

Spiritual Fellowship Journal

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A Question of Priorities

The Ascendancy of the Fifth Epochal Revelation

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.

The Spiritual Fellowship Journal

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Transition and Transformation

This is the tenth year of the publication of *The Spiritual Fellowship Journal*. After thirty-five years of interfacing with mainline Christian ministers, we started the Journal in the hope that we could get Christian leaders dialoguing about *The Urantia Book*. Although we had some Christian clergy using the Urantia Papers in their preaching and teaching, it became apparent that they had too much at stake to become openly involved with the Fifth Epochal Revelation. So in 1998, we shifted the mission of the Journal to laying foundations for the advent of new religious organizations to carry the Fifth Epochal Revelation throughout the world. The new mission of the Journal was to: *Promote Theological, Philosophical, and Polity Discussions Germane to an Appropriate Symbolism and Socioreligious Expression of the Fifth Epochal Revelation*.

At this time the Christ Michael Corps for Publishing and Outreach in Boulder, Colorado joined us in promoting discussions in the Journal with new Editorial and Resource Consultants. In my mid octogenarian years, I have increasingly had the conviction that I should relinquish my position as editor of the Journal and devote my remaining time on planet earth to other writing and developing the infrastructure of a new religious organization. This Spring, 2001 issue of the Journal will be the last issue of the Journal in which I will serve as editor. Our Associate Editor, Merlyn Cox, and the Editorial Committee, Bud Bromley, Judy Smith, Irene Sprunger, and Jack Williams have done an excellent job in maintaining the high quality of the Journal. I am deeply grateful for their invaluable help and inspiration.

The Journal, in my judgment, does have potentials to make significant contributions to the Urantia movement. I am happy to report that Larry Mullins has agreed to take over the editorship of the Journal and it will be published by Penumbra Press, which publishes materials for the Christ Michael Corps for Outreach in Boulder, Colorado. Larry is an accomplished speaker and writer, and a long time student of the Urantia Papers. He is author of: *Jesus: God & Man*, *Immature People with Power: How to Handle Them*, *Get Real*, and *A History of the Urantia Papers*. Larry is CEO of UltraSales, Inc., a nationally syndicated advertising and marketing business. *The Spiritual Fellowship Journal*, in my judgment, will be in excellent hands. Larry has asked me to write a column in the Journal under his editorship.

In addition to working on *A Discussion Manual* for the Urantia Papers and rewriting the *Psalms*, Sherilyn Henry and I are organizing a Research Board composed of subgroups to research and create resources that will be used in initiating the infrastructure for a new religious organization, *The Spiritual Fellowship*, based on the Fifth Epochal Revelation that will provide spiritual nourishment from birth to death. This will be in process for a number of years. We believe the time is right for this endeavor. The heart and underlying dynamic of The Spiritual Fellowship is the faith that all people of the world are beloved by God, and that each is a member of the loving family of God.

-MJS

A Seismic Shift in Christianity

The Editorial in the January, 2001 issue of *Theology Today* begins with the statement, "The jury is still out on whether mainline Protestantism can be saved." The author, Ellen T. Charry, goes on to point out that two heroic attempts are being made to restructure Protestant Christianity. The evangelical option stressing personal salvation and in-your-face evangelism poses a threat to the institutional church. The progressive-secular option is appealing to "people who find organized religion irrelevant, ineffective, or repressive." The Center for Progressive Christianity maintains that "Jesus Christ is no longer the Son of God, the second Person of the Trinity, the redeemer, but one of many gateways into the realm of God." There is a general recognition that denominationalism has lost its relevance.

Christianity has lost much of its spiritual dynamic. As the leaders of the Christian churches search for spiritual renewal, they may gradually be exposed to the Urantia Papers. This exposure will probably continue for decades. During this time the latent spiritual hunger of society will create conditions that are favorable for the organization of churches or religious institutions inspired by the Fifth Epochal Revelation.

We should remember that changes in religion always come through the influence of individuals and organizations at the grass roots of society. I believe the most effective carriers of the Fifth Epochal Revelation will be individual religious activities and religious organizations in local communities. Sooner or later there will be inspired religious leaders with ability who sense a calling to initiate such churches or religious institutions.

-MJS

The End of Christendom

Recently, I read a little book entitled, *The End of Christendom and the Future of Christianity*, written by Douglas John Hall, a Canadian theologian, who is Professor of Christian Theology at McGill University. The thesis of the book is that Christianity is undergoing a major transition. "I believe that commitment to the established institutional model of the church—to Christendom in its various institutional forms—is the single most important cause of inertia and the retardation of intentional and creative response to this great transition." (p. 7)

Professor Hall believes the hand of God is in this change. He thinks that this intentional disestablishment must be "a work of theology." This Post-Christian era must "rediscover our own distinctive ontological foundations." (p. 54) Dr. Hall does not specifically say that we must rediscover the religion of Jesus, but I think he implies that this is the goal of the new spiritual paradigm of the future. We must make a new beginning. "Today we are constrained by the divine Spirit to rediscover the possibilities of littleness." (p. 66)

This book is illustrative of the reoccurring motif of the imaginative prophetic thinking in the growing edge of contemporary Christianity. The Most Highs, in my judgment, are preparing our world for the Fifth Epochal Revelation. The conflict and lawsuits in the Urantia movement are minor distracting events in the major mission and purpose of the Fifth Epochal Revelation.

-MJS

A Restatement of the Gospels

Like *The Jefferson Bible*, Preston Thomas, founder of the Einstein School, has compiled a restatement of the Gospels. The first edition of *The Life and Teachings of Jesus* was published in May of 1992, and the second edition in November of 2000. This book is a succinct arrangement of the New Testament story following the chronology of *The Urantia Book* narrative. It is an effective presentation of the events in the life and teachings of Jesus.

The "Thomas Bible" is an efficient way to introduce people to the Gospel story or an expedient method of reviewing the life and teachings of Jesus. After years of reading *The Urantia Book* and the New Testament Gospels, I tend to forget where specific statements or accounts are located. The Thomas narrative is a convenient way to clarify my memory. You may find other uses for this interface between the Gospels and *The Urantia Book*.

-MJS

Interface

View From the Trenches

I believe there is a necessary evangelical imperative to faith. All of us want to share the Good News of the Fatherhood of God, and of ourselves as his human family, as witnessed in the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth.

Secondly, we also have a passion to introduce them to the expanded witness of this Good News in the Fifth Epochal Revelation, *The Urantia Book*. Without the first, the second is fruitless; and without the second, the first lacks the context for its fullest understanding.

To whom are we sent to share this great Good News? To all the world, of course. And where is the harvest most ripe?

The world is undergoing a mighty transformation, and a purely materialistic understanding of life, nourished and undergirded by a narrow and presumptuous understanding of science, is giving way to a more wholistic world view where the realm of spirit is not just speculative, but realized as paramount.

And where, then, is the forum, the real life situations, where we may enter into dialogue concerning this greater, truer, more joyful, and more liberating understanding of life? Well, it's virtually everywhere—in the streets, the universities, the work place, in any gathering where honest searching is going on.

It is even going on in the churches. Despite the massive inertia of institutional religion, the defensive strategies of denominations, and the addiction of churches to dysfunctional forms and relationships, it is a field ripe for harvest.

We need to clarify: The Good News has indeed been proclaimed and shared by the church, but its power and witness has been muted by infighting, competition, bigotry, and superstition. Its divisions are an embarrassment and contradiction to the message it proclaims. The Christian church remains one of the greatest impediments to its own stated task.

Nevertheless, while "Jesus did not found the so-called Christian Church, ... he has, in every manner consistent with his nature, *fostered* it as the best existent exponent of his lifework on earth." (p. 2085) And the authors of *The Urantia Book* suggest it will someday awaken and be transformed by the advanced revelation of Jesus' life and teachings, albeit the source of that awakening may come from outside the church.

I know and share regularly with caring, searching people in the church who are passionate about their faith. I see this as a "view from the trenches," where the nitty-gritty faith struggles of day to day living get played out. This great reservoir of faith and good will and searching minds and hearts is one of the best kept secrets to many in the Urantia Movement whose experience with institutional religion has been so negative.

I believe these communities represent a field ripe for the proclamation of a fuller understanding of the Good News as revealed in *The Urantia Book*. I sometimes feel like Paul preaching at Athens, who after looking at all the signs of religion around him, begins by saying, "I perceive you are a very religious people. ... I even saw an altar with an inscription that read, 'To an unknown God.' What you worship but do not know—this is what I proclaim."

As the pastor of a church, I sometimes want to say, "I perceive you are a people of great faith and charity, and your proclamation of faith in Jesus of Nazareth has borne much fruit in the Spirit. But let me now show you a more excellent understanding of the One whom you proclaim, an understanding of God's good and gracious ways, of his Incarnation in Jesus of Nazareth that will not only confirm your deepest hopes, but will exceed them, and add great joy and comfort to your life."

I believe the Christian church will someday be transformed by this new revelation. As to what it will look like, and what its institutional expression will be, I don't know. The changes may be so dramatic that we will recognize little from the past. But I believe there will always be *some* institutional expression of any community of faith.

If this is true, and the church will eventually be transformed by this revelation, then why are we talking about new institutions and expressions for the Urantia movement? Why not just work in the traditional churches?

I believe it is because of the obvious resistance of the church now and the need for people and families in the movement to be nurtured in a setting more closely in keeping with their understanding of God's revelation in Jesus of Nazareth, as it is confirmed and expanded in *The Urantia Book*.

I can envision families in the Urantia movement with a healthy participation in a traditional church and a Urantia church at the same time. A Urantia church will be a place for many searching people, as well as a place for the creative expression of many whose faith cannot be adequately expressed or shared in a traditional church.

What will this look like? It may in some instances look a lot like a present day church. I suspect, and hope, it will be diverse, flexible, constantly changing and reshaping itself in such a fashion that people in each generation can choose the kinds of communities and structures that best nourish and address their needs. And although such institutional expressions will always be secondary to faith, and carry with them their own unwanted baggage and dangers, we can pray they will be instruments for the glory of God and the transformation of the world. No lesser objective is worthy of our efforts and the revelation that has inspired us in its service.

-Merlyn Cox

Creative Outreach

Teachers, Leaders, and Trembling Hands

The early Urantians were told, according to a memo written by Bill Sadler, Jr. in 1955, titled *The Timing of the Urantia Book*, that the Urantia Papers belonged to "the era immediately to follow the conclusion of the present ideological struggle." Fortunately for us, *The Urantia Book* was not delayed until Russian Communism collapsed. The early Urantians were also told:

But the publication of the Book has not been postponed until that (possibly) somewhat remote date. An early publication of the Book has been provided so that it may be in hand for the training of leaders and teachers.

So it was that a great many Urantian servant-leaders and teachers in those earlier days were put on hold, so to speak. Moreover, the Urantia Movement itself developed a culture that became generally insular and inbred. There have been exceptions, of course. But those exceptions were usually individuals who blazed their own trails, defied conventional wisdom, and who ploughed new ground. These lonesome Urantian missionaries may have taken some small comfort in the final words of Bill Sadler's memo:

You who dedicate your lives to the service of the Book and the Brotherhood can little realize the import of your doings. You will doubtless live and die without realizing you are participating in the birth of a new age of religion on this world.

Once more, there were exceptions to this statement. Many of the early teachers and servant-leaders seemed to have an intuition that they were laboring for a great religious cause. Perhaps none of our earlier teachers and servant-leaders had a grand vision of our task that sur-

passed the vision of Dr. Meredith Justin Sprunger. And now, after 10 years of publishing the *Spiritual Fellowship Journal*, Dr. Sprunger passes the torch to other readers. He will be there for us still, but he will generally entrust this vineyard to other hands. I confess that my hands are trembling as I accept a role in the task of continuing the *Spiritual Fellowship Journal*. Because, in my own view, the *Spiritual Fellowship Journal* has been a beacon of light on what is generally a dark and bleak horizon. I tremble because Meredith and Irene Sprunger, Merlyn Cox, Bud Bromley, Judy Smith, and Jack Williams are a difficult team to follow.

The Journal will not change in format or in its mission. New teachers and servant-leaders must, however, come forth into the vineyard that has been so lovingly cultivated and prepared for us by Dr. Sprunger and the editorial team of the Journal. We are called to take this treasure and to seek to bring the *Spiritual Fellowship Journal* to a new level for a new millennium.

Where are these new teachers and servant-leaders who are equal to this task to be found?

Actually, they abound within the Urantia Movement. I became acquainted with some of them when Meredith and I were preparing *A History of the Urantia Papers*. And there are more, a great many more Urantians, with great gifts to offer and no clear path of service before them. These Urantians are usually not found in the familiar list of speakers at conferences. Their articles are rarely printed in official publications. They are not often called upon or sought out for counsel about the future of the Revelation. Yet, these forgotten believers may well represent the bright and shining future of the Fifth Epochal Revelation.

Some of these forgotten Urantians have been around a very long time, and others are quite young. Some have quietly served, or are serving, in the Urantia Brotherhood, the Fellowship, the IUA, and the Foundation. Some have yet to be called upon. Some are Americans, and some serve in other countries.

The hour has come for these unheralded Urantian servant-leaders and teachers. The time has come to step out of the closet and, with deeds, not words, proclaim themselves to be Urantian servant-leaders. There is a hungry and forlorn flock to be fed outside of the small and circumscribed Urantian culture. There are articles to be written, eager young ears to be filled with the glory of the new and everlasting religion of Jesus. There are multimedias to be created, books to be written, churches to be built. There are some *Living the Teachings* groups to be started, and untold tasks before us.

Urantians are united by a shared vision of the Mission of the Urantia Papers. Each of us carries a part of that vision, and the composite will be formed by the "Genius of the People." Our circle will be as broad as necessary to include each person of good will. Our politics will be simply and solely the greatest good for all concerned. Our religion will be Urantian.

Over six decades ago it was written, "*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.*" (p. 2082) Over six decades is a long time for Urantians to quiver. Many Urantians are now looking within, and they hear a still, small voice saying: "*Arise now, I have need of you. Go forth.*"

As the Master stated on page 1731: "*The religion of the spirit leaves you forever free to follow the truth wherever the leadings of the spirit may take you. And who can judge—perhaps this spirit may have something to impart to this generation which other generations have refused to hear?*"

- Larry Mullins

Psalms Today **Creative Service**

I aspire, Universal Father, to new expressions of spiritual service indigenous to the unique personality you have given me.

I long to achieve the nobility of character which feeds the wellsprings of creativity.

Deliver me from the foibles of spiritual immaturity:

Pining for optimum conditions rather than joyously accepting the rigorous living required by evolutionary experience;

Pleading that you solve problems that I should courageously grapple with myself; and,

Equating my circumscribed world with your larger vision.

Enlarge my appreciation of your endless Paradise resources mediated to us through the Supreme ministry of our Universe Sovereign.

I am enriched and invigorated by your presence and partnership in service and soul actualization.

I rejoice in the potentials of your high calling.

Keep me ever constant, steadfast, and sensitively tuned to your truth, beauty, and goodness!

Truth, What is Truth—Who Knows?

Kenneth T. Glasziou

To many of its readers, *The Urantia Book*, from the moment of its publication in 1955, became either a fictional heresy or an infallible iconoclastic replacement for an outdated Bible.

I still recall my first visit to a Urantia Book study group where it was dogmatically proclaimed that to discover just one error in this book would irreversibly nullify its status as revelation. No-one disagreed. How did experienced early readers, claiming to have multiple cover to cover readings of the text, overlook the repeated denials by the book's authors of infallibility for their revelation? Almost fifty years later, the farce still continues.

Underpinning the grant of infallibility was the book's extensive cosmology with its panoramic depiction of the seven superuniverses, the outer space levels, all surrounding a hidden Central Universe called Havona at the center of which was Paradise itself—all seen as revealed knowledge that far outstripped the human knowledge of those times. Thus it was undeniable, and unexplainable, coming at a time when Hubble had just made his revision for the age of his expanding universe from its initial 500 million years to 2 billion years—still 2.5 billion years less than the 4.5 billion years given by the book for the solar system, an age which received scientific support in 1955 through the radioactive dating of meteoric materials.

By 1960, the universe age had been expanded to 8-10 billion years and the discovery of the mid-Atlantic ridge had upset the almost total rejection by geologists of the continental drift hypothesis upon which the Urantia Papers had based their evolutionary story of life on our planet. The book was infallible after all—except for the mildly expressed views of one reader, Dr Meredith J. Sprunger, whose academic contacts enabled him to glean that the book's cosmology, taken as a whole, was only at approximately the same level as was orthodox science in the early 1930's—but was now, in parts, outdated.

The second gross, but persistent, misreading of the Papers concerns attitudes toward Christians and Christianity. A large and vocal group of readers saw both of these as irrelevant, intractable adherents to an outmoded Bible, a matter solely their own fault and rectifiable only by their unconditional acceptance of the Papers. Again there was a small voice crying from the wilderness, that of Dr. Sprunger and his associates. Together with their Spiritual Fellowship Journal, they initiated positive action to bring the Urantia revelation to the notice of

Christians whose original religion of the spirit had strayed from its earlier spiritual foundation to become an almost universal espousal of the religion of authority.

But how did such antagonistic opposition to Christians and Christianity develop in the face of the repeatedly expressed hopes in the Papers that this revelation was to be the catalyst for the return of individual Christians and "the church that bears his name" to the spiritual status of an individualized and personal relationship with the indwelling spirit of our Father-God? Can we make sense of what has happened? Apparently it has happened before:

"It was very difficult for the apostles to understand the Master's reluctance to make positive pronouncements relative to scientific, social, economic, and political problems.

They did not fully realize that his earth mission was exclusively concerned with revelations of spiritual and religious truths." (1839)

Since the Fifth Epochal Revelation contains an expanded version of the Fourth Epochal Revelation, and then elaborates on Jesus and his mission throughout the Papers, might we not have expected that the mission of the Fifth could have had a similar motive to the Fourth? If so, the above lines could read:

"It was very difficult for the Forum members to understand the revelators' reluctance to make positive pronouncements relative to scientific, social, economic, and political problems.

They did not realize that this Urantian mission was to be exclusively concerned with revelations of spiritual and religious truths."

The frustration of the revelators is revealed in the following indictment made after about twenty years of contact experience with the Sadler group through the sleeping subject in the attempt to upgrade their receptiveness to things of the spirit: "If you only knew what you are in contact with you would not ask such trivial questions. You would rather ask such questions as might elicit answers of supreme value to the human races." (from *History of the Urantia Movement*, by Dr W. S. Sadler, 1960).

Dr. Sadler then makes this telling remark, "Later on that night, one of our number said: 'Now they have asked for it—let us give them questions that no human being can answer.'" And in a section entitled "The Forum Begins to Ask Questions," we find, "We decided to start out with questions pertaining to the origin of the cosmos, Deity, creation, and such other subjects as were far beyond the present day-knowledge of all humankind."

The following Sunday, questions were brought in by Forum members, sorted, and presented. "Shortly thereafter, the first Urantia Paper appeared in answer to these questions... This was the procedure followed throughout the many years of reception of the Urantia Papers. No questions—no Papers."

The frustration of the revelators again shows through in the section entitled "The First Urantia Papers": "The first group of Papers numbered 57. We then received a communication suggesting that since we could now ask many and much more intelligent questions, the supervising agencies and personalities... would engage to enlarge the revelation and to expand the Papers in accordance with our new questions."

Apparently all the Papers of Parts 1 to 3 were given in response to questions. Reading between the lines, it appears the revelators could not get the questions they really wanted, questions that would "elicit answers of supreme value to the human race." Perhaps that is why Part 4 was provided independently of this question and answer procedure—which may lead us to conclude that most of the truly revelatory material in the Papers that is "concerned with revelations of spiritual and religious truths" is to be found in the Papers that constitute Part 4.

The Meaning of the Word "Cosmology"

On page 1109 of the book the revelators refer to some new developments that they could foresee, then remark: "but we are forbidden to include such humanly undiscovered facts in the revelatory records. Let it be made clear that revelations are not necessarily inspired. The cosmology of these revelations is *not inspired*. It is limited by our permission for the co-ordination and sorting of present-day knowledge. While divine or spiritual insight is a gift, *human wisdom must evolve*."

It is essential to understand that "cosmology" in the Urantia Papers does not mean astrophysics. The revelators use of the word cosmology has little relationship to its current meaning as the study of astronomy and astrophysics. In the Papers it has its traditional meaning that covers topics as far from its current meaning as St. Thomas Aquinas' cosmological argument, metaphysics, or features of the world as a whole, inclusive of speculative philosophy.¹

Probably eighty percent or more of Parts 1-3 could be contained within the mantle of the early twentieth century use of that word cosmology. Its current usage as referring almost exclusively to astrophysics did not really become general until well after the time of receipt of the Papers.

Cosmology, as it is used by the revelators, is the primary subject of remarks such as: "Information and Spring, 2001

intelligence, gleaned from even high sources, is only relatively complete, locally accurate, and personally true." (42) "Conceptual frames of the universe are only relatively true;..." (1260) "...within a few short years, many of our statements regarding the physical sciences will stand in need of revision... Truth may be but relatively inspired... statements with reference to cosmology are never inspired...." (1109)

"No revelation short of the attainment of the Universal Father can ever be complete. All other celestial ministrations are no more than partial, transient, and practically adapted to local conditions in time and space. While such admissions as this may possibly detract from the immediate force and authority of all revelations, the time has arrived on Urantia when it is advisable to make such frank statements, even at the risk of weakening the future influence and authority of this, the most recent of the revelations of truth to the mortal races of Urantia." (1008)

Receipt of the Papers

If we hark back to the acknowledgements at the end of the Foreword, we find, "But we know that there dwells within the human mind a fragment of God, and that there sojourns with the human soul the Spirit of Truth; and we further know that these spirit forces conspire to enable material man to grasp the reality of spiritual values and to comprehend the philosophy of universe meanings. But even more certainly we know that these spirits of the Divine Presence are able to assist man in the spiritual appropriation of all truth contributory to the enhancement of the ever-progressing reality of personal religious experience—God-consciousness." (17)

The above statement is summarized by Dr Sadler in the section entitled, "How we Got the Urantia Papers" as: "The Revelators depend upon the indwelling Adjusters and the Spirit of Truth to help us in the appropriation of truth in the Urantia Revelation." However, Forum members did not even ask the right questions, let alone attempt the "appropriation of truth in the Urantia Revelation."

Recognition of spiritual and religious truth and spiritual meanings and values is virtually impossible for us humans unless, by faith, we enter into an individual contract with the indwelling spirit forces of Deity to always seek to do the Father's will. Only then will true revelation become real to us—but as individuals and on a personal basis. The truth of this reality seems to have remained unrecognized among Forum members.

Thus it appears that the whole of the phase in which the Forum received Parts 1 to 3, about 10 years, was

Truth, cont.

actually a training phase for the creation of a group of God-conscious, spiritualized individuals, in which each would achieve a personal relationship with the Father-Spirit. Subsequently this group was to be a testing ground, a sounding board for the production of a new revelation "exclusively concerned with revelations of spiritual and religious truths."

If this speculation approximates the truth, then it appears the plan did not achieve the desired result. A compromise became necessary and our planet received the new, major revelation, now Part 4 of The Urantia Book, complete, all in one piece, but untested with regard to human appreciation and comprehension. But perhaps Part 4 was also a compromise? And the new revelation is still to come—for what else can these Part 4 comments mean? "The great hope of Urantia lies in the possibility of a new revelation...High-gear spiritual performances must await a new revelation and the more general acceptance of the real religion of Jesus." (2086)

This leaves open an arena for speculation on what happened, or should have happened, with Parts 1-3. Maybe their content was never intended for publication as a whole—which offers an explanation for some of the peculiarities, errors, etc., present in some of the Papers of this group.

What Then?

Having assimilated the true message of the Papers and having attained a personal relationship with our indwelling spirit forces, what then? What is the purpose? What are we to do? The Papers inform us that we must "be" before we can "do." By this they mean, "When men see you so love them, and when they behold how fervently you serve them, they will perceive that you have become faith-fellows of the kingdom of heaven, and they will follow after the Spirit of Truth which they see in your lives." (2044)

It is because of what we become as faith fellows, exponents of living as Jesus lived, demonstrating the Spirit of Truth in our lives, that we can serve in a manner that may aid the spiritual growth of our brothers and sisters. But note that at least initially, the expected audience is Christian—for only Christians are likely to comprehend the significance of the Spirit of Truth, Jesus spirit, at work in our lives.

There are now about two billion nominal Christians on this planet. It should not be surprising that such people would constitute the main target for a revelation that devotes about forty five percent of its content to the central figure of Christianity and the nature of his Father-God.

Also, there are not less than twenty-five paragraphs in the Papers that support the concept that a primary aim of the Papers is the spiritualization of authoritarian Christianity:

"The great hope of Urantia lies in the possibility of a new revelation of Jesus with a new and enlarged presentation of his saving message which would spiritually unite in loving service the numerous families of his present-day professed followers. (2086)

"The living Jesus is the only hope of a possible unification of Christianity. The true church—the Jesus brotherhood—is invisible, spiritual, and is characterized by *unity*, not necessarily by *uniformity*...And this brotherhood is destined to become a *living organism* in contrast to an institutionalized social organization." (2085)

"But paganized and socialized Christianity stands in need of new contact with the uncompromised teachings of Jesus; it languishes for lack of a new vision of the Master's life on earth. A new and fuller revelation of the religion of Jesus is destined to conquer an empire of materialistic secularism and to overthrow a world sway of mechanistic naturalism. Urantia is now quivering on the very brink of one of its most amazing and enthralling epochs of social readjustment, moral quickening, and spiritual enlightenment." (2082)

And there are many, many more such statements about revelatory hopes and aims. Most Urantians have yet to realize that the mission of the revelators has little to do with "scientific, social, economic, and political problems." Like the Fourth Epochal Revelation, its Urantian mission was intended to be dominated by the revelation of spiritual and religious truth.

Logically that mission must be directed to Christians and the Christian church for, realistically, only they have the numbers sufficient to permit followers of other religions to actually observe the Spirit of Truth fully functional in human lives. Hence only if the mission to Christians succeeds can there be any rational expectation that a significant proportion of "God-knowing believers" from other religions (Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, etc) will be provided with good cause to ponder the uniqueness and virtues of a truly living religion of the spirit.

What is Our Individual Task?

•Primarily we need to seek a personal relationship with our God-Spirit within, leading us to God-consciousness.

•Secondly, we need to seek always to do God's will. How can we know? Simply by the feeling of peace that comes with each decision.

•Thirdly, how can we serve our fellows, yet give God the credit? One way is group service but if recipients are to know of the Urantia revelation, an identifying icon would help. Little else is needed other than our heartfelt faith.

Alternative Scenarios for the Revelation

Most early readers of the book accepted more or less unquestioningly that the whole of *The Urantia Book* was true revelation from superhuman sources. Only with the passage of time, the revealing of out-datedness in sections of the book's cosmology, plus its error content, plus the increasing knowledge about the human sources used by the book's authors, was there any call for many readers to modify their earlier view ascribing near or total infallibility to the text of the book.

Regardless of what the detailed truth really is, the fact remains that in the Urantia Papers we have, all in one place, the most advanced collection of spiritual and religious truths ever to exist on our planet.

It is largely because of the unprecedented advances in scientific knowledge over the past fifty years that many of us are being forced to rethink those earlier views. But despite all else, the quality of the book as a whole is such as to force the conclusion that it is special, it really is quite unique—and particularly so in respect to spiritual and religious truths, meanings, and values.

That is one side of the coin. The other is that there are sections that defy credulity and force the question of how could, or why did, the revelators include such materials. One scenario is that much of Parts 1-3 of the book resulted from questions of Forum members "that no human being could answer." By not answering, the revelators endangered acceptance of their credentials. By answering in a way consistent with the universe ruling proscribing unearned knowledge (1109), they were compelled to downgrade the relative truth value of their response.

Compounding our difficulties is the fact that many of the stories relevant to receipt and publication of the Urantia Papers are inconsistent to the point that the shadow of doubt hangs over all. This may lead to an alternative scenario postulating that contact with the authors of the Papers was lost soon after the receipt of Part 4, and no further contact was ever established. If so, the Sadler group were left to their own devices to

communicate the revelation to the world—which is what happened to the apostles following Jesus' resurrection.

Such a scenario could mean that the Sadler group had to decide which of the Papers they had received were truly revelatory, and which were accumulated materials resulting from the Forum members' questioning. A possibility is they avoided that decision-making by printing the lot.

There is now no sure way to find answers to these questions. Certainly many of the Papers in Parts 1-3 contain much having great spiritual value, but still could have been in response to questions from the Forum rather than being revelation for all Urantia. Part 4 must certainly be in the latter category, not only because of its history as a distinct entity but simply because it has that mysterious "ring of truth."

Basic Fundamentals of God-centered Religion

Regardless of what the detailed truth really is, the fact remains that in the Urantia Papers we have, all in one place, the most advanced collection of spiritual and religious truths ever to exist on our planet. And we have a task to complete—to make the world aware of these truths. So, in drawing upon them, what do we find is the minimum set of basic fundamentals to which all God-knowing men and women of all religions could subscribe? My choice:

- Attributes of God: God is First Source and Center, origin of all that is. God is holy, just, and good, loving, compassionate, merciful, forgiving—and "Fatherly" in the highest possible sense of that word; God is perfect in all respects.

- As God's earthly children, we recognize that God's spirit dwells within each of us seeking to inspire a personal Father-child relationship of love and trust.

- Our first duty—to seek to become God-like, to become God-aware, to become God-conscious.

- Our earthly obligation: to serve our brothers and sisters with love, and in humility, that they might know the Father-Spirit-within as we ourselves know him.

"Christianity has indeed done a great service for this world, but what is now most needed is Jesus. The world needs to see Jesus living again on earth in the experience of spirit-born mortals who effectively reveal the Master to all men." (2084)

¹*The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, The Oxford University Press, 1995.

The Great Enterprise

Richard Bain

Have you ever gone past a construction site and peeked through the fence to see what was going on? If you saw the construction when it had just started, you may have seen a large hole with some men laboring at the bottom of it. If it had rained recently, they were probably caked with mud. These men were constructing a foundation for the building that would one day occupy the site. And once the building is finished, the foundation will never be seen again until the building is one day demolished.

The building that arises on the site may be graceful and elegant; people may say, "Look at that beautiful building!" But, excepting civil engineers, how many will say, "It must have a wonderful foundation." Yet the foundation may be one of the most important elements in the building; if it cracks or shifts, that beautiful building could be destroyed. Remember that Jesus' only parable about his profession, carpentry, told us of the danger of building a house on shifting sand; he knew the importance of good foundations. Unfortunately, the only time a foundation gets publicity is when it fails. It is my contention that we are only at the beginning of a great construction project; we are laboring in the hole to build a suitable foundation for some vast structure. Though we've only just started the project, some folks expect to come past the construction site and see a finished building.

Unrealistic Expectations

There are those in the Urantia community who bemoan the fact that *The Urantia Book* isn't on the best seller list and that there aren't a million study groups around the world. Others think that there should be a worldwide Urantia religion by now. There are even those who say that the revelation has failed because it is almost unknown by the world at large. They blame either the Urantia community in general, Urantia Foundation in particular for its policies, or infighting between factions within the community. Is the revelation a failure? How much progress should we see at this point in the evolution of our community?

What were the expectations of the pioneers of our movement? One expectation was that they would be building some sort of Urantia Book based church. According to a recent book¹, Urantia Brotherhood was structured after an early model of the Presbyterian Church. To prepare for this proposed spiritual organization, the Brotherhood started a school to train and ordain teachers and leaders. But the Brotherhood evolved into a social organization, and the school eventually closed. At-

tempts through the years to establish a Urantia church have thus far failed to produce a church organization that spread beyond the area of its inception. Perhaps like Jesus' disciples, the founders of our Urantia community expected the kingdom to come soon with power and glory. It didn't. What came to the disciples and apostles was the death of their cherished leader, rejection of Jesus' teachings by much of the Jewish community, and later on, persecution by the Roman government. Where was the power? Where was the glory? But we all know the rest of the story. Christianity eventually conquered the Roman Empire. Today, with 1.9 billion adherents, Christianity is the largest religion in the world. But it took Christianity several centuries before it got organized and became a significant force in the world. I have no doubt that some sort of Urantia church or spiritual organization is needed and will emerge in the fullness of time, when conditions are ripe.

Patience and More Patience

In papers that date from the 1930's, the authors of *The Urantia Book* tell us that our planet is quivering on the brink of a great spiritual renaissance. (p. 2082) For us mere mortals, six decades is a long time to quiver. Unfortunately, statements like this one by the authors might have some folks in a state of great expectation and anticipating some great spiritual event to happen soon or at least in our lifetimes. But we need to remember that the authors have a quite different sense of time than we do. Even the Midwayers have experienced thousands of years of Urantia history; a human lifetime is but a brief episode in the saga of human history to our unseen friends. One antidote for our impatience is for us to develop the far-sightedness of our celestial brethren. Though we may not live to see our efforts come to fruition, we must not lose heart. Someone once said that when you buy a home and plant a tree, you are probably planting it so the next owner will have shade. If no one ever planted a tree because they wouldn't get to enjoy the shade of it, then few of us would have trees or shade.

When people look back a hundred years from now, will they see the Fifth Epochal Revelation and our community as failures? I don't think so. I do think that they may decide that we lacked a clearly defined vision for the future of our community. We seem to be building a foundation for some sort of structure. Will the structure be a worldwide Urantia church? What is our vision?

The Urantia Church Debate

Dr. Meredith Sprunger and Sherilyn Henry have initiated a project to plan for an organization they call "The Spiritual Fellowship." This project has alarmed a number of Urantians around the world. They apparently feel

this either isn't the time for such a spiritual organization or else they fear and distrust organizations. They are no doubt thinking of how the Christian church has abused its power in the past.

The Christian church has indeed at times suffered from the ills of institutionalism and the folly of mixing religion and politics. The schismatic nature of the church has led to a multiplicity of parallel church organizations, resulting in a great deal of rivalry and duplication of effort. It would be sad to see this splintering take place within a Urantia spiritual organization. A second problem with institutions is that their main mission sometimes evolves into self-perpetuation. And finally, institutionalizing a movement can wall its members off from other religionists. Perhaps it is just as well that a strong Urantia church or religion did not emerge earlier in the history of our movement. A line from Robert Frost's poem, "Mending Wall", tells us, "Before I built a wall, I'd ask to know what I was walling in or walling out and to whom I was likely to give offense." Once the wall goes up, the process of separating ourselves from other religious groups begins. But in some respects, a degree of separation is not necessarily undesirable. Some amount may be needed to nurture and retain the character of our community. How much separation is needed; how much is healthy? To whom do we open our doors? How large is our umbrella? Can we be all things to all people? Should we try to be? These are questions we will have to address as we build any spiritual organization. But do we even need a spiritual organization?

When people look back a hundred years from now, will they see the Fifth Epochal Revelation and our community as failures? I don't think so. I do think that they may decide that we lacked a clearly defined vision for the future of our community. We seem to be building a foundation for some sort of structure. Will the structure be a worldwide Urantia church?

There is power in organization. While admitting the potential problems of organizations, we also need to acknowledge their positive potentials. The authors of *The Urantia Book* remind us of the synergy of people cooperating together on some task. How could there be team sports without teams? How could a great skyscraper be built without someone to coordinate and direct the construction crew? A team has the structure and leadership needed to help set goals and keep the team focused on these goals. Dr. Meredith Sprunger has pointed out that we need Urantia spiritual organizations to do tasks

that are too large for individuals or even small groups to handle. But is it time to start such a spiritual organization?

Is this the appropriate time? I don't know, but I do know that we would be wise to plan for the advent of such an organization. A beautiful garden does not happen by accident, and an effective organization requires some wise forethought. And as we plan, we should observe the problems of existing religious organizations and build safeguards into the structures we construct so we can avoid these pitfalls. While we debate the strengths and weaknesses of institutions and the need for them, we should also consider the needs of individuals within our community.

Communing with Kindred Spirits

There are many Urantians who would like to worship with kindred spirits. They may now be attending some Christian church where they worship on Sunday morning. While they derive spiritual benefit from this, they no doubt regret that they cannot share much with their church friends about *The Urantia Book*. And unfortunately, worship in some Christian churches lacks creativity; it all too often consists of reciting ancient theological phrases and singing songs whose words some of us may not accept. Those of us who have studied *The Urantia Book* sense that there is a depth of worship possible that could thrill the soul and give us a feeling of genuine communion with God. We would like to reach toward this, but feel stifled by the lack of spontaneity and creativity of some Christian ritual. We feel more like observers than participants. Some Christian thinkers have lamented this lack in the church. The existentialist philosopher, Kierkegaard, was just such a thinker. He lamented that in churches now, God is the prompter, the minister is the actor, and the congregation is the audience. The way it should be is that the minister is the prompter, the members of the congregation are the actors, and God is the audience. Furthermore, some theology of the Christian church is not in harmony with the high concepts of *The Urantia Book*. A glaring example of this is the Doctrine of the Atonement. About this doctrine, the authors of *The Urantia Book* tell us, "It is an affront to God to believe, hold or teach that innocent blood must be shed in order to win his favor or to divert the fictitious divine wrath." (p. 60) Perhaps then a Urantian spiritual organization is both needed and desirable. Can this organization serve the needs of everyone?

The Broader Picture

What sort of organization will emerge from the Urantia community? As I look at the community, one striking

feature I note is how it is rapidly becoming a worldwide phenomenon. Thanks in part to the translations of *The Urantia Book* now available, people from many diverse cultures are being drawn into our community. If the emerging foundation is worldwide, the logical conclusion is that the structure built on it will be as well. Obviously, as is true with Christianity in many cultures, any church or spiritual organization that emerges within a culture will bear the imprint of that culture. And no doubt there will be elements of existing religions in that culture that appear in a Urantia religious organization within that culture. How can we achieve unity amid the diversity of the various organizations that appear in our international community? I feel that a worldwide organization will evolve that will consist of a federation of all these local religious organizations. The umbrella organization will give the Urantia community a world image and a sense of global identity. But we should bear in mind that we aren't the only game in town.

Unfortunately, it's all too easy to slip into the "chosen people" mentality. For instance, we may be tempted to look down our noses at Christians and say to them, "You're still struggling with the Fourth Epochal revelation, and here we are with the Fifth one in hand. Come to us; we'll enlighten you!" But if we have a bit of humility, we'll realize that all religionists who are working to help people establish a closer relationship to God are fellow spiritual workers. Our knowledge of the Urantia Papers does not necessarily make us either more virtuous or more effective in bringing people to God and God to people. A more realistic view is that we are just one of the forces on our planet working toward this goal. We all have worthy contributions to the evolution of the Supreme. I believe that instead of plotting to convert the world to Urantianism, we should seek to establish working relationships with all the world's religious groups. But to do this we will need a religious organization that can represent our community to the world. With such an organization in place, we will be able to collectively dialogue with other religions as equals. Yes, there will no doubt be significant opposition from elements within the various world religions. Perhaps there will even be some persecution. That will be the downside of being noticed. But whatever the struggles we may encounter, we should take comfort that we have some powerful allies, that there are forces beyond mere mortals involved in this Great Enterprise. We can expect some help.

I mentioned before that we've never seen the plans for the structure that will sit on the foundation we're building. So where are the plans? Where are the architects? Is all this just happening by blind and random chance? I

don't think so. I believe that our unseen friends have been planning for the emergence of this worldwide structure for centuries, even millennia. We haven't seen much of their influence—except perhaps in the case of *The Urantia Book*—because they operate with methods too subtle for our detection. Consider the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe and the USSR. Was the domino fall of communist regimes just an accidental juxtaposition of circumstances? Perhaps, but as that great philosopher Winnie the Pooh once observed to his small friend, "Consider the possibilities Piglet." "So what if there is a plan," you ask, "What can I do about it if I don't know what it is?"

Partners in the Great Enterprise

There are things we can do. First, we can support efforts such as the ongoing translations, international conferences, international newsletters and journals, and using the Internet to bring our international community closer together. Second, we can pledge our support to our unseen spiritual friends. Does this seem strange? The Midwayers and angels are not normally allowed to make us aware of their presence. Nonetheless, we know they must be working hard to spread *The Urantia Book* and its ideals to all the cultures of the world. Their goals are our goals, and vice versa. Not only should we pledge our support, but also we should acknowledge and honor them for the decades and perhaps centuries of planning and work that our unseen friends have devoted to generating the Urantia Papers and fostering our community. They surely are among the unsung heroes of our world. They deserve both our accolades and our cooperation. They are our partners in this Great Enterprise.

I believe that instead of plotting to convert the world to Urantianism, we should seek to establish working relationships with all the world's religious groups. But to do this we will need a religious organization that can represent our community to the world.

Yes, we find ourselves in the hole working on the foundation, and we may not get credit for our work. Nevertheless, as potential agondonters, let us move out on faith. Let the importance of the work be our motivation. As we labor together with our unseen friends, another piece of the cosmic puzzle falls in place; God the Supreme emerges. "The act is ours, the consequences God's." (p. 556)

¹ *A History of the Urantia Papers*, Larry Mullins and Meredith Justin Sprunger, Penumbra Press, Colorado, 2000.

Faith and Spirituality

John Marks

What do faith and spirituality mean today? Both have fallen on hard times. The former, though it receives a good deal of lip service, especially among conservative Christians, ultimately appears to be having little lasting effect on our modern money-based, consumer-oriented, and technologically-driven culture. The latter, often associated with the New Age, has become a catchall term for all the vague longings of the many people searching for a meaning to their lives beyond that offered by the standard narratives of contemporary culture. Whereas faith is commonly viewed as adherence to certain foundational values as embodied in traditional religions, spirituality by contrast is usually interpreted as a rejection of the dated formulae of traditional religious belief systems and a search for something else to fill the void that neither religion or the material pursuits of modern life can fill.

Those of us who have been exposed to the enlightenment of *The Urantia Book* have the benefit of the most in-depth understanding of faith and spirituality ever presented. Indeed, no two concepts are stressed more in its 2097 pages, and the radical nature of its message lies in the fact that a *spiritual* vision of the universe is revealed, which can only be grasped by *faith*. This dynamic re-evaluation of these two vital notions is precisely what our culture needs today. In this paper I will explore aspects of *The Urantia Book's* concepts of faith and spirit, and seek to explain why they are considered to be so important.

Faith as Response to Spiritual Reality

One of the overriding goals of *The Urantia Book* is to convey to readers the reality of spirit, that most elusive yet ultimately most important feature of our mortal experience. The whole book is designed to reveal to us that there is a complex, multifaceted spiritual universe, which complements our current scientific picture of the material universe. As defined in *The Urantia Book*, faith is the essential attitude for getting in touch with the unseen spiritual dimension; indeed it is defined as the natural mental response to our experience of spiritual reality, just as reason is the natural response to our experience with the material world:

"Reason grows out of material awareness, faith out of spiritual awareness, but through the mediation of a philosophy strengthened by revelation, logic may confirm both the inward and the outward view, thereby effecting the stabilization of both science and religion. (p. 1138)

Science (knowledge) is founded on the inherent (adjutant spirit) assumption that reason is valid, that the universe can be comprehended. ... Religion (the truth of personal spiritual experience) is founded on the inherent (Thought Adjuster) assumption that faith is valid, that God can be known and attained." (p. 1141)

In our contemporary, science-based society we have cultivated the rational response to material reality into highly sophisticated sciences and technologies, which are extremely adept at investigating and manipulating the natural world. And educational systems, especially in the West, emphasize the approach of reason and turn out young adults ready to continue reason's development through the sciences, technology, and business

Those of us who have been exposed to the enlightenment of The Urantia Book have the benefit of the most in-depth understanding of faith and spirituality ever presented. Indeed, no two concepts are stressed more in its 2097 pages, and the radical nature of its message lies in the fact that a spiritual vision of the universe is revealed, which can only be grasped by faith. This dynamic re-evaluation of these two vital notions is precisely what our culture needs today.

Unfortunately, there is little appreciation of the faith response to spiritual reality in secular society, and our higher education system almost completely ignores this side of experience. This is the result of two historical factors. First, religion, traditionally the repository of spiritual wisdom, has been slow to respond to change for the last few centuries, and consequently has little to offer sophisticated people in this modern/postmodern age. Second, science has achieved unprecedented success in unraveling many of nature's secrets and its rational approach to reality has become the prevailing world view.

Hence, our culture is currently unbalanced, the sciences having progressed so far beyond our still hide-bound religions, that many educated people have begun to question the very value of religion as a cultural institution. With no strong cultural support for the faith approach to reality, it is no wonder that in contemporary society there is, on the one hand, much questioning of and skepticism about claims for the existence of spiritual reality from scientifically inclined people and, on the other hand, many manifestations of reactionary (fundamentalist) or naïve (New Age) displays of faith from spiritually inclined people with only a weak understanding of science. Religion is long overdue for a dynamic rediscovery of faith and for creating new techniques for

the cultivation of faith that are in step with contemporary knowledge.

The Urantia Book awakens us to the reality of spirit in our lives. We are encouraged to expand old concepts to envision a bold new view of faith as a form of "empowerment" (to use a term currently in vogue). Faith, we are told, spiritualizes our minds, expands our ideals, and vastly enhances the meaning of our lives. Thus defined it is a powerful technique for living and for exploring new dimensions of experience, not mere intellectual adherence to a particular creed.

Faith vs. Belief

The weakness of current religion seems to be its emphasis on belief and a lack of understanding regarding the meaning of faith. According to *The Urantia Book*, Christianity stumbled into error early on by substituting a belief system based on the crucified and risen Christ for the living faith of Jesus in the Fatherhood of God and the spiritual fellowship of all humanity as God's sons and daughters ("the kingdom of God"). Today, Christianity, knowing no better, perpetuates this error and over the ages has exacerbated the problem by becoming divided into so many different churches with variant creeds. Each church insists on the absolute validity of its particular creed, so religion, rather than being a unifying force based on spiritual ideals, has become a source of division based on disagreements over such issues as abortion, women's role in the clergy, homosexuality, the types of rituals endorsed, dogma regarding the place of faith vs. works, etc. From the point of view of liberal secular culture, which values tolerance and a "Live and let live" attitude, this internecine squabbling does not make Christianity attractive.¹

Faith, by contrast, in the words of *The Urantia Book*:

"...is a living experience concerned with spiritual meanings, divine ideals, and supreme values; it is God-knowing and man-serving. Beliefs may become groups possessions, but faith must be personal. ... Faith never shuns the problem-solving duty of mortal living. Living faith does not foster bigotry, persecution, or intolerance.

Faith does not shackle the creative imagination, neither does it maintain an unreasoning prejudice toward the discoveries of scientific investigation. Faith vitalizes religion and constrains the religionist heroically to live the golden rule." (p. 1114-15)

The fact that faith is personal helps to explain why organized religion easily loses sight of the true meaning of faith. For in its effort to create a structure for worship it naturally tends toward belief systems, which can be used as the basis for organization. But when belief

systems become too rigid and dogmatic, they tend to stifle personal faith and thus cut off the spiritual energy that is the lifeblood of religion. In the process, people become disaffected, feel alienated from the espoused principals of the leadership, over time membership falls away, and new splinter groups start up. This is the story of Christianity in modern times. The balancing act of any progressive religion is to maintain an organization that is at the same time broadly cohesive yet loose enough to encourage the free expression of personal, individualized faith.²

Living Faith

So what are the hallmarks of this "living faith" that *The Urantia Book* emphasizes? It must be significant that faith is so often described in *The Urantia Book* as "living." Whereas intellectual formulations of belief—creeds, theologies, dogmas—give structure and a sense of security to the religious life, they are essentially lifeless crystallizations of thoughts at a particular time and place. Faith has life because it is always an act of a person's living will, a living expression of personal spiritual experience. Beliefs are static, intellectual creations, whereas faith is a dynamic response of the whole person. When we recognize spirit as a sense of relatedness to some higher intelligence and source of wisdom and love, that is the basic act of faith, which *The Urantia Book* calls the faith response to spirit. Indeed, in our secular culture, it takes faith not to dismiss spiritual experience as mere fantasizing, wishful-thinking, idealistic longing, or some other psychological label. Psychology has been trying to rationalize away spiritual experience for about a century now.

As a matter of individual will, faith is completely subjective, and no objective evidence of the spirit perceived by faith can be offered other than the effect that such faith in spiritual reality has on the believing person (fruits of the spirit). A skeptic can never understand what the believer experiences unless he or she also wills to believe. In this respect, faith is somewhat like the experience of great art. I can wax enthusiastic about the music of J. S. Bach to people who don't appreciate classical music, and these persons may then become curious enough to listen, but unless they make the effort to appreciate this music, they will never understand what I am experiencing. You must try it to understand.

In responding to spirit through faith, *The Urantia Book* tells us, we are responding to a *personal* reality, and that is the personality presence of God:

"Spirit is the fundamental reality of the personality experience of all creatures because God is spirit....

Spirit (is) the highest personal reality.” (p. 140)

“Spirit is the basic personal reality in the universes, and personality is basic to all progressing experience with spiritual reality.” (p. 141)

Spiritual reality is thus the perceived presence of God’s personality, the recognition of which can only come through faith. We perceive the presence of God in similar fashion as we perceive the personality presence of people we know and love. God directs the personal presence of his spirit toward us, and if we respond, we can then direct our faith toward Him and experience this presence again and again. We feel His love and love in return, just as in human affairs we tend to love those who love us.

Eventually, this person-directed quid-pro-quo of the spirit between God and the individual human being (cf. Buber’s *I and Thou*)³ teaches each of us to see all other people in a new way. We learn to expand the circle of family fellowship beyond blood-ties, cultural bonds, national heritage, or ethnic or racial membership, to include all members of the human race. In this way the *relationship* that is established between God and an individual person is extended in spiritual fellowship to all other *persons*. For spiritual reality, having to do with persons, is essentially relationship. Through faith we learn that we are all related in spirit to the original Spirit, which *The Urantia Book* calls the Father of us all. This is the supreme relationship that is the basis of all spiritual reality.

Thus, living faith opens the door to spirit, which reveals this vast web of relationships, and taps into the energy of spirit, which motivates the person to act in accordance with this inspired idealistic vision.

Jesus as the Inspiration to a Faith-based Life

This may all sound very abstract but in the life of Jesus the practice of faith in pursuit of the spirit was made beautifully concrete. This is why, I believe, Part IV of *The Urantia Book* on the life of Jesus was added as the conclusion to *The Urantia Book*. It acts as a sort of capstone to the magnificent edifice of abstractions in the preceding 1300-plus pages and demonstrates perfectly how all the grand conceptions of the first three parts were put into practice in human life by the very Master of this life. There are so many examples of Jesus’ supreme faith as described in Part IV of *The Urantia Book* that one can turn to almost any page in this section and find inspiration for one’s own faith. I’d like to concentrate on a few less obvious examples, which nonetheless have important implications for everyone who tries to live a faith-based life.

The famous incident when the twelve-year-old Jesus wanders away from his mother and father during their Passover visit to Jerusalem is often cited as a manifestation of Jesus’ precocious intelligence. That seems to be the implication of the story as it is told in Luke’s gospel: “. . . they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.” (Luke 2: 46-47) No doubt Jesus did display a precocious intellect, but what I find impressive in this story is the child’s reaction to his parents’ worry when they finally find him after an anxiety-ridden four days of searching:

“Why is it that you have so long sought me? Would you not expect to find me in my Father’s house since the time has come when I should be about my Father’s business?” (p. 1384)

Previous to this encounter the book makes the point that “Jesus was strangely unmindful of his earthly parents; . . . Jesus did not seem to comprehend that they would be somewhat worried about his having lingered behind.” (p. 1383) Already at twelve, Jesus has developed a faith that has so fully engaged his mind that he fails to foresee or understand the mundane worries that his parents naturally felt in his absence. In fact his question seems to imply: How could you have worried? It’s as if he assumed their faith must have been as great as his, such that there should be no room for anxiety since it is clear (at least to him) that he has faithfully turned over his life to the loving care of the Father. When one fully trusts the Father in all things, one can never be truly lost.

To me this scene displays both precocious faith and a typical young boy’s self-absorption when he is fascinated with an activity; the world around him disappears while he focuses on the activity at hand and he forgets that others may have a different agenda. The later mature Jesus, the true master of human psychology, could not have overlooked his parents’ fears, but the young Jesus is still getting to know human nature. Yet on a spiritual level, he is already light-years ahead of everyone else and is actively pursuing the personal spiritual relationship that he long ago established with his Father. He knows God and God knows him; everything else is secondary and follows from that supreme relationship. Such faith motivates him to do extraordinary things and to step out of the expected role of a twelve-year-old boy.

But his faith also enabled him later in life to keep hope alive when faced with the trials and dreary ordinary hardships of daily life. After the accidental death of his father when Jesus was only fourteen, a seemingly cruel

blow of fate, he became responsible, as the oldest male, for the welfare of the family. Together they faced many difficult years of poverty and struggle, trying to make ends meet to keep food on the table for a family of ten. The child of great promise had suddenly to face the reality of very limited horizons and a foreseeable future of difficult toil in the carpenter's shop while helping his mother to raise an infant and seven children aged one to ten.

"Within a few years after his father's death all their property was gone....No youth of Urantia will ever be called upon to pass through more testing conflicts or more trying situations than Jesus himself endured during those strenuous years from fifteen to twenty." (p. 1395)

"His mother grieved to see him work so hard; she sorrowed that he was day by day toiling at the carpenter's bench earning a living for the family instead of being, as they had so fondly planned, at Jerusalem studying with the rabbis." (p. 1396)

"Apparently all Jesus' plans for a career were thwarted. The future did not look bright as matters now developed. But he did not falter; he was not discouraged. He lived on, day by day, doing well the present duty and faithfully discharging the *immediate* responsibilities of his station in life. Jesus' life is the everlasting comfort of all disappointed idealists." (p. 1393)

Perhaps the low point of this trying period was when his baby brother, Amos, died after a week's illness with a high fever. At eighteen, with his mother grief-stricken and his family pushed to the limit of their meager resources by the funeral expenses, Jesus was the family's pillar of strength.

"Jesus possessed the ability effectively to mobilize all his powers of mind, soul, and body on the task immediately in hand. He could concentrate his deep-thinking mind on the one problem which he wished to solve, and this, in connection with his untiring *patience*, enabled him serenely to endure the trials of a difficult mortal existence—to live as if he were 'seeing Him who is invisible.'" (p. 1400-01)

This was the extraordinary power of his faith. It enabled him later to formulate those exquisite formulations of faith in the Sermon on the Mount: "Happy are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted." Jesus knew a good deal about trying experiences and occasions for mourning. Though often surrounded by people, he sometimes felt very alone, for there was no other human being with whom he could share his unique human problems. He had to walk alone down a very

difficult and uncertain path, guided only by his faith. Yet we are told he was always cheerful and a source of encouragement to all. In the end he voluntarily accepted the greatest trial of faith—an awful, humiliating death as a common criminal and desertion by most of this followers, friends, and family—to underscore the saving power of faith.

Such faith as he possessed foresees the light of hope even from the depths of the darkest valley of doubt and confers on character the strength and patience to endure the difficult times and the reassurance that a better future is ahead. It allows the spirit to influence the mind, expanding its horizons beyond its present limits to envision a more hopeful future. A mind that can thus foretaste the future through spirit contact is not only comforted but is energized to act in an effort to realize such encouraging potentials.

But the benefits of spirit influence can hardly be realized unless faith is first exercised. That assent of the human will to the appeal of the spirit in the human heart is the necessary first step to permit spirit to act on the mind. Realizing that one can interact in a personal intimate relationship with the spirit of the infinite God is a powerful resource that enables one to face any challenge. As the life of Jesus demonstrates, cultivating this relationship with God is the best habit of mind that any human being can develop.

Cultivating Spiritual Habits

In a section of *The Urantia Book* entitled "The Lures of Maturity." (p. 1777), the Greek philosopher, Rodan of Alexandria, points out that the life of faith and the habit of communing with the spirit of God are the secrets of Jesus' mastery of the problems of life:

"Look to your Master. Even now he is out in the hills taking in power while we are here giving out energy. The secret of all this problem is wrapped up in spiritual communion, in worship. From the human standpoint it is a question of combined meditation and relaxation. Meditation makes the contact of mind with spirit; relaxation determines the capacity for spiritual receptivity. And this interchange of strength for weakness, courage for fear, the will of God for the mind of self, constitutes worship. ..."

"When these experiences are frequently repeated, they crystallize into habits, strength-giving and worshipful habits, and such habits eventually formulate themselves into a spiritual character, and such a character is finally recognized by one's fellows as a *mature personality*. These practices are difficult and time-consuming at first, but when they become habit-

ual, they are at once restful and time-saving. The more complex society becomes, and the more the lures of civilization multiply, the more urgent will become the necessity for God-knowing individuals to form such protective habitual practices designed to conserve and augment their spiritual energies." (p. 1777)

This is what our educational system, what our whole Western civilization, is sadly lacking today. Religion in the future must focus on this dynamic definition of faith and spirit, and provide practical means of allowing people to cultivate the habit of spiritual communion. It is the key to getting to know the God within us and learning what His will for us is. In this respect, the West can take a lesson from the East, where the Hindu, Buddhist, and Eastern Orthodox traditions have instilled an appreciation for the value of meditation and silent retreat. In the West we are so used to reasoning, arguing, formulating concepts, or pursuing agendas that it may be difficult to let go for a while of all our mental constellations and just *listen*, trying to be as receptive and as attuned as possible to the message of the silence. But this is clearly what Jesus often did. Throughout his life he followed a consistent practice of solitary retreat to restore his spiritual balance before engaging the practical challenges of the world. And his very active life and full involvement with people show that such periods of silent communion do not necessarily turn one into a hermit.

In short, this means that we need to rediscover the meaning and value of worship and, in turn, worshipful living. Through faith we come to realize our true place in this huge universe, and when we see through faith that we are part of a gigantic network of relationships that extend far beyond this world, that we are all related through spiritual kinship ties in the family of God, then we are naturally inclined to worship, to commune with the spiritual progenitor of this vast family, whom Jesus taught us to call "Father."

When religion rediscovers this living web of relationships, it will inspire a new enlightenment of spiritual awareness, one even more exciting than the scientific enlightenment that has created our modern world.

¹ The same might be said of the other two great religions of the Book: Judaism and Islam. In each there seems to be greater emphasis on adherence to specific creedal formulations and the letter of the law than on the unifying spirit. Just as in Christianity, one also finds many sects across the whole spectrum from orthodox to liberal.

² The Urantia movement is currently struggling to achieve a generally agreeable balance between organizational overcontrol and individual spiritual freedom, and will continue to do so in the future. On the one hand, there is a wide diversity of individual paths, from simple study groups of interested people, who read and discuss the book, to the Teaching Mission with its channelers. This indicates a very loose overall structure with little central control. On the other hand, the hard-line stance of the Foundation toward copyright infringement and the split between the Foundation and the Fellowship over the way to disseminate the book reveal a dogmatic and literalist (fundamentalist?) side of the movement. Though everyone seems to agree on the spiritual value of the book, there is a wide range of opinions regarding practical ways to attract new readers and to represent its teachings to the world. Perhaps this is the only way it can be. It is well to remember that the situation of the still-young Urantia movement is not unlike that of early Christianity, which had little unity, differing practices, various centers of influence, and much dissension over theology for three hundred years after the death of Jesus. Religion is an evolutionary, trial and error, and initially chaotic process, until some galvanizing set of practices and/or leaders come along that attract the majority of believers and naturally provide the basic foundation for overall structure.

³ The English translation of Martin Buber's classic work, *Ich and Du*, as I and Thou is misleading because the connotation of the German word *du*, the familiar form of you used only when addressing family members or close friends, is not conveyed by the archaic Middle English *Thou*. What Buber means to express in using *du* as the form for addressing God is that the relationship between a human being and God should be one of greatest intimacy, comparable to the relationship between intimate family members or friends.

It is just because the gospel of Jesus was so many-sided that within a few centuries students of the records of his teachings became divided up into so many cults and sects. This pitiful subdivision of the Christian believers results from failure to discern in the Master's manifold teachings the divine oneness of his matchless life. But someday the true believers in Jesus will not be thus spiritually divided in their attitude before unbelievers. Always we may have diversity of intellectual comprehension and interpretation, even varying degrees of socialization, but lack of spiritual brotherhood is both inexcusable and reprehensible.
p. 1866:3

Mind Mastery

Meredith J. Sprunger

The most important achievement of human experience is the mastery of our minds through the leading of the indwelling Spirit. This mastery is the key human factor in the initiation and development of our immortal soul. The Midwayers call attention to the importance of mind mastery by mentioning Jesus' progressive mastery of his human mind in his 24th, 26th, 29th and 30th years. This is the highest good and culminating achievement of human existence.

Definition of Mind

There are three basic types of reality: matter, mind, and spirit. The material mind functions through the electro-chemical activity of the brain and neural system, but is not merely electro-chemical energy. Just as a television picture and its sound is a different quality of phenomena than mere electrical energy, so the electro-chemical activity of the brain gives birth to a new quality of reality by virtue of its ability to tap into and utilize aspects of the cosmic mind stemming from the Infinite Spirit. The human mind is a quality of energy (consciousness) that mediates between the material energy below and the morontia-spirit energy above. Mind activity makes it possible for us to have a unitary experience of matter, mind, and spirit.

Consciousness is a very complex phenomena composed of many factors such as thoughts, concepts, emotions, will, motivation, values, and ideals. Personality is associated with the human mind that forms a unique pattern of identity and arrangement of energies that make for individuality and is a gift of the Universal Father. Mind is creative and functions uniquely in each individual. It basically controls matter and eventually fashions the qualities of the human body and physical mechanisms. The mind, in turn, is shaped, with the consent of the human will, by Spirit. Wherever the Spirit-mind functions, it fashions physical and character counterparts.

We Live in Mind Activities

Mind (consciousness) is the reality, the cosmic instrument, in which we live and about the only thing that is subject to our will. It is the energy (power) mechanism that enables us to shape our thoughts, attitudes, emotions, values, actions, and character. What mind is striving to be like determines our destiny. What we accept in our consciousness is determinative. Fantasy has consequences. Contemplating, accepting, and promoting thoughts, attitudes, emotions, and pleasures allow these thoughts to shape the quality of our minds and our destiny. Unhealthy or unwanted thoughts can be mas-

tered and eradicated by a whole hearted will decision to replace them by contemplating the joy of intimate fellowship with the indwelling Spirit of God. The quality of our decisions in cooperation with our Thought Adjuster creates our immortal soul, our morontia self.

Our entire personality functions as a holistic unit. The mind, the Thought Adjuster, the Spirit of Truth, the Holy Spirit, and the soul are involved in our consciousness. Knowledge is the product of the perceiving mind aided by the discipline of the scientific method. Truth and wisdom are the acquirement of the seasoned experience of the morontia soul. This is why truth is always a living, dynamic experience. When we try to translate this experience into speech or writing it tends to become static knowledge that loses much of its potential.

Spirit Mastery

The most creative objective in human experience is to master our minds under the guidance of the indwelling Spirit. Metaphors can be helpful in visualizing this transformation process. The Spirit is the architect, the mind is the builder, character is the edifice. Stated a little differently, "Mind is your ship, the Adjuster is your pilot, the human will is captain." (U. B. p. 1217) Only the spiritualized intellect can discern true values. As we discipline our mind and control our thoughts with the guidance of the Spirit, our consciousness becomes naturally attuned to the fruits of the spirit. This self-mastery gradually delivers us from negative control struggles and the slavery of self-denial as we spontaneously are motivated to actualize the fruits of the spirit: "loving service, unselfish devotion, courageous loyalty, sincere fairness, enlightened honesty, undying hope, confiding trust, merciful ministry, unfailing goodness, forgiving tolerance, and enduring peace." (p. 2054)

This growth is largely the result of the dominance of the soul. The soul actually functions as the mid-mind, between the lower material mind and the higher cosmic mind, and brings inner peace, joy, and the freedom of the spirit as the dominant atmosphere of our consciousness. As we mature spiritually we live more and more in our soul-mind that transcends the struggle between the "flesh and the spirit."

Mastery Methodologies

We achieve the mastery of our minds primarily through two basic life styles: (1) constant loving fellowship with our Thought Adjuster, the Spirit of Truth, the Holy Spirit, and our Seraphic Guardians; and (2) dedication to a life of service, a sense of calling.

Worship is the most creative activity of human beings which serves to mold the foundation and quality of

consciousness. It establishes the subliminal spirit-reality awareness that is always with us as we go about our daily activities. This constant fellowship with the indwelling Spirit of God progressively shifts the mind from animal motivation to divine aspiration. Through will dedication it establishes perfection of purpose and opens the neural pathways of superconscious spiritual wisdom. This divine fellowship creates foundation attitudes and gradually transfers personal identity from the material mind to the soul-mind.

Mind mastery grows in effectiveness when worship is coordinated with service. Service, a sense of calling, establishes the substance and direction of our lives. As we "lose" ourselves in service, we are delivered from crippling preoccupation with self and discover the spiritual liberation of joy that culminates in happiness. Service is the *modus operandi* of mind mastery—the operational process through which we achieve the mind qualities of courageous character directed by truth, beauty, and goodness.

Inspiring Examples

Sometimes it is helpful to observe how people have mastered their minds through a sense of calling to service. Waris Dirie, in *Desert Flower* (William Morrow, 1998), tells the story of her amazing odyssey from a goatherd's hut in Somalia to becoming one of the world's most famous fashion models. This courageous woman tells of the painful genital mutilation she endured in her childhood in the hope of putting an end to this brutal and demeaning tradition. She believes that her mission in life is to be a special ambassador to speak against this crime. She says, "My faith tells me God has work for me to do and this is my mission." A sense of mission along with faith that God is undergirding and directing one's service is a powerful aid in mastering one's mind and shaping one's life.

Harvard professor Jerome Groopman, in *The Measure of Our Days* (Viking Penguin, 1997), tells about the remarkable dedication of Dan Berger, a Hungarian Jew, to discovering the cure for blood diseases. Dan was accepted for a fellowship in the blood-disease department at Harvard's Deaconess Hospital. After a year of clinical training, he joined the lab team that was working to genetically alter blood cells and make them resistant to HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.

Dr. Dan Berger was a severe hemophiliac who had contacted AIDS from contaminated clotting factor concentrates that had saved his life. He went on working not telling Dr. Groopman, his mentor, about his condition until his health had seriously deteriorated. One day Dan told Dr. Groopman, "I'm not as religious as you, Jerry.

But lately I find myself quietly offering thanks to have my life as it is, to work in the world we do."

Dr. Berger determined that he and his sense of mission would control his life, not his disease. He lost his battle in 1996. And Dr. Groopman remarked, "His spirit, like the light from a distant star, continues to illuminate my life, long after its source was extinguished." Fellowship with God and a dedication to service are creative aids in helping us master our minds. As we fashion our minds and increasingly find our identity with our soul-mind, we shape our spiritual destiny.

Psalms Today

Creative Service

I aspire, Universal Father, to new expressions of spiritual service indigenous to the unique personality you have given me.

I long to achieve the nobility of character which feeds the wellsprings of creativity.

Deliver me from the foibles of spiritual immaturity:

Pining for optimum conditions rather than joyously accepting the rigorous living required by evolutionary experience;

Pleading that you solve problems that I should courageously grapple with myself; and,

Equating my circumscribed world with your larger vision.

Enlarge my appreciation of your endless Paradise resources mediated to us through the Supreme ministry of our Universe Sovereign.

I am enriched and invigorated by your presence and partnership in service and soul actualization.

I rejoice in the potentials of your high calling.

Keep me ever constant, steadfast, and sensitively tuned to your truth, beauty, and goodness!

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. (2091:5)

A Question of Priorities

Rev. Gregory Young

A group of friends went deer hunting. They separated into pairs. That night, one hunter returned alone, staggering under an eight-point buck. The other hunters asked, "Where's Harry?" The lone hunter replied, "Harry fainted a couple miles up the trail." The others couldn't believe it. "You mean you left him lying there and carried the deer back instead?" The man answered, "It was a tough call, but I figured no one was going to steal Harry." To this deer hunter it was simply a matter of priorities. And one of the secrets of success in life is to have your priorities in order. In the late 1980's and early '90s, Chris Spielman was an awesome linebacker for the Detroit Lions and the Buffalo Bills. Football was his passion, or so everyone thought. But in 1994, Chris Spielman gladly gave up football when his wife, Stefanie, was diagnosed with cancer. He moved into his wife's hospital room and waited on her hand and foot. He only ate what she ate, only slept when she slept. When Stephanie lost her hair to chemotherapy, Chris shaved his head. He became the primary caretaker for their two children. Today, Stefanie is in remission and feeling good. And Chris has no regrets about giving up his career. As he says, "This is my family. This is my responsibility. This is my duty." His family is his priority.

Jesus and his disciples had just arrived in Capernaum. When they settled in, Jesus asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?" Suddenly it got very quiet. Why? Because the disciples were embarrassed. They had been arguing about who was the greatest. They were arguing over who was number one. How is it that this argument seemed perfectly reasonable and important to the disciples until they had to share it with Jesus? Suddenly, they were able to see how petty their argument truly was—they didn't want to tell Jesus what they were arguing about. You can almost envision Jesus here, coming up to his quarreling disciples and asking, "What are you fighting about?" "Oh, nothing," would probably be their embarrassed response. The football player, Chris Spielman, might have at one time thought that winning football games was the most important thing in his life. It's amazing how his priorities changed when someone he loved had her life threatened by disease.

Jesus called the twelve together and said to them, "If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all, and servant of all." (Mk. 9:35) And taking a child, he set him before those gathered, and taking the child in arms, Jesus said to them, "Whoever receives one child like this in my name receives me; and whoever receives me receives not me, but him who sent me." (Mk. 9:37)

Now, we are steeped in a culture in which success and performance are highly valued. We want to be number one—and there is nothing wrong with that. I was reading recently about a young woman from New York who dreamed of being a movie star. She moved to Hollywood, studied acting, and pounded the pavement looking for jobs. Our young actress claimed to be fresh off the farms of Montana—maybe the "farm girl-turned-starlet" angle would work for her. She was pretty, but not glamorous. She couldn't sing or dance all that well. She was energetic and funny, but female comediennees were not very popular at that time. One of her colleagues even advised her, "Go back to Montana and just be a happy cowgirl." But that's not where this young woman's happiness lay. Eventually, she made a name for herself as the funniest woman in television, and she went on to become one of the most powerful people in Hollywood. Her name? Lucille Ball. There is nothing wrong with wanting to be successful. Personal ambition is a gift from God which motivates us to be the best that we can be and that is important, isn't it? When you go to a doctor, you want to go to one who strives to be the best doctor they can be, don't you? Who wants to go to a doctor that does the least that he or she has to do to get by? Not very reassuring, is it? When you get your car repaired, you would like to think that you have the best mechanic in town working on your car. There is nothing wrong with trying to be the best. As someone has said, "Intelligence without ambition is a bird without wings." Striving to be number one is healthy as long as we are able to put it in the proper perspective. Winning isn't everything neither is it the only thing. Notice that Jesus doesn't scold his disciples for wanting to be number one. What he tried to do in our text for this morning is to put it into perspective.

Some anonymous writer put it like this: "Imagine life as a game in which you are juggling five balls in the air. You name them: work, family, health, friends, and faith and you're keeping all of them in the air. You will soon understand that work is a rubber ball. If you drop it, it will bounce back. But the other four balls—family, health, friends, and faith are made of glass. If you drop one of these, they will be irrevocably scuffed, marked, nicked, damaged, or even, shattered. They will never be the same." That is powerful imagery, isn't it? Work is a rubber ball, but the other important things in life—family, health, friends, and faith are more fragile. If you neglect these other life concerns in your quest or obsession to be number one, your life will be empty, and your life will not really be a success.

A few years ago Tom Bloch resigned as chief executive officer of H&R Block, the \$1.7 billion tax-prepara-

tion and financial-services firm. Tom left behind his prestigious job to become a teacher at St. Francis Xavier middle school in Kansas City, MO. His annual salary suddenly dropped to less than \$15,000 a year, about three percent of his old salary. But Bloch knew his hectic schedule as CEO had been interfering with his top priority: his wife and their two sons. "The hardest part was telling my father," Bloch says, referring to H&R Block chairman Henry Bloch, who co-founded the company in 1955. "But I didn't want to look back on my life," Bloch continues, "and say, 'Gee, you had an opportunity to play a bigger role in your children's lives and didn't take it.'" Tom Bloch knew which ball was made of rubber and which one was made of glass.

In a way, this sermon is somewhat difficult for us, because we all want to succeed. There is tremendous pressure on all of us to be highly successful, and if we don't watch it, we can lose some things that are precious, things that are truly important to us along the way.

Mark was walking home from school one day when he noticed the boy ahead of him had tripped and dropped all of the books he was carrying, along with two sweaters, a baseball bat, a glove and a small tape recorder. Mark knelt down and helped the boy pick up the scattered articles. Since they were going the same way, he helped to carry part of the burden. As they walked Mark discovered the boy's name was Bill, that he loved video games, baseball, and history, that he was having a lot of trouble with his other subjects and that he had just broken up with his girlfriend. They arrived at Bill's home first and Mark was invited in for a Coke and to watch some television. The afternoon passed pleasantly with a few laughs and some shared small talk. Then Mark went home. They continued to see each other around school, had lunch together once or twice, then both graduated from junior high school. They ended up in the same high school where they had brief contacts over the years. Finally the long awaited senior year came and three weeks before graduation, Bill asked Mark if they could talk. Bill reminded him of the day years ago when they had first met. "Do you ever wonder why I was carrying so many things home that day?" asked Bill. "You see, I cleaned out my locker because I didn't want to leave a mess for anyone else. I had stored away some of my mother's sleeping pills and I was going home to commit suicide. But after spending time together talking and laughing, I realized that if I had killed myself, I would have missed that time and so many others that might follow. So you see, Mark, when you picked up my books that day, you did a lot more. You saved my life." Caring for another classmate, a fellow human being was a very

high priority for Mark. Serving others, loving them is one of the supreme spiritual priorities for our lives. Here is a person who was able to see what was truly important to him in his life.

It is interesting that Jesus put a child in their midst as a means of helping his disciples modify their priorities. Jesus knew that children are often the ones who remind us that our priorities are all out of whack. And our love for our children can help us motivate ourselves to get our lives back in their proper focus. Consider an article that appeared in *People* magazine recently about a man who regained his focus, thanks to his love for his daughter. Researchers report that of the few people who ever do lose substantial amounts of weight, most regain the weight within a few years. It seems so hard to find the motivation to lose the weight and keep it off. But Randy Leamer didn't have a problem with motivation. He knew if he didn't lose weight, his little daughter might die. At only eighteen-months old, Meagan Leamer was diagnosed with severe kidney disease. No matter what treatment the doctors tried with her, the toddler just kept getting worse. By the age of five, Meagan desperately needed a kidney transplant. Meagan's parents, Randy and Genie Leamer, were more than willing to donate an organ to their daughter, and both were found to be good matches. But Genie's family had a long history of kidney problems and high blood pressure, so an organ donation would be risky on her part. That left Meagan's dad, Randy, as the only possible donor. There was only one problem; Randy Leamer weighed over 300 pounds. Doctors were afraid that in Randy's condition he wouldn't survive the surgery to harvest his kidney. So Randy determined to lose over 100 lbs. in order to prepare for his daughter's surgery. He began exercising and eating a low-fat diet. Friends at work cheered him on and even brought in their old clothes for Randy when his clothes became too big for him. Within eight months, Randy Leamer had dropped to 194 lbs. Meagan's kidney surgery was performed on December 12, 1997. Both Randy and Meagan have recovered fully from the surgery. Because of his love for his daughter, Randy Leamer took a needed action that in the long run may give him a longer life. All of us want to be the best that we can be. We perhaps all feel that going through life is kind of like a juggling act. That's a given condition, and we can live with that. But remember that some of the balls we are juggling are made of rubber and some are made of precious glass. May God give each of us the wisdom and faith to set priorities which have lasting spiritual value.

The Ascendancy of the Fifth Epochal Revelation

Meredith J. Sprunger

During the first forty-five years of its history the Urantia movement has evolved from a handful of readers in Chicago to hundreds of study groups and tens of thousands of readers throughout the world. Without mass publicity or promotion about 500,000 copies of *The Urantia Book* have been sold and translations are available in many of the languages of the world. Audio and computer versions of the book are available and numerous study aids have been published. Regional and International Conferences are being held and secondary works are proliferating.

All this is impressive, but of much greater importance is the tempering and structuring of the Urantia movement in preparation for its world-wide mission. The rugged struggle of these early years has established solid foundations for carrying a new paradigm of spiritual reality throughout the earth. The Urantia movement, very early in its history, has encountered most of the challenges that have threatened religious transitions down through history. We have received an experiential vaccination against those viruses which have threatened creative spiritual growth in the past. The Fifth Epochal Revelation has demonstrated its dynamic and power in steering the movement repeatedly between classic Scylla and Charybdis encounters in our journey.

In our pilgrimage we have escaped oligarchical-authoritarian direction in the triumph of participatory democracy and openness. We were challenged by the intrigues of charismatic control and witnessed the emer-

gence of evolutionary-rational decision-making. The Urantia movement weathered the threat of legalistic-power strategies through the dominance of cooperative team work. Our fellowship was endangered by differences of psychic and spiritual guidance and we achieved the spiritual maturity to allow individuals freedom to evaluate the authenticity of their own experience. The Fifth Epochal Revelation was confronted by centralized organizational control and we have observed the power of individual initiative and creative diversity in outreach ministry.

The solid core of the Urantia movement has come through these tribulations with renewed dedication and balance. We have come of age. Spiritual freedom and participatory democracy have taught us that there can be unity of purpose in the midst of intellectual and political diversity. The Fifth Epochal Revelation will make its way and overcome any barriers placed in its way. We are standing at the threshold of "one of the most amazing and enthralling epochs of social readjustment, moral quickening, and spiritual enlightenment" on our planet. The preliminary orienting growth developments of the Urantia movement are largely behind us. The potential of an exciting outreach mission of the Fifth Epochal Revelation is awaiting us. The Most Highs have prepared us and our planet for the most thrilling vision of spiritual reality since Jesus of Nazareth walked on our world. This outreach mission will be many-faceted, pluralistic, and victorious!

The Christian Fellowship of Students of *The Urantia Book*, Inc.

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