

Spiritual Fellowship Journal

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Urantia Brotherhood— Origin, History, and Destiny

Mark Kulieke

Spiritual Practice and Individual

Lectio Divina

Nancy Long

A Tale of Two Orvontons

Richard Bain

The Call to Ministry

Meredith Sprunger

Gifts and Graces of the Urantia Community

Christianity in Transition

Jesus' Confrontational Technique

The Art of Teaching

The Spiritual Fellowship is a Religious Organization Whose Mission is to Bring the Spiritual Teachings of the Urantia Papers to All People.

We believe that the Fifth Epochal Revelation will enculturate the grass roots of society through new religious organizations and help lay the foundation for an interfaith movement that will eventually involve all of the religions of the world. The history of religion shows that spiritual value systems are always established and promoted by some kind of religious organization. We invite you to join us in this pioneering effort to establish new religious organizations that have the potential to bring a spiritual transformation to our world.

Guiding Principles¹

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

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

The Purpose of Religious Institutions is to:

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

Religious Institutions Should Avoid Dangers, Such As:

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

Central Objective

The central objective of those interested in initiating a new religious organization based on the teachings of the Urantia Papers should be to create a polity with maximum flexibility, function with both small groups or larger congregations, utilize lay leadership and/or ordained clergy, exhibit cross-cultural adaptability, and express broad theological inclusiveness.

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

¹ See U. B. p. 966

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

The Spiritual Fellowship Journal

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The Spiritual Fellowship Journal is an ecumenical publication published twice yearly by The Spiritual Fellowship. Its purpose is to support the larger Urantia Community, especially as it seeks to interface with the cultures and religious institutions of our world. It also seeks to address issues of special concern in the establishment of new religious institutions with roots in the Fifth Epochal Revelation.

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Editorials

Gifts and Graces of the Urantia Community

The Urantia Community is a diverse, talent rich, and complex community. As it continues to grow, it will surely become even more so. This can be both a source of satisfaction and of some consternation, for while I stand in awe of the gifts and graces of individuals in the community, I am at times dismayed at the lack of unity and common vision. Realistically, it should not come as a surprise; idealistically, it is disappointing and even discouraging at times.

However, I'm constrained to believe that such diversity is not just the failure of imperfect mortals to comprehend and live by divine mandates; it is, in part, a natural consequence of God's overall plan.

Not long ago a member of our study group expressed puzzlement at the bewildering array of different creatures outlined in *The Urantia Book*—and we are told that there are even greater numbers not revealed. Especially for new readers, it can appear overwhelmingly and unreasonably complex. Why couldn't God have created a simpler universe?

There is, I think, a good reason for this. It isn't just that the universe has to be a complex place for mortals to exist, it is that the Creator-Father desires to share responsibilities for that universe at every level and in every way possible. That means a diversity of natures and gifts that appears almost limitless, each with its own unique place in the overall design of things.

In the New Testament Paul uses the image of the church as the body of Christ. It is an image that has had some unfortunate implications—namely, that the church is the sole and whole expression of the work of the Risen Lord on earth; in other words, “God has no hands but ours.”

Nevertheless, there is an important core of truth in the image. A body must have many parts, each functioning properly, for it to function as a whole. It needs arms and feet and hearts and hands, as well as a head. You can't say that one is important and another is not. The same is true with gifts within any community. Each gift is needed. Every gift is important to the whole and the whole cannot be what it is intended to be without it.

The image of the church as a living organism is akin to that of *The Urantia Book* and the nature of the Supreme. God not only creates diverse personalities (albeit in groups of kindred spirits), he gives unique gifts to all, gifts that at various levels are needed for the well being of the whole. Not only is each personality unique in all the universe, each person (or creature) is given a gift and task. Each shares in the ongoing creative process and in the growth and fulfillment of the Supreme.

I've found the insights of Elizabeth O'Conner to be especially helpful in this regard. In a book entitled *The Eighth Day of Creation*, she says we are all gifted, and more than this, our calling in life is closely tied to the discovery of those gifts.

We often wonder, she says, what we should be doing in life and how can we contribute to the work of the kingdom, when, in fact, the answer is written into the very fabric of our being—it is outlined and blueprinted by the nature of our gifts. What we should be doing for the advancement of the kingdom is discovering and using those gifts.

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One of the primary purposes of the religious community is to call forth and support the gifts of its people, to be sure that they are recognized and used for the good of humankind as well as for the glory of God. Many of the more creative churches of our time do just that, they help people find their gifts, give them appropriate training, and then hold them accountable for their use.

When people find their calling in life by discovering and using their gifts, they often have a sense of being destined for that work. As many have expressed it, “I feel I was born to do this.” We are in a real sense predestined by our gifts. Our free will will always remain inviolate, but the gifts and talents of our nature will bend the course of our journey in time and eternity, including, no doubt, those gifts we have not yet discovered.

Along with such diversity comes inherent differences of perception and understanding. Un-kindred spirits do not tend to think alike. Midwayers, and even

angels, we are told, do not always agree, and these disagreements often come from the tension between their appointed tasks and resultant perspectives. In our Paradise journey, there will be courts of arbitration all the way to the shores of Havona.

It is not surprising then, that even the wisest and best intentioned mortals must constantly negotiate differences of perception and opinion. The Urantia Community will certainly never be exempt from this.

I believe, however, that we can, in love, grow to understand and appreciate our diversity and differences, even as we strive to be true to our own calling. We can each be true to our own best insights without casting aspersion on others. When we do, our unity in spirit will overshadow our lack of unity in thinking, and in the end, we can affirm and trust that all things will work together and contribute to the whole in ways we do not yet understand. Its puzzlement and problems may haunt us in time, but in eternity its glory and wisdom will surely be revealed.

-Merlyn Cox

In this issue:

- Mark Kulieke gives an authoritative and insightful survey of the origin and development of the Urantia Brotherhood.
 - Nancy Long shares insights from her own spiritual journey, including those gleaned from a recent retreat sponsored by Benedictine nuns in southern Indiana.
 - Meredith Sprunger highlights the challenges facing those who wish to minister and reach out to others, along with a list of principles that should help guide us in our actions.
 - Lee Loots looks at the process and the “art of education,” with suggestions for leaders of Urantia education and study groups.
 - Richard Bain explores questions and issues that arise as readers seek to understand the cosmology of the Urantia Book—in this case the relation of the Milky Way galaxy and the superuniverse of Orvonton.
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Christianity in Transition

In the April issue of *The Atlantic*, Philip Jenkins refers to *The Urantia Book* as a cult classic. Many thoughtful people, including mainline Christians, believe it is much more than this. It has a ring of truth that increasing numbers of searching people respond to, and this resonance only increases with years of careful examination and study.

Various prophetic observers of contemporary Christianity have stated that we are in a period of crisis and transition. They are predicting that the Christian religion will be much different in the future than the present traditional orientation. Jenkins, in his book *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, states his belief that the most significant and revolutionary event of the past hundred years is the change that has taken place in religion. Mainline Christianity has lost its creative dynamic. The most gifted young people are no longer inspired by traditional religion. There is, at the same time, a search for spiritual meaning seldom paralleled in history.

Theological views also continue to evolve. There is a growing appreciation of the religion *of* Jesus—the Fatherhood of God and the brother/sisterhood of all people, as opposed to the religion *about* Jesus—something basically acceptable to all of the world religions. The ecumenical movement is demonstrating that people do not have to believe alike or think alike to be unified in their goals and ideals.

Increasingly, many of Paul’s theological and cultural influences are being questioned: Women are no longer seen as second-class citizens and the blood atonement doctrine is seen as a distortion of the nature of God as a loving Universal Father. The love of God is seen as more significant than the legalism of God’s justice. Along with this, the literal interpretation of scripture is viewed as a distortion of the nature of revelation.

All of these evolutionary developments are working together to change the character of Christianity and, in my opinion, will lead to the discovery of the teachings of *The Urantia Book*. In the next few hundred years, I believe that The Life and Teachings of Jesus in the Urantia Papers is destined to bring a renaissance to Christianity and a harmonious relationship among the major religions of the world.

-Meredith Sprunger

Urantia Brotherhood – Origin, History, and Destiny

Mark Kulieke

It was only a few years after the Urantia Papers started arriving and the Forum was studying them together that serious thought was given as to a group or groups that would be formed to sponsor the new revelation of truth to the world and bring people of like-minded interests together. This initial period of rumination occurred in the 1930s and early 1940s. It is evident that some were of an idealistic bent and didn't favor organizations at all, or only the most minimal form of organization. From reading the Sherman Diaries, it is evident that Harold Sherman was one of these. Even a member of the Contact Commission, Bill Sadler, admitted to originally being of this persuasion—until a series of communications came which were to change his mind.

Even if all the text of these doesn't survive, it is fairly evident from some sections in the Urantia Book what the nature of these communications might have been. Paper 99, Section 6 is thorough in listing “the dangers of formalized religion” but likewise states, “there is a real purpose in the socialization of religion” and lists a great many of these purposes. The book talks about the difference between Moses and Iknaton: that Moses was a great organizer and succeeded, that Iknaton was, in essence, an idealist who failed. (Papers 95 and 96) A similar comparison is drawn between Paul and Abner. (Papers 195 and 95) Abner was an idealist but too rigid and was not successful in Arabia. One statement made by the revelators was to the effect that they “...loved Abner, but worked with Paul.” It was also mentioned that their hope for the Urantia Revelation was to have a real blending of *ideist* and *idealist*. But other key points for having an organization were summed up in these statements:

“Not since the Gospel of Jesus has there appeared on earth such a dynamic nucleus about which could be built so many organizations and which would attract so many differently motivated men—good, bad, and indifferent.”

“There has not in 1900 years been anything about which there could be so much confusion and competition for control as your organization, and you cannot spike organization guns except by organization in this present age.”

“...many strange isms and queer groups ... will seek to attach themselves to the Urantia Book and its far-flung influence. Your most trying experiences will be with such groups who so loudly acclaim their belief in the teachings of the book and who will so persistently seek to attach themselves to the movement. Great wisdom will be required to guard against the distracting and distorting influence of these multifarious groups and from equally distracting and disturbing individuals, some well-intentioned and some sinister, who will strive to become part of the authentic constituency of the Urantia movement.” (1940s Communications)

So besides the positive purposes of the socialization of religion, the effective organization also provides protection, blocking out distracting influences. (Bill Sadler once likened the Urantia Foundation to the position of offensive tackle and that of the Urantia Brotherhood as quarterback.)

Abner was an idealist but too rigid and was not successful in Arabia. One statement made by the revelators was to the effect that they “...loved Abner, but worked with Paul.”

The Forum absorbed all this information and thus concluded that some organization was essential, ultimately determining that they needed two: the Urantia Foundation to handle the text and sales of the Urantia Book, including translations, and the Urantia Brotherhood to be the membership and outreach group. The nature of the Brotherhood was rooted in the group paradigm of the era, essentially that of a protestant church group. While these early followers of the Urantia Papers attempted to make forward steps with the formulation of a new organization, it is only to be expected that these steps forward were evolutionary and not revolutionary nor revelatory.

Nor was there universal harmony in all this decision-making. The Sherman episode seemed largely connected to the organizations-to-be. It would have been unusual not to have various contentions—the apostles of Jesus wrangled and argued amongst themselves over every matter, even while Jesus was yet with them.

Comparisons have been drawn between the organizational birth of the revelation and the birth of the American nation. Both were approached through spiritual eyes, but neither group was forming a new religion. Regional representation was addressed by

both, a balance of society/state rights and federal control being considered desirable. Both were trying to plan for long range growth though only vouched a glimpse of the direction that growth might take. Neither can be regarded as a finished work but as a work in process.

The celestial overseers of the revelation did not offer specifics on organization but suggested that:

“You will do well to diligently study the order, plan, and methods of progression as they were enacted in the earth life of Michael when the word was made flesh.” “[M]any are the lessons which can be learned from a study of the former age.” (1940s Communication)

While the text of the Urantia Book was completed by 1942, it was to be 13 more years before publication. Typesetting and platemaking took eight years after adequate funds were raised. At this point, in 1950, Urantia Foundation was formed and slowly started making plans for publication. A provisional go ahead was given by the revelators on February 11, 1952. They would decide when the Urantia Book would be published, but if not heard from in three years time, the Urantia Foundation was free to proceed. The three years passed and the Foundation published the book on October 12, 1955. This 13-year period dragged on for many Forum members. They were eager to have their own copies of the Urantia Book and share its teachings with the world.

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The Urantia Brotherhood was formed the same year as publication, on January 2, 1955, when 36 members were elected to form a General Council from which were drawn the Executive Committee officers and chairs of nine standing committees. Committee members were also selected at that time. It was another year and a half, June 17, 1956 before the first society, the initial building block of the Brotherhood-to-be, formed. The major portion of active Forum members, 156 in number, all became members of First Urantia Society, Chicago, Illinois. Some few elected not to join this or any other group. But the vast majority of dedicated Forum members involved themselves with Urantia societies and the Urantia Brotherhood.

These Forum members all bought multiple copies of the Urantia Book and attempted to give them to family members, friends, associates, politicians, ministers and priests, and libraries. They expected dramatic results in many cases but were to experience a different reality. The book was indeed spread abroad, but quietly and gradually. Some Forum members were surprised and disappointed at the progress made. Perhaps a few were relieved. It took 12 years to distribute the first printing of 10,000 copies. Meanwhile, the organizational machinery of the Urantia Brotherhood began to turn. Within a few years, there were six Urantia societies formed and functioning, most of them started and peopled by Forum members. It was these six societies which sent delegates to the first Triennial Delegate Assembly in 1964 to elect new General Council members and pass resolutions. They performed their voting functions and the organizational pump was primed. There has been a Triennial Delegate Assembly every three years since, and now about a score of societies send delegates.

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The first major conference was the 1963 Summer Study Session held at 533 with about 100 people in attendance. There were several more of these Summer Sessions held in the 1960s, but it was not until the 1970s that conferences grew dramatically in number held and in numbers attending. There was a shift of gears between the late 60s and early 70s. By 1974, about 10,000 Urantia Books were being sold per year—as many as the entire first printing of 10,000 which required 12 years to distribute. They were going to all 50 states and various foreign countries as well. Study groups formed rapidly, increasing from a few dozen to several hundred in just a few years. Two out-of-Chicago conferences were held—in Los Angeles (1973) and Oklahoma (1976) with hundreds in attendance. The Chicago-based conferences grew to 400 participants in 1974 and 1975. By 1978, participation was 600 (Lake Geneva, WI); by 1981, about 1000 (Snowmass, CO), where it seems to have plateaued.

With all the additional manpower, the standing com-

Brotherhood... cont.

mittees of the Brotherhood were peopled by individuals with drive and new ideas, and more activities of many kinds were taking place. Educational workshops were held annually; newsletters, both regional and movement-wide, were issued regularly; new fundraising and extension projects were undertaken. The Brotherhood mailing list was many thousands by this point.

To counterbalance the focus on the federal level of functioning, regular attempts were made to refocus on grassroots-level functioning. A conclave of Urantia societies was held in 1981 and several more were held in the 1980s. Other attempts at downward focus were made with zip code organization for study group referrals, the publication of a study group directory, and the development of an area coordinators program. Many would still regard the growth of the 1970s and 1980s as modest, but at the time, it seemed to be dependable and steady growth.

We might characterize 1955 to 1981 as the Growth Phase when Urantia Book adherents dealt with the mechanics of ever-increasing numbers. 1982 to 2005 might be regarded as the Transition Difficulties Phase. It is in this period when we are oft reminded of the challenge: “Are you ready for your baptism of joys and sorrows which will certainly attend upon the early distribution of the Urantia Revelation?” (1940s Communication)

Within a couple of years, the movement was in an uproar over alleged celestial messages being received by several individuals concerning probable global war. Just a few years after that, there was a virtual explosion of readers claiming to receive channeled messages from celestials.

The death of the last member of the Contact Commission in 1982, E. L. Christensen (Christy), seemed to result in the opening of a Pandora’s Box of new and trying situations to grapple with. Within a couple of years, the movement was in an uproar over alleged celestial messages being received by several individuals concerning probable global war. Just a few years after that, there was a virtual explosion of readers claiming to receive channeled messages from celestials. By the 1990s, it seemed there was a channeler in almost every study group. The Teaching Mission of channelers became a major phenomenon, while a large group positioned themselves in opposition and rejected all such material. Learning to live together and to grow

became a long-term challenge for opposing groups.

Within the Foundation Board, a power shift resulting in the removal of its president occurred almost simultaneously with the global war messages mentioned above. This action was soon to culminate in ever more power grasp by the Foundation core. The Foundation increased the price of the Urantia Book to unsustainable levels and brought criticism upon its head. The Foundation also sought to exert ever more authority to the point that, by 1989, a major rift in the Urantia Movement tore it apart—the separation of Urantia Foundation from the Urantia Brotherhood, the loss of trademark privileges and name change of the Brotherhood, and a fierce competitive struggle. By this time, the movement was reeling.

The Foundation formed a new membership organization, the International Urantia Association, and tried to drive the Brotherhood, to be henceforth called the Fellowship, out of existence. The Foundation had millions in funding all through the 1990s; it opened offices, started translations, and poured resources into the IUA effectively to eclipse the Fellowship. Obviously, the Foundation was now tackle and quarterback, in fact the whole team. The Foundation also spent large sums on legal expenses to hold on to the copyright to the Urantia Book and sue alleged infringers.

With first a temporary, and then a permanent loss of the Foundation’s copyright to the Urantia Book, the Fellowship attempted to survive by issuing its own printing of the Fifth Epochal Revelation to develop new readers and keep study group activity vigorous and growing. These few paragraphs cannot hope to summarize adequately the vast amount of time, money, and effort expended by thousands of people on opposing sides to avert confusion, recover from these events, advance their particular causes, and try to keep the Urantia Revelation on course as they have perceived it.

The Urantia Brotherhood is now the Urantia Book Fellowship and has held itself together, though growing only slightly in the last 15 years. With the final loss of the copyright to the Urantia Book, the Fellowship once again is distributing its own edition of the revelation. The main points of contention with the Urantia Foundation seem to be passing, and cooperation between the two organizations has been occurring and is expected to be augmented in the future. About one half million English edition copies of the Urantia Book are now abroad in the world. Translations are at

last being issued at a rapid pace and finding thousands of interested readers worldwide. It would seem the stage is set to pass into a new major phase.

Translations are at last being issued at a rapid pace and finding thousands of interested readers worldwide. It would seem the stage is set to pass into a new major phase.

There are some who are critical of the organizations, of many steps they have taken, and the progress of the Movement—that is to be expected. It is to be hoped that we can keep learning from corrective criticism as well as the school of experience. I believe it is wise and good to remember that we live on an experimental world and that we are in the middle of an experiment. Even the high celestial revelators do not know fully what to anticipate—this kind of project has apparently never been attempted before in Nebadon. It is OK to try things, to err and stumble, and to try anew and learn from the errors. Let us not be dismayed by any events of the past but continue undaunted. We need to keep doing our best as ambassadors from the future to strive arduously, to make decisions and to make them sincerely. Just that one thing—making sincere decisions—will get us where we are going. If the bulk of Urantia Book soldiers of the circles continues striving to make sincere and wise decisions, our destiny is assured. As always, “The act is ours; the consequences God’s.” (48: 7: 11)

Mark Kulieke is president of the Morning Star Foundation, which holds a library of over 200 secondary works associated with the Urantia Book. His father and uncle were Forum members (along with several other family members) and past presidents of the Urantia Brotherhood, and Mark is past president of the First Urantia Society, and was a full time worker for the Foundation from 1974-1978.

The Call to Ministry

Meredith J. Sprunger

Anyone who has experienced a dynamic personal relationship with God and has dedicated himself or herself to the demands of this relationship must do something about it. Genuine religion always motivates action and changes lives. Jesus emphasizes that service is the true indicator of our relationship with the Universal Father. Religionists have often side-stepped the demanding discipline of spiritual ministry by engaging in religious substitutes such as theologizing, cult cultivation, organizational administration, and mystical contemplation. Cults and sectarian groups tend to be centripetal— inward—their focus and primary relationships are with insiders. A more mature religion or religionist is open and outgoing and seeks to bring ministry to all humankind.

Service to others can take many forms, and each of us must discover which function or channel we find creative. We can serve God in every vocation of society and through all of the arts and sciences. Jesus directs us to seek the Father’s guidance and direction for our lives. All of us are not called to the same ministry. Courageously keep step with the music you hear; and so will the Father’s symphony of service benefit all people.

All of us are not called to the same ministry. Courageously keep step with the music you hear; and so will the Father’s symphony of service benefit all people.

There are three basic forms of service in which each of us is challenged to participate. First, we should strive to live the inspiring truths given to us. This is elemental. Second, we ought to engage in various types of material service. We should aid the needy, work for social, economic, and legal justice, and foster the actualization of human well-being. Finally, and most importantly, we are called to participate in a spiritual ministry to the minds and souls of our fellows. This sharing and proclamation of the good news has, historically, effected the greatest transformation of human life of all of the forms of service. And today there is a great need for the restructuring of the spiritual foundations of society along with a growing hunger in the world for a larger understanding of the universe and God.

New Potentials of Ministry

The latest and greatest truth the Master has committed into our hands is the Fifth Epochal Revelation. This momentous event has opened vast new potentials of ministry. Each of us should ask ourselves, how are we actualizing these dynamic possibilities? What fruits of the spirit show that we are doing something creative with this enlarged vision of truth in our lives and in our service? Where have we sown this new seed of truth? Are we cultivating soil and planting seed with care; or are we merely letting nature take its course and busying ourselves with other things while the winds of time broadcast the seed at random?

Although there have been many evolutionary periods of spiritual revival spearheaded by great religious leaders, the most significant eras of spiritual awakening on our world have been initiated by the advent of epochal revelation. We have many charismatic religious leaders today who recognize the need for the spiritual renewal of our society, and who are exerting their best efforts to bring about such a spiritual transformation of our culture. The spiritual rejuvenation of our planet, however, requires something more than religious genius and human heroics.

Because of this depletion of our evolutionary spiritual reserves, we have been given the Fifth Epochal Revelation. It has come in the fullness of time; for only an enlarged and integrated vision of Reality along with the faith-power of new revelation can bring about a spiritual renaissance on our world.

The depth of our world dilemma and the decadence of our spiritual resources is seen in the relative impotence of the religious leaders and the religious institutions of our day. Because of this depletion of our evolutionary spiritual reserves, we have been given the Fifth Epochal Revelation. It has come in the fullness of time; for only an enlarged and integrated vision of Reality along with the faith-power of new revelation can bring about a spiritual renaissance on our world. The crisis of our age challenges every serious student of the Urantia Book to dedicate himself or herself to some form of active and systematic outreach ministry.

Fields of Ministry

The most significant fields for spiritual ministry which will have a lasting effect on our culture and civilization are the religious institutions of our soci-

ety. No spiritual influence has ever made an enduring contribution to our world unless it has become institutionalized. Although religious organizations increase the potential for evil and doctrinal misdirection, no spiritual dynamic has been able to make its way as a viable aspect of history without utilizing institutional channels. This means that the teachings of the Urantia Book must either leaven the religious traditions of the world or new religious institutions will have to be created to serve this purpose.

Those who are too “turned-off,” disenchanted, or frustrated to serve actively in the religious institutions of society largely eliminate themselves from one of the most important evolutionary instrumentalities in bringing about a spiritual renaissance on our world.

In view of these experiential realities, it becomes clear that one of the most important avenues of service in which students of the Urantia Book can function is within the religious institutions of society. Spiritual leavening always comes from within. This is, obviously, a slow and difficult process; but there is no other way to spiritual growth. Those who are too “turned-off,” disenchanted, or frustrated to serve actively in the religious institutions of society largely eliminate themselves from one of the most important evolutionary instrumentalities in bringing about a spiritual renaissance on our world.

This does not mean that one must be a member of a religious institution to contribute to spiritual progress. Individuals and noninstitutional religious groups can make great contributions to religious growth. These “freelance” contributions, however, must eventually be incorporated in religious institutions if they are to survive. If the Fifth Epochal Revelation is to make its way into our culture it must first influence the lives of individuals; but in order for these teachings to survive and become a social force in civilization, these individuals must either leaven the traditional religions of our world or create new entities which become the channels through which these truths enlighten humankind. Hopefully, the Urantia movement will move in both of these directions.

In time there will be new religious groups arising that recognize the Urantia Book as the center of their faith and practice which will furnish all of the pastoral, social, educational, and sacerdotal services of contemporary churches and synagogues. *The Spiritual Fellowship*

is one the first of such new religious organizations. Eventually, the Fifth Epochal Revelation will transform all of the religions of the world. It is, therefore, vitally important that ever increasing numbers of Urantia Book students assume active leadership roles in the religious institutions of the world. If we wisely prepare the ground, eventually thousands of study groups will spring up within these historic communions.

It is, therefore, vitally important that ever increasing numbers of Urantia Book students assume active leadership roles in the religious institutions of the world. If we wisely prepare the ground, eventually thousands of study groups will spring up within these historic communions.

Principles of Ministry

Whatever form of outreach ministry you should choose to engage in, the quality and effectiveness of that service depends, largely, on how it is done. Divine revelation and human experience have taught us the importance of the following seven principles of ministry:

Use Wisdom

Use wisdom and balance in all of your service. Avoid extremes, exhibitionism, oversell, and the spectacular. Learn to distinguish between artistic good taste and the theatrical. Remember that personal contact is more effective than impersonal mass communication. Understand the wisdom and effectiveness of small groups. These groups form coalitions and networks more open and dynamic than hierarchical bureaucracies and self-serving cults. Such a network is many times greater than the sum of its parts. It has multiple leadership, pluralistic policies, and its center is everywhere. Start where people are, not where you are. Communicate in their frames of reference and anticipate their natural reactions. Combine the most expert knowledge with the highest values in all of your ministry. Master your mind through the power of the spirit. Be strong in the spirit; know that in liaison with God nothing can defeat the spiritual purposes of your life. Be fearless but act with discretion.

Let Love Create

Let love create the atmosphere of all of your interpersonal relationships. Remember that you cannot communicate effectively with others unless you positively and unconditionally accept them with all of their

imperfections. Strive to prevent your own biases and limitations from interfering or distorting your service to them. Support, stimulate, and help people; do not seek to coerce them. See all of your fellows as persons of worth and strive to build their self-confidence and self-respect. Be natural and genuine and enjoy their company. Serve out of love, a thankful heart, and the joy of the act itself. Ministry is an intrinsic activity of the creative mind and the loving soul. Extrinsic motivation in service compromises its spiritual value. Serving God even for good extrinsic purposes such as building your study group, society, or church, or even to bring about a spiritual renaissance limits its spiritual value and personal satisfaction. Minister out of the intrinsic motivation of love, thankfulness, and joy, and the extrinsic repercussions or results will largely take care of themselves. Serve in the openness of creative love; but do not try to manipulate people.

Cultivate Openness

Temper your personal convictions with philosophical objectivity. Always be honest and open. Cultivate freedom of opinion and respect the right of others to disagree with your most deeply held convictions. Honor each person's God-given right to self-determination. Try to establish common ground but do not contend with people. Let your enthusiasm for truth animate your discussions but never knowingly offend people.

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Co-operate with Evolution

Recognize that evolution is the underlying principle of life. Do not expect immediate results. All growth is unconscious and has mustard seed beginnings. The roots of a new tree of life take decades to penetrate the rocks of tradition on which it is planted. Be patient but do not become the victim of a fearful "do-nothing" psychology and bury your talents and treasure in the bogs of stagnation or the quagmires of cult obscurities. Be concerned about ministering effectively but

Call to Ministry, cont.

relatively unconcerned about results. Realize that your ministry must be planned and conducted in the context of the law of readiness. Always minister at the point of evolutionary readiness, but do not confuse this basic preparation for the surface conditions of psychological and social readiness. All who have prophetic vision know that evolution, the plow of history, eventually breaks the crust of individual resistance and moves the clods of social stagnation. Be loyal and persistent in your service without needing to see results or to be honored by success. It is our privilege and responsibility to minister; the results are in the hands of God the Supreme. In all things cultivate in yourself the mind and attitude of the Supreme. The vicissitudes of time do not change the goals of eternity.

Be actively involved in routine, commonplace experiences. Grow, bloom, and bear fruit in the soil where you are planted. If possible, keep your old social and religious ties strong and healthy.

Live with the Commonplace

Be actively involved in routine, commonplace experiences. Grow, bloom, and bear fruit in the soil where you are planted. If possible, keep your old social and religious ties strong and healthy. Share at the level of spiritual acceptance. When you are a tadpole do not live under the illusion that you are a trout or an eagle. Only dedicated and creative tadpoling will bring you inner satisfaction and a sense of fulfillment. These mundane activities and identifications will bring a sense of proportion, genuineness, and integrity to your ministry. Forget the failures of the past and do not allow yourself to be preoccupied anticipating the future. Live in the present in constant fellowship with the Father and absorbed in the existential moment of experience.

Develop a Sense of Humor

Cultivate an active sense of humor. Humor helps us maintain a proper sense of perspective. You can carry human-sized loads if you are not carrying the world on your shoulders. Do not take yourself too seriously even though you are participating in important work. Be unconcerned about prestige and status. Strive to avoid self-contemplation and cultivate self-forgetfulness. Finite personalities can become tragic figures when they lose their sense of perspective and fail to appreciate the comedy of life. We need to laugh at

ourselves and the frustrating, ridiculous, and absurd situations we encounter. A light-hearted spirit can be a great asset in carrying the sometimes heavy burdens of ministry.

Serve with Joy

Above all, live with joy in your heart and find joy in your ministry. You belong to the Father's kingdom which has an eternal future of unimaginable adventure and reward. Nothing can long prevent the fulfillment of your most ardent spiritual hopes and fondest dreams. All who experience this faith in an eternal destiny live with irrepressible joy even in the midst of material hardship, social conflict, and seeming personal defeat. As you free yourself from the slavery of the lure of things, the adoration or criticism of people, and the importance or preoccupation with self, you will experience the liberating joys of service. You will also discover that in doing so you are free from the egocentric social pressure to be successful or to maintain a reputation. When your will is in harmony with the will of God, the life of service also brings a deep inner peace. This meaningfulness and joy of worship and service transcends the rewards of all other human activities.

Living Faith Acts

We are living in one of the major transitional periods of human history. Our society desperately needs an enlarged spiritual vision which will give guidance and stability to the new age which is struggling to be born. The Urantia Book has been given to us providing the spiritual fulcrum to lift our world into a new era of human achievement. Our Sovereign Master speaks to us as to Peter: "If you love me, feed my sheep."

Meredith Sprunger is a retired UCC pastor and college professor who has worked for over fifty years to interface with mainline clergy. He is the founder and first senior editor of the Spritual Fellowship Journal, and currently serves as associate editor.

Jesus' Confrontational Teaching Technique

Lynn E. Rhoderick

In the three decades I've been a student of the Urantia papers, I've encountered personal disappointment in two areas. The first area is the suspicion and mistrust that seems to exist within and between the various Urantian groups. How can those of us struggling to interest others in the beautiful teachings of the papers be uplifted by "a house divided against itself?" No one dwelling in such a house receives spiritual nourishment: "fear, anger, envy, jealousy, suspicion, and intolerance, likewise, tremendously interfere with the spiritual progress of the evolving soul." (110:1:5)

My second area of disappointment is the seemingly lack of interest that many intelligent individuals I know have for the beautiful promises of the Fifth Epochal revelation: "True it is, you mortals are of earthly, animal origin. Your frames are indeed dust. But if you actually will, if you really desire, surely the heritage of the ages is yours, and you shall someday serve through out the universes in your true characters, children of the Supreme God of experience and divine sons and daughters of the Paradise Father of all personalities." (112:7:19)

Can the lack of interest shown by many to whom I've introduced the Urantia concepts be blamed on my teaching techniques? Or is their lack of interest due to the fact that they are afraid to "wholeheartedly" follow in the footsteps of Jesus? Consider what Jesus taught in paper #159, page 1767: "Teach all believers that those who enter the kingdom are not thereby rendered immune to the accidents of time or to the ordinary catastrophes of nature. Believing in the gospel will not prevent getting into trouble, but it will insure that you shall be unafraid when trouble does overtake you. If you dare to believe in me and wholeheartedly proceed to follow after me, you shall most certainly by so doing enter upon the sure pathway to trouble. I do not promise to deliver you from the waters of adversity, but I do promise to go with you through all of them."

In October of 2004 I signed a contract with a printing company for the publication of my autobiography entitled "Christianity's Degrees of Insanity." It is the story of my "turbulent religious quest" to find theological sanity and how I found it in the Urantia Book. I intend to use my story to "confront" the ignorance

and prejudice rampant within Christianity. Would Jesus approve of such a confrontational approach?

"Jesus gave this man his sight by miraculous working, on that Sabbath morning and in Jerusalem near the temple, for the prime purpose of making this act an open challenge to the Sanhedrin and all Jewish teachers and religious leaders. This was his way of proclaiming an open break with the Pharisees. He was always positive in everything he did. And it was for the purpose of bringing these matters before the Sanhedrin that Jesus brought his two apostles to this man early in the afternoon of this Sabbath day and deliberately provoked those discussions which compelled the Pharisees to take notice of the miracle." (164:3:16)

As a public school educator for almost four decades I practiced the belief that children can't be taught without first obtaining their attention. However, I finally concluded that even getting a student's attention can prove fruitless if what is being taught has no lasting value. What I learned in Urantia paper #72 about the error of keeping children confined to classrooms caused me to become a "conscientious objector." I could no longer blame students for not paying attention nor could I blame myself for failing to inspire some to learn. I ended my teaching career because I believed I could better benefit the children of America by using Urantia teachings to confront the ignorance of our nations' educational, social, political, economic and religious institutions. Without any doubt I knew that by so doing it would lead me to follow "the sure pathway to trouble."

Will my fellow Urantians applaud my efforts to openly confront "the doctrinal fallacies of Christianity" and by so doing move our planet one step closer to the age of "Light and life," or will they view my motives with suspicion and mistrust? My hope is that God did approve of my efforts to write "Christianity's Degrees of Insanity" and that I was guided by his gift of the Thought Adjuster. Time will tell for surely the "proof is in the pudding."

Lynn Rhoderick has been a student of the Urantia papers since the mid-seventies. He retired from teaching in 1994 after 36 years in the classroom. His book can be purchased from Amazon.com. A companion work entitled "Christianity's Doctrinal Fallacies" is scheduled for publication.

Spiritual Practice and Individual

Lectio Divina

Nancy Long

The Significance of Spiritual Practice

Spiritual practice— it fascinates me. When the opportunity arises, I find myself eagerly broaching the subject with others. I’ve discovered that it means different things to different people. However, there does seem to be a common foundation to those different definitions. That foundation is a belief that the regular performance of some selected activity (i.e., the “practice”) brings us closer to some worthy aspect of life, an aspect which transcends material existence. Some of us say we are trying to discern the will of God, or trying to find our highest purpose, or becoming attuned to our Higher Power. Others say we are trying to be in the moment, the here-and-now, or we are on the path to enlightenment. Whatever the reason, those who engage in spiritual practices seek to be transformed day-by-day, effort-by-effort, they look to form habits that create their gateway to the Divine.

The idea of spiritual practice took on a deeper significance for me last year after I read *Long Quiet Highway*, an autobiography by Natalie Goldberg. Goldberg is a contemporary writer and teacher of creative writing. Hers is the story of a Jewish woman-turned-Zen Buddhist, who finds herself, and awakens to her spirituality, through writing as spiritual practice. I had one of those “a-ha!” moments somewhere in the middle of her book, where the power and symbolic importance of spiritual practice came alive. I was struck by the compelling role that spiritual practice could play in both religious symbolism and developing the inner life.

The Urantia Papers urge us to develop new and appropriate religious symbolism (87:7.6). I have come to realize that spiritual practices are one such symbol. The spiritual practices we sanction and perform, whether individually or collectively, will be part of those elements that make up a “cult of mutual support” and will be indicators of that group we “belong to” (87:7.3). As such, they deserve serious and earnest consideration.

“*Perfect your inner spiritual life*” (140:8.17). Regarding our earthly challenges and goals, the Urantia Papers teach us that our great challenge is to achieve better communication with the indwelling spark of God. And our greatest adventures, here on earth at least, will be those well-balanced and sane efforts we wholeheart-

edly attempt in order to push our self-consciousness to actual contact with that divine presence (196:3.31). To me, such efforts are primarily in the arena of our *inner spiritual lives*. The Revelators share that Jesus, were he here today, would counsel us about the inner spiritual life, not about political, social, or economic problems. Instead, he would teach us ways to perfect our inner spiritual life so that we could solve those purely human problems ourselves (140:8.17).

We believers in the Urantia revelation do not have to plough new snow in this area of spiritual practice. While some spiritual practices that will arise from the revelation will indeed be new, I believe we would do well to also explore the many tried and true practices that have added value to the inner spiritual life of those who came before us. This exploration is not an appeal to duplicate archaic practices which have no relevance for us today. Rather, it is an appeal to rediscover what works in our human tradition, to rediscover and perhaps add a fresh twist to those practices which have stood the test of time as proven paths to God. To prime the pump on our consideration of spiritual practices, I offer the following discussion on *lectio divina*.

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***Lectio divina*: Background**

As we intuitively know, there is no one best spiritual practice. Jesus taught the apostles that people are different and should be allowed to develop, each in their own way, as a perfecting and separate individual before God (140:8.26). I felt consideration of *lectio divina* was fitting for those studying the Fifth Epochal Revelation, since we are a group that loves to read. *Lectio divina* can be translated as “*sacred reading*” or “*divine reading*.” Most faith traditions currently have, or have had, practices that involved the recitation of spiritual texts. For example, in Buddhism such texts are used in recitation-practice that contributes to spiritual cultivation. In Hinduism there are various practices, with passage-meditation being a more recent example, where “the object of attention is not an image or an external object but an inspirational passage chosen from any of the world’s great spiritual traditions and

memorized ahead of time.” And Judaism places its sacred reading at the center of faith, believing that the words are the voice of God.

In Christianity, lectio divina rose out of Catholicism, where it is an ancient practice of reading the Bible aloud, slowly, and purposefully. The Benedictine orders trace their devotion to lectio divina back to the Rule of St. Benedict, written in the mid 6th century. It is still actively practiced today by various Christian denominations, not just Catholics. If you wish to learn more about the origins and applications of lectio divina, a visit to a spiritual retreat center sponsored by the Benedictine or Carmelite orders might prove beneficial. For example, there are two retreat centers within a short drive from me in central Indiana, both run by Benedictine sisters, that include lectio divina in their open, interfaith retreat programs. In addition, a search for lectio divina on the internet will return a host of sites. (The Order of Saint Benedict’s link devoted to lectio divina is <http://www.osb.org/lectio/about.html>.) And of course, there are a number of books on the subject, such as *Sacred Reading: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina*, by Michael Casey, prior of the Cistercian abbey of Tarrawarra in Victoria, Australia.

“*Thomas, Thomas, how long before you will acquire the ability to listen with the ear of the spirit?*” (142:7.17) The underlying principle of sacred reading is that it is communion with God, a personal encounter with the Divine. One does not practice lectio divina to acquire intellectual knowledge from the text being read. In lectio divina, we linger over the text, read it repeatedly, rest reverently with it. The approach during this time of communion is generally not the same as it is when we study the Urantia Papers. With lectio divina, we are not intending to learn from the literal meaning of the words. Instead, we strive to listen with the ear of the spirit, to spiritually hear the “voice” of God to teach and transform us.

“*Prayer is the breath of the soul.*” (144:2.3) Most practitioners consider lectio divina a form of prayer. Of course, there are many different ways to pray. And in a good number of them, our prayer is active. That is, we seek a dialog with God, and in some cases, it is an outright monologue where we do all of the talking. Lectio divina is a method of praying that provides a loose structure, with the main task being to *listen* rather than to talk. It embraces a rhythm of reading, deep listening, where we gradually turn away from our own agenda and open our spirits to what God shares

specifically with us. Lectio divina is not reading in a linear way, where we start at the first page and proceed until the end. No, this prayer method of sacred reading is more circuitous, with lots of repetition and wandering, savoring, and silence.

Lectio divina also incorporates a step of prayerful, interior silence, not to serve as a void or time to do nothing, but to carve out a space for God’s presence, to give us room to be attentive to God. Indeed, Jesus taught us to remain for a time in silent receptivity after prayer to afford the indwelling spirit the better opportunity to speak to our listening souls (146:2.17).

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Lectio divina: The Process

Some consider lectio divina a spiritual discipline and have a strict process and set of rules to follow. However, in most of my personal encounters with practitioners, it is taken more generally and is applicable to any spiritual, holy, or religious text.

If you feel inclined to try this spiritual practice, feel free to make it your own. Remove or change those things that do not have meaning for you or are not your cup of tea. Add elements that bring you closer to God. For instance, before I start the first step of lectio divina, I try to adopt a contemplative attitude. I find a quiet space where I am reasonably sure to remain undisturbed for a while. I like to go, when I can, to places that have spiritual significance to me: a spot under a certain beautiful sycamore tree near where I work, or a small sacred area I have set aside in my home. I sit comfortably, enter into silence, and take a few moments to quiet my mind. Some people focus on their breathing to quiet their minds. Some say a particular prayer or just remain silent. I start by ringing a small bell and, when the ringing sound has stopped, I repeat three times a phrase that is personally significant, taking a slow, deep breath between each phrase. The phrase of significance to me is “Listen for God.”

Lectio divina can be practiced alone or in a group. Individual lectio divina is generally considered a four-step (or stage) process, described below. Group lectio divina takes a somewhat different format and is left for another article.

Spiritual Practice..., cont.

Stage 1 - Reading (lectio)

Slowly, paying attention to the sound of the words (not necessarily their meaning), read aloud a passage from the Urantia Papers or any spiritual text. It does not matter which text or passage you chose. Savor each word. Repeat words or phrases as you feel lead. Read until a word or phrase strikes you. You might feel the presence of Christ Michael, an increased sense of God's love, increased peace, or lifted in spirit. Whatever it is, once you feel moved, that is the time to stop reading. Sit and wait until you are no longer drawn by the experience. However, do not be discouraged if nothing seems to happen. Continue reading until you feel that you should stop if no word or phrase strikes you.

You might end up reading only one word, or you might read an entire page, before something catches your attention or you feel moved to stop. You do not have to be able to articulate the significance of the word or phrase. You do not need to know why you felt the urge to stop. There are no hard-and-fast rules here, just be guided by the Spirit. However, do be wary of slipping into "study" mode or reading to finish a section or some other such goal. Remember to leave what you read and the amount you read in God's hands, not yours.

Stage 2 - Reflection (meditatio)

Next, think about the word or phrase that caught your attention, or the passage you read before you felt you should stop. Turn it over in your mind, trying to discern what it is that God wants to impart to you. Allow it to mix and mingle with any memories, beliefs, and ideas that come to the forefront of your mind in relation to your word, phrase, or passage. Include the memories, beliefs, and ideas in this reflective dialogue you are having with God. Meditate on the word, phrase, or passage as a means of transforming whatever has been awakened in you.

Stage 3 - Prayer (oratio)

Jesus taught us that an effective prayer is one that is not for ourselves alone. It is one that is steeped in faith, and is sincere, intelligent, and trustful (144:3.8). Offer a prayer now, after your time of reflection. You might pray for insight. Or offer a prayer of thanks for what has been revealed. Offer to God what you have found within your soul. Your prayer can be verbal—said aloud or silently. It could take the form of an image, idea, feeling, a combination of those things,

or something else entirely. What is important here is loving interaction with God.

Stage 4 - Contemplation (contemplatio)

When you have finished praying, enter into union with God. Sit silently, simply resting in God's presence, until the Spirit leads you to stop. Let go of your own ideas, words, and thoughts during this time, no matter how spiritual you might think they are. Listen at the deepest level of your being for God and allow yourself to be transformed from within.

"You may preach a religion about Jesus, but, perforce, you must live the religion of Jesus." (196:2.1) No practice is complete if we do not go forth living what we have learned, sharing the fruits of our relationship with God, and incorporating the spiritual teachings of Jesus into our day-to-day lives. This is a crucial part of any spiritual effort.

Conclusion

As a newly-forming religious community, I believe *The Spiritual Fellowship* should include consideration of spiritual practice as a critical part of an on-going discussion on new and appropriate religious symbolism and as a potentially powerful method in the development of an individual's inner spiritual life. Existing practices, or some modified form of them, as well as new practices have a place in our developing spiritual community.

Lectio divina is one such existing practice that is certainly relevant for us today. It is an experience in sacred, spiritual rhythms, an ebb and flow from activity to receptivity, back to activity. Lectio divina can be transformative, for the Revelation teaches us that prayer is that part of the divine plan for making over that which is into that which ought to be (144:4.9). If lectio divina resonates with you, be regular and persistent in practice, as our beloved Sovereign encourages us to be persistent in prayer, not to win favor with God, but to change our attitude and to enlarge our soul's capacity for spirit receptivity (144:2.50).

Nancy Long has been a student of the Urantia Book for over twenty years. She currently serves as interim Executive Director of The Spiritual Fellowship and is preparing for TSF ministry. Spiritual practice is a subject near and dear to her heart. She invites you to share your experiences and thoughts regarding spiritual practice with her. You can reach her at nlong@thespiritualfellowship.org.

A Tale of Two Orvontons

Richard Bain

No matter how many times I've read the cosmology and astronomy information in Papers 15 and 41, I have never been able to form a consistent picture of the size and structure of Orvonton, our superuniverse. I suspect that I'm not alone in this. Other Urantians have deduced from the same information that Orvonton may be as small as the Milky Way galaxy, or as large as thousands of galaxies.

After many years of consideration, I've decided that the book presents not one, but two or more different pictures of Orvonton. The following sections are my attempt to tease apart the different pictures. One concept the authors support is that our galaxy, the Milky Way galaxy, is the core of Orvonton, probably the major portion of it. But there is other information in Papers 15 and 41 from which we can conclude that Orvonton is much larger than this. My comments are in brackets following each quote.

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The Milky Way is a Major Part of Orvonton

15:3.1 "Practically all of the starry realms visible to the naked eye on Urantia belong to the seventh section of the grand universe, the superuniverse of Orvonton."

[This statement intimates that there may be few things we can see with the naked eye that do not belong to Orvonton. According to sources found on the Internet, with the naked eye we can see galaxies M31 (Andromeda), M33, M81 and M83 outside of our Milky Way galaxy. These galaxies are from 2.4 million to about 15 million light years from us. The above statement from the book indicates that one or all of these galaxies may not be part of Orvonton. This would mean that Orvonton is less than 30 million light years in diameter, perhaps even less than 5 million light years.]

15:3.1 "The vast Milky Way starry system represents the central nucleus of Orvonton, being largely beyond the borders of your local universe."

[The term "central nucleus" implies here that Orvonton is more than the Milky Way Galaxy, but the authors don't give us a clue here about how much bigger Orvonton is than our galaxy. One possibility is that Orvonton consists of the Milky Way Galaxy plus its satellite galaxies, such as the Large and Small Magellanic Clouds, hereafter referred to as the Milky Way galactic system.]

15:3.1 "This great aggregation of suns, dark islands of space, double stars, globular clusters, star clouds, spiral and other nebulae, together with myriads of individual planets, forms a watchlike, elongated-circular grouping of about one seventh of the inhabited evolutionary universes."

["Watch like" does not accurately describe our galaxy. It has a central bulge surrounded by a thin disc, sort of like two fried eggs back-to-back. However, if Andromeda is included, then the envelope of Orvonton could be elliptical and watch-like.]

15:3.2 "From the astronomical position of Urantia, as you look through the cross section of near-by systems to the great Milky Way, you observe that the spheres of Orvonton are traveling in a vast elongated plane, the breadth being far greater than the thickness and the length far greater than the breadth."

[The authors are saying that this is how our galaxy appears from our position inside of it. This sentence seems to equate the Milky Way galaxy with Orvonton. If the Small and Large Magellanic clouds were included, then some of the stars of Orvonton would *not* be traveling in the plane of the Milky Way since these small galaxies are below the plane of the Milky Way galaxy. And if our closest neighbor galaxy, the Andromeda galaxy, were part of Orvonton, it would not be traveling in the plane of the Milky Way either.]

15:3.3 "Observation of the so-called Milky Way discloses the comparative increase in Orvonton stellar density when the heavens are viewed in one direction, while on either side the density diminishes; the number of stars and other spheres decreases away from the chief plane of our material superuniverse."

[This is what we see as we look towards and then away from the luminous strip of light in the night sky known as the Milky Way, which is the densest part of our galaxy. One inference we can derive from this

Tale of Two Orvontons, cont.

sentence is that the Milky Way galaxy is Orvonton.]

15:4.8 “The globular type of star clusters predominates near the outer margins of Orvonton.”

[This intimates that the Milky Way galaxy and possibly its satellites constitute Orvonton. Globular clusters are found above and below the center bulge of our galaxy and other similar galaxies. They are not found at the outer margins of clusters of galaxies.]

32:2.11 “From Jerusem, the headquarters of Satania, it is over two hundred thousand light-years to the physical center of the superuniverse of Orvonton, far, far away in the dense diameter of the Milky Way. Satania is on the periphery of the local universe, and Nebadon is now well out towards the edge of Orvonton. From the outermost system of inhabited worlds to the center of the superuniverse is a trifle less than two hundred and fifty thousand light-years.”

[The current estimate of the size of the Milky Way galaxy is up to 150 light years in diameter. This would place the center of Orvonton outside the opposite edge of our galaxy. Recently however, the size of Andromeda was revised upward by a factor of three (to 220,000 light years) due to detecting the extension of the galactic arms further away from the main body of Andromeda. If the Milky Way galaxy were three times larger for the same reason, the center of Orvonton would be within our galaxy, but still not at the center of our galaxy. Also, if the radius of Orvonton is 250,000 light years as indicated, then Orvonton could not include any other major galaxies, even Andromeda, the closest large galaxy, which is at least 2 million light years from us. Thus the referenced section above appears to indicate that Orvonton is the Milky Way galactic system.]

Recently however, the size of Andromeda was revised upward by a factor of three (to 220,000 light years) due to detecting the extension of the galactic arms further away from the main body of Andromeda. If the Milky Way galaxy were three times larger for the same reason, the center of Orvonton would be within our galaxy, but still not at the center of our galaxy.

12:2.2 “Although the unaided human eye can see only two or three nebulae outside the borders of the superuniverse of Orvonton, your telescopes literally reveal millions upon millions of these physical uni-

verses in process of formation.”

[This paragraph is one of the places where the authors use the terms “nebulae” and “physical universes” to refer to galaxies. It’s true that we can only see the Andromeda galaxy and perhaps two or three others under very dark skies without a telescope. The authors thus indicate that these 3 or 4 galaxies are *not* in Orvonton, indicating again that Orvonton consists mostly of the Milky Way galaxy.]

Orvonton as Much Larger Than the Milky Way Galaxy

12:2.2 “Most of the starry realms visually exposed to the search of your present-day telescopes are in Orvonton, but with photographic technique the larger telescopes penetrate far beyond the borders of the grand universe into the domains of outer space, where untold universes are in process of organization. And there are yet other millions of universes beyond the range of your present instruments.”

[The telescopes of the 1930’s could see many galaxies. If “Most of the starry realms visually exposed to the search of your present-day telescopes are in Orvonton,” this would indicate that Orvonton contains many galaxies. Notice that this seems to directly contradict the preceding part of this section.]

12:2.3 “At the same time these more powerful telescopes will disclose that many island universes formerly believed to be in outer space are really a part of the galactic system of Orvonton. The seven superuniverses are still growing; the periphery of each is gradually expanding; new nebulae are constantly being stabilized and organized; and some of the nebulae which Urantian astronomers regard as extragalactic are actually on the fringe of Orvonton and are traveling along with us.”

[Island universes was an early term for galaxies. The first sentence clearly states that Orvonton is a “galactic system” composed of many galaxies. If “nebulae” in the last sentence is replaced by “galaxies,” the concept of an Orvonton composed of many galaxies is strongly reinforced.]

15:3.4 “Of the ten major divisions of Orvonton, eight have been roughly identified by Urantian astronomers. The other two are difficult of separate recognition because you are obliged to view these phenomena from the inside. If you could look upon the superuniverse of Orvonton from a position far-distant in space, you would immediately recognize the ten major sectors of

the seventh galaxy.”

[Astronomers have been able to map much of our galaxy even though obviously they have to do it from inside; there are not eight recognizable divisions of the Milky Way galaxy. Our galaxy does have four spiral arms, but these could hardly fill the bill as major sectors. What are recognizable as separate entities are galaxies and clusters of galaxies. The possible conclusion is that a major sector of Orvonton is either a galaxy, or a cluster of galaxies. This would mean that Orvonton is immense compared to our galaxy. However, notice the use of “galaxy” in the last sentence. It appears that the authors were trying to dilute the idea that Orvonton is composed of more than one galaxy, or they mistakenly used “galaxy” instead of superuniverse.]

15:3.5 “The rotational center of your minor sector is situated far away in the enormous and dense star cloud of Sagittarius, around which your local universe and its associated creations all move, and from opposite sides of the vast Sagittarius subgalactic system you may observe two great streams of star clouds emerging in stupendous stellar coils.”

[We are looking toward the center of our galaxy when we look toward the constellation Sagittarius. The “two great streams of star clouds emerging in stupendous stellar coils” apparently refer to two of the arms of our galaxy, which radiate from the center bulge of our galaxy. The preceding sentence implies to me that our Milky Way Galaxy is a minor sector, but the term “subgalactic system” contradicts this. It appears that either the authors were making the section deliberately contradictory, or else the authors that wrote this section did not have a good knowledge of astronomy.]

15:4.7 “Not all spiral nebulae are engaged in sun making. Some have retained control of many of their segregated stellar offspring, and their spiral appearance is occasioned by the fact that their suns pass out of the nebular arm in close formation but return by diverse routes, thus making it easy to observe them at one point but more difficult to see them when widely scattered on their different returning routes farther out and away from the arm of the nebula. There are not many sun-forming nebulae active in Orvonton at the present time, though Andromeda, which is outside the inhabited superuniverse, is very active. This far-distant nebula is visible to the naked eye, and when you view it, pause to consider that the light you behold left those distant suns almost one million years ago.”

[The first sentence is apparently referring to galaxies as “spiral nebulae.” This is reinforced by the reference to the Andromeda galaxy as a “sun-forming nebula.” The authors idea of stars passing in and out of the galactic arms does not agree with the most widely accepted scientific explanation. The most widely accepted theory of galactic arm formation is the idea that density waves move around the galaxy and cause large numbers of stars to be formed in their wake. The stars thus formed outline the spiral arms of the galaxy. And astronomers know that it takes light over two million years to reach us from the Andromeda galaxy. And there are quite a few “sun forming nebulae” in the Milky Way galaxy, but they are variously shaped clouds of gas and dust, not “spiral nebulae.”]

15:4.8 “The Milky Way galaxy is composed of vast numbers of former spiral and other nebulae, and many still retain their original configuration. But as the result of internal catastrophes and external attraction, many have suffered such distortion and rearrangement as to cause these enormous aggregations to appear as gigantic luminous masses of blazing suns, like the Magellanic Cloud.”

[Astronomers have identified the remains of several smaller galaxies that are being ingested by our galaxy, so this statement agrees with our current understanding of how the Milky Way galaxy and others formed. However, astronomers have not identified any that have retained their “original configuration” within the Milky Way galaxy. And there are two Magellanic Clouds rather than one. Both have been distorted by the gravity of our galaxy.]

15:4.9 “The vast star clouds of Orvonton should be regarded as individual aggregations of matter comparable to the separate nebulae observable in the space regions external to the Milky Way galaxy.”

[Since the authors use “nebulae” to indicate galaxies in Section 1, and since they say the “individual aggregations of matter” are like the nebulae (galaxies) that are external to our galaxy, the authors seem to be saying that Orvonton is composed of many galaxies.]

12:1.6 “The Seven Superuniverses are not primary physical organizations; nowhere do their boundaries divide a nebular family, neither do they cross a local universe, a prime creative unit. Each superuniverse is simply a geographic space clustering of approximately one seventh of the organized and partially inhabited post-Havona creation, and each is about equal in the

Tale of Two Orvontons, cont.

number of local universes embraced and in the space encompassed.”

[If by “nebular family” the authors mean clusters of galaxies, then they may be saying that Orvonton is a cluster of galaxies. On the other hand, they may regard the Milky Way galaxy and its small close-by satellite galaxies as a “nebular family.”]

15:5.6 “The superuniverse of Orvonton is illuminated and warmed by more than ten trillion blazing suns. These suns are the stars of your observable astronomic system.”

[Astronomers currently estimate the size of our Milky Way galaxy as up to 400 billion stars. If a major sector contains about one trillion stars (one tenth of Orvonton,) then our galaxy is about 40% the size of a major sector. The Milky Way galaxy and its satellite galaxies plus the Andromeda galaxy and its satellite galaxies are about the size of a major sector. This is smaller than the cluster of galaxies proposed by a few people for Orvonton, but considerably larger than just our galaxy by itself. In a presentation at the 2002 International Conference, Fred Beckner made the case for Orvonton consisting of our galaxy, the Andromeda galaxy and their satellite galaxies.]

41:0.2 “While the administrative organization of the grand universe discloses a clear-cut division between the governments of the central, super-, and local universes, and while these divisions are astronomically paralleled in the space separation of Havona and the seven superuniverses, no such clear lines of physical demarcation set off the local creations. Even the major and minor sectors of Orvonton are (to us) clearly distinguishable, but it is not so easy to identify the physical boundaries of the local universes.”

[This intimates that both the minor and major sectors are visible as separate entities like galaxies and clusters of galaxies. This offers some support for the idea that the Milky Way galaxy is a minor sector.]

41:0.4 “Such is the constitution of the local star cloud of Neadon, which today swings in an increasingly settled orbit about the Sagittarius center of that minor sector of Orvonton to which our local creation belongs.”

[If the “Sagittarius center” is the center of our galaxy, then this may be another indicator that the Milky Way galaxy is a minor sector. But this could also mean that the center of the minor sector is in the direction of the Sagittarius constellation rather than at the center of

the Milky Way galaxy..]

41:3.10 “Better methods of space measurement and improved telescopic technique will sometime more fully disclose the ten grand divisions of the superuniverse of Orvonton; you will at least recognize eight of these immense sectors as enormous and fairly symmetrical star clusters.”

[If we accept that star clusters are clusters of galaxies, then this lends added support to the idea of our galaxy as a minor sector. But the authors could also mean that a star cluster is a galaxy.]

Use of the Term “Nebulae”

Before Edwin Hubble discovered stars in the Andromeda galaxy and others, there was a great debate on whether or not those fuzzy patches of light in the sky were galaxies full of stars or clouds of gas. The authors of the Urantia Papers seem to use nebulae to mean both clouds of gas and galaxies. Indeed, there are clouds of gas within our galaxy, and some of them are visible because they are illuminated by various forms of radiation. The sections and comments below explore the various ways the authors used the term “nebulae.”

12:4.8 “But the greatest of all such distortions arises because the vast universes of outer space in the realms next to the domains of the seven superuniverses seem to be revolving in a direction opposite to that of the grand universe. That is, these myriads of nebulae and their accompanying suns and spheres are at the present time revolving clockwise about the central creation.”

Before Edwin Hubble discovered stars in the Andromeda galaxy and others, there was a great debate on whether or not those fuzzy patches of light in the sky were galaxies full of stars or clouds of gas. The authors of the Urantia Papers seem to use nebulae to mean both clouds of gas and galaxies.

[Nebulae and universes here seem to refer to galaxies.]

15:4.4 “Paradise force organizers are nebulae originators; they are able to initiate about their space presence the tremendous cyclones of force which, when once started, can never be stopped or limited until the all-pervading forces are mobilized for the eventual appearance of the ultimatonic units of universe mat-

ter. Thus are brought into being the spiral and other nebulae, the mother wheels of the direct-origin suns and their varied systems.”

[The term “spiral nebulae” indicates to me that the authors are referring to galaxies.]

15:4.4 “In outer space there may be seen ten different forms of nebulae, phases of primary universe evolution, and these vast energy wheels had the same origin as did those in the seven superuniverses.”

[In this sentence, nebulae obviously refers to galaxies and the many forms they take. Hubble identified ten types of galaxies (nebulae) in his 1936 book, *Realm of the Nebulae*.]

15:4.6 “Nebulae are not directly related to any of the administrative units, such as minor sectors or local universes...”

[In this case, it’s difficult to say whether “nebulae” refers to subsystems within galaxies or to galaxies themselves. This sentence could be interpreted as saying that our nebula (galaxy) is *not* a minor sector.]

41:8.3 “In large suns--small circular nebulae--when hydrogen is exhausted and gravity contraction ensues, if such a body is not sufficiently opaque to retain the internal pressure of support for the outer gas regions, then a sudden collapse occurs.”

[This is the only case I can find in the book where nebulae refers to a sun.]

41:8.4 “As a rule, the vast extrusion of matter continues to exist about the residual cooling sun as extensive clouds of nebular gases. And all this explains the origin of many types of irregular nebulae, such as the Crab nebula, which had its origin about nine hundred years ago, and which still exhibits the mother sphere as a lone star near the center of this irregular nebular mass.”

[The Crab nebula appears to have had its origin as the result of a supernova of its central star, which is now a neutron star. In this case “nebula” refers to a cloud of gas within our galaxy, rather than a galaxy.]

57:3.1 “The enormous nebula now began gradually to assume the spiral form and to become clearly visible to the astronomers of even distant universes. This is the natural history of most nebulae; before they begin to throw off suns and start upon the work of universe building, these secondary space nebulae are usually observed as *spiral phenomena*.”

[The term “nebula” in this paragraph apparently

refers to those giant gas and dust clouds that supply the material to form galaxies. All the spiral galaxies our astronomers can see are visible because they have stars. It doesn’t seem possible to see clouds of gas and dust without something to illuminate them, such as material spewed from supernovas or ultraviolet light from giant blue stars. However, such clouds of gas can be “seen” in infrared light with special sensors on a telescope.]

Conclusions

I think the preceding analysis demonstrates that there are at least two pictures of Orvonton contained in The Urantia Book. Which one is correct, and why are there two or even more? We can only speculate about this. Perhaps the Milky Way is a minor sector, but because of the constraints against revealing unearned information, the revelators could not present the exact picture of the seven superuniverses. But they could and did present some hints with the big Orvonton picture intermixed with the small Orvonton picture. John Causland presented a slide of a possible big picture universe during his presentation at the 2005 International Conference. The slide showed a number of superclusters of galaxies that appear to be arranged around a feature called “the Great Attractor.” The Great Attractor is a region of massive gravitational attraction that lies on the other side of our galaxy. It seems to be controlling the large superclusters around it. Because of its position, we cannot see what it contains. Could it be the center of Orvonton? Could the superclusters be major sectors? John pointed out that the supercluster of which we’re a part (called the Local Supercluster, centered on the Virgo cluster of galaxies) consists of about 1000 galaxies and that there are 100 minor sectors in a major sector. Could these galaxies be minor sectors? No one can say for sure, but I think it’s at least as good a theory as any other put forward.

Richard Bain is an electrical engineer, a long time reader of the Urantia Book, and a consulting editor to The Spiritual Fellowship Journal.

What Constitutes the Art of Teaching

Lee Loots

The Urantia Book Fellowship operates a listserv for present and past Society administrators, as well as Fellowship officers. Recently on this listserv, an open inquiry was posed regarding what a budding teacher may want to keep in mind. The majority of the comments below were offered in response to this discussion..

1.) Don't be afraid to let students see who you are.

Parker Palmer, an inspiring author on the art of teaching, emphasizes this. A person will be at their most effective by being their natural self, and not by attempting to be some model of what is thought to be a good teacher. In spiritual terms, don't try to divorce the content from your divine gift of personality expression. The student will receive "you" as much as they receive content through you, and both matter. Trying to deliver content without allowing one's self to be seen in the process is an old model in academia and still, in fact, exists in some universities. Yet this is not a spiritual approach.

2.) Try to see each student as he/she is.

Palmer says that by doing the above (publicly accepting your own unique personhood), you put yourself in a better position to see the unique personhood of every student before you. Acceptance of a student's uniqueness will go a long way toward helping her/him grasp and integrate the material presented. All it takes is just one teacher to really "see" a student for that student's whole life to open up. This is one of the great and humbling privileges of teaching.

3.) Be as clear as possible about expectations.

Studies of teacher evaluations have shown that students can adapt to many different teaching styles capably, *as long as the students know what to expect*. When the student clearly understands expectations (including the consequences for lapses), then the student feels empowered to make good choices. Likewise, there is a certain relaxation engendered for learning when learning is protected by good boundaries. Even if teaching the UB, for example, let the student know how the lessons will be conducted so the student can align her/his mind with what unfolds.

4.) Within groups, fairness does not always mean the same treatment.

Most unfortunately, the modern school is modeled after a factory (falsely giving the impression that students are uniform learning machines, and that the conveyor built of time will pull them farther along in their progress) A factory mentality aims to rubber stamp learning for each grade level, and thus does not particularly allow time for all the desirable adaptations to individual needs.

However, if the teacher wants to both support and guide (the Creator Son/Divine Minister combo), then adaptation to individual circumstances is important. This is obviously easier said than done (as any parent of more than one child knows). Moreover, in endeavoring to make such adjustments, a teacher will encounter her/his personal land mines, such as inadvertently offering the kind of sympathy which weakens, unconsciously acting out of favoritism, potentially allowing one's self to be taken advantage of, etc.

Nevertheless, there is no other way to develop one's discernment than to traverse this unknown, rocky territory. Consultation with knowledgeable others about such judgment calls can really help, however. Healthy interdependence is, after all, the universe pattern.

In UB study groups, where we are all each others' teachers, we might want to look at whether we unconsciously run the study group like a factory—delivering a specific number of papers per session via conveyor belt, and if this approach invites individuals to maximize their learning.

In UB study groups, where we are all each others' teachers, we might want to look at whether we unconsciously run the study group like a factory — delivering a specific number of papers per session via conveyor belt, and if this approach invites individuals to maximize their learning. My thought is that each group has the responsibility to collaboratively decide what the best approach is for all those who belong to that group, lest no one be left out or left behind.

5.) Create opportunities for students to apply what they are learning as much as possible.

None of us really knows if we have learned something until we can apply it or teach it to someone else. This is reflected in our universe model wherein as soon as one individual learns something, they turn around

and teach it to the person right behind them. Such a technique not only offers reaffirmation for what was just learned, but moreover, such a teacher cannot help but be freshly in touch with the memory of how they learned what they learned. (I think you will agree that it is easy to forget how we felt, and how we struggled, when we were at earlier learning stages—and this forgetfulness can impair our ability to reach a student somewhat)

If we want to apply this model to teaching the Revelation, we could ask the student to articulate what they believe they have learned. We could also invite the student to seek experiential wisdom through attempted application of ideas, and then report back to us.

In the classroom, students generally enjoy being put in pairs or small groups to teach each other current concepts in their own words (and when this happens, the students are startled at how often they have to consult their notes for the details±—which is a good wake-up call, of course). Likewise, students can be asked to apply the material to a current event or a small practical project, and to return with the results of their efforts. It is only in the application that the fullest grasp happens, which accounts for the existence of the Supreme.

An application approach, however, will greatly slow down the “conveyer belt,” and that is why it is not utilized in the classroom as much as it might be. In public K-12 schools, there may not be a lot of leeway for this (not sure). In other settings, however, if there is leeway, such experiential applications are an important part of any lesson plan. As school currently functions, far too much of school involves going through the motions of covering material with subsequent testing—but sadly without offering vivification of the material in experience. All the students through the decades who complain about having to learn things that they seemingly don’t need to know are inadvertently pointing precisely to this lapse.

6.) Learning is most effective as an act of collaboration between teacher and student.

Anyone can lecture or otherwise rattle off information, but this is more “being the authority” than it is actual teaching. Teaching really is collaborative. In essence (though this is trite), teaching/learning is honestly a dance which is guided by the music/rhythms of unfolding awareness. That is, adjustments must be consistently made between teacher and student if the

dance is to be experienced as worthwhile by both. On my public school course syllabus, I have the following motto which implies this: “I will build a bridge to reach you, but I will not cross over it to come and get you.” This motto points to the dance, but what I don’t say in that motto is that the bridge is living and adaptable.

Just as the Father continually beckons us to choose the better way, likewise, the teacher can continually invite a connection to elevate the student’s learning. Yet, just as the Father waits for us to choose Him, the student likewise has the responsibility to move towards this offered connection. The dance once begun (whether with Father/creature or teacher/student) requires the active involvement of both. The Father humbles himself to reach us where we are, and we stretch ourselves up to reach where He is beckoning.

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Directly connected to this dance is the value the UB puts on the pursuit of relationship for its own sake. God is most able to be an influence within the living connection of relationship, because God is living Himself. Therefore, one can never be too practiced in making adaptations to evolving relationships (because each one is different). In fact, whenever we forget to do the relational dance, we temporarily fall out of living reality.

7.) Uphold boundaries, but do not fail to offer support while doing so.

As much as possible, deliver predictable consequences for behaviors, so that students recognize they are in charge of their own experiences. Consider this hypothetical comment: “I was sorry to see that you chose to take a zero on that assignment by not having it ready on time. You have so much to offer that I was really looking forward to what you had to say. Let me know if you need help on the next assignment.”

This is a clear statement which places the responsibility for the consequences squarely in the student’s court, but does so in a way that supports the student. Very importantly, this method does so without sham-

Art of Teaching, cont.

ing, while also offering the hope of the future. I doubt I am alone in having had the experience of teachers who managed to deliver consequences stained by their personal disapproval (and I have fallen into this myself, I am sorry to say, both as a teacher and as a parent). Whenever this type of communication happens, it just pollutes the learning environment.

Love in regard to boundaries and expectations has been aptly discussed already here. I will add that I have often relied upon Scott Peck's definition of love in *The Road Less Traveled*. As he defines love, love is not necessarily a feeling (because feelings come and go). Rather love is a *commitment* to fostering what is best for the people involved (and this includes the teacher, too).

We have a mission, should we choose to accept it, and that is to serve as we are guided. Thus, prayer before each teaching session helps, and helps in ways that transcend our immediate awareness.

8.) Never forget that what a teacher does is sacred work (just like all work).

We have a mission, should we choose to accept it, and that is to serve as we are guided. Thus, prayer before each teaching session helps, and helps in ways that transcend our immediate awareness. Preparation is essential of course. But at the same time, show up with vibrant expectation that you will be guided.

Because I earn a living teaching, I have found that praying in the car on the way to class is a good habit (and on funky days, I sing the prayers just to give me a boost). I have also found that simply telling God "*I trust you*" to work through me really makes a difference. On the way home from class or when retiring for the night, debriefing in prayer about the day's experiences is not only enlightening, but is reinforcing of a heartwarming sense of partnership.

9.) Teach with an open heart.

In his *Compare* column of 9/1/'05, Tom Allen offered this guidance from St. Augustine:

"So great is the influence of a sympathetic mind, that our students are affected by us as we teach, and we by them as they learn. Thus we come to dwell in each other; they speak in us what they hear, while we learn in them what we teach."

—*St. Augustine, Instruction of beginners XII, 17 (p. 354-430)— as written beneath a statue of St. Augustine*

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