

Spiritual Fellowship Journal

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The Spiritual Fellowship of Students of The Urantia Book

A Spiritual Leadership Network Interested in *The Urantia Book* as a Resource in Living,
Creative Service, Teaching, Preaching, and Writing.

Guiding Network Principles

1. We believe *The Urantia Book* can make a significant contribution to the stimulation of spiritual creativity in churches, synagogues, and other religious institutions and their people.
2. We believe that at the present stage of spiritual development it is wise for ministers, priests, and rabbis to use *The Urantia Book* as a resource for preaching and teaching rather than referring to the book itself or directing attention to it. Almost every concept in *The Urantia Book* can be associated with some theologian, philosopher, or scientist in the past or present.
3. We believe that, although one should not be secretive about interest in *The Urantia Book*, one should use discretion in recommending it to people. The light of enhanced truth can frighten and blind as well as guide and illuminate.
4. We believe *The Urantia Book's* claim to a revelatory source and status is not germane to its usefulness in the presentation of spiritual truth. Truth has an inherent appeal, regardless of its source, and can be used to enrich one's preaching, teaching, and living.
5. We believe the Spirit of God works among us in a differential and evolutionary manner; therefore, we recognize that for whatever reason some clergy may not wish to read and critically evaluate *The Urantia Book*. This diversity should in no way stand as a barrier to our mutual respect, fellowship, and love.
6. We believe the leavening process of creativity stimulated by *The Urantia Book* should be ecumenical in nature.
7. We believe *The Urantia Book* will eventually be recognized by the great majority of the world's religious leaders as one of the most constructive spiritual messages our world has received since Jesus' ministry on earth.

Network Recommendations

1. Read the entire *Urantia Book* to get its sweeping universe view of reality. Many of us started reading the book at Part IV, The Life and Teachings of Jesus. If you should like to get a quick overall view of the book you might read "The Gift of Revelation," a twenty-two page summary of the basic facts and truths of *The Urantia Book*.
2. Have the *Concordex* of *The Urantia Book* available to help in researching topics on which you are preaching or teaching.
3. Use the *Paramony*, which is a parallel and harmony of the Bible and *The Urantia Book*, to locate *Urantia Book* material on the Biblical text you are using in sermon preparation.

**The Spiritual Fellowship
Journal**

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About the Editors

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

Editorials

An Age of Transition

Our secular culture has been variously labeled as “the post-Christian age,” “the postmodern age,” “the age of suspicion,” and “the carnival age” where everyone is trying to lure you into their sideshow, but no one attraction has a privileged position and everything is relativized. It is a world very much like the Greco-Roman civilization into which the apostles of Jesus went with their gospel message. Ours is an era that is lacking solid philosophical-religious foundations, a world that views all truth-claims as matters of opinion, and moral convictions as personal preferences.

Dr. Thomas G. Gillespie, president of Princeton Theological Seminary, in his farewell remarks to the class of 1996, told the graduates, “Do not look to the culture for support of your views or your visions. Do not be surprised if even the church resists your witness and is indifferent to your testimony, for the church today is an acculturated institution.”¹ Unfortunately, even within the leadership of traditional religious institutions there is a paucity of creative searching for enlarged truth.

Our world is clearly experiencing an age of transition. We are being prepared for a new spiritual paradigm—the Fifth Epochal Revelation. Religious leaders are not only confused and depressed about the future, with many experiencing “burn out,” but they are particularly afraid to seriously examine anything that purports to be new revelation. We have shared information about *The Urantia Book* with thousands of main-line ministers with little response, positive or negative. They consciously or unconsciously (and erroneously) assume it will undermine the authenticity of their faith and mission.

It may take generations for this new vision of spiritual reality to gain recognition by religious leaders, and centuries for it to transform culture throughout the world. But the creative minority among us, both inside and outside of religious institutions, are now discovering this enlarged presentation of truth to humankind and are the pioneers of the new Age of Faith evolving in the wings of history.

¹ *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin*, Vol. 17, No. 3, p. 282

-MJS

Confirming and Enlarging the Biblical Message

The Urantia Book purports to be the Fifth Epochal Revelation. Such a claim is audacious and raises serious doubts for people with critical minds. Those of us who feel threatened by such revelatory claims (and a 2000 page book with strange terminology and authorship) quickly brush it aside as another crackpot invention. Many of the curious

among us, however, have decided to give this claim critical examination.

The basic test of new revelation is a threefold check: (1) Does it harmonize and resonate with our highest personal experience and reasoning; (2) does it confirm and build on the best of previous revelation; and, (3) do people with balanced and critical minds confirm your own evaluation? Among the thousands of people who have seriously examined *The Urantia Book*, there is virtually unanimous agreement that this unique book passes all of the criteria for testing new revelation with flying colors. Students of the Bible are particularly grateful for the enlarged information of *The Urantia Book* that confirms and brings greater authenticity to the basic truths of the Bible.

The December, 1996 issue of *The Disciple* carries an article entitled, “When the Bible Upsets Us,” by Dr. Marti J. Steussy, Old Testament professor at Christian Theological Seminary. Dr. Steussy rejects any notion of divine dictation regarding the Bible, and acknowledges that there are many disturbing passages that need further clarification and thought. Readers of *The Urantia Book* will find many of these disturbing passages clarified and enhanced along with expanded spiritual insights, and the entire context of the Bible illuminated by an inspiring picture of the spiritual cosmos.

The companion relationship between the Bible and The Urantia Book is even more closely integrated than is the companion relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament.

The companion relationship between the Bible and *The Urantia Book* is even more closely integrated than is the companion relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Just as the New Testament enhances appreciation of the Old Testament, so *The Urantia Book* increases one’s understanding and appreciation of the entire Bible.

-MJS

A Call to Revival

Dr. Paul H. Sherry, president of the United Church of Christ, in his Pastoral Letter of October, 1996 says, “As we prepare for a new century, we must confess that there is a cynicism and weariness in ourselves and in others. We need to be revived. Our churches need to be renewed. We need, once again, to receive the power of the Holy Spirit that we may be joyful witnesses to the crucified and risen Christ in our communities and to the ends of the earth.”

Indeed, our entire culture needs a revival. The philosophers of history for the last half century have been documenting the deterioration of Western Civilization. The spiritual stimulus released by the renaissance and the reformation has run its course. Our culture is in critical need of a relevant and cogent vision of reality—a new Age of

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the Spirit. I believe the only adequate source of spiritual renewal for our jaded civilization and equally depleted Christian Church is a fresh revelatory breakthrough that will establish an enlarged spiritual paradigm which speaks to our day and age.

As impossible as it may seem to present day religious leaders, this new and enlarged vision of spiritual reality has been given to us in *The Urantia Book*. Thousands of people with critical and balanced minds have heralded its arrival. How long will it be before the leaders of the church “discover” this redemptive revelation of which they are so deeply in need? If we take our clue from history, it will be some time. Religious leaders of the old dispensations are among the last to recognize a new vision of reality. The priests characteristically stone the prophets, and their descendants marvel at how long it took their forbears to recognize the enlarged presentation of truth.

The supermortal authors of *The Urantia Book* are well aware of our human difficulties in recognizing a new spiritual paradigm:

The time is ripe to witness the figurative resurrection of the human Jesus from his burial tomb amidst the theological traditions and the religious dogmas of nineteen centuries. Jesus of Nazareth must not be longer sacrificed to even the splendid concept of the glorified Christ. What a transcendent service if, through this revelation, the Son of Man should be recovered from the tomb of traditional theology and be presented as the living Jesus to the church that bears his name, and to all other religions! (p. 2090)

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. It is futile to talk about a revival of primitive Christianity; you must go forward from where you find yourselves. Modern culture must become spiritually baptized with a new revelation of Jesus' life and illuminated with a new understanding of his gospel of

eternal salvation. And when Jesus becomes thus lifted up, he will draw all men to himself. Jesus' disciples should be more than conquerors, even overflowing sources of inspiration and enhanced living to all men. Religion is only an exalted humanism until it is made divine by the discovery of the reality of the presence of God in personal experience. (p. 2084)

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. (p. 2082)

Religion does need new leaders, spiritual men and women who will dare to depend solely on Jesus and his incomparable teachings. If Christianity persists in neglecting its spiritual mission while it continues to busy itself with social and material problems, the spiritual renaissance must await the coming of these new teachers of Jesus' religion who will be exclusively devoted to the spiritual regeneration of men. And then will these spirit-born souls quickly supply the leadership and inspiration requisite for the social, moral, economic, and political reorganization of the world. (p. 2082)

-MJS

Interface: When Time is Not of the Essence

As I've grown older, my view of history has changed—not just my understanding, but my sense of what is truly old and ancient and what is recent. As a young child I tended to view anything longer than the present day as a long time past or a long time into the future. Gradually, my view of things lengthened, but it tended to settle in on my generation, my lifetime, as the measure of all things significant. Only in more recent years has it grown much beyond that. I now compress history into larger chunks, where events of a thousand or even ten thousand years ago seem not that far away.

I occasionally pause to remind myself of this longer view of things when I consider the impact of *The Urantia Book*. I believe the typical scenario of a *Urantia Book* reader is something like this: We discover the book—often after a period of great skepticism and reticence to even explore it—but we “discover” it; we reach the time when the heart pounds with excitement, the limitations and boundaries of old views and paradigms begin to fall, and a new world of intelligence and grace and meaning so floods our lives that we are overcome with gratitude and joy.

We discover the book—often after a period of great skepticism and reticence to even explore it—but we “discover” it; we reach the time when the heart pounds with excitement, the limitations and boundaries of old views and paradigms begin to fall, and a new world of intelligence and grace and meaning so floods our lives that we are overcome with gratitude and joy.

The impulse to share it becomes paramount in our lives. This inconceivably good news has to be shared. But how? We quickly learn the difficulty of sharing it with others, and find their initial skepticism and fear greater than was our own. We long for ways to encourage them to just give it a try; but most return it with a look of polite puzzlement. On the one hand we understand their initial reaction; on the other hand we are amazed that so few have the courage and spiritual insight to recognize the truth of it.

Discouragement and frustration sets in. We may largely withdraw the effort, or at least become more cautious and selective in our efforts to share it. It is difficult not to wonder and speculate: How long, how long? When will the world finally come to embrace its insights and through it encounter the living presence and promises of Jesus of Nazareth?

Some may fall into millennialist thinking, trying to tie celestial events to man-made time tables, and look to our calendars for signs of coming events. This, I believe, is when

we need to pause and consider the longer view of things. Time is not of the essence here. Eternity is the measure of time, not the other way around. “A thousand years is as a watch in the night...” applies here as well.

There is an apocryphal story related to the *The Urantia Book* that I think is both interesting and helpful. According to the story, those responsible for initiating the process that led to *The Urantia Book* initially petitioned higher authorities to begin this project around the end of the twelfth century, feeling the time was right for such an upstep in knowledge and understanding. It was denied. The time was *not* right. Only after 800 more years was permission given. In retrospect, we can see how many things needed to take place, especially the scientific and technological revolution, before we were ready for such a revelation. Those involved with receiving the papers were told that even then (the 1930-1950's), it was primarily for generations still to come.

We don't know how many generations will come and go before *The Urantia Book* is widely read and received as a revelation to our planet. We don't need to. Combining our impulse to share with patience and wisdom, we can be assured that while “The act is ours, the consequences [are] God's.” (p. 1286)

Just as early Christians were impatient to see “the end of the world” and all things fulfilled in their lifetime, so we want to see results on a global scale on the immediate human horizon. We need the viewpoint of eternity in which to place our own time.

I'm convinced that someday people will look back with sadness and amazement at how few people in this generation were able or willing to receive the insights of *The Urantia Book*. But they may also wonder at the impatience of those who received the revelation. Just as early Christians were impatient to see “the end of the world” and all things fulfilled in their lifetime, so we want to see results on a global scale on the immediate human horizon. We need the viewpoint of eternity in which to place our own time.

Above all, we should never cease to give thanks that this revelation is here now, ours to know and celebrate and share.

—Merlyn Cox

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. It may well utilize such social organizations, but it must not be supplanted by them. (U.B., p. 2085)

Thoughts on the Brotherhood of Man

William M. Kelly

In a world whose most changeless fact may be the fact of change, we are confronted with the task of reevaluating the relevance of the truths espoused by former generations. This is necessary because every generation is confronted by new discoveries and new personal and social experiences. Historic spiritual values undergo fresh interpretation and application with the passage of time. One of these traditional values that is being challenged today is the concept of the "Brotherhood of Man."

For some people this phrase is unacceptable because it is couched in sexist language. It reflects a long history of male chauvinism and must be rephrased in nonsexist language before its value can be considered. Others reject it as a concept of hopelessly outmoded idealism on a planet that is torn by ethnic wars, racial struggles, economic injustices, environmental destruction, and human stupidity. It is a vision that has been tried and found wanting and has been relegated to the lowly status of an impossible ideal rather than a vigorous and substantial human reality.

I will not address the feminist agenda in this essay, not because I disagree with their position or find fault with their complaint, but because I wish to transcend the limitations of sexist language to get to the essential affirmation of the original concept, that there is a family reality to humanity. Can this concept be defended and its implications realized?

I will not address the feminist agenda in this essay, not because I disagree with their position or find fault with their complaint, but because I wish to transcend the limitations of sexist language to get to the essential affirmation of the original concept, that there is a family reality to humanity.

Robert Blye in his book, *The Sibling Society*, reaches the conclusion that human societies world-wide are becoming devoid of the vertical dimension of authority which used to reside in the traditional patriarchal family. Fathers have disappeared from their families in alarming numbers, either because of out of wedlock pregnancies or in divorce and desertion. The result, he says, is a society of siblings without fathers or mothers and without a sense of authority that the intact family contributed, not only to its own members, but to the other institutions of society as well. We are siblings, but we are really not brothers and sisters because we have no father, and sometimes no mother. This siblinghood does not establish a basis for the brotherhood of man or the sisterhood of woman.

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The main reason the brotherhood of man has not been an inspirational ideal in our secular culture, I believe, is that it is associated with the scientific species classification of homo sapiens. Such a naturalistic, biological, or cultural view of humankind lacks a familial connotation and fails to communicate sufficient commonality among the diverse peoples of the world to inspire the concept and behavior of brotherhood. The idea and atmosphere of brotherhood requires a sense of family.

Human fraternity comes most easily in blood families, less easily in the enlarged family, tribes, and nations. A sense of brotherhood is indigenous to the nuclear family structure of parents and children. But human brotherhood based on blood ties among all human beings is too abstract an idea for most people to feel a natural identity. Racial, cultural, ethnic, class, and gender differences seem to belie any serious notion of being of "one blood" when gazing upon the myriad variations of humanity. When looking at people through the lens of these differences it simply is not true that "all men are created equal." Nor does it seem logical that all peoples are fundamentally related beyond the "dead level" of species identification.

When looking at people through the lens of these differences it simply is not true that "all men are created equal." Nor does it seem logical that all peoples are fundamentally related beyond the "dead level" of species identification.

Since brotherhood or sisterhood is a family term it requires parenthood to make it a reality relationship. If I am your brother or if you are my sister, we must have at least one parent in common. Otherwise the term is meaningless, at least as long as we remain at the biological, ethnic, or socio-cultural level in our thinking. This is why such an understanding can only be an idealistic abstraction at best, and the reason why it has not succeeded in revolutionizing humanity's interactions.

But what if there really is a "brotherhood/sisterhood" of humanity, not just an ideal but a fact! On what basis could this assertion be made? As all of the religions of the world testify, this is based on the spiritual commonality of origin, nature, and destiny.

Our origins are not only biological but include the special gift of personality bestowed by God. Our personalities are unique but have a common divine origin. This gives us a personality dignity derived from the Source of all personalities. This origin of personality establishes a fraternity of personalities and is our initial human commonality.

Our nature is both human and divine, that is, we are natural animals with minds endowed with a Fragment of Divinity. We not only have a common spiritual Parent in

...the Brotherhood of Man, cont.

our biological creation, but this Parent has made us spiritual children through the bestowal of the Divine Spirit. We are all members of the family of God. And because we have a common Parent, we are sisters and brothers.

This understanding of the universal brotherhood of man is consistent with the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. It transcends any “chosen people” attitude that we find in many world religions. We are all children of the same benevolent Creator which establishes our true spiritual equality despite the many differences due to our material heredity and environment.

Finally, a common destiny awaits all humanity, based on the purposes of God. Individually, if we choose, we can meet our Spirit Parent upon completion of the grand adventure of the ascension career which is open to all who will undertake it. To know God and to be like God is the goal of our entire existence. This intriguing adventure has only barely begun in this mortal life. Its enthralling fulfillment is consummated in eternity.

The authors of *The Urantia Book* assure us there is also a common destiny for inhabited planets. This climaxing destiny is termed a state of “Life and Light” that is somewhat analogous to the concepts of Utopia projected by visionaries throughout the world. Many people are becoming convinced that we are in the beginning stages of a spiritual awakening on this planet, even in the face of an overall decline in traditional religious institutions and a deterioration of morality in society. There is a general recognition that our world is in the midst of a major transitional period in our history. A sense of cosmic citizenship is emerging in many people’s minds that transcends the boundaries of traditional religion. Indeed, there is a perception among many scientists and others that we are not the only inhabited planet in the universe and that this is not “accidental.”

There is a general recognition that our world is in the midst of a major transitional period in our history. A sense of cosmic citizenship is emerging in many people’s minds that transcends the boundaries of traditional religion.

The secular skeptics among us say, “Well, all this talk about a spiritual renaissance sounds great, but we need to be realistic. How do we know this is not just another visionary pipe dream? Where is the evidence for such a conclusion?”

Look around you at what is happening in the world—not just the focus of the media, which is usually negative, but the overall picture. Seldom in history have we experienced an era with greater spiritual hunger than our generation. Take a look at the historical perspective presented by the authors of *The Urantia Book*. This marvelous vision of spiritual reality is being discovered by tens of thousands of searching people on our world.

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 [our world] is now quivering on the very brink of one of its most amazing and enthralling epochs of social readjustment, moral quickening, and spiritual enlightenment. (U.B. p. 2082)

But most of all look within. Listen to your heart, the intuitions of your soul. Take time to meditate and listen to the indwelling Spirit of God. Remember that Elijah didn’t hear the voice of God in the thunder or the fire, in the impressive sounds of the outside arena. He heard the “still small voice” within guiding him. So can we find this guidance of the indwelling Spirit of God.

If we could see our fellow human beings beyond their surface appearances and intuit them as persons like ourselves who are partners with the indwelling Spirit of God, instead of merely clever animals or variously annoying individuals in our daily experience, we would have a start in understanding and living in the context of the brotherhood of man.

Vern B. Grimsley put it this way:

All human kind are one vast family
this world our home.
We sleep beneath one roof
the starry sky.
We warm ourselves before one hearth
the blazing sun.
Upon one floor of soil we stand
and breath one air
and drink one water
and walk the night
beneath one luminescent moon.
The children of one God we are
and brothers of one blood
and members of one worldwide
Family of God.

I believe the *Family of God* is a fact, not just an ideal. I also have experienced the amazing difference it makes when I view another person as truly my spiritual sibling. My brother, my sister—I invite you to join me in this perception!

William M. Kelly is a school psychologist and former Presbyterian minister who resides in Pocatello, Idaho.

The Urantia Book and Spiritual Renewal

My Spiritual Pilgrimage

Jean Barr

I was raised in the Church of Christ, my father was a minister, and until I was in my forties, I did not realize how many fears organized religion contributes to the lives of its adherents. I had all of those associated with orthodox theology, plus some that most certainly came from my environment and experience. Fortunately, I had long before decided that I could talk to God just as well as the preacher could, and I discussed these fears with Him on a regular basis. I felt that He heard me most of the time and I did feel that I had answers at times.

The first 44 years of my life were lived in the shadow of the Bible and its teachings. I was extremely well versed in its contents, as I was my father's assistant in the early years of my life, translating from the original text and finding strange discrepancies that did not make sense. For instance, the word "messiah" really means "perfected or enlightened or the ideal form of humanity," yet it was translated as "anointed."

The word "repent" (metanoia) has also been mistranslated and misunderstood causing a distortion of Jesus' teachings, suggesting simply feeling sorry for our sins, whereas it really means "to go beyond or to go higher than." I began to realize that we could achieve high spiritual goals in our lives here but I could not find any clear steps, nor could I find anyone who could help me to do this. And so I discovered that the Bible, in essence, presents the story of Jesus' enlightenment, but it has been largely ignored for nearly 2000 years in favor of control and various attenuated, misdirected objectives.

I began to realize that we could achieve high spiritual goals in our lives here but I could not find any clear steps, nor could I find anyone who could help me to do this. And so I discovered that the Bible, in essence, presents the story of Jesus' enlightenment, but it has been largely ignored for nearly 2000 years in favor of control and various attenuated, misdirected objectives.

In the back of my mind, I held to the hope that someday I would find a clear, defined way to achieve the "transcendence of self" that I knew existed, but I lost sight of this goal during the child-raising years. Over time my children married, and since I had divorced, I found myself painfully alone for the first time in my life. I began to search the churches of Dallas for something more than I had been exposed to and found that everyone was searching for something. However, they either were not finding it, or were finding a comfort zone

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and, whatever the zone was, not moving one way or another regardless of the things occurring around them.

I could not stay in the "comfort zone" that others had made for themselves; I had to know more and find ways to experience God. I made an irrevocable commitment to my Heavenly Father in 1973, and thus began the journey that led me to *The Urantia Book*. During the next four years, I began to experience things that I still cannot explain. But I knew that I was headed in the right direction because each turn in the path was followed by confirmation in some manner that "this was the way." Even so, it was very difficult for me to be open to anything other than organized religion.

Frustrated, I prayed and pleaded with God to teach me more and show me how to be closer to Him. When all seemed closed, one Sunday afternoon, feeling adrift, I experienced what I now know to be illumination. That event forever changed my life. And from that time forward, with the help of a teacher who also came into my life that same day, I found the truth revealed in *The Urantia Book*.

...I prayed and pleaded with God to teach me more and show me how to be closer to Him. When all seemed closed, one Sunday afternoon, feeling adrift, I experienced what I now know to be illumination.

At first I was very skeptical, but the truth literally resounded within me and I felt an excitation—I knew that even if I could not understand all of it initially that I would persevere until I reached for every drop of truth available.

I am now an ordained minister and teacher. The story of all of my journey is too long to tell, but each step was "presented" to me, not forced by me. Day by day I experienced validation of this enlarged truth, and I knew I was headed in the right direction. Miracles of life, changes that seemed to me impossible, happenings that could not happen, all began like a march to a goal.

I had found the way to achieve "Self Transcendence" or "Cosmic Consciousness." And I did achieve it! Every step of the way I had help, and I worked diligently to learn the things necessary to accomplish this as fast as I could. Then, five years later, I was asked to teach this wonderful book by my first student and I began to teach.

I was determined to find ways to make it easier for others to understand this method of growth and, with guidance, now have a system that works. I have thirty students that are working to become teachers, and three of these have achieved Self Transcendence or Cosmic Consciousness. The majority of the rest are very close. These three now have their own students and we are moving forward.

Let me give you an example one of the many occurrences that announces to us that this enlarged vision of spiritual

My Spiritual Pilgrimage, cont.

reality is true. Some four or five years ago, one of my business associates died of a heart attack at the young age of 45. I met his family at the funeral; and his wife, two daughters, and a son later became my students. I was not able to go to their home in St. Louis often, but when I did the young son (around 14) would lie on the floor and listen. He grew up and went off to college, and a couple of weeks ago, while still in college, he and his girl friend began a discussion on religion.

He tried to explain his beliefs and she backed off, being thoroughly grounded in the Baptist faith, and yet as the discussion continued she began to see that there was no real conflict—just an enlargement and correction of concepts she knew and accepted. From past experience she knew him to be a young man of integrity and strength, and as they talked he showed her materials that I had provided. Finally, when she appeared to be open-minded, he showed her *The Urantia Book*.

She got up and started to go down the hall for a minute, and turning said, “I am so confused, but I can see that there is not much difference in our concepts, I just wish I knew what to believe!”

At that moment, she said with alarm, “You’re fuzzy—I cannot see you clearly, now you are full of brilliant light—what is happening?” He was also experiencing the identical experience while looking at her! They were both radiating brilliant light and with tears streaming down both faces, they experienced identical feelings of being permeated by incredible love!

I have no explanation for this, other than that the Spirit of Truth literally manifested itself to them in this manner, but they both felt that it was confirmation of the truth of the Revelation. These happenings are occurring all over the world as sincere individuals look for greater truth and ways to find happiness and peace. Many of my students experience things similar to this.

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Most people have no idea how many fears they have and how much the fear influences their health, family, work, and all relationships—in other words, their life! If humanity understood that ego is the outward manifestation of fear and insecurity and creates the majority of the problems of today either directly or indirectly, then we would see vast improvement in all relationships and the world in general. As yet this has not happened, and if we are to succeed in eliminating drugs, violence and associated vices, then we must face up to this and modify our fears into positives which will result in stable, consistent, balanced individuals who can and will

change the world!

These changes can only be implemented by the individual, not the church, not government, not organizations, but each individual becoming aware of the incredible goals available that can be achieved now, not just in the hereafter! Humanity as a whole has no spiritual goals for today—and really not for the future. Puerile visions of flying on a cloud with a harp, or equally unrealistic views of the spiritual cosmos, do not appeal to the intelligent person. Searching people throughout the world are hungering for the inspiring vision of infinite reality found in *The Urantia Book*.

Humanity as a whole has no spiritual goals for today—and really not for the future. Puerile visions of flying on a cloud with a harp, or equally unrealistic views of the spiritual cosmos, do not appeal to the intelligent person. Searching people throughout the world are hungering for the inspiring vision of infinite reality found in The Urantia Book.

The Urantia Book says that “Goals rather than creeds should unify religionists” (p. 1091) and that is what I and my students teach—the goal of Cosmic Consciousness or Self Transcendence. It transcends all religious doctrines and dogmas. Any religion that is based on a belief in God must agree that we are supposed to make this a better world, and unless the individual changes dramatically, the world will not change for the better.

“Nineteen hundred years ago, unlearned Galileans surveyed Jesus giving his life as a spiritual contribution to man’s inner experience and then went out and turned the whole Roman Empire upside down.” (U. B. p. 2077) We are not “unlearned Galileans;” therefore we must teach the world the goals that are attainable here—in *this lifetime*—not just a vague “hope of heaven.” We must inspire humankind with: (1) the reality of Self Transcendence or Cosmic Consciousness, (2) the reality of life without fear and a closer relationship with God, and (3) the actuality of the modification of any person who is willing to change their habit patterns and transform their fears into the positive reactions of living faith. And this discipline alone, inspired by the indwelling Spirit of God, will produce the happiness engendered by the brotherhood of man and the Fatherhood of God on this planet!

Jean Barr, in addition to having a successful business career, is now a minister, lecturer, and teacher of Urantia Book concepts. She is founder and president of The Michaels Foundation, Inc.

The Religion of Jesus

A Personal Discovery of the Jesusonian Faith

Bruce R. Jackson

During my last semester at a major evangelical seminary I was forced by the church establishment to make a firm decision regarding the public statement of my faith. This was a truly difficult task as my decision was to have serious consequences on my ministerial career and the public expression of my faith. I was forced to seriously rethink my understanding of the basic tenants of the Christian faith in the light of my personal experience, my Christian training, and a basic reading of *The Urantia Book*.

My Initial Experience with *The Urantia Book*

Some four years before entering the seminary I had come in contact with *The Urantia Book*. At the time I was convinced that it was an important revelatory document sent to this planet by Jesus Christ through the efforts of many diverse beings as is clearly indicated in "The Titles of the Papers." Though I believed that my basic convictions were not in conflict with the teachings of the church, I recognized that *The Urantia Book* would be slow to find acceptance in mainline Christianity.

My initial relationship with *The Urantia Book* prior to entering the seminary was rather brief. I read it only once and would seldom reread passages. I estimate that I initially read only about two-thirds of the book, and I skipped around the text as I felt led by the Spirit. One of the most interesting phenomena that I experienced in my initial reading of the book was that once I had read a passage I seldom would forget it. That remains true to this day.

As the result of my experience with the church and The Urantia Book I have concluded that the church is in dire need of a second reformation. Additionally, I believe that the book significantly adds to the wisdom and spiritual vision of Christianity and other world religions.

While in the seminary I did not actively read or study *The Urantia Book* and was totally immersed in the Christian faith and teachings. Only in the last of my five years as a doctoral student at the seminary did I develop a catalogue of inconsistencies between the Christian faith and the religion of Jesus as represented by *The Urantia Book*. In that final semester I identified four significant areas of potential conflict between the public faith practice of Christianity and the faith outlined in *The Urantia Book*: a first century vs. a twenty-first century cosmology, formalized religion vs. personal religious experience, the promise of eternal life vs. the realities of eternal living, and the interpretation of the meaning of the cross in relation to sin.

As the result of my experience with the church and *The Urantia Book* I have concluded that the church is in dire
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need of a second reformation. Additionally, I believe that the book significantly adds to the wisdom and spiritual vision of Christianity and other world religions. Though there are profound differences between the Christian religion and the religion of Jesus as represented by *The Urantia Book*, I am convinced that Christianity is fully capable of learning from *The Urantia Book* and incorporating its teachings into its 21st Century theology.

Some day a reformation in the Christian church may strike deep enough to get back to the unadulterated religious teachings of Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. You may *preach* a religion *about* Jesus, but, perforce, you must *live* the religion *of* Jesus. In the enthusiasm of Pentecost, Peter unintentionally inaugurated a new religion, the religion of the risen and glorified Christ. The Apostle Paul later on transformed this new gospel into Christianity, a religion embodying his own theologic views and portraying his own *personal experience* with the Jesus of the Damascus road. The gospel of the kingdom is founded on the personal religious experience of Jesus of Galilee; Christianity is founded almost exclusively on the personal religious experience of the Apostle Paul. Almost the whole of the New Testament is devoted, not to the portrayal of the significant and inspiring religious life of Jesus, but to a discussion of Paul's religious experience and to a portrayal of his personal religious convictions... The New Testament is a superb Christian document, but it is only meagerly Jesusonian. (U. B. p. 2091)

Largely as the result of this quotation and one other passage (p. 2084), I have adopted the title "Jesusonian" as the descriptive title for the public expression of my personal faith and beliefs. Though it is dangerous to adopt titles for the public expression of the religion of Jesus because such titles somewhat falsely imply the existence of institutions, dogma, worship practice, and other evolutionary rationalizations of a living religious experience, I have found it necessary in order to differentiate between the public ramifications of the religion of Jesus and the established practices of the traditional church.

Cosmology

I have found that the first century cosmology of Christianity has serious cultural and personal ramifications, and is in need of revision in the light of the teachings of *The Urantia Book*. The Christian cosmology transmits a first century understanding of the cosmos which projects a flat earth between a dual universe of heaven and hell. It is a cosmology that has long been outdated, and is very difficult for a member of the "Star Trek" generation to accept. Most twentieth century men and women conceptualize the universe as a gigantic, complex, and very probably inhabited cosmos.

The Urantia Book not only projects such an enlarged material cosmology, but reveals a parallel spiritual cosmology. It offers Christianity the opportunity to develop a better

Religion of Jesus, cont.

understanding of how our mortal lives intersect with the eternal spirit beings who are assigned to our watchcare. In twentieth century Christianity it is not popular to believe that invisible beings influence our personal lives because of the role such beings are supposed to have played in the development of splinter cults, fanaticism, and mysticism. In this materialistic age, that which cannot be understood through empirical demonstration or evolutionary (time tested) faith is immediately suspect. It is a great mistake, however, to believe that just because we are unable to see angels and other immortal beings, they do not exist. Their ministry to the human races is extensively recorded in the sacred scriptures of the world religions, and no doubt their participation in modern life is more pervasive than is realized by our secular culture. Indeed, our paucity of knowledge and distortion of understanding regarding spirit personalities has caused a great deal of confusion in Christian and other world faiths.

One of the greatest sources of confusion on Urantia concerning the nature of God grows out of the failure of your sacred books clearly to distinguish between the personalities of the Paradise Trinity and between Paradise Deity and the local universe creators and administrators. During the past dispensations of partial understanding, your priests and prophets failed clearly to differentiate between Planetary Princes, System Sovereigns, Constellation Fathers, Creator Sons, Superuniverse Rulers, the Supreme Being, and the Universal Father. Many of the messages of subordinate personalities, such as Life Carriers and various orders of angels, have been, in your records, presented as coming from God himself. (U. B. p. 60)

The pervasive influence of orthodoxy has resulted in a large segment of the Christian Church focusing on the changeless past rather than facing the conceptual challenges of spiritual growth.

The traditional ignorance of the structure and organization of the universe has spawned some rather unfortunate consequences. Christianity has often failed to enlarge and evolve its spiritual concepts because of its bondage to dogma. There has been a tendency to make a fetish out of the Bible as the only source of revelation, and to worship the text as the “Holy Word of God.” The pervasive influence of orthodoxy has resulted in a large segment of the Christian Church focusing on the changeless past rather than facing the conceptual challenges of spiritual growth.

For ages the inhabitants of Urantia have misunderstood the providence of God. There is a providence of divine outworking on your world, but it is not the childish, arbitrary, and material ministry many mortals have conceived it to be. The providence of God consists in the

interlocking activities of the celestial beings and the divine spirits who, in accordance with cosmic law, unceasingly labor for the honor of God and for the spiritual advancement of his universe children.

Can you not advance in your concept of God’s dealing with man to that level where you recognize that the watchword of the universe is *progress*? (U. B. p. 54)

Many Christians believe that the spiritual challenge of our complex contemporary world remains the same as it was in Biblical times. The limited cosmology of Christian orthodoxy tends to confirm this stagnate view of history in which the Holy Bible is seen as the only revelation of God which was given once and for all time. Any other spiritual vision or source of revelation is seen as erroneous, heretical, or inspired by the devil. This narrow view of orthodox theology justifies their refusal to honestly and seriously examine *The Urantia Book*. Even as a Christian, years ago I was forced to question this orthodox view as a “self fulfilling prophecy” that perpetuates a Biblical perspective that may not be based on historical or universal reality.

The reliance of the Christian faith on the Bible as the *only* “Word of God” is a serious weakness of the faith that tends to exclude the wisdom of other cultures and faiths, and separates believers from the authentic brotherhood of humanity. I am deeply concerned that the Christian faith has created for itself a truly lamentable form of exclusivism and isolation from the rest of the human race that is wholly out of keeping with the teachings of Jesus Christ.

While your religion is a matter of personal experience, it is most important that you should be exposed to the knowledge of a vast number of other religious experiences (the diverse interpretations of other and diverse mortals) to the end that you may prevent your religious life from becoming egocentric — circumscribed, selfish, and unsocial. (U. B. p. 1130)

The Urantia Book describes God as constantly involved in history. From the Christian perspective, I had serious difficulty with the idea of a stagnant (quasi deist) God ministering to an unchanging (nonevolutionary) people. Any assertion that the cultural and spiritual challenges of the 20th Century are the same as those of the first century shows a lack of knowledge and insight. In our Information Age human society has a markedly different approach to reality and spirituality than the peoples of prescientific civilization. There are many evidences of God’s involvement in our times. For example, the collapse of communism is the product of a much greater historical dynamic than the confrontational political policies of the United States. It is, in my judgment, one of the greatest demonstrations of the leadership of the Most Highs in history. The sovereignty of God’s overcontrol in history always prevails. Armageddon is not “just around the corner.”

The time is dawning when the human races are beginning to recognize that we are all part of the same Kingdom of
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God enunciated by Jesus. Though the religious expressions of that kingdom may take on many indigenous forms of worship and interpretations of theology, the reality of that eternal kingdom is destined to become a focal awareness in the consciousness of all peoples as we live out the central truth of *The Urantia Book*: in the Fatherhood of God we must live as brothers and sisters on our planet.

One of the most serious weaknesses of Christianity, I believe, has been the fostering of denominationalism, ecclesiasticism, dogmatism, and the suppression of creative individual spiritual experience—all of which are the result of institutionalization.

Formalized Religion vs. Personal Religious Experience

One of the most serious weaknesses of Christianity, I believe, has been the fostering of denominationalism, ecclesiasticism, dogmatism, and the suppression of creative individual spiritual experience—all of which are the result of institutionalization. The fractionalization of Christianity has created serious inconsistencies and ambiguities in the presentation of the religion of Jesus Christ, and must be addressed if Christian institutions are to remain a vital spiritual force in the modern world. What the church needs now is the uncompromised teachings of Jesus. Theological interpretations of his message through historical criticism are legitimate approaches for the religious scholar, but society needs to hear anew the gospel of Jesus in order to experience first hand the religion of Jesus.

But as religion becomes institutionalized, its power for good is curtailed, while the possibilities for evil are greatly multiplied. The dangers of formalized religion are: fixation of beliefs and crystallization of sentiments; accumulation of vested interests with increase of secularization; tendency to standardize and fossilize truth; diversion of religion from the service of God to the service of the church; inclination of leaders to become administrators instead of ministers; tendency to form sects and competitive divisions; establishment of oppressive ecclesiastical authority; creation of the aristocratic “chosen-people” attitude; fostering of false and exaggerated ideas of sacredness; the routinizing of religion and the petrification of worship; tendency to venerate the past while ignoring present demands; failure to make up-to-date interpretations of religion; entanglement with functions of secular institutions; it creates the evil discrimination of religious castes; it becomes an intolerant judge of orthodoxy; it fails to hold the interest of adventurous youth and gradually loses the saving message of the gospel of eternal salvation. (U. B. p. 1092)

Christianity has suffered the fate of evolutionary religion. In its attempt to mold religious experience into definable
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forms, Christianity has lost the very essence upon which it was founded and is no longer the spiritual adventure that so excited its first apostles. The Christian faith has become convenient, lacking in spiritual challenge, and is slowly dissolving under its own institutional weight. *The Urantia Book* indicates that this was not the case in the beginning.

The early Christian cult was the most effective, appealing and enduring of any ritual ever conceived or devised, but much of its value has been destroyed in a scientific age by the destruction of so many of its original underlying tenets. The Christian cult has been devitalized by the loss of many fundamental ideas.

In the past, truth has grown rapidly and expanded freely when the cult has been elastic, the symbolism expansile. Abundant truth and an adjustable cult have favored rapidity of social progression. A meaningless cult vitiates religion when it attempts to supplant philosophy and to enslave reason; a genuine cult grows. (U. B. p. 965-6)

A recent Time magazine article examined this very issue and concluded that the “baby boom” generation no longer feels an allegiance to a single denomination, but now employs a “super-market approach” to religious experience: dabbling here and there to find what best fits at the moment. The concern of many church leaders about the lack of growth in mainline churches indicates that the spiritual message is no longer reaching the people. The Time article, however, did not recognize the harmful effect of sectarianism and dogma.

Sectarianism is a disease of institutional religion, and dogmatism is an enslavement of the spiritual nature. It is far better to have a religion without a church than a church without a religion. (U. B. p. 1092)

The sad fact is that many mainline churches have become little more than exclusive country clubs for the social benefit of its patrons. This trend can do little more than offer congregation members the humanistic comforts of an appealing message, acceptable music, entertainment for the kids, and an atmosphere of community and friendship. Many church leaders bemoan the fact that when spiritually challenged these same church members will be quick to leave for another venue. This is the dilemma of the modern materialistic age where the primary concern is for temporal security rather than eternal reality. Accordingly, church clergy have elected to cater to these temporal needs in emphasizing social action and parroting the traditional dogma in which the laity have been conditioned, rather than to challenge them with the larger spiritual truths taught in mainline theological seminaries. At the same time, the power structure of the church largely ignores the religious experience of earnest seekers of truth that appear to be outside of their theological boundaries. *The Urantia Book* suggests that the church needs to return to its spiritual message and foster an atmosphere of creative spirituality.

Religion of Jesus, cont.

The visible church should refuse longer to handicap the progress of the invisible and spiritual brotherhood of the kingdom of God. And this brotherhood is destined to become a living organism in contrast to an institutionalized social organization. It may well utilize such social organizations, but it must not be supplanted by them....

And the genuine lovers of truth will be slow to forget that this powerful institutionalized church has often dared to smother newborn faith and persecute truth bearers who chanced to appear in unorthodox raiment.

It is all too true that such a church would not have survived unless there had been men in the world who preferred such a style of worship. Many spiritually indolent souls crave an ancient and authoritative religion of ritual and sacred traditions. Human evolution and spiritual progress are hardly sufficient to enable all men to dispense with religious authority. And the invisible brotherhood of the kingdom may well include these family groups of various social and temperamental classes if they are only willing to become truly spirit-led sons of God. But in this brotherhood of Jesus there is no place for sectarian rivalry, group bitterness, nor assertions of moral superiority and spiritual infallibility. (U. B. p. 2085)

The authors of *The Urantia Book* are quick to point out, however, "But the Christianity of even the twentieth century must not be despised. It is the product of the combined moral genius of the God-knowing men of many races during many ages, and it has truly been one of the greatest powers for good on earth, and therefore no man should lightly regard it, notwithstanding its inherent and acquired defects." (U. B. p. 2085) It is easy to point out the problems of Christianity resulting from over institutionalization and dogmatic formalism, but in the Christian faith the seeds of truth are deep and eternal.

Do not overlook the value of your spiritual heritage, the river of truth running down through the centuries, even to the barren times of a materialistic and secular age. In all your worthy efforts to rid yourselves of the superstitious creeds of past ages, make sure that you hold fast the eternal truth. But be patient! when the present superstition revolt is over, the truths of Jesus' gospel will persist gloriously to illuminate a new and better way. (U. B. p. 2082)

We cannot escape the social reality in which we currently find ourselves. We have a responsibility to the kingdom to recognize our problems and to deal with them. The Information Age has brought upon our planet a new consciousness of obligation and commitment that must result in significant social change if the human race is to survive.

The twentieth century has brought new problems for Christianity and all other religions to solve. The higher a civilization climbs, the more necessitous becomes the duty to "seek first the realities of heaven" in all of man's

efforts to stabilize society and facilitate the solution of its material problems.

Truth often becomes confusing and even misleading when it is dismembered, segregated, isolated and too much analyzed. Living truth teaches the truth seeker aright only when it is embraced in wholeness and as a living spiritual reality, not as a fact of material science or an inspiration of intervening art....

A lasting social system without a morality predicated on spiritual realities can no more be maintained than could the solar system without gravity. (U. B. p. 2075)

The Urantia Book makes it clear that there are few institutions better prepared to lay the spiritual foundations for necessary social changes than the Christian Church. The contemporary church will have to make a serious effort to revitalize its spiritual message if it is to continue to serve the spiritual kingdom.

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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. It is futile to talk about a revival of primitive Christianity; you must go forward from where you find yourselves. Modern culture must become spiritually baptized with a new revelation of Jesus' life and illuminated with a new understanding of his gospel of eternal salvation. (U. B. p. 2084)

When I entered the seminary I truly believed that such a rethinking of Christian theology was possible, and I still hold to that belief. The current climate of rapid social change clearly indicates that the Most Highs have prepared our world for such a change. I am deeply convinced that the institutional church can experience a second reformation through the new and uncompromised teachings of Jesus revealed in *The Urantia Book*.

Eternal Life vs. Eternal Living

Of all the teachings of *The Urantia Book*, the discussion of eternal life starting on the mansion worlds had the most profound effect on my life. It is my personal testimony that the revelation of the eternal career ahead was the most profound and life changing event that I have ever experienced. Christianity has woefully little to say about the realities of eternal life. What little the Christian faith has to say about our ascension career is couched in

surreal terms like “golden streets” and “pearly gates.” My grandmother, for instance, after 75 years of marriage to a highly successful evangelical minister, was convinced that her resurrection from death would be to the streets of gold at the feet of Christ where all of her problems would be transformed into a life of perfection and ease.

The Gods cannot—at least they do not—transform a creature of gross animal nature into a perfected spirit by some mysterious act of creative magic. When the Creators desire to produce perfect beings, they do so by direct and original creation, but they never undertake to convert animal-origin and material creatures into beings of perfection in a single step. (U. B. p. 541)

I consider the inability of Christianity to explain the realities of eternal life in a credible manner to be one of the most significant limitations of its teachings. A parallel analogy might be something like the development of an entire society of grade schoolers who attempt to plan their lives without the benefit of knowing what middle school, high school, college, or graduate school have in store for them. Human beings are severely handicapped in their spiritual growth without this knowledge. A large section of the Christian constituency has seriously misunderstood the nature of evolution and the important role that it has in the development of our lives, our planet, and the entire universe.

The first and perhaps most glaring error of the church in understanding the nature of eternal life is the basic requirements to attain eternal life. It is generally assumed in orthodox dogma that “being saved” requires allegiance to certain creedal or doctrinal positions and that our status in heaven is immediate perfection where there are no problems or suffering. Many hold that the church is the door way to eternal life; it holds “the keys to the kingdom of heaven.”

Eternal survival of personality is wholly dependent on the choosing of the mortal mind, whose decisions determine the survival potential of the immortal soul. When the mind believes God and the soul knows God, and when, with the fostering Adjuster, they all *desire* God, then is survival assured. Limitations of intellect, curtailment of education, deprivation of culture, impoverishment of social status, even inferiority of the human standards of morality resulting from the unfortunate lack of educational, cultural, and social advantages, cannot invalidate the presence of the divine spirit in such unfortunate and humanly handicapped but believing individuals. (U. B. p. 69)

From the perspective of *The Urantia Book*, it is clear that it is easy to ascend into heaven. It is a great mistake to maintain, as do some sections of the institutional church, that they hold the keys to eternal life. Even the mightiest beings in the universe, the authors of *The Urantia Book* Spring, 1997

point out, do not profess to hold such power.

Having thus provided for the growth of the immortal soul and having liberated man’s inner self from the fetters of absolute dependence on antecedent causation, the Father stands aside. Now, man having thus been liberated from the fetters of causation response, at least as pertains to eternal destiny, and provision having been made for the growth of the immortal self, the soul, it remains for man himself to will the creation or to inhibit the creation of this surviving and eternal self which is his for the choosing. No other being, force, creator, or agency in all the wide universe of universes can interfere to any degree with the absolute sovereignty of the mortal free will, as it operates within the realms of choice, regarding the eternal destiny of the personality of the choosing mortal. As pertains to eternal survival, God has decreed the sovereignty of the material and mortal will, and that decree is absolute. (U. B. p. 71)

In the light of Jesus’ teachings about our Heavenly Father, this decree of God establishing the sovereignty of human free will choice regarding eternal survival resonates with authenticity. And in the face of God’s respect for the free will choice of even the lowest of God’s mortal children, it is regrettable that some sections of the church declare that only their creedal position for eternal salvation will prevail, and even assert the infallibility of their judgment.

What is so incredible about The Urantia Book is its demystification of life after death presented in concepts and descriptions that make sense to the rational mind.

What is so incredible about *The Urantia Book* is its demystification of life after death presented in concepts and descriptions that make sense to the rational mind. The portrayal of the “mansion worlds” and celestial abodes where we sojourn in our educational pilgrimage to Paradise and the Universal Father is given in sufficient detail to stimulate spiritual growth in the here and now. It is refreshing to learn that there are even more differing careers in our post-mortal existence than in our contemporary world.

The Urantia Book also makes an astounding promise of adventure to all mortals: we will be playing a very significant role in the development of the ongoing evolution of the universe. Although mortals are the lowest of God’s created beings capable of eternal survival, we have the opportunity to evolve to the very heights of spiritual experience. We must move through many stages before we become perfected spirit beings, and this process takes a very long time—maybe eons. While each transformation on our journey to Paradise brings new opportunities to grow as a spirit being, we will always retain our personality identity which is absolutely unique for each individual.

Religion of Jesus, cont.

Those things which you might have learned on earth, but which you failed to learn, must be acquired under the tutelage of these faithful and patient teachers. There are no royal roads, short cuts, or easy paths to Paradise. Irrespective of the individual variations of the route, you master the lessons of one sphere before you proceed to another; at least this is true after you once leave the world of your nativity. (U. B. p. 551)

The Urantia Book authors remind us that what is not learned here as mortal beings must be learned after our resurrection on the mansion worlds. I found that this counsel and enlightenment greatly effected my perception of life and my understanding of my mortal obligations. For example, consider some of the earliest lessons of the lowest (the seventh) mansion world:

One of the purposes of the morontia career is to effect the permanent eradication from the mortal survivors of such animal vestigial traits as procrastination, equivocation, insincerity, problem avoidance, unfairness, and ease seeking. The mansonia life early teaches the young morontia pupils that postponement is in no sense avoidance. After the life in the flesh, time is no longer available as a technique of dodging situations or of circumventing disagreeable obligations. (U. B. p. 551)

I believe that it is important for the church to seriously rethink its message about eternal life. For far too long most Christians have embraced the view that eternal life is some form of heavenly bliss, a trip to Nirvana, the eradication of tribulations, and a ticket to a life of ease. According to *The Urantia Book*, this is clearly not the case!

The mortal-survival plan has a practical and serviceable objective; you are not the recipients of all this divine labor and painstaking training only that you may survive just to enjoy endless bliss and eternal ease. There is a goal of transcendent service concealed beyond the horizon of the present universe age. If the Gods designed merely to take you on one long and eternal joy excursion, they certainly would not so largely turn the whole universe into one vast and intricate practical training school, requisition a substantial part of the celestial creation as teachers and instructors, and then spend ages upon ages piloting you, one by one, through this gigantic universe school of experiential training. The furtherance of the scheme of mortal progression seems to be one of the chief businesses of the present organized universe, and the majority of innumerable orders of created intelligences are either directly or indirectly engaged in advancing some phase of this progressive perfection plan. (U. B. p. 558)

With such a knowledge of our eternal career we no longer need to fear death; it is a graduation to a more dynamic continuation of our life. *The Urantia Book* indicates that although we have a more durable morontia (part material,

part spiritual) body, our spiritual growth continues just where we left it in our mortal existence. The great wonderment and exciting promise of this eternal ascension career is that we mortal will-creatures are promised an incredible universe career that even those beings created in perfection are envious of.

In traversing the ascending scale of living existence from mortal man to the Deity embrace, you actually live the very life of every possible phase and stage of perfected creature existence within the limits of the present universe age. (U. B. p. 558)

Thus, *The Urantia Book* offers a vision of life that moves far beyond the constraints of this limited planet. Through this vision I was better able to understand something of the possibilities of human life now and in the future; and I am astounded by the unlimited opportunities that are before us. I believe that *The Urantia Book* presents humanity with the opportunity to anticipate the career adventure ahead while clarifying our current mortal obligations. With this understanding it is possible to avoid being influenced by the fanatic ravings of demagogues who promise eternal life without living its realities. I am convinced that this information is vital to the next phase of evolutionary human progress.

Sin and the Meaning of the Cross

Most of the Christian doctrines of human nature are predicated on the assumption that in “the fall of Adam” human nature was corrupted and as a result human beings are “prone to evil and sin.” These doctrines had their origin in Pauline theology; Jesus did not share this negative view of human nature.

The doctrine of the total depravity of man destroyed much of the potential of religion for effecting social repercussions of an uplifting nature and of inspirational value. Jesus sought to restore man’s dignity when he declared that all men are the children of God. (U. B. p. 1091)

I believe that the core of the contemporary Christian problem is the misinterpretation of the nature of sin in relation to the meaning of the cross. The words “Christ died for our sins” has become the Christian mantra. Just because this phrase is repeated incessantly in many Christian groups does not make it true. It is my opinion that this view of the atonement of sin through Christ’s death on the cross is a barbarous concept unworthy of the 21st century understanding of God. This doctrine has led to a serious misunderstanding of the nature of sin, the meaning of the cross, and the nature of God. The atonement for sin doctrine was never taught by Jesus nor did he present a concept of God implied by this doctrine.

The barbarous idea of appeasing an angry God, of

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

The Urantia Book presents a picture of salvation that is compatible with rational and balanced minds: each person is loved by God and their survival is not dependent on subscribing to the right dogmas or performing proper religious rituals. As stated earlier, eternal survival is wholly dependent on the choosing of the human mind: “When the mind believes God and the soul knows God, and when, with the fostering Adjuster, they all *desire* God, then is survival assured.” (p. 69) Even Lucifer would be forgiven by God if he repented and asked forgiveness for his iniquitous acts. The willingness of the Heavenly Father to extend forgiveness for sin is even beyond the comprehension of the immortal beings who authored *The Urantia Book*.

The Urantia Book presents a picture of salvation that is compatible with rational and balanced minds: each person is loved by God and their survival is not dependent on subscribing to the right dogmas or performing proper religious rituals.

Our contemporary world needs a redefinition of the nature of sin if it is to evolve to the next phase of human achievement. Sin is the result of the choices of a mortal being in relation to the will of the Universal Father. Sin is the responsibility of the individual, and must be actively eradicated through personal will decision, growth, and maturation.

The consciousness of sin persists in the mortal mind, but the thought patterns of salvation therefrom have become outworn and antiquated. The reality of the spiritual need persists, but intellectual progress has destroyed the olden ways of securing peace and consolation for mind and soul. (U. B. p. 984)

If the Christian Church is to effectively reach the inquiring minds of the Information Age, then we must redefine sin in accordance with universe wisdom:

Sin must be redefined as deliberate disloyalty to Deity. There are degrees of disloyalty: the partial loyalty of indecision; the divided loyalty of confliction; the dying loyalty of indifference; and the death of loyalty exhibited in devotion to godless ideals.

The sense or feeling of guilt is the consciousness of the violation of the mores; it is not necessarily sin. There
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is no real sin in the absence of conscious disloyalty to Deity. (U. B. p. 984)

This is, in my view, a much higher understanding of the nature of sin than the theology presented in conservative Christian dogma. Christianity suffers under the handicap of having no adequate historical record of the events surrounding the Lucifer rebellion. *The Urantia Book* gives an extended account of this celestial event that adds significantly to the understanding of our planetary history. Though final adjudication of Lucifer and his cohorts has yet to be finalized, the lessons and meaning of sin have been forever clarified for all universe beings through that experience.

There are personal responsibilities in relation to sin. God does recognize our repentance and forgives our sins. As suggested by Christian theology, the religion of Jesus makes provision for coping with our guilt resulting from sin that is basic to our psychological and spiritual well being.

The confession of sin is a manful repudiation of disloyalty, but it in no wise mitigates the time-space consequences of such disloyalty. But confession—sincere recognition of the nature of sin—is essential to religious growth and spiritual progress.

The forgiveness of sin by Deity is the renewal of loyalty relations following a period of the human consciousness of the lapse of such relations as the consequence of conscious rebellion. The forgiveness does not have to be sought, only received as the consciousness of re-establishment of loyalty relations between the creature and the Creator. And all the loyal sons of God are happy, service-loving, and ever-progressive in the Paradise ascent. (U. B. p. 984-5)

In the light of God’s relationship to his mortal children and the forgiveness of sin, we must reexamine the meaning of the cross. We can no longer accept the erroneous atonement doctrine as the true meaning of the cross; not only because it misrepresents the nature of sin and forgiveness, but also because the meaning of the cross holds a much higher symbolism for universe beings. *The Urantia Book* informs us that the cross is the high symbol for selfless and loving service. It is the good bestowing themselves on the evil needing regeneration whose attitude is best portrayed in Jesus’ prayer, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” (U. B. p. 2007) Through his death on the cross Jesus demonstrated that he did not condemn sinners, but offered them a loving path of salvation in laying down his life for his enemies.

The cross is that high symbol of sacred service, the devotion of one’s life to the welfare and salvation of one’s fellows. The cross is not the symbol of the sacrifice of the innocent Son of God in the place of guilty sinners and in order to appease the wrath of an offended God, but it does stand forever, on earth and throughout a

Religion of Jesus, cont.

vast universe, as a sacred symbol of the good bestowing themselves upon the evil and thereby saving them by this very devotion of love. The cross does stand as the token of the highest form of unselfish service, the supreme devotion of the full bestowal of a righteous life in the service of whole-hearted ministry, even in death, the death on the cross. And the very sight of this great symbol of the bestowal life of Jesus truly inspires all of us to want to go and do likewise. (U. B. p. 2019)

Christianity has always recognized the transforming power of the cross on the life of the believer, but the meaning of that transformation needs to be reformulated. When the concept of the atonement is disassociated from the cross, it stands out in its full power as the ultimate symbol of loving and selfless service, and motivates us to become true sons and daughters of Christ in loving and selfless service.

When thinking men and women look upon Jesus as he offers up his life on the cross, they will hardly again permit themselves to complain at even the severest hardships of life, much less at petty harassments and their many purely fictitious grievances. His life was so glorious and his death so triumphant that we are all enticed to a willingness to share both. (U. B. p. 2019)

Concluding Comments

I have discovered that I possess no particular advantage because of the revelatory power of *The Urantia Book*. My life has not been materially better, I have not had earth-shaking visions of truth, and I have not experienced any identifiable earthly or spiritual benefits from my knowledge of the information contained in *The Urantia Book*. I truly believe that I am no different in spiritual or material status than any other child of God, no matter what faith system he or she adopts.

*It is a fact that if you are looking for any divine favor, any spiritual advantage or any universe privileges through embracing the Jesusonian religion or reading *The Urantia Book*, you can expect to be sorely disappointed. God loves all his children of time and space, and each individual has an equal opportunity to progress spiritually. The religion of Jesus is truly open to all and is completely inclusive.*

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The religious impulse to seek truth and discover the will of God is universal and important to all the mortal races. Anthropologists inform us that there has never been a so-

ciety that did not possess some form of religion. Inevitably *The Urantia Book* must have a significant impact on human thought because the revelation of the religion of Jesus is simply too important to be ignored. I am concerned, however, that Christianity may pay a high price in terms of credibility if it continues to ignore *The Urantia Book*.

The Urantia Book suggests that this new revelation highlighting Jesus' life and teachings will probably develop into a new public expression of faith and a religious cult quite separate and distinct from the church.

Regardless of the drawbacks and handicaps, every new revelation of truth has given rise to a new cult, and even the restatement of the religion of Jesus must develop a new and appropriate symbolism. Modern man must find some adequate symbolism for his new and expanding ideas, ideals, and loyalties. This enhanced symbol must arise out of religious living, spiritual experience....

The old cults were too egocentric; the new must be the outgrowth of applied love. The new cult must, like the old, foster sentiment, satisfy emotion, and promote loyalty; but it must do more: It must facilitate spiritual progress, enhance cosmic meanings, augment moral values, encourage social development, and stimulate a high type of personal religious living. The new cult must provide supreme goals of living which are both temporal and eternal—social and spiritual. (U. B. p. 966)

Although I respect the forgoing statement, I am not absolutely convinced that it will be necessary to establish a new religion (Jesusonianism?) to present the world with the new and enlarged message of the life and teachings of Jesus. It is my sincere hope that the Christian Church and other religions of the world will be able to absorb these new ideas and evolve their theology to meet the needs of the 21st Century. I am convinced that all this is possible, and we shall be able to evolve and grow to meet the new challenges of the Information Age and beyond. I should like to conclude this presentation with one of my favorite passages from *The Urantia Book*—a passage which profoundly influenced my life.

Religion does need new leaders, spiritual men and women who will dare to depend solely on Jesus and his incomparable teachings. If Christianity persists in neglecting its spiritual mission while it continues to busy itself with social and material problems, the spiritual renaissance must await the coming of these new teachers of Jesus' religion who will be exclusively devoted to the spiritual regeneration of men. And then will these spirit-born souls quickly supply the leadership and inspiration requisite for the social, moral, economic, and political reorganization of the world. (U. B. p. 2082-3)

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Significant Books

The Real Jesus

Luke Timothy Johnson

Harper, San Francisco, 1996, 177 pp.

Dr. Luke Timothy Johnson, Professor of New Testament and Christian Origins at the Chandler School of Theology, Emory University, has written what I believe is the definitive book evaluating the “misguided quest for the historical Jesus” by the Jesus Seminar and other contemporary theologians. He first of all points out that only around 40 members of the Jesus Seminar, out of thousands of New Testament scholars, were actually involved in the production of *The Five Gospels*. To suggest that they represent New Testament scholarship, Johnson says, “is ludicrous.” The Jesus Seminar has been engaged in a ten year exercise in academic self-promotion that has succeeded in drawing an extraordinary amount of public attention.

Johnson asserts that the Jesus Seminar started out with preconceived ideas of Jesus. This raises serious questions concerning the Seminar’s self-proclaimed objectivity. “What sort of scholarship, then, do we find in *The Five Gospels*? It is not an impressive quality. The most notable lack in the publication is any discernible *demonstration* or even *argument*. Much is asserted here without either evidence or even substantial logic.” (p. 25)

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“The narratives of Acts and the Gospels are tossed out as mythical fabrications based on faith....And this is announced *before* the Seminar takes up its (equally portentous) work of figuring out which deeds attributed to Jesus ‘really’ came from him. This is not responsible, or even critical, scholarship. It is a self-indulgent charade. As Professor Richard Hays of Duke University concluded in a lengthy review of this book (‘The Corrected Jesus,’ *First Things*, May 1994, pp. 43-48, ‘...the case argued by this book would not stand up in any court.’ (p. 26)

Dr. Johnson also reviews books written by Barbara Thiering, Bishop John Spong, A. N. Wilson, Stephen Mitchell, Marcus Borg, John Dominic Crossan, and Burton Mack in which he finds certain consistent features in common with *The Five Gospels*: (1) They reject the canonical Gospels. (2) These books shape their portrait of Jesus without reference to other canonical sources, such as Paul’s letters. (3) The mission of Jesus is portrayed in terms of social or cultural issues rather than religious or spiritual realities. (4) They

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have a theological agenda stating that the traditional view of Jesus is a distortion of the “real” Jesus. (5) They have a premise that *historical* knowledge is normative for faith. (6) These authors, except for Stephen Mitchell, come from inside the Christian culture and identify with the academic community rather than the church.

Cultural confusion, Johnson observes, is the basis for our theological disunity. Christianity in America is profoundly divided between traditional orthodoxy and Enlightenment modernity. “ We see, then, a fascinating phenomenon: the form of Christianity most explicitly at odds with modernity is enjoying the greatest success in terms of growth and real political influence, while the form of Christianity that seeks to accommodate itself with modernity verges ever closer to the margins of irrelevancy and even extinction.” (p. 64) The heart of the problem centers around the dominance of historical criticism as a key determinative factor for faith. Johnson reminds us that a great deal of what human beings consider “real” escapes historical knowledge. Historical knowledge deals only in degrees of probability, never with certainty.

The heart of the problem centers around the dominance of historical criticism as a key determinative factor for faith. Johnson reminds us that a great deal of what human beings consider “real” escapes historical knowledge. Historical knowledge deals only in degrees of probability, never with certainty.

After considerable scholarly analysis Johnson makes the following summary statements: (1) “History is a limited mode of human knowing.” (2) The New Testament is analyzed best when its literary integrity is respected and appreciated. (3) Despite the diversity of the Gospels, there is a remarkable consistency in the image of Jesus throughout the New Testament. (4) The expression “the real Jesus” should not be used to refer to a historically reconstructed Jesus. Such a Jesus is only a product of scholarly preference and imagination. (5) There is a “real Jesus” in the texts of the New Testament. (p. 167)

Dr. Johnson ends his dissertation by presenting a more comprehensive model for critical scholarship which encompasses the anthropological, historical, literary, and religious aspects of the text. What a marvelous occasion it will be when Biblical scholars finally discover the wealth of research material found in the Life and Teachings of Jesus presented in *The Urantia Book*. Scholars will discover that it affirms and enhances the “real Jesus” found in the Gospels as Johnson so effectively points out.

-MJS

The Power Behind Positive Thinking

Eric Fellman

Haper, San Francisco, 1996, 237 pp.

Eric Fellman worked with Norman Vincent Peale in the nine years before his death as editor-in-chief at the Peale Center for Christian Living. In 1992 he was named President and CEO of the Peale Center. Dr. Peale's book *The Power of Positive Thinking* sold more than twenty-five million copies worldwide and popularized the importance of positive thinking in all areas of life.

In this book Fellman points to spiritual resources as the key to the effectiveness of positive thinking. "Through the years many people have copied and expanded on Dr. Peale's techniques, often leaving his spiritual emphasis out of their work," Fellman observes. "But Dr. Peale was convinced, and he convinced me, that no amount of self-belief, self-talk, attitude adjustment, or other technique, can be of lasting benefit unless a person understands and maximizes the spiritual element that stands behind the technique." (p. 1)

"The failure to pursue spiritual potential in this country is grounded in the unique American confusion of the word *spiritual* with the word *religious*....But *religion* is not *spirituality*. Simply defined, spirituality concerns matters of the spirit; it describes the inevitable search all human beings undertake to answer their questions about a Supreme Being or Higher Power....Religion on the other hand, is any person-made system that defines a particular method of conducting that search. Spirituality is based on our innate longing, while religion is based on rules and regulations set out to define (and sometimes control) that longing." (p. 11)

Fellman builds a basic life pyramid of key spiritual values that are simple to enumerate, such as faith, hope, and love, but are often difficult to actualize. The cornerstones of this pyramid are simplicity, inner quality, and divinity. The superstructure involves building belief into faith, optimism into hope, and kindness into love. Building on this framework we can strengthen the mental, emotional, and physical aspects of our personality structure. Using imagination and imaging, we can master our minds by the power of spiritual reality and grow through focus and commitment to these values in the actualization of service.

I found Eric Fellman's presentation of these classic spiritual disciplines to be interesting and insightful, and the life-situations he uses to illustrate these techniques of spiritual growth are stimulating and inspiring.

-MJS

Sermon Series on Spiritual Growth

Part 2

Recognizing the Goodness of God

Rev. Gregory Young

As we proceed together to explore steps toward increased spiritual growth, I should like to begin by asking you a question. How many of you as you were growing up ate your oatmeal without parental prompting? How many of you did it under great duress?

Let me tell you about Johnny. Johnny and his mother were having a dispute about oatmeal. Johnny's mother was trying her best to persuade the boy to eat his oatmeal, but he stubbornly refused to do so. Finally, in desperation, she said, "Johnny, if you don't eat your oatmeal, God will punish you." Still, Johnny refused, and his mother sent him to bed. Before long, a great storm arose. Lightning flashed, the thunder crashed, and the wind whipped the rain against the house. Johnny's mother rushed upstairs to comfort her son. "Johnny, are you okay?" she asked. "I guess so," he replied, "but this sure is an awful fuss to make about a little oatmeal."

What is Your View of God?

This theological fairy tale prompts me to ask: What kind of God do you believe in—I don't mean what kind of ideas you have learned about God—but in your heart and soul what kind of God are you willing to trust completely with your ultimate welfare and spiritual destiny? What kind of God would you be compelled to love with all of your heart, mind, soul, and strength?

I venture to say that a faith based upon frightening people into some sort of obedience is a faith based on primitive superstition. It is not far removed from the ancient practice of making sacrifices to appease an angry and fickle God, a capricious God. I believe there is a yearning, a hungering, in each and every human heart and mind to be cared for by a God of unquestionable love, and to give our love in return to this loving Supreme Being. The basis of faith and devotion is a love relationship. A relationship of faith and love is the foundation of unwavering trust, the confidence to expose our vulnerability and give ourselves completely to that relationship.

God's Purpose for our Lives

We must intuit, even before we commit ourselves to God's will for our lives, that God believes in us and is committed to our welfare. Because God knows that we are capable partners in this adventure of the ages, he has entrusted us with the awesome responsibility of human destiny. God, knowing our potential much better than we do, entered the arena of human affairs in Christ incarnate who told us, "You are the light of the world." (Matt. 5:14) Our Heavenly Father knows

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that we have the ability to learn and grow. We are challenged to accept God's purpose for our lives because God believes so deeply in us.

The human soul hungers to fill an emptiness that brings ultimate meaning to life. In the business of our lives we often forget that the love of God is the most enduring and fulfilling experience of human existence. Other experiences are limited in nature and content, their newness and excitement wear off, but our experience with God has no limits, save those of our own limitations. When you search for God—and there are a lot of people searching, many in the wrong places—you are engaged in contacting the most important presence in your life. And when you find God whose spirit dwells within your mind and soul, you have found everything!

God is our Loving Heavenly Father

Jesus, while sojourning at Amathus, spent much time with his disciples instructing them in the nature of God. God, he told them, is "Abba" (a casual expression for father, more like daddy). He constantly spoke of God as our Heavenly Father. Jesus addressed God in this endearing way in his prayers and personal relationships with the Father's presence in his daily activities. God is a tender loving parent like the loving father accepting his prodigal son home, like the good shepherd actively seeking out the lost sheep. One need look no farther than Jesus to see what God is like. God is Abba to us, a tender loving spiritual creator, not a stern bookkeeper chiefly engaged in making damaging entries against his erring children.

One of our nightly rituals is getting our children to bed in a timely fashion. They are masters in using delaying tactics. They always seem to come up with a new twist to stay up just a little bit longer. Some time ago, on one of those evenings when I was home, Gabrielle had already had stories and the usual request for a drink of water, when she wanted me to come in and hear her bedtime prayers. Great, I thought, one more delaying tactic. So I went into her room and knelt beside her bed. Gabrielle sat up, held her hands together in a prayer fashion and started her prayer. "Thank you God for..." and she started to name the endless list of the stuffed animals in her room. She thanked God for her mom and dad, her brother, her pets and other things. But then she said, "And take care of Jenny's grandmother (who had died sometime before), and thank you God for love."

As I knelt there beside her bed, my eyes began to swell up with tears, for it dawned on me that this prayer was sincere, and what I felt was the utter sense of trust and openness of Gabrielle's heart. I became aware of how much of that child-like trust so many of us lose as we grow into a skeptical, mistrusting adulthood.

Growth: the Miracle of God's Love

Believing in God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength leads to a willingness to have an openness for God to work miracles of love and faith in our lives. A truly victorious life

on earth is one in which we can give thanks to the goodness and love of God in all circumstances. It means having enough trust, enough devotion in the creator to dare to face the worst life has to offer and declare, "Even if I cannot do this, there lives in me one, much greater, who can and will do it." With and through the guidance and strength of Christ we can surmount and transcend every obstacle in our mortal pilgrimage. This is the victory that overcomes the world. When we open the door of our heart to the spirit of the living God we are challenged to grow. If you assume that your growing years are over, I have some good news for you, you have only just begun!

Living faith is much more than holding an idea, a theory, or an opinion in your mind. A faith that changes our lives requires a total investment of heart, mind, soul, and strength. It is the total mobilization of all the powers of our personality that inevitably results in growth that culminates in action. Living faith takes on value only as it is applied to our life relationships. God has given each and every one of us enormous potential to grow in the truth, beauty, and goodness of his love.

If you are troubled, if you are anxious and afraid of what tomorrow might bring, if the experiences of life crush heavily upon you, making it almost too much to bear, allow God to be that resource of strength beyond your own strength. You might ask yourself. "To what extent have I made spiritual realities a part of my life; how wholeheartedly have I dedicated myself to God's will?"

Many of us are like the Dr. Manette that Charles Dickens writes about in *A Tale of Two Cities*. The doctor had been in prison for twenty years prior to the French Revolution which brought his release. In prison he learned to be a cobbler and in the gloom of his cell he spent his days making shoes. Finally, the day came when he was given his freedom and let out into the bright sunlight. The freedom and sunshine terrified him. He had been in the shadows and darkness of the cell too long and had grown to love that darkness. For his comfort a servant was given the task of locking him up at night in an attic room the size of his old cell. There in the twilight gloom he could be seen enjoying his trade of making shoes.

In a similar way, some of us have become accustomed to the narrowness and weakness of our constricted and imprisoned lives and we are afraid to venture into the larger life which the spirit of God is inviting us to enter. We are offered magnificent opportunities for growth that we hesitate to accept. God has limitless resources and when we are in partnership with God, no limit can be placed on our growth potential. How much do we truly, wholeheartedly, wish to dedicate ourselves to this partnership? Let us have the courage to respond to the spirit of God within us; for God has not given us a spirit of fear, but the spirit of power, the spirit of love, and a sound mind through which to mold our lives by his truth, beauty, and goodness.

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Prayerful Problem Solving

Meredith J. Sprunger

Human beings are by nature problem solving creatures. Our basic needs and urges interact with environmental stimuli in search of organismic satisfaction and fulfillment. All problem solving from birth to death is set in the context of our nature, experience, and learning. How we solve our problems is most fundamentally determined by our nature and resources. We are material beings integrated and controlled by a neural system directed by mind and indwelt by spirit. Human beings, therefore, have physical, mental, and spiritual resources to aid in problem solving. All of these capacities and capabilities interact and function holistically.

Centuries of experience—verified by scientific discovery, rational insight, and spiritual revelation—have taught us that these triune human resources exist in a hierarchical relationship. Our material nature is directed by the meanings and quality of mind, and mind is eventually influenced and determined by the values of spiritual reality. The more immature and underdeveloped the individual is psychologically and spiritually, the greater the domination of the physical laws and conditions will be. Conversely, the more mature and developed we are mentally and spiritually, the less we are influenced and controlled by our physical condition and the material world.

The human approach to problem solving reflects this hierarchical relationship of resources and leads to a differential strategy in finding a solution to our difficulties. Usually we start by analyzing the situation, attempting to break it down into its simplest components. We isolate facts and influences. If this initial analytical process does not lead to a solution, we have learned to employ the more systematic techniques of the scientific method. The scientific method is especially helpful in understanding and solving problems related to the material world.

When these analytical-empirical attempts at problem solving bring inadequate results, we turn to the more holistic or integral method of creative thinking. Graham Wallas, a pioneer in creative thinking research, describes this type of thinking as a four-step process: preparation, incubation, illumination, and verification. This is solution by insight. In creative thinking we are able to cross the border line between our empirical-rational capacities for the resolution of difficulties and prayerful problem solving. We cannot distinguish whether insights originate in our conscious and subconscious mind or if they are received from spiritual, superconscious resources.

We do find that sooner or later we reach the limit of our human ability to solve difficult problems. At this point those of us who accept the reality and availability of spiritual resources and the efficacy of prayer may consciously engage in prayerful problem solving. At the outset, spiritually mature people need to rule out prayer as a form of magic or a technique in

which we can bargain with or change God. God is infinite in goodness and love and does not need to be persuaded to do good. Secondly, we must have an understanding of God and universe laws which enable prayerful problem solving to operate effectively. Physical, mental, and spiritual laws were established by God to regulate the world and our lives. Prayer is not a means to circumvent these laws.

While God's relationship with material reality is largely through the utilization of impersonal laws, God's relationship with people is personal. Through personal communication God seeks to assist us in using universe laws more effectively to augment our welfare. We receive this spiritual ministry primarily through our minds and the minds of others. Mind is the arena in which prayerful problem solving takes place.

Efficacious prayer is not a rocking chair solution to tough problems or an easy detour around the hilly road of rigorous living. When prayer is used as an escape mechanism or psychological safety net by the fearful, slothful, or cowardly, it does not achieve genuine spiritual quality or power.

Efficacious prayer is not a rocking chair solution to tough problems or an easy detour around the hilly road of rigorous living. When prayer is used as an escape mechanism or psychological safety net by the fearful, slothful, or cowardly, it does not achieve genuine spiritual quality or power. Prayer is not a spiritual crutch or a magic wand. It is the actualization of an indigenous partnership with God. God works with us, not "for" us, as an indulgent wonder worker. There are elemental spiritual requirements which must precede problem solving prayer. We are required to face reality courageously, and to have exhausted our human ability to cope with our difficulties. Egocentric, selfish, or purely personal objectives must be surrendered for a dedication to spiritual values and growth. Indecision and vacillation are barriers to divine guidance. Only a wholehearted decision to follow God's will as we sincerely understand it will bring spiritual wisdom. Our prayer should be for guidance, not some miraculous happening. Finally, we need to pursue our quest with living faith, not doubting that our spiritual resources will be sufficient for any mortal eventuality.

Even though prayer does not change God's mind and is not a way of changing natural or spiritual laws, it is a process through which the natural course of events can be altered.

Even though prayer does not change God's mind and is not a way of changing natural or spiritual laws, it is a process through which the natural course of events can be altered. We live in an open universe in which human thought and action may influence the sequence and quality of events. Prayer is a spiritual technique through which we sometimes discover or utilize higher laws that may nullify or counteract lower laws.

It is a psychological-spiritual relationship that may change our thinking and behavior. As a result, different options or events take place, higher and more inclusive laws may be set in motion, or superior resources may be made available to help us solve or cope with problems.

The editors of Guideposts in *His Mysterious Ways* (1988, Guideposts Associates, Inc.) have compiled the stories of over a hundred people who have escaped tragedy or death or whose lives have been dramatically changed by seemingly miraculous happenings brought about as the result of prayer. How do we understand these unusual events? And why are people in similar situations, who appear to be just as good and righteous, not the recipients of such miraculous deliverance through their prayers?

While the answer to these questions is hidden by our incomplete knowledge and limited view of divine wisdom, it appears that the basic factor in God's relationship with persons is a spiritual quality of love which is unique for each individual in any given situation. The effect of every personal relationship with God is determined by the quality and circumstances of its singular reality.

It may be helpful to speculate about the methodologies of prayerful problem solving. Our minds are indwelt by the spirit of the Universal Father and nurtured by the Spirit of Truth and the Holy Spirit. There are, no doubt, many ways in which we may be assisted by this triune spirit ministry. The following avenues are suggested as ways in which prayer may bring spiritual help in problem solving.

1. New ideas or insights which result in changed attitudes and/or actions that alter our lives and the reactions of our associates.

2. Augmented faith and imagination activate psychological and spiritual resources which are able to change body chemistry and functions. Scientific research is building incontrovertible empirical evidence for the efficacious power of prayer in the healing process. Many medical schools and physicians now openly recognize prayer as a significant modality in healing.

Visualizing in prayer that particles, atoms, cells, organs, functions, and the entire body and mind are being perfectly renewed is an effective healing resource. These changes appear to be miraculous only because we are largely ignorant of universe laws which enable psychological-spiritual activities to change body functions when fully undergirded by faith visualization and creative imagery.

3. Possible greater utilization of latent extrasensory capacities: telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, and psychokinesis. In unusual situations and times of crisis we observe the association of prayer and exceptional perception, awareness, and other unusual events.

4. The activity of angels or other superhuman beings to minister to needs and bring help which is sought through Spring, 1997

prayer. The ministry of Seraphic Guardians may be more extensive than we realize. Such events may take place more frequently in extremely critical situations or when larger providential purposes are served.

5. Prayer may enable us to use channels, energy forms, or laws unknown to us. We are learning that entities are often connected even though widely separated in space. In the quantum world of physics we know that particles are connected even when distantly separated. Space, it appears, is filled with fields—invisible structures that are indigenous to the universe. There is considerable evidence that there are mental and spiritual fields or energy lanes that link and influence people across space. Sometimes it appears that prayer brings about a mysterious coordination of people and events.

Any or all of these methods of ministry may be involved in prayerful problem solving. Sometimes prayer enables us to find approaches to our difficulties which were not available to us through analytical-rational-creative thinking. At other times we find that prayer does not bring those ideas, attitudes, or actions which alter the external conditions of the problem. It is still there in all its terrible reality. But even in these situations prayer is spiritually efficacious. It is a dynamic spiritual fellowship which inspires creative attitudes and courage, enabling us to live with even the most difficult problems such as personal deficiencies, tragedy, injustice, pain, and death.

One of the most difficult questions associated with prayerful problem solving is the place of intercessory prayer. Is it a legitimate spiritual technique for helping others or only a psychological-social way of expressing our concern for their welfare?

One of the most difficult questions associated with prayerful problem solving is the place of intercessory prayer. Is it a legitimate spiritual technique for helping others or only a psychological-social way of expressing our concern for their welfare? Certainly intercessory prayer cannot be used to manipulate people. God does not need to be informed of their condition nor be persuaded to perform good deeds. God is our loving Universal Father whose spirit indwells each of us, and we do not need saints, supermortal beings, or fellow mortals interceding for us. Nevertheless, we are social beings and I believe the indwelling Spirit of God leads us to share in the ministry to others through prayer.

Jesus engaged in intercessory prayer and urged his apostles to pray for others. Jesus did not play spiritual games. He was sincere, forthright, and honest, and as a Creator Son he was thoroughly conversant with universe laws and resources. Jesus' attitude toward and practice of intercessory prayer assures us that there are channels through which we can minister to others through prayer.

Prayerful Problem Solving, cont.

Furthermore, there are many double-blind scientific studies demonstrating the efficaciousness of intercessory prayer in healing. Other scientific studies show the influence of prayer on enzymes, fungi, bacteria, and cells. It is my assumption that there are mental and spiritual fields or energy lanes which can be accessed through prayer to undergird others; and in our personal relationship with God there is always the opportunity, within God's loving discretion, to share in personal divine ministration to those in our loving concern.

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Regardless of its effect, we spontaneously pray for those we love. There is great value in the psychological-social ramifications of intercessory prayer. There is evidence, however, that intercessory prayer has more than autosuggestive or sociosuggestive validity. If this is so, how do we understand this form of ministry? One explanation is that our extrasensory capacities have the ability to enter other minds and bring comfort, strength, and love. Another possibility is that God not only gives us the opportunity to be co-partners with him in shaping our own lives, but, as we have intimated, may have created spiritual channels through which we are privileged to be co-ministers with him in helping others within the limits of their spiritual autonomy.

In concluding our thinking about prayerful problem solving, we should remember that the stimulus of problems is basic to personal and spiritual growth. Problems are really opportunities for development and service. There are, therefore, inherent limits to problem solving in the evolutionary

universe. These limitations are germane to our glorious destiny and the quality of spiritual perfection which we are forging out between the hammers of anguish and the anvils of necessity here on planet earth.

The best picture of the efficacious use of prayer is to observe the prayer life of Jesus:

Jesus never prayed as a religious duty. To him prayer was a sincere expression of spiritual attitude, a declaration of soul loyalty, a recital of personal devotion, an expression of thanksgiving, an avoidance of emotional tension, a prevention of conflict, an exaltation of intellection, an ennoblement of desire, a vindication of moral decision, an enrichment of thought, an invigoration of higher inclinations, a consecration of impulse, a clarification of viewpoint, a declaration of faith, a transcendental surrender of will, a sublime assertion of confidence, a revelation of courage, the proclamation of discovery, a confession of supreme devotion, the validation of consecration, a technique for the adjustment of difficulties, and the mighty mobilization of the combined soul powers to withstand all human tendencies toward selfishness, evil, and sin. He lived just such a life of prayerful consecration to the doing of his Father's will and ended his life triumphantly with just such a prayer. The secret of his unparalleled religious life was this consciousness of the presence of God; and he attained it by intelligent prayer and sincere worship—unbroken communion with God—and not by leadings, voices, visions, or extraordinary religious practices. (U. B. p. 2089)

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Urantia Book Resources

Clyde Bedell (1898-1985), a widely recognized author and speaker in the field of advertising, over many years compiled an index-concordance of words, concepts, ideas, topics, and themes found in *The Urantia Book*. He published the first edition of the *Concordex* in 1971. The third edition came out in 1986 and has over 110,000 references. The *Concordex* is an indispensable research tool for finding passages and studying topics in *The Urantia Book*.

Dr. Duane L. Faw, Professor of Law emeritus of Pepperdine University School of Law, spent six years compiling a parallel and harmony of *The Urantia Book* and the Bible. The *Paramony* was published in 1986 and contains 25,000 cross-references revealing the similarities and differences between the facts and concepts of these two great books. Dr. Faw has been a teacher of adult Bible classes for 40 years and a certified lay speaker in the United Methodist Church for over 25 years. The *Paramony* is an essential reference tool for studying relationships between *The Urantia Book* and the Bible.

The Uversa Press edition of *The Urantia Book*, the Pathways edition of *The Life and Teachings of Jesus*, the *Concordex*, and the *Paramony* can be purchased from The Good Cheer Press, P. O. Box 18764, Boulder, CO 80303 (1-800-767-5683).

An exhaustive *Urantia Book Concordance* was published by the Urantia Foundation in 1993. If your local bookstore does not carry *The Urantia Book* or *The Urantia Book Concordance*, they can be ordered from the Urantia Foundation, 533 Diversey Parkway, Chicago, IL 60614 (1-888-872-6842). The Urantia Foundation also publishes French, Spanish, and Finnish editions of *The Urantia Book*.