

THE ARENA

ANZURA

Volume 11 No. 3

The Australian and New Zealand
URANTIA Association

Autumn 2002

THE MIND ARENA OF CHOICE

"Mind is your ship, the Adjuster is your pilot, the human will is captain." (p.1217)

The authors of the various papers in *The Urantia Book* chose their words very carefully and used the English language to its full extent to express new and incredibly far-reaching, sometimes almost incomprehensible concepts. The language used to introduce such concepts forces us to stretch our minds to the limit in an effort to comprehend much of the book's message. The more we read and study the book the more we understand it as we get used to the language and concepts. Many a would-be student has abandoned *The Urantia Book* because of this complexity. It takes perseverance and determination to stick with it during the painful times when the muscles of the intellect are being stretched to the limit as the channels of understanding are being forged ever wider so that the new revealed information may more easily flow through the riverbeds of the mind.

It may be useful to ponder the design of the Urantia Papers and to search for some hints as to the value of such a design. Certain themes can be found throughout the entire book as they are woven into its exquisite tapestry. Study and Education are two such themes. We learn that study and education are an ever and ongoing reality in our ascension careers. The word "study" appears in *The Urantia Book* 103 times, and "education" appears 104 times. They can be found in certain contexts such as these: (*editor's emphasis*)

*...it is permissible, and may prove helpful, to **study** certain characteristics of the divine nature which constitute the character of Deity. (p.33:1)*

*In the **study** of the religious life of Jesus, view him positively. (p.68:3)*

*...it is only necessary to **study** the spiritual attributes of God the Father to understand and correctly evaluate the attributes of God the Son. (p.77:3)*

*There is not a Urantia religion that could not profitably **study** and assimilate the best of the truths contained in every other faith, for all contain truth. (p.1012:4)*

On Education:

***Education** is the business of living; ... (p.806:5)*

*The real purpose of all universe **education** is to effect the better co-ordination of the isolated child of the worlds with the larger realities of his expanding experience. (p.43:5)*

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*It is the **purpose of education** to develop and sharpen these innate endowments of the human mind; ... (p.192:7)*

*Even secular **education** could help in this great spiritual renaissance if it would pay more attention to the work of teaching youth how to engage in life planning and character progression. **The purpose of all education** should be to foster and further the supreme purpose of life, the development of a majestic and well-balanced personality. (p.2086:3)*

*But his [Jesus] real **education**—that equipment of mind and heart for the actual test of grappling with the difficult problems of life—he obtained by mingling with his fellow men. (p.1363:1)*

And let's never forget:

Of all human knowledge, that which is of greatest value is to know the religious life of Jesus and how he lived it. (p.2090:4)

Not just reading, but *study, study, and more study; education, education, and more education*—especially in and of those things containing loads of spiritual value such as *The Urantia Book* is how this world will be transformed.

Let's become more aware of the value of *Urantia Book* study groups and develop informal frameworks for the spreading of these supernal teachings.

Urantology—A New Website

by a Reader of *The Urantia Book*

What is Urantology? It's lots of things really, including the name of a new web site.

In the past forty-seven years, a great number of excellent writings and study aids have been inspired by the Urantia Papers. A selection of these has been used to create a new web site. Presented collectively they show the Papers in an expansive and interesting way.

The information on this site has been collected from other web sites, newsletters, and from individuals. While it is not an exhaustive list, and many people may find some favorites are not there, it is intended to be a start. New material will be added progressively to keep pace with the general interest now being generated by the Papers.

The name of the site, "Urantology" www.urantology.org, is intended to give authority to our valuable musings which have now become an impressive body of knowledge. The Urantia Papers need to be seen as an important document worthy of serious consideration and analysis. By presenting the teachings in a learned way, it is hoped that there is a credibility afforded to the Papers. This scholarly concept will also ensure that a high standard of content is maintained. And new readers and researchers need to know their starting point, if they are going to realise the scope of contributions to date.

Urantology has been defined as:

The study of the Urantia Papers and the sharing of that knowledge through discourse and derivative work; the discovery of related facts; the experiential comprehension of significant revelation.

The site concentrates on articles that can expand our understanding of the content of the Papers. It can be a means for generating new ideas and discussion. The information is presented in an easy-to-source format and the content has a practical edge. In this way, the site may attract interest from a whole new range of potential readers. The material may also be useful for introducing new readers to the Papers.

Hopefully the site will build over the years and contributors from diverse viewpoints will write articles, get involved in special projects, create networks, and move us all forward.

A whole hearted thank you to all who assisted with the development of the site. Take a peek at www.urantology.org sometime soon, and find out more.

Australian Foundation Office WebSite

Updates have recently been made to Urantia Foundation's Australian branch office website to help

service readers in Australia/New Zealand and Asia. It now has an interactive order form and a section where you can inform the office of any address changes. It has a list of some internet bookshops in Australia and New Zealand that now carry *The Urantia Book*, along with a much easier menu so you can also find up to date information on *The Urantia Book*, Urantia Foundation, and global information on reader activities. Have a look at www.urantia.org.au and make it one of your book marks.

Also there is an ANZURA web site, www.urantia.org.au/anzura where you will find information about ANZURA, conference news, listings of study groups, back issues of *The Arena*, and a selection of secondary works produced by readers.



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The Arena is a quarterly publication dedicated to the promotion of goodwill and understanding among readers of The URANTIA Book.

Editorial contributions are welcome.

Subscription rates:

Australia/New Zealand – \$A10 per year.

Other countries – \$A15 per year.

Please remit in Australian currency, cheques made payable to ANZURA.

Interpretations and opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of The Arena or URANTIA Foundation. All quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are from The URANTIA Book 6 1955 and used by permission.

National Study Day

27 / 28 April, 2002

Theme: *Religion in Human Experience—Paper 100*

It's that time of the year again when study group hosts throughout Australia and New Zealand have agreed to be available to conduct a study day for any readers in their region interested in coming together to study, discuss, and get to know one another. (See the enclosed letter for details.) All you need to do is to contact the host closest to you—the hosts are listed on the back on the letter—and find out more details about the day. Here's a great opportunity to get to know some readers in your region. Hope you can find time to meet over the weekend of 27/28 April.

Australian & New Zealand Annual Conference

Sunshine Coast, Queensland

11–14 October, 2002

'Being' and 'Doing' According to *The Urantia Book* is the theme of this year's annual conference. This event will be held in Queensland at Dicky Beach on the beautiful Sunshine Coast north of Brisbane. Readers from the Brisbane and Sunshine Coast study groups have kindly offered to host the conference this year. Mark your calendars so you don't miss this, what's shaping up to be a very promising event. Further details will be announced in the next issue of *The Arena*, or you may contact ANZURA on: ph:(02) 9970-6200, fax:(02) 9970-6201, or email: anzura@urantia.org.au.

Food for Thought

A series of questions was sent to readers over some reader discussion lists recently. One of the questions was: "Are study groups important? Why?"

Here is a sample of the answers that were submitted:

Jeffrey Wattles (USA): Study groups are part of the design for the dissemination of the teachings of *The Urantia Book* on our planet. Study groups enable new readers to benefit from the experience of seasoned readers. They enable seasoned readers to be enlightened by the insights and wonderful questions of beginners. And they enable both groups to realise that the difference between beginners and seasoned readers is eclipsed in the joy of our spirit equality.

Jerry Prentice (USA): Yes. Study groups serve several functions: They enhance understanding of the concepts in the book, encourage and inspire us by contact with fellow readers, and serve as a check to prevent us from getting carried away by our own perspectives.

Sue Tennant (Canada): Yes! Study groups are very

important when they enlarge our concepts of spiritual and cosmic realities. A more intelligent and civilised world depends on our knowledge of and personal experience with spiritual realities. But the theory of *The Urantia Book* is useless, even a detriment, without practical application. A mature study group will model better ways of communicating across differences. And when study groups become dreadfully serious, they will create warm hospitality and fun for a balance.

Peep Sõber (Estonia): There are many reasons why study groups are important. I think readers need to share their spiritual life with others on a regular basis. We need friends with spiritual interests; in a friendly atmosphere we can get into better contact with our spiritual helpers. I have about 30 years experience with different kinds of study groups and can say, our *Urantia Book* groups are certainly the best. We don't have gurus and holy books therefore our activity can be more creative. But study groups are also living cells in the body of the *Urantia* movement.

Kathleen Swadling (Australia): Study groups are very important. We all see things differently because we've all had different experiences and because we are all unique. We come to conclusions based on our personal perspectives. In other words, if we just read alone we get a subjective understanding of *The Urantia Book* based on our own circumscribed viewpoint. When we study *The Urantia Book* with others our view or our perspectives are broadened. We are given an opportunity to learn from others and to examine our own understanding. We are given an opportunity to articulate those things we may have only kept to ourselves as private thoughts, therefore not tested on others for rationality and balance. An added bonus for study groups is that while they provide an informal educational framework, they also provide for the opportunity to forge meaningful friendships and relationships with our fellows and experience a little taste of the Brotherhood of Man under the Fatherhood of God for a couple of hours every now and again.

Carlos Rubinsky (Argentina): If you have the experience you will have the knowledge...until then I can only give you words, saying how good it is....because for many reasons....I'd rather recommend you try it and enjoy the experience !

Why Reading *The Urantia Book* With Others is Worthwhile

Nancy Shaffer, California, USA

The first reading of *The Urantia Book* can be a daunting undertaking. It provides experiences such as “I have read this sentence five times and I now realise that I definitely do not understand it” and, “Wow” and, “I *knew* it!” For some of us it sharpens questions, conflicts, and doubts. For many it awakens a willingness to dare to hope, perhaps to begin to actually believe, that it is all true, that God does not play tricks on mere mortals, that this book is a manifestation of his will, that it is part of the outworking of the divine plan. Because the teachings of *The Urantia Book* are so unique, it is especially helpful during the first reading to have a group of other readers to ask questions and with whom one can share and discuss the teachings. It is also very helpful and reassuring to associate with other people who have similar spiritual goals.

The second reading of *The Urantia Book* is easier, but it reveals how much was not understood or was forgotten after the first reading. The experiences of “Hey, I didn’t remember that was in there” begin, as does the first realisation that what you are getting out of the book has changed because you have changed. The other members of a study group offer the opportunity for experiences such as “Does it really say that? Where?” and all variations on that theme.

If the first or second readings don’t generate a desire to compare recurring issues in different parts of the book, the third one is bound to. There are so many “threads” to pursue. Life experiences are all judged against some teaching or idea from the book. The other members of a study group provide additional perspectives and understanding fellowship in the process of mastering the book and its teachings.

The fourth reading confirms that “mastery” of the teachings is a relative term. One could memorize the entire book but still not understand its teachings. At some point, sooner or later, the fact that one cannot expect to fully understand all of the truth revealed in *The Urantia Book* in this life hits with full force, along with the realisation that you want to keep reading it over and over because it is true, beautiful, and good; because it provides a sense that you can reach through and touch that other, spiritual universe inhabited by midwayers, angels, and all of the other beings in God’s creations; and because trying to understand actually increases understanding, and increased understanding actually does help you to be a better person. With the other members of your study group, you begin to bring into being in your own life and in your own experience—to actualise—a spiritual brotherhood. And all of the readers you know form an expanded study group, an extended brotherhood. And when you meet readers for the first time, you know they are part of that brotherhood. And that is good.

How Does the Individual Organise the Soul for Dynamic Service?

Kathleen Swadling, Sydney, Australia
Conference Sydney 2001 Presentation

How does the individual organise the soul for dynamic service? That’s the topic of this morning’s pre-morning tea presentation. When I first started to ponder this topic about organising the soul for dynamic service I thought that perhaps we should begin by taking one step back and ask the question: why would one even *want* to organise the soul for dynamic service? I thought about changing the title to read “why *should* the individual organise the soul for dynamic service?” What are we trying to get at here by dedicating an entire conference to this theme of individual preparation for service?

Well, I figured that before we can seriously consider the merits of organising the soul, it may be useful to ponder what drives us—what factors come into play that cause us to ponder this idea of organising our souls for service. As Rex has explained, we’ll be taking a two-pronged approach to this theme this weekend—today we’ll be dealing with the individual aspect. We’ll be looking at ideals and philosophical concepts as they relate to the individual’s spiritual quest, and tomorrow we’ll be exploring the more practical aspects of service—projects, group activities, networking, outreach etc.—good gutsy stuff like that.

My presentation will be dealing with the broader picture—an idealistic and philosophical view of the individual’s inner life quest for God. After morning tea William will take us on a, no doubt, entertaining journey of what we’re up against as we try to put our ideals into practice on a consistent daily basis. If I know William well enough it will be entertaining and very valuable I’m sure. He’ll look at the realism of being religious idealists living in a confused, messed up world. (I’m glad I don’t have his job :-)

Let’s start by taking a good look at the quote that inspired this theme:

Religion is not a technique for attaining a static and blissful peace of mind; it is an impulse for organizing the soul for dynamic service. It is the enlistment of the totality of selfhood in the loyal service of loving God and serving man. (The Urantia Book p.1096:6)

This quote is talking about **religion**. First it says what religion is *not*—it’s not a technique for attaining a static and blissful peace of mind—and then it says what religion *is*: it’s an “*impulse ... for organising the soul for dynamic service.*” So if we want to explore what this phrase, “organising the soul for dynamic service” means, we need to explore something about the *impulse* that leads us there—about the term *religion* as defined in *The Urantia Book*. We need to get a good handle on that and how it relates to the individual in the context of our theme.

Throughout *The Urantia Book* religion is defined over and over again. Let's take a look at a few—note the action words. (The emphasis is mine.)

*Religion is not a specific function of life; rather is it a **mode of living**.* (p.1100:3)

*True religion must **act*** (p.1121:1)

*There is no real religion apart from a **highly active personality*** (p.1120:4)

*The religion of Jesus was the **most dynamic** influence ever to activate the human race.* (p.1084:10)

*The experience of **dynamic religious living** transforms the mediocre individual into a personality of idealistic **power**.* (p.1094:1)

*But **true religion** is a **living love, a life of service**.* (p.1100:7)

“A living love, a life of service.”—Good stuff. It's alive. As students of *The Urantia Book* we should be familiar with the fact that Jesus' teachings—Jesus' religion—the gospel if you like, is all about action for the benefit of our fellow man—living, loving, giving, serving. Through our study of *The Urantia Book* we know that to serve God is to serve our fellow man, and the reverse may also be true—to serve our fellow man is to serve God.

I just need to add a qualifier here to make a distinction between service that has spiritual value, and purely humanitarian service that may or may not have spiritual value. Both may be the result of an inner drive or some kind of passion, but both may not be of spiritual value. I don't want to go into that now—perhaps this notion can be explored in the workshops or over lunch—but I do want to emphasise that for this presentation I'm talking about the kind of call to service that comes as a direct result of one's desire to do the will of the Father in heaven.

With that said, before we can contemplate service and worry about serious soul decisions to get ourselves organised to be effective, I'd like to take a look at what happens to an individual that makes him or her become a true believer and to embrace this true and living religion that causes this *impulse* to serve and to freely give.

In simplistic terms, if we don't have some kind of sincere inner relationship with God happening—if we don't have a desire to do the will of God—then the notion of service is just a duty really. Our conscience may tell us we should be altruistic and service minded, and we may even feel that God may frown upon us if we're not being of service, but our natural impulses and desires to serve may not get sparked sufficiently to drive us to that point where we make important choices about service, where we decide to devote ourselves to some worthy cause for the spiritual enlightenment of humankind. This kind of service is a fruit of the spirit—it's an outworking of our personal religious living—our very faith in God. Once the motive is right the spiritual fruits flow, and then we need to manage that flow of energy—that's what

organising the soul for service is all about—harnessing the energy of spiritual outflow and putting it to effective, practical use.

But what brings an individual believer to that place where he or she has a burning desire to serve God? What does it really mean to believe in God? What happens to us to make us come to that conclusion where we can honestly say—“yes, I believe in you, Lord and I want to do your will.” Because unless we feel that way with a whole heart, our religion isn't really alive and meaningful.

Perhaps for many of us we start out on our spiritual quest by first experiencing a kind of restlessness, an increasing awareness of discontent, a need to know more, to find more meaning in life. We feel a kind of emptiness that gradually becomes more of a discomfort, or an irritation, and eventually becomes a conscious awareness of a kind of hunger, like a dying thirst.

This yearning to know more becomes a kind of an impulse that takes over the entire being. It stimulates the human mind to ponder and to analyse the situation and to make some vital decisions about what to do to satisfy this hunger and to fill the emptiness, to search for the water of life, to embark upon the quest for truth.

The mind slowly recognises that there is possibly a higher force at work here. This is an impulse coming from a higher realm that can't be seen or heard with the physical senses—yet the hunger is real—it's just as real as physical hunger yet—somehow different.

So what is this force we ask ourselves. Where is this powerful drive coming from? How do I find its source? We finally realise that we can't figure this one out alone. It goes beyond the limitations of our reasoning ability. We realise that we need help.

We figure that nothing comes from nothing, therefore this all-encompassing drive *must* have a source—and we know that it's not human or material. We deduce therefore that there must be a higher mind, a greater intelligence—dare we even say *God*—at work here? So we decide to take a risk. We decide to reach out and ask this intelligence for help. We don't know who or what we're reaching out to but we *know* it's something or someone.

We don't know it yet but we've just taken that first leap of faith—we've made the vital decision to knock on the door of uncertainty. Of our own free will, we have actually asked God to come and help us in our quest. Now, this is the moment the spiritual forces have been waiting for—the creature has now reached out and asked, it's made an important decision and by doing so has assisted the spirit to work more effectively in the mind arena.

Gradually we start to feel a subtle change. The decision to reach out has taken a huge load off our minds. We feel at peace, we feel an inward glow, we feel good about our decision. As a matter of fact it feels so good, we decide to increase the dialogue—we learn to pray! We learn that to be still and to make the conscious choice to invite God into our life changes our inner equilibrium somehow. We

decide to form the habit of making prayer a regular part of our lives. Prayer is an essential key to the effective development of this relationship.

As an aside I can't emphasise this point hard enough—*The Urantia Book* says about the doing of the Father's will: *The doing of the will of God is nothing more or less than an exhibition of creature willingness to share the inner life with God...* (p.1221:2)

So, by making regular decisions to pray—to attempt to share the inner life with God, we start to have actual experiences—we *experience* a peace that passes all understanding, we start to *experience* a knowingness that runs too deep for words, we *experience* a powerful presence that we recognize as being true, beautiful, and good. We may get moved to tears by an all-powerful feeling of love, safety, peace. We've *experienced* the power of the spirit—the love of God. We've become a believer! Right—well we've just made it to first base.

So this is what it *means* to be a believer. It's to *know* God in your heart as a reality, as a vital part of your life, as a necessary component to the development and well being of your soul. And through faith, you have come to trust this God explicitly. But this is only the beginning. Now a new question arises: What's the *value* or the purpose of being a believer? Why are we given this remarkable experience, this precious gift? Surely the purpose can't merely be just to feel good about having that hunger satisfied. Surely it's not just so we can feel a nice inward glow and peace when we talk with God.

Remember the first part of our quote: *Religion is not a technique for attaining a static and blissful peace of mind...* Another stirring begins to take place within our being. We become aware that this new found gift can't be contained within. It needs to be shared; it needs to be given away.

To keep it to ones self just doesn't make sense. The new found love you've been given has made you fall in love with God. You feel so grateful to the Father for the joyful experience of this new spiritual birth that there develops a desire to reach out to God and to say: "Father, you've given me so much, what can I give in return?" When you fall in love with someone you usually want to do something for them—it's an innate quality of love.

By this statement you've just taken the first step along the path of selflessness. You've embarked on the journey of selfless, loving service. The altruistic urge has been born! So now you've now made it to second base—we're making real progress here. Now this is the stage where you'd better hang on because when you reach this stage of your journey this is where you get the opportunity to show what you're really made of.

Why? Because suddenly you're confronted with a vast, rich array of choices—of service opportunities. In fact the choices are so great it becomes a real challenge to decide just how best you can serve the endless needs that confront you. This is where you begin to organise your

soul. Remember the second part of the quote ...*[religion] is an impulse for organizing the soul for dynamic service.*

This is decision making time—remember when it started to dawn on Jesus that he had a special mission to undertake, he took himself away and did some serious pondering with God (my husband likes to call this "factual mediation"). He had to take into account all the practicalities of his life—finances, family etc. as well as the knowledge of his culture, politics, established religions, limitations of human beings—the whole gamut. He laid the whole lot out before God and pondered and explored all aspects, always seeking the Father's will in the process—sharing his inner life with the Father while making decisions about his practical life in the flesh.

Because the choices are so great and because you know you want to do this God's way, your regular prayer life becomes key to this process of decision making. It becomes like a dialogue with a senior partner. You enter into this factual meditation, or a problem solving style of communion where you and your spirit are working in partnership to decide how best you can serve God.

Your relationship with God has become like that of an ideal parent/child kind of relationship. You've long recognized the all wise, merciful, loving nature of God, and that your own nature, by comparison, is like a child's who looks to the father for guidance and security. You know beyond any doubt that you can trust this Father to take care of your every need and to be with you at all times. Your faith is strong by now. You start to feel a healthy self-respect and a new confidence in the security of being anchored by faith.

So you start to look around you, you become more aware of your fellows, you begin to realise that your fellow human beings and you are all in the same boat—that each and every one of your fellows is struggling with all the same impulses and problems that you've had to endure. You realise that God, being a parent, wants for all his children, that which he wants for you. This can be quite an inner revelation—that all my fellow men and women are just like me—we're like a family living under the loving watch-care of our Heavenly Father—*my* Father, my new found saviour of my soul, is also *their* Father! We are, in truth, a family.

Then you may think; "Why has it taken me so long to realise this incredibly simple truth? I've been so wrapped up in myself and in my own desires to satisfy the thirst and hunger of my own inner life, I've failed to see that everyone else is suffering and struggling also." As you begin to understand the nature of your fellow man, that your fellows hold all the same kinds of strengths and weaknesses as you yourself hold, you begin to like people more because you've become a little more understanding—which then makes you a little more tolerant. You know that the same spirit that indwells you also indwells each and every one of mankind.

You realise the human race is, in potential, the

Brotherhood of Man living under the Fatherhood of God. And because of the fabulous attributes of God—the entire universe must be friendly! This new awareness that we're actual a family of God is causing, once again, subtle changes within the believer. You start behaving differently towards your fellows without even knowing it. You begin to be a little more friendly and loving in your attitude.

You begin to understand that each and every one of us possesses a gemstone that lies underneath the rubble of our imperfect natures—it's called the soul. And because the soul is an evolving, growing thing it's easy for it to get hidden under the rubble. We all have the choice about what to look for in life and what to look for in our fellows. We can choose to see just the outside rubble of the imperfect nature and relate just to that when we deal with our fellows, or we can look for the gemstone—the soul—the true child of God, and relate to that. But like discovering most gemstones, it requires effort and determination to uncover the glorious wonders of the spirit. It requires a motive for persevering—it requires love, which, as stated in *The Urantia Book* on page 648, is the *desire to do good to others*.

You start to take more of a genuine interest in your fellow men and women. You take time to befriend them, to get to know them. Once you get to know them you begin to understand them. Once you understand them you begin to forgive them their failings and imperfections, you begin to look for truth and value within their personality, you begin to detect glimmers of their spirit to varying degrees, you begin to have increased tolerance and patience of their shortcomings—and low and behold—you find yourself growing to love them! *You've reached third base*. This is an important ingredient as love is in and of itself, the most powerful motivator for spiritual service. As I said before—when you love someone you want to do things for them.

This experience of love for your fellow men and women and for the human race holds infinite potential for service. The love for God from within your being spills over to become a love for mankind without. Gradually it all starts to meld into one, it all starts to come together, to make sense. You're starting to understand that the love you hold for your fellow man is one and the same as your love for God. Therefore, to serve God is to serve mankind.

The Urantia Book tells us a lot about the spiritual fruits, about how life is devoid of meaning and value unless we're growing spiritually and sharing our spiritual fruits with our fellows. Valuable quotes on this important lesson can be found on pages 1946:3, 2054:3, 1091:5, 1095:3, 2090:4.

It's all there in *The Urantia Book*. If we read and study it enough and internalise the amazing truths and make decisions to act upon what we glean to be true, beautiful, and good, we can't go wrong. But while the book gives us some wonderful stuff to ponder, it's only a means to an end. It's only a tool. The real work gets done as a result of our decisions, and it's by our decisions that we get our

souls organised for service.

Now this can be a really tricky phase in our journey. Everything I've said so far has really just been an analysis of the process that takes place within the religionist to bring him to this place. All that's happened so far is just the setting of the stage—preparatory work. It's now time to get the soul organised for service—this is where the very theme for our conference kicks in. I asked the question in my introduction what we were trying to get at by devoting an entire theme to this topic of the organisation of the soul for service. Well, because it's such a crucial time in the journey of the religionist, we figured it was worthy of detailed examination. We figured it was worthy of setting up a platform for the sharing of ideas with one another—our friends and fellows on this same journey—to help to stimulate our thinking and examine the problems as well as the opportunities that confront us.

When considering how best to serve, we may need to make some important decisions about our lives—many factors need to be considered—things like what *can* I do, what am I *able* to do, where are my strengths and weaknesses, what material responsibilities do I have—family and economic considerations are big ones—what talents and skills do I have, what do I need to do to get these things accomplished, what's standing in the way, how will I fund this work, how and where will I live. In other words you're figuring out a plan for your life. Just as we make career decisions or other material kinds of decisions for our physical maintenance and wellbeing, so do we need to make plans and decisions in similar ways for our spiritual service life. And of course, if we're talking about organising the soul, then by the very nature of the term soul, must God be involved in the decision making process.

No one can ever presume to tell another what he or she should or should not be doing—we all have to figure it out for ourselves with our indwelling spirits, but we can be of assistance to one another—especially if you choose an avenue of service that requires group activity and teamwork. Tomorrow we'll be discussing more about this aspect. For now I'd just like to wind this up by pointing out a few things on how Jesus went about figuring out his life and his mission. While his mission was obviously much greater than any calling any of us would have, his methods for figuring out his earthly life can be studied and reviewed as a model for our service lives.

Ever since his Father died he had to juggle his family and economic commitments with his future plans in accordance with his growing awareness of his mission to become a great teacher. He had to decide whether to go down the road of rabbinical teaching or be independent of man made institutions. He spent a lot of time studying. As he grew older he gradually planned for the exchange of family responsibilities by carefully training his siblings and, when they were ready, would gradually hand over the reigns of the family to their care. When he went off for 40 days after the baptism at the Jordan, he did some

serious decision making—we can read all about the process he went through by studying his plans for future work and the 6 great decisions. It says on page 1515:

The forty days in the mountain wilderness were not a period of great temptation but rather the period of the Master's great decisions. During these days of lone communion with himself and his Father's immediate presence—the Personalized Adjuster ...he arrived, one by one, at the great decisions which were to control his policies and conduct for the remainder of his earth career. (p.1515:4)

As a child he accumulated a vast body of knowledge; as a youth he sorted, classified, and correlated this information; and now as a man of the realm he begins to organize these mental possessions preparatory to utilization in his subsequent teaching, ministry, and service in behalf of his fellow mortals on this world and on all other spheres of habitation throughout the entire universe of Nebadon. (p.1405:6)

So I think we have a lot to ponder this weekend. I've tried to give a fairly broad, philosophical and perhaps rather simplistic view of the process and condition of the religionist as he develops spiritually to the point where he needs to make important decisions about how best to give—how best to harness and direct that flow of spiritual fruit. With all that said, however, if it was as simplistic and straightforward as this, why don't we see more evidence of the fruits of the spirit from the millions of professed believers?

When I look into my own soul I must ask: Well if I believe all of what I've just said to be true, why do I still get impatient and intolerant? Why do I still get angry sometimes? Why do I still suffer from mood swings? Why is it so hard to stay consistent and positive in the day-to-day struggle of every day life?

Well, I've left it up to William to solve those riddles—I've done the easy bit—after morning tea he's going to tackle the real hardcore issues. Thanks for listening everyone. God bless.

(for William's address that followed this one see the previous December 2001 issue of The Arena.)

In Search of E.T.'s Breath

Nasa, January 10, 2002

If "E.T." is out there, whether in the form of intelligent beings or much simpler organisms, we may soon be hot on its trail. For the first time in history, the dream of searching for signs of life in other solar systems belongs not only on the philosopher's wish list, but on the list of doable and planned human endeavors.

Momentum is gaining rapidly. Only 6 years ago, the first planet around another Sun-like star was discovered by scientists using Doppler Detection — a method that

reveals Saturn-sized (or larger) planets close to their parent suns. Today, we know of more than 80 candidates for such worlds, and more are being found all the time.

Scientists crossed a new frontier in "exo-planet" research just last year when, using the Hubble Space Telescope, they detected sodium in the atmosphere of a large alien world orbiting the star HD 209458. The Hubble data not only revealed that exo-planets have atmospheres, but also that we can analyze them from a distance. For the first time, humans are discovering *and exploring* worlds outside the solar system. So far, all known extra-solar planets are gas giants — unlikely abodes for life as we know it. In fact, some are so large that they might not be planets at all, but a kind of failed star called a "brown dwarf." Of greater interest are Earth-size planets, which are too small for even the Hubble Space Telescope to detect. Nevertheless, astronomers believe they exist.

Enter Kepler, a space telescope approved recently by NASA.

Beginning in 2006, Kepler will monitor about 100,000 nearby stars, searching for the slight dimming that occurs when an orbiting planet blocks some of the parent star's light. Because Kepler will be sensitive enough to detect planets as small as Earth, this celestial survey will give scientists an idea of how common Earth-like planets are — and identify candidates for further study.

If all goes as planned, an important new tool for exploring such planets will be operating by the end of this decade. Called the Terrestrial Planet Finder (TPF), this space telescope will use a technique called "interferometry" to dramatically reduce the obscuring glare from the planet's parent star, allowing scientists to see the planet itself. The Web site for the European Space Agency's similar Darwin project notes that, "Looking for planets around nearby stars is like trying to discern, from a vantage point 1000 km away, the feeble light from a candle next to a lighthouse."

It is indeed a daunting challenge, but worth the effort. The goal is nothing short of finding worlds that could support life — and perhaps some that do.

By taking advantage of the wave nature of light, interferometry can cancel out some of the light coming from a star, enabling the telescope to image the much dimmer planets in orbit around it.

Planets circling other stars are many light years away. (A light-year is the distance that light travels in a year — about 9.5 trillion km.) Even with the TPF's advanced optics, Earth-like worlds would appear as a single pixel of light. How, then, will it be possible to learn much about them? Amazingly, that tiny speck of light can speak volumes about the planet from which it came. Embedded in that light are the "fingerprints" of the chemicals that have touched it, including the gases in the planet's atmosphere. By splitting the light into its component frequencies — which for visible light creates the familiar rainbow of colors — scientists can reveal these "fingerprints" and learn about the chemistry of the planet's

atmosphere. If an alien astronomer on a distant planet were exploring our solar system, they might guess that something special is happening on Earth. The spectra of Venus and Mars show the mark of a carbon dioxide-rich atmosphere, but only Earth's spectrum has strong ozone and water vapor fingerprints as well. Scientists will use clues such as these to search for the chemical signs of life on planets around other stars.

If life is widespread on a planet, its atmosphere should show signs of life's presence. Just as the air you exhale has more carbon dioxide and less oxygen than the air you inhale, the combined "breathing" of all the life on a planet will change the chemistry of its atmosphere. If life is plentiful on the planet, these changes may be large enough to notice.

A simple premise — but what would E.T.'s breath look like? Which gases should we search for? We know the answers for our own world, but predicting how an alien biology might interact with its atmosphere is no simple matter. "As astrobiologists we've got to be sure that we're not too Earth-centric," says Michael Meyer, senior scientist for astrobiology at NASA Headquarters in Washington, D.C.

The possibility that life elsewhere has a biology that's radically different from our own is perhaps the most exciting and challenging part of astrobiology (not to mention a ubiquitous theme of science fiction.) If life evolves by random mutations and natural selection, why should we expect alien life forms to be even remotely similar to Earthly life?

"We have to be very careful about how foreign biology might be different from our own, especially when you get to the bigger molecules such as DNA," says David Des Marais, principal investigator for the Ames Research Center team of NASA's Astrobiology Institute.

For example, people have speculated that silicon, a primary component of sand and a close cousin to carbon, could form the basis of an extraterrestrial biology. Alien life might forgo sunlight and depend instead on the geothermal energy in hydrogen and sulfur compounds emitted from the planet's interior, much like the deep-sea vent ecosystems here on Earth. Or maybe the chemistry of alien life will be utterly different and unimaginable.

Even life on Earth can surprise scientists. The strange deep-sea creatures in this ecosystem, discovered in 1977, thrive on chemical energy rather than sunlight. Fortunately, the chemical constraints within which life must function make it likely that simple molecules such as oxygen and carbon dioxide will play the same roles in an extraterrestrial biology as they do on Earth.

"Suppose," says Meyer, "that there is silicon-based life. [It might be] photosynthetic, and you would still end up with oxygen in the atmosphere. You could go there and the life could be completely different, but some of the chemistry could still be the same [as on Earth]."

"The small molecules are going to be more universal," agrees Des Marais. "Large molecules like DNA and

chlorophyll represent later, highly significant innovations of life on Earth, but also the ones that may have differed elsewhere."

For this and other reasons, the exploration of distant Earth-like planets with TPF will focus on simple gases such as oxygen, ozone, carbon dioxide, methane, and, of course, water vapor.

Oxygen gas is a good indicator of life. But, scientists caution, oxygen has been abundant on Earth only since the advent of photosynthesis — probably a billion years or more *after* life began! To have the greatest chance of spotting extraterrestrial life, astrobiologists must consider how life looked on the young Earth, too, when the atmosphere was different.

Oxygen and its tag-along cousin ozone will top the list of target molecules. Without life, oxygen should be rare on rocky worlds. A small amount of it can be created without life by ultraviolet radiation that splits water vapor into hydrogen and oxygen. But that oxygen would be readily consumed by rocks and minerals on the planet's surface in the "oxidizing" reactions that produce, for example, rust. Volcanic gases also react with oxygen and remove it from the atmosphere. Geological processes alone usually work against the accumulation of oxygen.

An oxygen-rich atmosphere is, therefore, out of chemical equilibrium, suggesting that some active agent — namely photosynthetic life — is constantly replenishing the supply. As Carl Sagan noted in a 1997 *Scientific American* article, "the great concentration of oxygen (20 percent) in Earth's dense atmosphere is very hard to explain by [any means other than life.]" The same would be true of planets around other stars.

The planet, which harbors abundant life, has an oxygen-rich atmosphere (with a dash of methane) and telltale signs of chlorophyll on the ground.

Next on the list of target molecules is methane. Scientists suspect that for roughly the first billion years of its history, life on Earth had not yet evolved oxygen-producing photosynthesis. Instead, the microorganisms that then dominated the planet tapped the energy in gases leaking out of the Earth's interior, with some microbes creating methane as a byproduct.

On a planet with a similar geology to Earth, methane levels greater than about 100 parts per million would suggest the presence of life. But methane would be a more ambiguous discovery than oxygen, because planets of a different geological make-up might produce abundant methane without life.

Other details about these planets — such as their size, their distance from the parent star, their carbon dioxide and water vapor levels, and their reflectivity — will help scientists accurately interpret a methane or oxygen discovery. These other details can also be measured (or at least estimated) using TPF and other telescopes.

Some of these ideas have already been tested on a planet known to support life — Earth.

In 1990, the Galileo spacecraft made a flyby of our planet on its circuitous journey to Jupiter. As it passed, Galileo's sensors detected high levels of oxygen and methane in Earth's atmosphere and signs of chlorophyll on the ground. Chlorophyll, which absorbs light at the far-red end of the visible spectrum, is a "red flag" for life. The TPF won't be sensitive to chlorophyll on a planet's surface because atmospheric water vapor, which is opaque in the mid-infrared frequency range that TPF will observe, will hide the surface below. Even without chlorophyll, signs of oxygen and methane — which TPF *can* detect — would make a persuasive case for life.

If the TPF finds a habitable planet with lots of oxygen and some methane in its atmosphere, it would be a momentous discovery. But would such data really *prove* life is there? "Proof" is always a tall order in science, especially when discussing extraterrestrial life. Nevertheless, say astrobiologists, such evidence would be "very compelling."

One day it might happen ... and after catching its first whiff of E.T.'s breath, humanity won't likely give up the chase. The next step would be an even larger space telescope that could see the planet as more than one pixel, allowing scientists to see surface features such as continents and to observe the changing of the planet's seasons. And perhaps by the end of the next decade it would be possible to send a probe across interstellar space to take a close-up look, which could finally provide incontrovertible evidence.

Proof will be for the patient: Even using advanced propulsion technologies, a probe might take decades to reach a neighboring star. But to answer a profound question that's been asked by humanity for centuries, perhaps that isn't too long to wait.



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