid this accretion from outside sources? Should we? For better or for worse, much of the theology of Christianity consists of the interpretations and concepts of Paul and the apostles with additions by various later theologians such as Thomas Aquinas. *The Urantia Book* authors have mixed reactions to Paul. On the one hand, because he was flexible, he was able to shape Christianity so that it appealed to adherents of existing Western religions. On the other hand, he downgraded the status of women in the church, and emphasized the Atonement Doctrine. Will a Pauline figure emerge from the Urantia community to put his own spin on the theology of *The Urantia Book* or reinterpret it for another culture? How shall we react to such goings on?

New Wineskins or Old?

And what do we do about the rites and rituals of a Urantian religion? Do we just borrow from Christianity and other religions for a new Urantia religion? When a Pharisee asked Jesus why his Apostles didn't fast as other Jews did, he answered in part, "Neither do men put new wine into old wine skins, lest the new wine burst the skins so that both the wine and the skins perish. The wise man puts the new wine into fresh wine skins. Therefore do my disciples show wisdom in that they do not bring too much of the old order over into the new teaching of the gospel of the kingdom." (p. 1655) The new concepts in the Fifth Epochal Revelation will obviously require new observances and rituals but a religion centered in the Urantia Papers could also utilize the best in older religious practices. I believe that we should use symbols and rituals that can be invested with new meanings, meanings appropriate to our community and the theology of *The Urantia Book*, but these rites, rituals, and symbols should not be just a copy of existing ones. For instance, because of its connection with the Atonement Doctrine, I would be surprised to see a cross on, or in, a Urantian worship center, but I would expect to see a communion service celebrated in such a center. It is logical that communion will find a place in a Urantian religion, especially since Jesus established this ritual at the Last Supper. But the theology of this communion will certainly not be like that of the Christian communion, since *The Urantia Book* strongly condemns the Atonement Doctrine. Fortunately, we do have some guidance from Jesus in *The Urantia Book* on how to invest the elements of the communion service with new and more appropriate meaning. (p. 1941-42)

Christmas and other Christian holidays may be another problem area for Urantians. There are many Christian rituals associated with Christmas. Will Urantian religionists celebrate

Christmas differently than Christians? I suspect that religious organizations in our culture will retain much of the Christmas pageantry and ritual since it is a part of the cultural heritage for those of us coming from a Christian background. But I expect a modest birthday celebration on Aug. 21st each year will also be one of the rites of Urantian worship centers. Easter in the Urantia Papers is not associated with the Atonement Doctrine. But the cross and the dramatic events leading to it are as much a part of *The Urantia Book* as they are a part of the Bible. I am certain that the papers in *The Urantia Book* dealing with these events will be the basis for uniquely Urantian Easter services. We can certainly profit from "Lessons From the Cross," (p. 2017) and celebrate the resurrection as sincerely as Christians do, though not for all the same reasons.

Symbols for a Urantian Religion

An organized religion arising out of the Urantia community will need potent symbols to help unite its participants. One symbol that has already been supplied by the authors of *The Urantia Book* is the three concentric circles. This symbol was unfortunately a political football because it was registered as a trademark by the Urantia Foundation. However, it seems that this symbol can now be used by a religious organization as a religious symbol without creating legal problems; it is my understanding that the Foundation will permit the use of the concentric circles for religious purposes. Undoubtedly, other symbols will emerge out of the religious life of Urantians as a Urantian religion evolves. And symbols are important. The authors of *The Urantia Book* point out, "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. Modern man must find some adequate symbolism for his new and expanding ideas, ideals, and loyalties. This enhanced symbol must arise out of religious living, spiritual experience. And this higher symbolism of a higher civilization must be predicated on the concept of the Fatherhood of God and be pregnant with the mighty ideal of the brotherhood of man." (p. 966)

The new concepts in the Fifth Epochal Revelation will obviously require new observances and rituals but a religion centered in the Urantia Papers could also utilize the best in older religious practices. I believe that we should use symbols and rituals that can be invested with new meanings, meanings appropriate to our community and the theology of The Urantia Book, but these rites, rituals, and symbols should not be just a copy of existing ones.

There are many questions that those who choose to build a religious organization to incorporate the emerging Urantian religion will have to address. Questions such as:

1. What role will *The Urantia Book* play in this religion?
2. How will we balance between inreach and outreach? Will Urantia religious organizations sponsor social outreach programs?
3. Will we be able to have unity without uniformity?
4. Will we engage in evangelism activities to win people to our organization?
5. Will we have some sort of national organization? What will be our relationship to this organization?
6. Will we have a professional clergy? Who will train them? Who will certify them?
7. What shall we do initially about symbols and rituals?
8. What will we call this organization?
9. How shall we establish and maintain a unique identity? Do we need to?
10. Is the emerging Urantian religion mature enough to benefit from the services of a Urantian religious organization?

Building on Existing Foundations

If this movement to build a Urantian religious organization develops and begins to grow rapidly, we will have to address many of these questions quite soon. There are a few lessons that we should learn from history. One of these is that the Christian church did not spring suddenly from nowhere. It built on the foundation of Judaism, Zoroastrianism, and other traditions. While we should and certainly will evolve our own symbolism, rituals, and even music, I believe that we will, at least initially, need to appropriate and adopt these things from Christianity and other sources as needed. We could profit from taking the best from these sources and adapting these observances to our needs. This has several advantages. First, the rituals and music will seem familiar to those of a Christian background—or whatever background we draw from—and they will be more comfortable with these things than something new and strange. Perhaps we should deliberately pull from some other traditions as well to give them a point of contact with the new religion and religious organization.

I believe we have much to learn from the world's religions and religious institutions. They have evolved psychologically satisfying symbols, rituals and music over centuries and millennia. I don't believe we should stoop to mere imitation, but we should profit from both the mistakes and hard won lessons of all these sources, and select and adapt the best of all of them to fit our needs. Isaac Newton said that he stood on the shoulders of the scientific giants who preceded him. No doubt we will be standing on the shoulders of giants as well—the spiritual giants of ages past.

Richard Bain is an electrical engineer and an editor of Innerface International. He is a longtime student of The Urantia Book.

There is Always One More Move

Rev. Gregory Young

A little boy went to the grocery store and asked the clerk for a box of Duz detergent. The clerk said, "Son, what do you need detergent for?" The little boy said, "I want to wash my dog." The clerk said, "Well son, that Duz detergent is pretty strong for washing a little dog." The little boy said, "That is what I want." The clerk said, "All right," and he sold him the Duz, but he advised, "Now you be careful when you wash your dog. That detergent is very strong; it might kill him." The little boy said, "I'll be careful." He took the box of detergent home.

About a week later the little boy came back to the store. The clerk recognized him and said, "Son, how's your dog?" The little boy said, "I'm afraid he's dead." The store clerk replied, "Oh, I'm sorry, but I did try to warn you that the Duz was pretty strong to wash your dog with." The little boy shook his head and said, "I don't think it was the Duz that did it. I think it was the rinse cycle that got him."

Sometimes it feels like we've been through the rinse cycle, doesn't it?

The past few years have sent much of our sense of hope in life through the rinse cycle. A home-grown terrorist sets off a bomb in front of the Federal building in Oklahoma City killing scores of people, many of them children and we ask, "Is there any hope?" T.W.A. Flight 800 crashes to the sea killing all on board, and we ask, "Is there any hope?" A man or woman falls onto economic hard times, and they wonder how they will be able to provide for their families, and they ask, "Is there any hope?" A person struggles just to make it to the other side of the day, caught up in the grip of a dark depression, and they ask, "Is there any hope?"

This gospel which Jesus presented is the ultimate message of hope in the midst of despair and defeat.

If we could step back for a moment from the specific content of the gospel and ask ourselves this question, "What is it telling us, how does it apply to the tragedies and challenges of living? What would it say?" I suspect that the gospel is telling us something very significant. For it was in the midst of the worst possible atmosphere, one of the most depressing periods of history that Jesus entered our world. It was, the Gospel of Luke tells us, when Quirinius was governor of Syria that God entered the arena of human affairs in the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. In this quiet and humble manner God began the rescue of our planet from its confusion and despair. This gospel which Jesus presented is the ultimate message of hope in the midst of despair and defeat.

Perhaps we will never know how much has been born out of life's challenges, difficulties, and seemingly hopeless

situations. Most of the psalms were born in the wilderness, yes even the joyous and thankful ones. Most of Paul's epistles were written from prison. The greatest thoughts of the great thinkers have all passed through the fires of criticism and persecution. Some of the greatest accomplishments of human life have come from persons who at one time or another were stuck in the depths of some personal hell.

Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote that hope never spread her golden wings but in unfathomable seas. And this is exactly what the gospel is trying to tell us: not to dismiss the tragedies of life, not to ignore that bad things happen, but that in the midst of that darkness to look for the light of the spirit of the living God, and to realize that no matter how terrible and oppressive the dark, the darkness will not overcome the light.

The author of the book of Hebrews is telling us that we have a sure and certain anchor for our soul in Jesus. I suspect that we all have learned how transitory, how fickle, it is to put the entire stock of our hope in the things of this world. When life's storms rage and throw so much at us, we oftentimes discover that the lesser anchors we hope will keep us from going adrift on life's turbulent seas do not hold fast.

The greatest thoughts of the great thinkers have all passed through the fires of criticism and persecution. Some of the greatest accomplishments of human life have come from persons who at one time or another were stuck in the depths of some personal hell.

Mark Twain and another man were walking to church one Sunday morning. As they stepped into the street, a heavy rain began. "Do you think it will ever stop?" the man asked. "It always has," Twain replied. This bit of Twain humor is a commentary on life.

A difficult or unpleasant situation may seem to go on relentlessly. Like the heavy downpour of a dark storm, it will end; eventually it passes and the darkness turns to light. Some problems may feel so crushing, so persistent and consuming, that they may cause us to ask, "Will it ever end? Is there any hope?" When that doubt plagues your mind, remember that you are not alone in your darkness. Even in the midst of the valley of the shadow of death, even though the earth shake and the mountains fall into the sea, even though we make our bed, as the psalm says, in the pit of hell, God is with us to sustain us if we are but willing to accept God's help. Through every trial and in the presence of every hardship, spirit-born souls are sustained by that hope which transcends all fear, because the love of God is shed abroad in all hearts by the presence of the Father's divine Spirit. With God's sustaining strength, and with the love of God expressed through caring human relationships, you will make it through the storm.

Last summer I was walking through the yard when I saw a tiny little spider seemingly suspended in the air right in front

of me. It looked as if it were floating there, yet it was climbing. I looked up to see where it was climbing—to a high limb on an immense tree. Its task looked utterly hopeless. To make matters worse, the wind was blowing briskly, causing that little spider to lose ground in its effort to climb to that high limb. But nobody had told that spider that its goal was impossible, that its efforts were futile. That little spider didn't seem to be discouraged by its slips and setbacks; it kept climbing, and eventually it did make it to that limb. Scientist and author Loren Eiseley described our world as a place "where even a spider refuses to lie down and die if a rope can still be spun to a star."

Why do you suppose that so many people come to church on Christmas Eve and Easter? Holiday Tradition? Perhaps, but I have another idea. I believe people are drawn to this place and others like it because on these holy days they know that these holidays should say something about hope, and they come, I believe, out of a yearning to have a sense of hope rekindled deep in their being once again.

In closing, let me remind many of you who remember the world famous, champion chess player, Bobby Fisher. He was known the world over for his brilliance and skill in the game of chess. One summer, while on vacation in Europe, Fisher continued his favorite hobby, visiting art galleries and museums. In one particular museum, he came across a very interesting painting. The picture so captivated him that he stood there approximately six hours, studying, staring intensely at it. As you might imagine, since he was a connoisseur of chess, the picture was of a chess game. It was, however, unlike any other game he had ever seen. On one side of the board sat the devil with a smug smile on his face. On the other side sat a young man with tears rolling down his face, sweat cascading down his brow, biting his fingernails nervously. The devil was reaching out to make the last move. The young man was terrified at the prospect of how the game would end. One look at the name of the picture reveals why the devil was smiling and the young man was petrified. The name of the painting was "Checkmate." As the devil reached to make the last move, there was absolutely nothing that the young man could do to resolve or change the situation.

Having stood there approximately six hours, Bobby Fisher finally said to somebody nearby, "Bring me a chess board." He duplicated on his board the game that was in the picture. After a few more moments, a smile came across Fisher's face. He said, "Young man, I wish that you could hear me, for I have some good news for you. Things are not as dark and bleak as they seem. I have studied this game more than six hours, and I have discovered that it's all right to allow the devil to make his move because after he makes his move, I have found that there is one more move on the board! Let him make his move; you will be the one who says, 'Checkmate,' because there is one more move on the board."

My friends, whatever pain or suffering you bear, what ever personal darkness you may be walking through, please do not give up on hope, don't give up on life. God is with us, and for us, telling us that there is one more move on life's board! Christ comes to us, Emmanuel, and with his coming he brings to us the undefeatable hope of Spirit mastery and transcendence!

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

Psalms Today **The Saving Presence**

The subconscious mind speaks to us according to our hungers and desires. All too often, our sensual needs and egocentric motives take precedence and dictate their guidance to our plans.

When civil law or the social good block our path, this scheming inner design justifies our premeditations.

Our selfish intentions are styled in respectable clothing. The thwarted ego assures us that we have our rights, that our indulgences are justified.

Your steadfast love, O Lord, does not abandon us to this dark side of our nature; our lower urges are challenged by the integrity of your indwelling presence.

Your saving grace reaches us even in the midst of corruption and despair; our fragmented and imperfect lives are saved by your loving guidance.

You rescue us from the pitfalls, the addictions, and the evil lures which have captivated us; and you save us from ourselves.

How precious is your steadfast love, O God!
We children of earth live by its warmth in deep confidence and unshakable security.

Your Spirit is our foundation of life; in your light we see the truths of eternity.

As we strive to live by these great truths of your kingdom, all other needful things become ours as well.

Indeed, your blessings are so abundant and so deeply satisfying, we feel an eternal debt of love which grows each day.

What an overflowing fellowship of love is bringing joy to our days and meaning to our destiny!

Significant Books

Why Christianity Must Change or Die

A New Reformation of the Church's Faith and Practice

John Shelby Spong

Harper San Francisco, 1998, 228 pp.

John Shelby Spong is the Episcopal Bishop of Newark, New Jersey, and author of fifteen books, including the best selling *Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism*. He is a controversial cleric. Bishop Spong remarks that "the drumbeat of hostility from conservative, fundamentalist, and evangelical circles has been my daily bread," (p.xiv) and he has been the recipient of sixteen death threats.

The source of this hostility is Spong's rejection of a personal God, the divinity of Jesus, the atonement doctrine, and heaven and hell—although he believes in an ambiguous form of immortality. He calls himself "a believer in exile." (p. xix) The linchpin of Spong's theology is his rejection of the theistic God. "The replacement of the theistic God of the past with the inescapable God who is the Ground of Being is, in my opinion, the prerequisite to sounding forth the mighty chorus of the future." (p. 70) He accepts Paul Tillich's concept of God as indigenous to human nature, and he is very close to understanding God's presence in human experience presented by the concept of the Thought Adjuster in *The Urantia Book*.

Interestingly, Bishop Spong accepts the teachings and actions of Jesus in the Gospels that relate to human ethical behavior—no matter if the portrayals are not literally accurate—but does not accept Jesus' testimony of God. "It was the being of Jesus, the full humanity of Jesus, that ultimately revealed the meaning of God." (p. 132) Spong's entire theology is based on the experience of God which he points out is the same from generation to generation. The only thing that changes is the explanation of that experience. Although Bishop Spong holds a nonorthodox view of God

and Jesus, he constructs a theology that has all of the practical aspects of Christianity. He redefines concepts like transcendence—the endless depths of life, and prayer—focus time. "If prayer is to continue to be a part of my life I must start in a new place that requires, first of all, a new way of envisioning God." (p. 142)

The book ends with a view of the emerging and future church. "I suspect that both the liturgy and the structure of that emerging Church will have a very different look—so different, in fact, that I wonder if we will see continuity between the Church of yesterday and the Church of tomorrow." (p. 183) We are, he believes, on the threshold of major changes in religion. "In less than a hundred years I am certain that the shape of religion in general and Christianity in particular will be clear." (p. 227) And his final testimony is, "I am first, last, and always a believer." (p.228) Bishop Spong has circulated a paper entitled "A Call for a New Reformation" dated 5/10/98 in which he lists twelve theses and says, "So I set these theses today before the Christian world and I stand ready to debate each of them as we prepare to enter the third millennium."

Bishop Spong's religion centers around his experience with the indwelling presence of God. In many ways its practical expression is harmonious with the teachings of the Fifth Epochal Revelation. This religious view would really soar if it had the wings of the spiritual cosmology and vision of Deity and Reality in *The Urantia Book*,

-MJS

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

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