

Our Ministry to the Christian World

By Preston Thomas

Part 1

The Importance of Christian Ministry

My topic is *Our Ministry to the Christian World*. I would like to approach this subject by offering a personal perspective. My hope is that it will be helpful to you in developing a more effective and rewarding *personal ministry*.

Let me begin by asking you to consider several questions that students of The Urantia Book often ignore:

First, "Is our ministry to the Christian world important?"

Second, "If it is, and we want to be successful, what should be our approach?"

And third, "Should we adapt and adjust our ministry so as to harmonize and even unify with the best in Christianity?"

In this paper I will outline my reasons for holding to the importance of a Christian and Bible based ministry and then discuss the out-workings of these beliefs in my life.

There are two major reasons why I have chosen to pursue such a ministry. The first reason derives from two inescapable facts of my experience:

Fact # 1. I strongly desire to *effectively* minister on a personal level to others, to really help them to live a better life. Like many of you, I believe I have found in Jesus, especially as portrayed in The Urantia Book, the way of truth, the way of life; and this *truth must be shared*. The higher goal of my ministry is to contribute to a revival of the *actual* teachings of Jesus and an expansion of his inner spiritual kingdom in our world.

Fact #2. I live in a Christian world. The traditions, culture, beliefs, and values of those I contact with in my daily life are predominantly Judeo-Christian. Even those who reject organized Christianity generally hold to a background belief in the goodness and value of its better teachings. And on a wider level our highest planetary ideals in morals, ethics, and religion are embodied in the Christian tradition. Even in our modern secular and materialistic age most people still accept, to one degree or another, the authority of the Bible and the positive value of its Jesusonian teachings.

Given these two facts: that I seek to effectively minister to others, and that Christianity is the dominant religious influence of my world, I have made a conscious decision. I have chosen a ministry that focuses on the life and teachings of Jesus especially as presented in the *New Testament* gospels of *Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John*. I have found that by relying on the Biblical teachings of Jesus I can effectively minister and teach the

truth I have discovered in The Urantia Book without arousing antagonism or resistance. Indeed I find that most people are quite receptive to new insight into Jesus when it is presented in a way that harmonizes with Christian ideals.

My second major reason for undertaking a ministry to the Christian world derives from the teachings of The Urantia Book itself. For if we look at what the Urantia Papers really teach we do not find that they direct us to spread Urantia Books—rather, they call for a new revelation of Jesus and his saving gospel. The following quotations should help make this clear:

Page 2083, “The hour is striking for a rediscovery of the true and original foundations of present day distorted and compromised Christianity—the real life and teachings of Jesus.”

Page 1866, “There must come a revival of the actual teachings of Jesus.”

Page 2084, “Modern culture must become spiritually baptized with a new revelation of Jesus’ life and illuminated with a new understanding of his gospel of eternal salvation.”

Page 2090, “Of all human knowledge, that which is of greatest value is to know the religious life of Jesus and how he lived it.”

And please take special note of this last quotation from page 2082:

“Religion does need *new leaders*, spiritual men and women who will dare to *depend solely on Jesus and his incomparable teachings*.” (My emphasis)

If we take seriously The Urantia Book’s call to bring about a new revelation of Jesus, what should be our approach? For me the answer to this question is the same as the answer to the question of how I can be most effective in my personal ministry. I believe we need to recognize the background beliefs and values of our world and adapt our ministry to the understanding and receptivity of our audience. This means we need a ministry that, like the Urantia revelation itself, exalts and affirms the best in Christianity and the Bible. We need to recognize that the truths originally portrayed in the gospels are the *same* saving truths that The Urantia Book teaches.

In doing this we are merely following the example of Jesus’ ministry to the Jewish world. He always adapted his teachings to the ways and comprehension of his listeners. He did not incite confusion and arouse antagonism by teaching truths too far removed from the capacity of his hearers. Jesus always affirmed the best in the Jewish religion and showed due respect for the ways and traditions of his people. He often affirmed and even relied upon the *authority* of the Jewish scriptures in his effort to get across his own expanded teachings.

In our work for a new revelation of Jesus I believe we should do the same. Whereas Jesus lived and taught mostly among the Jews, the culture we live in is basically Christian. If we are to go to the world we live in, the Christian world, we should first respect their traditions, second, affirm our commonly held beliefs and values, and third, present our expanded revelation of Jesus in a way that best harmonizes with their understanding and

belief system; in sum, we should simply relate to Christians as fellow religionists who share many of our beliefs and values, and learn to speak to them in their own language.

Part 2

Personal Experiences in Christian Ministry

What results may we expect when we pursue such an approach?

I have experimented with this form of ministry for more than 20 years and the following is an outline of some of my experiences and observations. I hope they will stimulate your personal ministry and help make that ministry more effective.

These experiences and comments are presented on three major levels: personal ministry to close family and friends, ministry in the social arena, especially the workplace environment, and the wider sphere of planetary ministry.

Personal Level

My first really significant experience in teaching Jesus using the Bible occurred many years ago when my grandmother lay on her deathbed. At such a crucial time of her life I felt a strong urge to read to her good and meaningful words. I searched for the best and most trustworthy teachings I could find and finally settled on a small book that contained only the teachings of Jesus as found in the Bible. I came into her room as often as I could and read to her from this book. I hope and believe it was helpful to her; certainly I had the great satisfaction of knowing I had ministered comforting words and the saving teachings of Jesus at a time they would have special meaning for her.

On the personal level the best part of a ministry that seeks harmony and unity with Christian ideals is the sense of community and acceptance I feel with close family and friends.

I grew up as a part of a large and closely-knit extended family that included parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins. We all grew up faithfully attending mainline churches and the Christian religion has always been a central part of our lives.

What has my acceptance of the Urantia Revelation meant to my relations with this close family circle? It has not meant that we live in two separate worlds where each side rejects the beliefs of the other. In fact our religious unity has grown stronger. Because I accept and affirm the best of Christianity our religious viewpoints are mutually respected. I can minister freely to those closest to me and by openly affirming Jesusonian teachings can help strengthen them in "fighting the good fight of faith."

While most members of my personal family circle are a part of the mainline Christian tradition, my wife's parents and my brother adhere to a stricter interpretation of the Christian viewpoint. With these more seriously devoted religionists I have also found deepened and more rewarding relationships.

My brother is a conservative Christian, and we have had many positive discussions through the years; we both feel a sense of shared values. In fact, our relationship has been defined more by unity of religious ideals than by differences in theology or personal approach. I have enjoyed attending his church as well as religious retreats sponsored by that church. At these church gatherings I found I could easily minister insights I have

gained from The Urantia Book, and in turn was uplifted by a sense of unity and fellowship with other sincere religious believers.

I have even had a very positive discussion with my father-in-law, a fundamentalist, concerning the atonement doctrine. With this fundamentalist believer I was able to make all my important points and arguments by prefacing my discussion with this viewpoint:

Of all the teachings in the Bible, Jesus' stand out as the *highest* and *best*. His teachings are perfect and all others should be judged by their harmony with his concepts and pronouncements.

In this way I operated from an authoritative source that he also respected. We had a six-month correspondence and actually drew closer while arguing for fundamentally opposing viewpoints.

It is important to observe that my ministry to the Christian world has not just been one way. In many instances Christian friends and acquaintances have ministered to and prayed for me in my times of need. Indeed I feel certain that their prayer and ministry has been instrumental in bringing me through some of my most difficult times. My experience is that when we seek religious unity with Christianity we gain great benefit from the prayer and ministry of our Christian friends, and we open up great new opportunities for inspirational fellowship and communion with other devoted religionists.

Social Level

This sense of religious community that I feel with close family and friends also extends to my workplace environment.

For 18 years I have served as director of the Einstein School, a small private school I founded in 1981. The following words were part of the school's original statement of guiding principles. They demonstrate the ease with which one may blend Christian and Urantia Book teachings in a way that is acceptable to the general public:

Einstein School believes that learning and character development should not be separated. Its purpose is the balanced development of the **whole personality**—body, mind, and spirit. The school affirms the basic values and teachings of Jesus. It encourages students to see themselves as children of a loving heavenly Father and to treat others in a brotherly manner. Love, thoughtfulness, helpfulness, and service to others are emphasized.

This religious orientation is generally reassuring to parents of all persuasions, and in eighteen years I have known of only one parent who rejected the school because of its religious stance. On the contrary, the fact that the school fosters Christian beliefs and values is a major plus. Many parents have indicated that the school's religious outlook was an important factor in choosing Einstein School for their child.

We generally have a number of students who come to us from Christian Schools, but we also have others who come from non-religious and secular backgrounds. Also, the school has employed a number of excellent Jewish teachers and we often have Jewish students. By

ignoring Christian dogma and focusing on the *actual teachings* of Jesus we are able to speak freely to all and encourage our students to learn and live Jesusonian ideals.

I have found it both rewarding and effective to apply Jesus' teachings in the many real life situations that arise at school. For example one of the most fundamental problems children face is lack of self-respect. This often results both in serious learning problems and in difficulties relating to other students and to teachers. The school's answer to this widespread problem is to teach the students to see themselves as children of God and therefore worthy of respect. At the same time it is emphasized that all others are also worthy of respect, and that the more we respect others the more we can respect ourselves. This idea and ideal that we are all sons and daughters of a loving heavenly Father is the most central teaching of the school, the one that I seek most to impart to our students.

Because the school is openly Jesusonian and Christian in its policies I find it easy and natural to minister in many ways. For example, I begin each Monday morning by announcing a "word of the week." It is a character or positive value word such as faith, tolerance, altruism, etc., and sometimes a phrase like "Be of good courage," or "To have friends be friendly." We discuss the concept and each student looks up the word and writes a short description of it. The younger students also do a color poster each week and we vote each Monday on the previous "poster of the week."

The school has enjoyed great success and we receive many times the applications that we have space for. It has become well known in the community as a place where children who had previous difficulty in school enjoy success, growth, and more fully reach their full potential. All this has taken place in a school that teaches revealed Jesusonian concepts using the Bible as a background authoritative source.

Planetary Level

My primary efforts at ministry beyond the personal and social levels involve a book entitled *The Life and Teachings of Jesus* that I first published in 1992. I began work on it in the mid 1980's after searching in vain for a book that isolated and compiled all the Biblical verses dealing with Jesus. Failing to find a book that I felt comfortable with, I decided to undertake the project myself. Using The Urantia Book as my guide, I sought to collect and organize all the *true* Biblical verses concerning Jesus in chronological order, from birth through death and resurrection. I used the Revised Standard Version as my basic text, but also used up to 26 translations of the Bible to find the most fitting translation.

My first and most basic purpose for the book was to have an easy to read, trustworthy, and acceptable version of Jesus' life and teachings to give to others. The book was dedicated to the students of Einstein School and every year at the school's closing ceremonies I present a copy of the book to each departing pupil as their special gift from the school. I feel real satisfaction in being able to leave with every student a book that continues and reinforces the ideal ministry of the school, and that also can serve as a life long source of inspiration, guidance, and comfort.

This book is always readily received and even looked forward to by the students. In fact, two years ago my high school students repeatedly requested that we study the book as a part of our history course. So last year I am taught History of Religion to my eleventh grade class using *The Life and Teachings of Jesus* as our textbook.

I have also given the book to many others, especially friends and individuals who are facing difficulty or crisis in their lives, and have received numerous reports of positive results. Other readers have also found the book useful. For example one long time Urantia Book student told me it had helped heal his relationship with his parents who had been concerned about his being into The Urantia Book. In another instance, a couple reported using it with great success to teach a Sunday school class in a mainline church—in fact, most of the class later ordered the book

A book of this type, that gives a purified Biblical account of Jesus and his teachings can prove especially useful for Urantia Book believers. By becoming familiar with the record of Jesus in the Bible we clearly see the fundamental harmony of the two accounts. But perhaps its greatest value lies in the fact that it provides us with a language of *intercommunication*; with it Bible and Urantia Book students can talk to each other. It gives us a way to teach the truths that activate us, and reference these truths with words and teachings that are revered by our hearers.

My final example of the usefulness of the Biblical record of Jesus concerns my youngest son. When he was around 15 we began regular weekly readings of *The Life and Teachings of Jesus*. He was not ready for The Urantia Book and its wording was too advanced for his comprehension. But he could more easily grasp the simplified and ordered presentation of Jesus collected from the Bible. For a teenager this approach had another special virtue—by learning about Jesus from the Bible he did not have to feel different from his peer group. We went forward each Sunday morning for several years reading the book, and I found that I was able to impart and emphasize all the important teachings of Jesus. Then one morning, as we began our reading, he said: “We have now read this book several times and I know it. When can we read The Urantia Book?” Well, we began reading *The Urantia Book* that day and continue to the present time. His acceptance of Jesus’ teachings and positive character development over the last four years, and throughout many difficult times, has been an answer to his parents’ fervent prayers.

Part III

Our Ministry to the Christian World

In this paper I have outlined my major reasons for pursuing a ministry that affirms the better elements of Christianity. I have related some of my personal experiences using this approach and a few of the positive results that can be obtained.

Today I challenge you to develop your own personal ministry into a more effective force for the uplift of others. Remember, The Urantia Book calls for a new revelation of Jesus and an expansion of his kingdom—the rule of God in the heart of the individual believer. To help bring about such a spiritual transformation in others is a far greater task than spreading Bibles or Urantia Books. It means leading others to actually accept and live Jesus’ teachings—to become loyal sons and daughters of God who live their lives by faith, and give forth the fruits of the spirit.

For such a great task we need all the resources we can muster. By seeking harmony with the best in Christianity we move from a very limited audience to a ministry that unifies us with our world and has real potential to transform that world. Remember, the presentation of a new vision of Jesus that attracts and unifies Christian believers is *the goal*

the revelators present to us in their vision of our world's ideal religious future. Listen to their great prophetic promise from page 2086: "The *great hope of Urantia* lies in the possibility of *a new revelation of Jesus* with a new and enlarged presentation of his saving message which would *spiritually unite* in loving service *the numerous families* of his present day professed followers." (My emphasis) This is our mission. *This is our call.* May it guide and inspire us to achieve a more effective and rewarding personal ministry.