

Spiritual Fellowship Journal

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**The Cultural Impact of *The Urantia Book*
in the Next Fifty Years**
Meredith Sprunger

The Geography of Faith
Merlyn Cox

A Mainline Reaction to Apocalypticism
Jack Rogers

Resistance to Spiritual Truth

Urantia Book Fundamentalism

The Future of Religion

The Emergence of the CyberChrist

Psalms Today

How Good is the Good News?

My Life's Most Significant Spiritual Event

Book Reviews: *Truth in Religion* by Mortimer Adler
God and Religion in the Postmodern World by David Ray Griffin

The Spiritual Fellowship of Students of The Urantia Book

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

Guiding Network Principles

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

Network Recommendations

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

**The Spiritual Fellowship
Journal**

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About the Editors

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

Resistance to Spiritual Truth

Religious authorities are usually the most difficult people to introduce to new spiritual truth. The followers of Jesus found it impossible to work within Judaism. It was necessary to start a new religious movement to accommodate Christian teaching. Similarly, during the period of the reformation, the reformers were unable to work within the Roman Catholic Church. As a result, the Protestant movement was born. It is not surprising, therefore, that the majority of the leaders bringing new spiritual truth to humankind have been laypersons rather than religious professionals.

Our experience over the past thirty-five years reveals the same pattern developing in the spread of the Fifth Epochal Revelation. The group of people receiving the Urantia Papers were laypeople. The dissemination of the teachings of *The Urantia Book* has been carried out largely by laypersons. When our small group of United Church of Christ ministers discovered *The Urantia Book*, we planned to work in and through the church in spreading this Good News. (Our current Clergy Network has similar objectives.)

Experience reveals how difficult this is. For most theologians and religious authorities, if a piece of literature does not fit into their preconceived parameters of spiritual truth, they do not give it serious and full consideration. Normally such "short-cut" evaluation is a reasonably adequate way to determine the worth of religious writing. With a book containing the sweeping reconstruction of our view of spiritual reality which *The Urantia Book* presents, it is completely inadequate. This "traditional" mindset is one of the reasons why it takes so long for significant new spiritual truth to make its way into our institutions and culture.

*Normally such "short-cut" evaluation is a reasonably adequate way to determine the worth of religious writing. With a book containing the sweeping reconstruction of our view of spiritual reality which *The Urantia Book* presents, it is completely inadequate.*

In 1980 I wrote personal letters to around 100 theological professors in seminaries affiliated with the American Association of Theological Schools enclosing a pamphlet introducing *The Urantia Book* and offering a loan book. Only two of these religious teachers, who are normally kind and considerate people, even bothered to answer my letter. This further illustrates how difficult it is for traditionalists and structured academic disciplines to recognize new sources of truth. They usually do not seriously examine anything which does not fit within their truth criterion parameters. (This caution is

essentially good.) Our evolutionary religious structures are not geared to recognize new revelation. It is through what Abraham Maslow calls the one percent of humanity who are the searchers and innovators that new truth is introduced into our institutions.

In spite of these difficulties, most of the members of our Clergy Network believe it will eventually be possible to share the truths of *The Urantia Book* within the church. Fortunately, the pluralism which has evolved in mainline Christianity allows for the sharing of new and heterodox ideas. Higher and more inclusive truth will slowly replace the more limited concepts of Reality. Progress in the church depends on our capacity to communicate this larger vision with love, patience, and wisdom. The Spirit of God ever leads humankind to a fuller realization of truth.

-MJS

Urantia Book Fundamentalism

Christian fundamentalists believe in the literal inerrancy of the Bible. They are so impressed with the spiritual truths of scripture that they assume the physical science, economics, sociology, and history of the Bible are of equal quality. The scholarship of mainline Christianity has long since delivered the church from such naive illusions. We have come to realize that the purpose of revelation is spiritual enlightenment, not scientific or historical facts. The main body of Christianity has achieved the spiritual maturity to distinguish between spiritual guidance and material facts and conditions.

It is interesting to observe that many students of *The Urantia Book* with high intelligence, but lacking the experiential background of mainline theological scholarship, are entertaining the same illusions as the Biblical fundamentalists. They assume the science of *The Urantia Book* is inspired revelation although the authors clearly state: "The laws of revelation hamper us greatly by their proscription of the impartation of unearned or premature knowledge...The cosmology of these revelations is *not inspired* ...While divine spiritual insight is a gift, *human wisdom must evolve*." (p. 1109) They recognize that "within a few short years many of our statements regarding the physical sciences will stand in need of revision."

The authors of *The Urantia Book* used the science of the 1930's and 1940's or facts about to be known for the material setting of the book. In 1957 as an aid to help me evaluate the scientific orientation of *The Urantia Book*, I asked the head of the Physics Department and a nationally known nuclear physicist at Purdue University to appraise the quality of Papers 41 (Physical Aspects of the Local Universe) and 42 (Energy—Mind and Matter) of the book. Both of them said, in effect, "This is about where the leading thinkers in physics were a few years ago, we think we are a little beyond this

now." Further research over the years has revealed that virtually all of the scientific material found in the book was the accepted scientific knowledge of the period in which the book was written, was held by some scientists of that time, or was about to be discovered or recognized.

The validity of revelation is determined by the quality of its spiritual enlightenment, which is tested by experience. The authors of *The Urantia Book* used the best of contemporary science and human philosophy to show the integration of science, philosophy, and religion under the overcontrol of the First Source and Center of all things and beings. The spiritual insights and truth resonance of the harmonious integration of the entire universe pictured in *The Urantia Book* is without parallel in world literature; it is a magnificent revelation.

Scholarly evaluation shows that Urantia Book fundamentalism is just as untenable as Biblical fundamentalism. In the same way that higher criticism established sound foundations for Biblical studies, so must critical scholarship prepare the way for creative study of The Urantia Book.

Scholarly evaluation shows that *Urantia Book* fundamentalism is just as untenable as Biblical fundamentalism. In the same way that higher criticism established sound foundations for Biblical studies, so must critical scholarship prepare the way for creative study of *The Urantia Book*. Thus freed from any illusions about its literal infallibility, we are delivered from defensive, fundamentalistic attitudes and open to evaluate its spiritual insights, cosmology, theology, and its view of human origins, development, and destiny. In this capacity its potentials are without parallel on the human scene.

-MJS

The Future of Religion

Recently I listened to Dr. Anson Shupe of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Indiana-Purdue University at Fort Wayne give a lecture on "The Future of American Religion." Dr. Shupe listed five major trends: (1) Increasing Religious Pluralism, (2) Numerical Decline of Membership in the Major Mainline Denominations and Continued Growth of More Conservative Denominations, (3) A continuation of Cult Scares, (4) The New Christian Right, and (5) An Increased Emphasis on, and Sensitivity to, Religious Influence in Physical/Mental Healing.

Dr. Shupe commented on the tremendous alterations taking place in the religious topography of the nation in recent years. There are more Moslems in the United States than Episcopalians or Pentecostals and as many Mormons as Jews. Mainline denominations are losing membership through a low birth rate and a failure to retain their children as adult

members. More than 40% of the members of many mainline denominations are over 55 years of age. While the traditionally dominant denominations are losing cultural influence, the New Christian Right has become an accepted part of the Republican Party and conservative politics.

The 18th century Age of Enlightenment with the emergence of biological germ theory in medicine relegated religion to a peripheral role in health care. Now it is being recognized that the brain, the mind, and the body work together as a unit. There is hard scientific evidence that our thoughts and emotions effect our physiological condition. Our psychological-spiritual attitudes can harm or heal. This realization is shifting the emphasis in religion from theological constructs to the experiential realities of faith, courage, confidence, dedication, and love.

One does not need prophetic insight to see that this widespread unsettled condition in the economic, social, political, and religious institutions of our world is laying the foundations for major changes in our culture. But we are not very good at seeing the true watersheds in human affairs. They are usually not revealed in the headlines of the daily news. Daniel J. Boorstin in a *U.S. News & World Report* article (4/22/91) entitled, "History's Hidden Turning Points," states that the key factors in these major transitions are usually discovered only in retrospective historical analysis. Boorstin also observes that authentic turning points have centuries-old roots and are slow in unfolding.

This, it appears, is a description of the age long religious evolution which is taking place. Both the transition from polytheism to monotheism and the pilgrimage from perceiving a God of wrath to experiencing a God of love has taken eons of time and is still in process. The life and teachings of Jesus is a unique milestone in this odyssey. Early Christianity mixed Jesus' Advent and mission with the mystery religions of that era and developed a religion *about* Jesus. The Middle Ages added unsavory institutional appendages to religion. The Protestant Reformation attempted to bring us back to the Bible as the basis of religious authority and open the way for a first hand, personal relationship with God. These are important milestones in religious development, but a clearer view of spiritual reality is desperately needed.

The current religious unrest and spiritual searching portends a major turning point in our religious history. I believe the next spiritual reformation will bring us back to the religion of Jesus and a universal view of the Fatherhood of God and the kinship of all humanity. It is my conviction that some day historical reflection will reveal that the coming of *The Urantia Book* was the revelatory breakthrough which brought about the spiritual reformation of the 21st century.

-MJS

Interface:

How Good is the Good News?

It has often been said that the reason many people have trouble believing the Good News is that it is simply too good to be true. The idea of divine incarnation, God revealing himself in human form, still seems too intimate, *too good*, to be quite believable. Jesus' teaching of the Creator's relation to his creatures as that of an infinitely wise and loving parent strikes many as wishful projection. Jesus, no doubt, was a good and great, even heroic man; but surely he can't be all the church has made him out to be. Again, that would simply be too much to believe—too good to be true.

There are contemporary New Testament scholars who tend to view Jesus as a wise, uncommonly sensitive, "God intoxicated Jew," whose mystical tendencies were rewarded with insights the vast majority of mortals never approach. At the same time, however, it is assumed his understanding was necessarily limited by his own first century theology and cosmology, particularly that of Jewish apocalypticism.

Therefore, while he is at once a model of virtue and a teacher of higher righteousness, he ultimately misunderstood his own divine mission, which makes him admirable but something less than "the way, the truth, and the life." The idea of the incarnation becomes severely compromised, if not irrelevant, for many.

I know pastors who shy away from using John's gospel because of the apparent immodesty of Jesus' claims recorded there: not just "I am the light of the world" or "I am the bread of life," but "I am the resurrection and the life" and "Before Abraham was, I am." John's emphasis on the divinity of Jesus is glossed over in favor of the synoptics' more human one. In a world still largely dominated by a secular, materialistic mindset, such claims of divinity are by definition mythical, at best having no more than poetic truth.

The Urantia Book offers a picture of Jesus' integrated divine and human natures that, while still beyond explanation, is reasonable and profoundly reassuring.

The Urantia Book offers a picture of Jesus' integrated divine and human natures that, while still beyond explanation, is reasonable and profoundly reassuring. The classical Christian affirmation regarding Jesus' humanity and divinity, his pre-existence as well as his full earthly humanity, is uncompromisingly affirmed. The book reflects and amplifies the truth of John's witness and further says to us, as Jesus said to those who questioned his claim: "I am all that you say but more."(1711)

Indeed, in *The Urantia Book*, not only is Jesus more than we may have dared believe, but Reality itself is far more gracious and intelligent and purposeful than we had imagined, or were even capable of imagining. "What eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived..." is illustrated by fact after fact and layer upon layer of insight integrated into a coherent and understandable whole.

Indeed, in The Urantia Book, not only is Jesus more than we may have dared believe, but Reality itself is far more gracious and intelligent and purposeful than we had imagined, or were even capable of imagining.

In reading many of the descriptions of new theories in science one regularly finds words such as "elegance," "symmetry" and "charm." Many scientists affirm that great truths are essentially simple and "beautiful" because of the way they integrate and harmonize other known facts. Poincaré, the great mathematician, said that in terms of useful discoveries the most useful are precisely the most beautiful. Werner Heisenberg, a noble prize winner, said that the researcher in physics recognizes the truth by "the splendor of its beauty."

Many serious students of *The Urantia Book* are at first intrigued and then awed by the graceful integration of theological, philosophical and scientific realities. For all of the complex aspects of reality dealt with in its 2,000 pages, there emerges a harmony that is convincing, awe inspiring and profoundly beautiful. In *The Urantia Book* the Good News is indeed even better than we had hoped for. In fact, many have found *The Urantia Book* itself too good and too beautiful *not* to be true.

-Merlyn Cox

"To 'follow Jesus' means to personally share his religious faith and to enter into the spirit of the Master's life of unselfish service for man. One of the most important things in human living is to find out what Jesus believed, to discover his ideals, and to strive for the achievement of this exalted life purpose. Of all human knowledge, that which is of greatest value is to know the religious life of Jesus and how he lived it."(2094: 4)

The Urantia Book ***and Spiritual Renewal***

This feature is written by ministers. Since The Urantia Book at this point in time is potentially controversial, the name of the author is sometimes withheld so as not to interfere with his or her rapport in ministry.

My Life's Most Significant Spiritual Event

My contact with *The Urantia Book* began with considerable skepticism. My initial reaction was that it was some sort of gnostic tome created by a cult of fanatics. My first attempted reading in the book, which was part of the Foreword, only added to the mystery, for despite my minor in philosophy and a degree in theology I was largely lost in a plethora of new words, concepts, and cosmology. So I put the book aside.

But my friend who had loaned me the book wanted feedback and explained that the book did not support gnosticism. He was a science teacher at the secondary level and in no way came across as a fanatic; indeed, he was a good Methodist! So I agreed to try reading in a different part of the book. I choose to read the story of Jesus' resurrection, a subject of considerable theological and philosophical importance to me. I was amazed to discover an account that made sense out of the differing Gospel records and it explained the disappearance of the material body of Jesus in a way that was original and very convincing.

My contact with The Urantia Book began with considerable skepticism. My initial reaction was that it was some sort of gnostic tome created by a cult of fanatics.

And so I decided this book needed a fair hearing and I began to read on an almost daily basis beginning with paper one and continuing. Approximately halfway through the book I began to entertain serious thoughts about its possible authenticity, and gradually became more and more convinced as I continued reading.

One of the first and continuing aspects of *The Urantia Book* that impressed me was that its cosmology made sense. Again and again, I commented to my friend that I was agreeing with what I was reading; that yes, I had a similar theory about the status of planet earth; that yes, I always wondered about the

accuracy of Trinitarian theology, and Jesus as the Creator Son rather than the Eternal Son made more sense.

The second impressive thing about *The Urantia Book* was that it presented new ideas, new concepts and united other disparate ideas and concepts. It began to feel like revelation and not speculation. The word "feel" is the best word I can think of, for this was not just an intellectual experience. I can tell you a great deal of prayer, including prayer for illumination and protection went into the first reading. As belief in its authenticity began to dawn upon my mind and soul, I was almost "beside myself" that such a marvelous truth was here, staring me in the face, in that big, heavy, blue book!

I can tell you a great deal of prayer, including prayer for illumination and protection went into the first reading. As belief in its authenticity began to dawn upon my mind and soul, I was almost "beside myself" that such a marvelous truth was here, staring me in the face, in that big, heavy, blue book!

How has *The Urantia Book* affected my life? It has significantly changed my attitude, deepened my faith, and altered my life style. It has changed my attitude toward other people. The importance of free will and the presence of the Thought Adjusters (Spirit of God) have resulted in my being less controlling toward others, more confident of God's work in their lives, and more patient. And at the same time, I have changed my attitude toward myself along the same lines.

I regard *The Urantia Book* as the most significant spiritual event in my life to date. Since I believe in the validity of the scientific method, I regard the authenticity of *The Urantia Book* as a serious issue. I realize that some do not worry about origins, yet the fact that so much of the book is devoted to rigorous detail in regard to history implies to me this is an area of value, just as its spiritual teachings have value.

I have not solved the problem of relating the teachings of *The Urantia Book* to organized Protestant Christianity, my religious background. Many of these people are closed minded, some even believing the book is "a work of the devil." Other friends, less prejudiced and fearful, have found the book to be the revolutionary spiritual storehouse I have experienced. And I look forward to the continued exposure to the teachings of Jesus, free from the distortions of the barnacles of tradition.

The Cultural Impact of *The Urantia Book* in the Next Fifty Years

Meredith J. Sprunger

What will be the cultural impact of *The Urantia Book* during the next fifty years? Who of us can even be sure about what will happen tomorrow? People have been making predictions about the future since the dawn of history. As such prophecies are examined, one is impressed by the lack of accuracy of a large percentage of these predictions even when they are made by the most learned people. In the late 1800's when Lord Kelvin was president of the British Royal Society, he predicted that radio would have no future, heavier-than-air flying machines were impossible, and X-rays would prove to be a hoax. Dr. James Bryant Conant, president of Harvard University, in addressing the American Chemical Society in 1951 predicted that by 1985 solar energy would be harnessed and power would be so cheap and abundant that fresh water would be distilled from the ocean and deserts would be turned into garden spots. Not only are our best forecasts often inaccurate, but unexpected historical events change the context of the entire cultural situation. Nevertheless, human beings are incurable futurists; we love to look into the unknown and construct a scenario of the future. Even though our vision may be inaccurate, such anticipation of the events of tomorrow is more creative and constructive than simply reacting to incidents after they take place.

Around 1960 I became interested in evaluating the future of *The Urantia Book* in our contemporary society. I made a study of many contemporary religious movements and found that it took about thirty years for them to become known to the informed public. Accordingly, I hypothesized that *The Urantia Book* would become known to the educated community sometime in the middle or late 1980's. This prediction has turned out to be partially true. At the University of Ottawa a Ph. D. thesis was completed on *The Urantia Book* in 1983. The American Academy of Religion held a consultation on *The Urantia Book* in 1985. Various academic people have inquired about the book and many people are aware of its existence.

From our vantage point in 1991, what cultural impact might we expect *The Urantia Book* to have on our society by the year 2041? As a background for our discussion we might look at the ten millennial megatrends cited by John Naisbitt and Patricia Aburdene in their Book *Megatrends 2000*, published early in 1990. They see these major influences dominating the early 21st century:

1. The Booming Global Economy of the 1990's.
2. A Renaissance in the Arts.
3. The Emergence of Free-Market Socialism.

4. Global Life-styles and Cultural Nationalism.
5. The Decline of the Welfare State.
6. The Rise of the Pacific Rim.
7. The Decade of Women in Leadership.
8. The Age of Biology.
9. The Religious Revival of the New Millennium.
10. The Triumph of the Individual.

Looking at their last two megatrends—the religious revival of the third millennium and the triumph of the individual—they see a decline in mainline religion and a boom in the New Age movement allowing individuals to practice spirituality in their own way without institutional hindrance. The highly individualistic religious revival predicted by the authors could create a cultural climate in which a knowledge of *The Urantia Book* would be facilitated.

In the light of these observations, what cultural impact might we expect *The Urantia Book* to have in the next fifty years? This is still difficult to predict. First of all, *The Urantia Book* is a new revelatory phenomenon; we do not have comparable historical parallels. Former major revelations were brought by personalities. Machiventa Melchizedek's mission lasted ninety-four years and the public ministry of Jesus took place in about three years. Both Machiventa and Jesus could communicate with only a limited number of people at one time. *The Urantia Book* is continuously present and is available to any number of people at the same time. Secondly, each historical period is unique and is governed by its own dynamics.

We observe that the major characteristic of evolution is its slow developmental nature. It took three hundred years for Christianity to become the dominant religion of Western Civilization. Five hundred years were needed to actualize the new vision of the renaissance and the reformation.

Mindful of these difficulties, I should like to present two possible scenarios illustrating two aspects of the evolutionary process: slow growth and sudden change. We observe that the major characteristic of evolution is its slow developmental nature. It took three hundred years for Christianity to become the dominant religion of Western Civilization. Five hundred years were needed to actualize the new vision of the renaissance and the reformation. Following this slow development pattern, I can visualize the following events in the *Urantia* movement in the next fifty years:

First, a modest increase in readership and study groups will take place, but this growth will remain largely a low profile movement.

Second, the Clergy Network will expand slowly and *The Spiritual Fellowship Journal* readership will gradually in-

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crease among the more progressive and adventurous ministers; however, the power structure in mainline denominations and seminaries will largely ignore the book.

Third, numerous new leaders and organizations will emerge and pursue various agendas.

Fourth, there will be a sharp increase of secondary publications following the expiration of *The Urantia Book* copyright in 2030.

Fifth, small groups will start churches representing new religious organizations.

The first hundred years of any viable new movement is spent establishing grass root foundations in the society and culture. If, however, a new movement should have its origin synchronized with the "sudden change" aspect of the evolutionary process, and if its purpose is harmonious with the thrust of that change, a different scenario will be followed.

The first hundred years of any viable new movement is spent establishing grass root foundations in the society and culture.

Let us look now at this "sudden change" scenario. Evolution is punctuated periodically by sudden changes. It is generally recognized that we are at a point in our economic, political, and social culture when basic changes are taking place. The growing edge of theological thinking is already harmonious with the spiritual outlook of *The Urantia Book*. The authors of *The Urantia Book* say we are "quivering on the very brink" of one of our most amazing periods of "social readjustment, moral quickening, and spiritual enlightenment." For decades spirit ministry has been preparing our planet for the Fifth Epochal Revelation. We are experiencing a spiritual vacuum longing to be filled. Unquestionably, we are living in one of the pivotal periods of history.

Even though the Urantia movement may be facing sudden changes in the next fifty years, we should also realize that all of the aspects of gradual evolutionary development which we previously enumerated will continue. But superimposed on this evolutionary growth, some or all of the following catalysts of rapid change may burst upon us:

1. A religious leader of national or international stature may espouse *The Urantia Book*. A Billy Graham, Paul Tillich, or Robert Schuler could quickly focus attention on *The Urantia Book*.

2. A leading figure in the business, political, creative arts, or entertainment world might champion the Fifth Epochal Revelation and lead a movement to bring its awareness to our society.

3. If the Clergy Network becomes large enough, it could result in a mainline interface with *The Urantia Book* that attracts general public attention.

4. A prominent Evangelical or Fundamentalist religious leader may promote a national attack against *The Urantia Book*. A Jerry Falwell or Jimmy Swaggert could bring about a confrontational atmosphere focused on *The Urantia Book* in the larger religious and educational communities.

5. An unexpected breakthrough may take place in the physical or social sciences which could change the way we view reality and how we establish human priorities. This, in turn, could direct attention to the compelling relevance of the teachings of *The Urantia Book*.

If one or more of these unusual events should take place in the next fifty years, the creative 1% of the world leadership could shortly thereafter be directing their lives out of the spiritual dynamics which they find in the Fifth Epochal Revelation. Such leadership, building on the considerable foundations which have already been established by creative spiritual evolution, could bring rapid change in our society. Such cultural-spiritual dynamics have already brought about some sudden changes in Europe considered visionary and unrealistic only a few years ago.

What is the probability that one or more of these catalytic events will happen in the next fifty years? I think there is a greater than 50% chance that one or more of these, or some other focusing event, will take place in the next five decades. If this assessment is correct, what can we do to prepare for it? Outside of being mentally and spiritually prepared, I think there is little that we can or should do—other than building an evolutionary foundation for future growth. This we should be doing irrespective of any "sudden change" possibilities; for whatever does survive must have this kind of solid foundation.

A religious leader of national or international stature may espouse The Urantia Book. A Billy Graham, Paul Tillich, or Robert Schuler could quickly focus attention on The Urantia Book.

Unexpected events have their own dynamics. Outside of developing a stable grass roots presence in our society, we can do little to prepare for unusual events. If and when these sudden changes occur, they will be governed by their own leadership and our ability to respond wisely in the contemporary situation. Our task is to continue traveling the pot-holed, boulder-strewn road of evolutionary development. The sudden changes will shape their own destiny.

The Geography of Faith

Merlyn H. Cox

The "Holy Land" has always held a special interest and even fascination for Christians. Pilgrims have long journeyed there to be near the places where the events of the Old and New Testament took place. It is more than a matter of satisfying academic curiosity. For Christians as well as for Jews, traveling to Israel is a kind of spiritual homecoming. People wish to "walk where Jesus walked", to visit the towns and areas where he lived and taught, to look out over the landscape and see the same hills and valleys and the shimmering waters of the Sea of Galilee.

Most are not disappointed. While the dream of returning to sites as they were 2,000 years ago must give way to the realistic expectation of change, it is surprising in how many places so little has changed. So while Caesar's Hotel rises up along the coast line of Tiberius, now a popular tourist resort on the Sea of Galilee, you can walk north along the shore road, past Magdala, Mt. Arbel, across the plains of Tabgha, the ruins of Capernaum and down to Kursi, and see the landscape very much as the disciples would have seen it 2,000 years ago.

If you get off the beaten path, you can easily get the feeling that there are many places little touched by time. Bedouin shepherds living in tents still tend their sheep and goats in the Judean wilderness, using the same wells their ancestors have used for thousands of years.

However, our knowledge about where many events took place is still uncertain, and much of that has come from the past two centuries of archaeology, rather than from any clear and unbroken tradition reaching back to those events. Following the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans in 70 A.D., Jews and early Christians (being mostly Jewish converts) were driven out of Jerusalem and even denied entry under penalty of death. Generations passed before they were back in the city in significant numbers.

Important early Christian communities formed outside of Palestine due to the work of Paul and the other apostles and disciples. The gospels themselves were written outside of Palestine, which may account in some measure for their lack of specific detail concerning the places where recorded events took place. The process of this isolation of newly formed Christian communities was well under way. In fact, there is no clear and definite proof of *any* Christian community in the Holy Land from about 70 to 270 A.D., although there is evidence of a Christian presence during this period.¹

A great resurgence of interest in locating the "holy places" took place during the reign of Constantine in the fourth century. Many great churches and monuments were built

during this period on sites then believed to be authentic, although the evidence in some cases is quite suspect.

After the fall of the area to Islam, travel and contact again became difficult and dangerous. During the dark ages of Europe contact with Palestine was minimal, with only a trickle of pilgrims bringing back stories and information about the Holy Land. The Crusades brought renewed interest, but their failure also brought another lapse in safe access to the holy sites.

It is not surprising then that most of our knowledge of Palestine has come from archaeological work in the past two centuries. One could make the case that serious archaeological study of the near east began when Napoleon led a French military expedition to Egypt in 1798 and one to Palestine the following year. He brought with him a group of scholars who made a careful study of the ancient remains. Another great resurgence of interest followed their publication. British and German adventurers and scholars soon followed, bringing back fascinating artifacts, drawings and stories of the native people.

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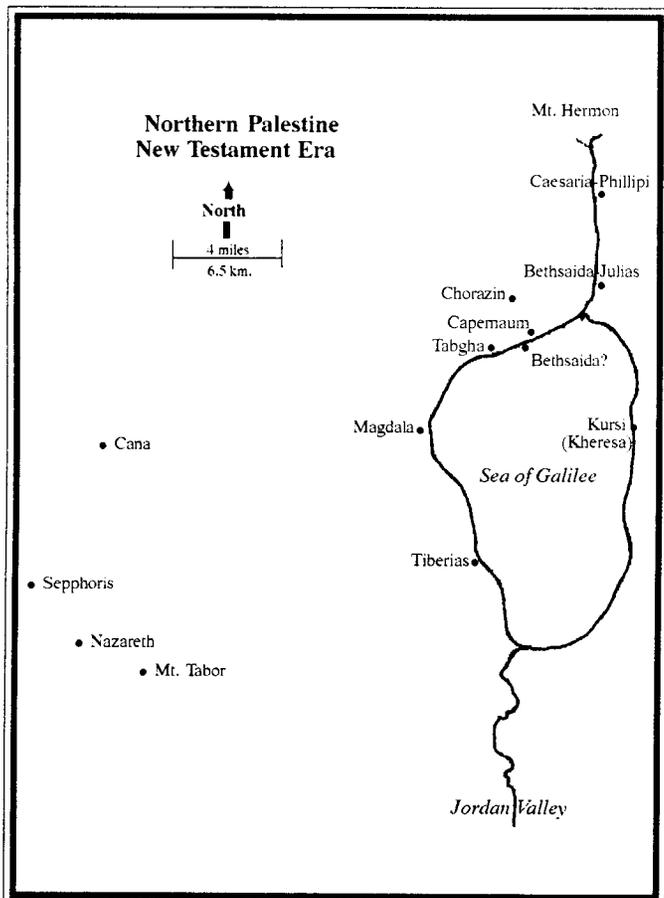
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To get an idea of how recent much of our knowledge is, we have only to consider that until the 1930's, we were still uncertain of the location of Capernaum. Capernaum was Jesus' home during his adult life, and the town, next to Jerusalem, most often mentioned in the New Testament. While some excavations at this site took place as far back as the mid 1800's, its identification remained open to question, and it remained largely buried under rubble until the Franciscans purchased the land from local Arabs in the 1894. Since then a great deal of work has taken place, including the reconstruction of an ancient synagogue. Though the synagogue dates to the 4th or 5th centuries, there is evidence to suggest it was built on the foundation of an earlier synagogue dating to New Testament times. Since the late 1960's convincing evidence been also been found to indicate the location of Peter's home close by, a site used by early Christians as a home-church, and still later as a destination for pilgrims.

Palestine in New Testament Times: In General

Our knowledge of Palestine and the area around the Sea of Galilee in New Testament times is therefore still quite incomplete. Much of our knowledge comes from the records of the Jewish historian Josephus, either directly or by inference; but again, much has come from archaeology. Some 134 settlements in the area of the Golan (northeast Palestine adjoining Galilee) are on the Israeli antiquities survey. Five of these are large enough to be considered cities, fourteen provincial towns, twenty eight large villages, and eighty seven small hamlets or agricultural settlements. Fifty one other sites cannot yet be accurately assessed. The survey necessarily reflects a significant population growth in this area from 135 AD through the fourth century.² The region of Galilee in New Testament times is considered to have had as many as nine towns in excess of 15,000 population, large communities by Biblical standards.

We know that major trade routes crossed through upper Galilee and the city of Sepphoris on the way to Damascus. Sepphoris was rebuilt by Herod Antipas as the capital of Galilee, and in Jesus day it was the second largest city in Palestine. Josephus referred to it as the "ornament of all Galilee." Following the fall of Jerusalem, it was for a time the seat of the Sanhedrin, the governing body of the Jews. The Mishnah, a compilation of the oral tradition, was completed there in the third century.



According to tradition, it was also the birthplace of Mary and her parents, Joachim and Anna. Although Sepphoris is not mentioned in the New Testament, it lies only about 4 miles northwest of Nazareth. One can climb the north ridge in Nazareth and still see the winding trail leading to the city's remains, within easy walking distance.

In contrast to the lack of specifics in the New Testament concerning the geography of events in Jesus life, The Urantia Book is rich in such detail.

What Nazareth was like in Jesus' day also remains unclear. Some believe that it was a small hamlet populated by a few extended families. A recently excavated cave beneath the Church of the Annunciation is thought by some to be representative of the kind of primitive dwelling Joseph and Mary and their family may have lived in.

New Testament Palestine in *The Urantia Book*

In contrast to the lack of specifics in the New Testament concerning the geography of events in Jesus life, *the Urantia Book* is rich in such detail. For example, Jesus' journey from Beersheba to Dan before the beginning of his public ministry is described as follows: "On this journey northward he stopped at Hebron, Bethlehem (where he saw his birthplace), Jerusalem (he did not visit Bethany), Beeroth, Lebonah, Sychar, Schechem, Samaria, Geba, En-Gannim, Endor, Madon; passing through Magdala and Capernaum he journeyed on north; and passing east of the Waters of Meron, he went by Karahta to Dan, or Caesarea-Philippi." (1492)

On another occasion Jesus and the disciples, traveling from Caesarea-Philippi to the Phoenician coast, "passed around the marsh country, by way of Luz, to the point of junction with the Magdala-Mount Lebanon trail road, thence to the crossing with the road leading to Sidon, arriving there Friday afternoon." (1728)

During the Peraan mission, they "worked in the following cities and towns, and some fifty additional villages: Zaphon, Gadara, Macad, Arbela, Ramath, Edrei, Bosora, Caspin, Mispeh, Gerasa, Ragaba, Succoth, Amathus, Adam, Penuel, Capitoliass, Dion, Hatita, Gadda, Philadelphia, Jogbehah, Gilead, Beth-Nimrah, Tyrus, Elealah, Livias, Heshbon, Callirrhoe, Beth-Peor, Shittim, Sibmah, Medeba, Beth-Meon, Areopolis, and Aroer." (1817)

There are references to over one hundred and twenty five towns and villages in these narrations. It describes Galilee as "a province of agricultural villages and thriving industrial cities, containing more than two hundred towns of over five thousand population and thirty of over fifteen thousand." (1369)

Geography of Faith, cont.

As regards the town of Nazareth, "From time immemorial, many caravan routes from the Orient passed through some part of this region to the few good seaports of the eastern end of the Mediterranean, whence ships carried their cargoes to all the maritime Occident. And more than half of this caravan traffic passed through or near the little town of Nazareth in Galilee." (1333)

Nazareth was a caravan way station and crossroads of travel. Joseph's primary means of supporting his young family was in running a small workshop near the caravan lot. Here Jesus as a young lad could listen in on the conversations of conductors and passengers from the all over the known world.

Galilee is described as largely gentile in population; in fact, in Jesus' day it was more gentile than Jewish. The Jews of Nazareth are also described as being more liberal than most in their interpretation of social restrictions based on the fear of contamination by contact with the gentiles, thus giving rise to the common saying in Jerusalem, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?"

There are also many references to the city of Sepphoris. Jesus frequently visited there as a child, and as a adult spent several months working there as a smith. Sepphoris was also the place where Joseph met a tragic death. When Jesus was but fourteen, Joseph was a foreman on the construction of the governor's residence and was critically injured by a falling derrick.

Present day ruins of Capernaum, looking north-east toward the partially reconstructed synagogue.
(Photo by author)



Specific Issues: The Location of Bethsaida

The straightforward description of the locations of events is sometimes at odds with tradition. For example, the transfiguration, according to *The Urantia Book*, took place on the gentile mountain of Mt. Hermon, not on the traditional site of Mt. Tabor. This is, however, in keeping with scholarly evidence that has long recognized that Mt. Tabor would have been an unlikely spot since it was topped by an armed garrison at the time. But tradition, once set, often overrides all other reasonable evidence.

Another issue of more current and scholarly interest involves the location of the town of Bethsaida. Next to Jerusalem and Capernaum, it is the town most mentioned in the gospels. It is the birthplace of Peter and Andrew and the home of the apostle Philip. It has been traditionally considered the home of the fisherman Zebedee and his sons, James and John. Many events recorded in the gospels took place near there, including the healing of the blind man and the second feeding of the multitude.

There is still considerably uncertainty, however, about just where it was located. Many scholars now identify it with the town of Bethsaida-Julias, a town raised by Herod's son Philip, and named in honor of Philip's daughter Julia. The difficulty with this assumption, however, is that John specifically locates Bethsaida in Galilee, not in Philip's domain of Gaulanitis, where Bethsaida-Julias is located.³ The Jordan River was the boundary between the two regions. The argument has been offered for an alternative location further south, bordering on the Sea of Galilee, where the town may have spread out over both sides of the river.

There seems to be no way to settle the issue on the basis of current evidence. *The Urantia Book*, however, gives an alternative picture, one in keeping with John's record. Here it is quite clear that Bethsaida and Bethsaida-Julias were two different towns some distance apart.

Bethsaida is described as the "fishing harbor of Capernaum." It was located on the sea of Galilee "just down the shore" from "near-by" Capernaum; so close that one gets the impression that Bethsaida was a virtual suburb of Capernaum. In one instance it is even referred to as "Bethsaida in Capernaum."

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Most traditional accounts, however, such as that of Theodosius in the sixth century, clearly state or suggest that these towns were several miles apart.⁴ As to where the location of these towns were thought to be when so identified is not always clear, but current consensus is that Peter's home and the synagogue of Capernaum were very close to each other.

According to *The Urantia Book*, Bethsaida was indeed the home of Zebedee and his two sons, James and John, and the home Jesus resided in while working in the Zebedee boat shop. Peter's home was also in Bethsaida and near that of

Looking "down" the shoreline of the Sea of Galilee from the area adjacent to the ruins of Capernaum. Is this natural inlet the site of Bethsaida?

(Photo by author)



Zebedee, and the disciples often stopped by the home of Peter on the way to and from the near-by synagogue (Capernaum). On one occasion, as Mark's recounts, "As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew..."⁵

In the Gospel of Mark, Peter is said to have lived at Capernaum, while John says that Bethsaida was the "city of Andrew and Peter." If Bethsaida was not only the birth place of Peter, but also his home as an adult, and these towns were so close together, this could explain some confusion in the records.

According to *The Urantia Book* narratives, the Zebedee home became the headquarters for the disciples and home-base for their missionary and evangelistic outreach. The great event of multiple healings took place in the front yard of the Zebedee home the same evening of Jesus' ministry to Peter's mother-in-law. And it was at the Zebedee home that the paralytic, "carried down from Capernaum on a small couch by his friends," was lowered inside from the roof. (1666) At one time Bethsaida was the location of a large seaside tent city made up of various seekers and followers, and included a training school for new disciples, as well as a sizeable hospital.

It is also interesting to note that, according to *the Urantia Book*, it was Bethsaida-Julias, not Bethsaida, which was listed among those cities so unresponsive to the proclamation of the good news: "Woe to you, the inhabitants of Chorazin, Bethsaida-Julias, and Capernaum, the cities which did not receive well these messengers. I declare that, if the mighty works done in these places had been done in Tyre and Sidon, the people of these so-called heathen cities would have long since repented in sackcloth and ashes." (1807)

Geography of Faith, cont.

In retrospect, one might question the gospels' account for this reason: why would Jesus have mentioned Bethsaida, when it was, in fact, so clearly productive of disciples and followers?

Using *The Urantia Book* as a Source for the "Geography of Faith"

Will we ever be able to verify or disprove such a picture, especially in regards to such specific questions as the location of Bethsaida? It is difficult to say. While it would appear very difficult for archaeology to confirm or deny with certainty, I would hesitate to place limits on what future work might reveal. A combination of new historical insights and archaeological investigations may lead to convincing new evidence, or the always hoped for but elusive "proof." The reasonableness of *The Urantia Book* position, it seems to me, ought at least to stimulate those interested to test it further.

This is but a brief overview of how *The Urantia Book* can be used as a source to interact with ongoing scholarly research, as well as to enrich our knowledge and understanding of the events in Jesus' life. I believe those persons, lay or scholar, who are interested in the "geography of faith" will find *The Urantia Book* a stimulating and immensely satisfying resource. The authors, while clearly eschewing any overly sentimental attachments to supposed holy sites, do seem to appreciate the natural curiosity and human sentiment attached to such places. These authoritative and graceful narratives give us not only a comprehensive understanding of Jesus' life and teachings, but a richly detailed geographical backdrop against which this greatest of all divine-human events took place.

¹Eric Myers, "Early Judaism and Christianity in the Light of Archaeology," *Biblical Archaeologist*, June, 1988, p. 69.

²*Ibid*, p. 76.

³Modern scholarship and *The Urantia Book* both place Bethsaida-Julias south of Caesarea-Philippi. According to *The Urantia Book* Bethsaida-Julias was located south of Caesarea-Philippi and north of Magadan park, an area on the eastern shore of Galilee frequently visited by Jesus and the disciples. The park was one of several located north of Kursi, (or Kheresa in *The Urantia Book*-see map), "near" and "just south of Bethsaida-Julias."

⁴Bargil Pixner, "Searching for the New Testament Site of Bethsaida," *Biblical Archaeologist*, December, 1985, p. 208.

⁵Mark 1: 29, N.R.S.V.

The author traveled extensively in Israel and briefly in Egypt during the summer of 1989. In addition he participated for two weeks as a volunteer at an archaeological dig in Sephorris, a project jointly sponsored by the American Schools of Oriental Research, Duke University, and the Israeli Department of Antiquities.

Some Quotations from The Urantia Book

"...paganized and socialized Christianity stands in need of new contact with the uncompromised teachings of Jesus; it languishes for lack of a new vision of the Master's life on earth. A new and fuller revelation of the religion of Jesus is destined to conquer an empire of materialistic secularism and to overthrow a world sway of mechanistic naturalism. Urantia is now quivering on the very brink of one of its most amazing and enthralling epochs of social readjustment, moral quickening, and spiritual enlightenment." (2082:7)

"Christianity has indeed done a great service for this world, but what is now most needed is Jesus. The world needs to see Jesus living again on earth in the experience of spirit-born mortals who effectively reveal the Master to all men. It is futile to talk about a revival of primitive Christianity; you must go forward from where you find yourselves. Modern culture must become spiritually baptized with a new revelation of Jesus' life and illuminated with a new understanding of his gospel of eternal salvation. And when Jesus becomes thus lifted up, he will draw all men to himself. Jesus' disciples should be more than conquerors, even overflowing sources of inspiration and enhanced living to all men. Religion is only an exalted humanism until it is made divine by the discovery of the reality of the presence of God in personal experience." (2084:1)

"This gospel of the kingdom is a living truth. I have told you it is like the leaven in the dough, like the grain of mustard seed; and now I declare that it is like the seed of the living being, which, from generation to generation, while it remains the same living seed, unfailingly unfolds itself in new manifestations and grows acceptably in channels of new adaptation to the peculiar needs and conditions of each successive generation. The revelation I have made to you is a *living revelation*, and I desire that it shall bear appropriate fruits in each individual and in each generation in accordance with the laws of spiritual growth, increase, and adaptive development. From generation to generation this gospel must show increasing vitality and exhibit greater depth of spiritual power. It must not be permitted to become merely a sacred memory, a mere tradition about me and the times in which we now live." (1931-32)

"All Urantia is waiting for the proclamation of the ennobling message of Michael, unencumbered by the accumulated doctrines and dogmas of nineteen centuries of contact with the religions of evolutionary origin. The hour is striking for presenting to Buddhism, to Christianity, to Hinduism, even to the peoples of all faith, not the gospel about Jesus, but the living, spiritual reality of the gospel of Jesus." (1041: 5)

Significant Books

Truth in Religion

By Mortimer Adler
Macmillan, 1990, 162pp.

Mortimer Adler is probably best known as the guiding force behind the *Encyclopedia Britannica* and the *Great Books* series. He has also been called America's "philosopher for everyman." For many years he has been seeking to bring clarity of thought to fundamental issues in philosophy. Since the mid-seventies he has chosen primarily to address the lay person rather than the academic. The reasons for this appear to be at least twofold: to share with a wider audience issues that matter to everyone, and to defend common sense against the "perversions of modern thought"—the "philosophical mistakes, perplexities, subtleties and puzzlements he believes have arisen in philosophical thought since the end of the seventeenth century."¹

His latest book, *Truth in Religion*, follows in this tradition, in this case seeking to extricate the discussion of truth in religion from the subtle distortions he believes are pervasive in modern thought. His concern is how to think clearly about the issues involved, rather than bring his own personal conclusions into the process. He therefore wishes to write as a philosopher of religion rather than a practitioner of any of the world's religions.

There are two main issues in the book: the plurality of religions and the unity of truth. "The doctrinaire liberals of the twentieth century espouse pluralism and tolerance as if they were desirable values on which no restrictions or qualifications should be placed when they are applied to the life of society and of thought." Pluralism is desirable, he says, in all realms of action and thought except those in which unity is required. "When unity is required, pluralism must be restricted." In matters of taste, pluralism is desirable and tolerable; in matters involving truth, it is neither.

He does allow the classic distinction between poetic truth and logical truth. Poetic truth is the kind of truth that prevails in art—music, narrative fiction, painting. Here pluralism is both tolerable and desirable. Such "truths" are not necessarily incompatible with each other. However, descriptive or factual truth, giving knowledge of observed phenomena, is another matter. Here the logic of truth must prevail. The line that divides fact from fiction and fantasy also divides logical truth from the poetic.

In dealing with questions of truth in religion, the issue becomes even more difficult. Articles of faith are simply not provable. "Religion has none of the ordinary means or methods—no appeals to experience or reason—for judging where
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the truth lies when it affirms, denies, or contradicts what is denied or affirmed in other parts of truth."

However, Adler argues, that does not mean religious claims are exempt from being subject to the logic of truth; i.e., correspondence to reality, coherence and non-contradiction. Two contradictory claims cannot both be true (although both can be false). For example, the proposition that the universe exists everlastingly, without beginning or end (Aristotle), and the belief that creation is *ex nihilo* (Aquinas), are not compatible. Both cannot be true. "All the diverse parts of knowledge, including religious knowledge or knowledge by faith, must coherently form one and only one integral whole"; i.e., the unity of truth.

In our desire to be tolerant in a pluralistic world, there is a danger, he believes, of returning to "Averroism." Averroes was an eleventh century philosopher who argued that there are two separate truths, the truths of faith and the truths of reason, and they cannot come into conflict. Aquinas challenged him on the grounds that the truths of faith were not just poetic, but logically true, factually true, in the same sense that truths of philosophy and science are true. You cannot have two truths.

It is on this point that he is critical of Eastern thought that adopts Western technology and presumably its underlying assumptions from the West, while seeking to keep religious thought in a separate compartment, unconcerned about possible contradictions that might arise between the two. "The principles of logic are neither Western nor Eastern, but universal."

There can be no airtight compartments that protect questions of faith from the logic of reason. When religious affirmations, including articles of faith, contradict what is known with certitude in other parts of the whole of truth, such as in mathematics, science, and philosophy, they must give way. When such a belief continues to be affirmed, even though clearly incompatible with known truth, it is no longer simply an article of faith; it becomes superstition—counterfeit religion.

At the same time Adler warns against "the danger of dogmatic materialism so often found in modern science and materialistic monism in modern philosophy." "It may be thought," he says, "that such religious beliefs (as, for example, the belief in angels and in God as purely spiritual beings) come directly into conflict with the knowledge we have of the material cosmos through the physical sciences. But that is not the case... That assertion should be dismissed as sheer dogmatism. Angels for example, may not exist, but their existence is not impossible." "While the philosophical arguments for the existence of God may fall short of certitude... the philosophical atheist has never been able to construct a logically valid argument that supports the opposite conclusion and thus constitutes disproof of God's existence."

Truth in Religion, cont.

Adler further explores what he believes is the confusion concerning religion and mythology in contemporary thought. He takes to task Wendy Donniger O'Flaherty, Joseph Campbell, Harvey Cox, and Hans Kuhn for contributing to that confusion by failing to understand and apply the logic of truth. For example: Campbell believes that all religions are simply misunderstood mythologies, that all of the world's organized and institutionalized religions are nothing more than mythologies, having neither truth nor falsity in any logical sense. That leaves only poetic truth and no logical, factual truth at all. But Adler points out that this is itself a dogmatic assertion; he offers no scientific proof that all religions are really mythologies in disguise.

Adler also delves into what he believes are mistaken philosophical assumptions in the modern scientific community itself, specifically in quantum mechanics and scientific cosmology.

Appendices at the end of the book include excerpts from lectures given at the Aspen Institute: "The Unity of Man and the Unity of Truth", and "Human Nature, Nurture, and Culture." Both further explore issues related to the unity of truth in a pluralistic world.

Adler has made it plain that he believes the current condition of philosophy in America, England, and Europe is in a near hopeless state, and that the 20th century is dominated by a philosophy that's made a mockery of truth: namely, positivism. It has led to an indifferentism that affirms that all religious thought is equally valid and tolerance is the only certain truth. While that may sound appealing to many, it logically makes no sense if Adler's points are correct. Adler will readily allow that all the major religions have truth in them (or, more correctly, may have), but he does not allow as a consequence that it makes no difference what one thinks or believes.

Another way of saying it, I believe, is that while that all human understanding of the truth may be relative, it does not follow that truth itself is relative. Truth is still one, and it is precisely what all religions, as well as all human philosophy and science, is seeking.

In my estimation Adler's book is a breath of fresh air that does in fact address and redress errors we've grown accustomed to, errors that make neither logical nor common sense.

I look forward to his forthcoming work in which he will share his own personal convictions in matters of faith and religious truth—the culmination of his own life's work, and, I take it, his own search for truth.

-Merlyn Cox

¹Mortimer Adler, *Intellect: Mind Over Matter*, (New York: Macmillan, 1990), p. 81

God and Religion in the Postmodern World

By David Ray Griffin.

State University of New York Press, 1989, 175 pp.

There is a growing sentiment that humanity can and must go beyond the modern scientific worldview. Dr. Griffin speaks of a constructive or revisionary postmodernism that involves a new unity of scientific, philosophical, and religious thought that envisions a fresh conceptualization of reality. The continuation of modernity, Griffin believes, threatens the very survival of life on our planet.

In the postmodern era, Griffin advocates that we return theology to the public domain. Postmodern theology must go beyond conservative theology based on supernatural revelation, and liberal theology which is little more than ethical humanism. Postmodern theology should be marked by its internal coherence, its confirmation by experience, and its spiritual illuminating power. It should articulate a religious vision of the universe based on a naturalistic theism which holds a doctrine of creation compatible with evolution. The primacy of nonsensory perception is the epistemological foundation of postmodern theology. Each person has a dimension of perception, an intuition of the "Beyond," that is not the product of our cultural experience. Naturalistic theism should develop more creative and "spiritually spontaneous" individuals than have supernaturalism or materialism.

The story of the universe which a culture accepts determines the ultimate concern for the individual and society by showing what is of highest value in the nature of reality. The medieval worldview stressed the importance of personal qualities, saw humankind as the crown of creation, and believed in the continuity of life after death. In the modern worldview these verities have been denied. Scientism emphasized the material and impersonal aspects of life—human beings are merely accidental collocations of atoms. Humanistic existentialism declared that there is no inherent meaning to life, no divine purpose, no hierarchy of values. Having become more important than being.

The postmodern view of Griffin accepts the fact of revelation but rejects authoritarianism as the arbiter of truth. The truths of revelation must be judged on their intrinsic convincingness and verified by experience. We believe the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of all people because they are confirmed by experience. Following the epistemology of Whitehead, Griffin sees all entities, when viewed from within as having experience, for all things embody energy, experience, and creativity. Because of this experience, everything has value or importance in and for itself. The quality of experience is primary in the nature of things.

Griffin believes that the postmodern God will not be the arbitrary God of the Middle Ages who controls all things in puppet-like fashion. Rather, this God works in and through the natural processes. God does not coerce but persuades. The Creator works with and inspires the creature to create and recreate themselves. Evolution is the modus operandi of the universe through which God brings about eternal purpose. Theistic evolutionism sees {the experience of} God as a natural aspect of our total existence. Having the courage to live and be guided by this indwelling divine persuasion alone is the defining characteristic of the postmodern age.

A postmodern spirituality of creativity should have greater growth potential than the medieval spirituality of obedience. Since Heisenberg we now speak of an inherent indeterminacy in the universe. Evolution is an open and creative process. To some degree the world can be seen as radically self-creative and open to a co-creative relationship with God. There is an evolving aspect of deity that Whitehead referred to as "the consequent nature of God" that exerts a creative influence on all finite entities. Since creativity and divine inspiration are universal, we can expect and understand both the diversity and commonality found in ideas of truth, beauty, and goodness.

Supernaturalistic theism tends to view God acting unilaterally, apart from the world, and to support various forms of imperialism since external coercion and force are seen as the divine way of doing things. Postmodern theology should reject both this arbitrary theism and atheistic naturalism. It should discard the extreme voluntarism and separateness of God from the world in prescientific theism, and replace it with a naturalistic form of theism. This postmodern theology supports a belief in God, and living faith, on the basis of personal experience and within the context of the facts of science and the coherence of reason.

"Finally, this worldview strengthens our sense of kinship with each other, portraying us all as having a common divine source, as living in the midst of a common divine reality, and as having a common divine goal. This divine reality of the universe dwells in us, and we in it, and our lives have immortal significance in it." (p. 67) Dr. Griffin gives a penetrating analysis of the limitations of both traditional theology and secular modernism. He then utilizes the insights of process theology to develop a postmodern theistic worldview. This is an excellent book to keep one abreast of some of the most insightful thoughts in contemporary theology.

-Meredith Sprunger

A Mainline Reaction to Apocalypticism

Jack Rogers

For a number of years I have had a special interest in examining the messages of some current televangelists. Among many of the more fundamentalist televangelists there seems to be a common theme in their preaching that might be of some concern to both mainline clergy and readers of *The Urantia Book*.

First, there has developed a form of apocalyptic dispensationalism that includes predictions of war, famine, disease, and an unprecedented level of world destruction preceding the return of Christ. Second, there is a concerted attack on the New Age Movement that tends to be particularly vicious in its condemnation of participants uncritically lumped into this category.

Although there is nothing new in this message, it may be helpful to look at it in the context of current events. In these shifting and uncertain times of social, political and economic events, we need the faith and stability of mainline theology and the evolutionary universe grasp of reality so insightfully presented in *The Urantia Book* rather than televangelists' pronouncements of gloom and doom.

Revisiting Dispensational Claims

For those not familiar with televangelists' preaching, it may be helpful to review some of their dispensational claims. There is an elaborate time table for the return of Christ, which is considered immanent. Out of their predicted devastating social and political events, a theology of the "rapture" has evolved in which the faithful will avoid the "seven year tribulation" by being taken to heaven. The wrath of God will then be poured out on the earth for seven years. An army of 200 million will attack Israel from the north. There will be famine, disease, pestilence, and even interstellar cosmic destruction. At the end of these events Christ will return in triumphal array, bind and imprison the devil, and establish his kingdom for a thousand years of peace.

Central to this scenario is the belief that the Antichrist is now on the planet. The European Common Market is linked with Biblical texts, and is expected to be the seat of power for the Antichrist. Accordingly, the democratization of Eastern Europe, the breakup of the Soviet Union and other sociopolitical events are being interpreted as the fulfillment of prophesy rather than stages of social evolution. This mythology has evolved a magical theology of the saved and the lost.

New Age Phenomena

It has been fashionable in fundamentalist circles to attack the New Age Movement as unchristian, inspired by the devil, and born out of such philosophical swamps as secular humanism, hedonism, satanism, scientism and many other social, cultural, and quasi-religious organizations. Many televangelists lump every social movement that does not meet their approval under this single heading without any effort to distinguish among widely divergent groups. Most of these groups are a refurbished version of philosophical and religious movements of past centuries.

We are living in one of the major turning points of history. Our entire socioeconomic and political civilization is undergoing change. Underlying all of our cultural institutions there is a searching, a spiritual hunger, and a worldwide stirring which may be preparing us for a new spiritual renaissance. During such times of unrest and transition there is always a resurgence of conservatism in politics and religion. Those experiencing the greatest trauma in these periods of change are the fundamentalists of the old order. It is, therefore, not surprising that they denounce everything and anything that is new and different.

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Most mainline Christians have traditionally chosen to ignore the extremism inspired by these end-time theologies. Some form of fundamentalist dispensationalism has been with us since the time of Christ. Furthermore, such attacks on new ideas by religious reactionaries have played an important part of our history. Although such hostilities threaten the freedom of expression and diversity in our society, they may also serve to define extremism and clarify the faddish and illusory perspectives that proliferate in periods of spiritual awakening. The authors of *The Urantia Book* point out that such dogmatic and reactionary pronouncements speak more of spiritual arrogance than truth, and throughout history have tended to stifle creative endeavors in the search for reality.

Apocalypticism and the Spiritual Kingdom

The second coming of Christ has been a focal point of the Christian community since its inception. Speculation and predictions of its time have been legion. The primary misconception of televangelists in their apocalyptic pronouncements is that they confuse the finite material kingdom of the world—or the church—with the Kingdom of God, which is spiritual

and eternal. The teachings of Jesus clearly distinguish between the two.

Neither mainline Biblical scholars nor *The Urantia Book* provide a timetable for Christ's return to our world. Both sources affirm that there is no reliable way to make such predictions and both come to the same conclusions regarding his return: Although Jesus promises to return, his return should not be connected with any particular epoch or event. We should always be ready to welcome him on earth, even as he is now prepared to welcome and receive us in heaven.

Implications of Dispensationalism

The televangelists' pronouncements of apocalyptic dispensationalism have many negative and erroneous implications. They dispense a theology of fear, pessimism and disappointment. Their literalist interpretation of the Bible projects a static view of the human condition. Evolution is seen as a concept born out of secular humanism. Instead of viewing it as the creative methodology of God in the finite universe, as do the authors of *The Urantia Book*, they see evolution as a heretical evil.

The "saved" and "lost" psychology of the fundamentalistic televangelists makes it very difficult for them to think of our world as existing under Jesus' concept of the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of all humankind. They view the world theologically as an area of irreconcilable confrontation and their preaching is often framed in nationalistic and patriotic terms.

The religion of Jesus considers all ideas defining the "chosen" in terms of material qualities of lifestyle, political philosophy, theological perspective, and social status as arrogant and erroneous human judgments. Neither the Bible nor *The Urantia Book* provide us with an infallible guide to spiritual evaluation. Such an assumption of infallibility in the minds of ordinary people or demagogues is dangerous. History is littered with examples of tyrants imposing their will upon people because they possess "the true way."

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In spite of these limitations, there are constructive developments which accrue from apocalypticism. What the teachings of mainline theologians have failed to accomplish in the popular mind, television may now provide the opportunity to achieve. As a much larger audience is exposed to the extremism of their positions and the failure of their predictions, the light of truth may be increased in our culture. It is becoming increasingly difficult to persuade the person on the street that the Battle of Armageddon will result from the breakup and democratization of the Soviet Union.

Perhaps humankind will mature beyond the simplistic literalist interpretation of scripture and recognize its deeper qualities as a spiritual guide. A new generation of truth seekers will understand the realities of evolutionary change without needing the fictitious quick fix of the "rapture." An enlightened humanity will no longer tolerate the vagaries of a Biblical anthropocentric cosmology.

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Finally, the religious fundamentalists and reactionaries contribute a helpful service to society in providing comfort and psychological security to those who find it threatening and difficult to adjust to new ideas and progressive change, while at the same time counterbalancing the more radical aspects of religious visionaries who are equally out of touch with evolutionary reality.

Conclusions

The future of human destiny is in good hands. Even though we do not have a spiritual crystal ball to foretell the vicissitudes of human destiny, the sovereignty of God controls the culmination of history. The overcontrol of the Creator will assure that divine purposes and objectives will be achieved. We see a demonstration of this truth as we look at the spiritual depth and hunger of the Soviet people as they emerge from the despair of Marxist atheism.

Finally, I am convinced that Christ's return to our planet will surpass our highest human expectations and be far more glorious than any of us imagine! We need not conjure up scenarios of disaster to win souls for the kingdom. The program of the Master emphasizing the priorities of truth, beauty, and goodness actualized through love and service is sufficient to inspire all people to enter the kingdom and share the joyful knowledge that life is progressively enriching and eternal.

The Dawn of a New Age*

O sing to the Lord a new song, for his spirit has brought about marvelous things!

Creator of universes, nations that arrogantly declare your nonexistence fall into chaotic confusion.

The people hunger and their atmosphere is filled with life destroying pollutants.

Their leader's disregard for freedom of expression, individual creativity, and humane treatment of those who dissent undermine their capacity to govern.

Disorder and ineptitude rule the land.

Let the people of the world rejoice, for materialistic totalitarianism is falling.

Its spiritual nakedness is laid bare.

The unseen agents and influences of the Most High will prevail.

The inexorable destructiveness of a Godless society is revealed for all to see.

This is the dark before the dawn of a new day.

Through your epochal enlightenment these people are rediscovering their rich spiritual heritage, and are being lifted to a fresh and enlarged vision of Reality.

A new era of creativity is dawning.

The decadence of materialism and secularism is passing.

A rebirth of spiritual beauty and divine harmony inspires our souls.

Greater aspirations of righteousness and justice stir our minds and hearts.

**A contemporary Psalm based on Psalm 98.
See also Psalms Today, p. 23.*

The Emergence of the CyberChrist

Byron Belitsos

The Jesus of Part IV of *The Urantia Book* will inspire many new Christologies in the next century. In one version, I believe, Christ Michael will appear as the "CyberChrist." The concept of the CyberChrist is the form of Jesus most presentable to the direct descendants of the computer revolution—as the gospel gets restated for their generation. Prophetically speaking, the CyberChrist is the Christ of personal transfiguration as this is induced by advanced, computer-based media: the Jesus who sponsors cosmic religious experiences in a post-modern world. Hopefully, this Jesus can compete with the neo-pagan gods now filling the spiritual void of the sophisticated children of the computer age.

The word "CyberChrist" comes from *Lawnmower Man*, an oddly-titled new science fiction film. It is uttered, barely audibly, by Jobe, protagonist of the movie, awestruck by a series of electronic visions. Jobe is at the height of a religious euphoria induced by experiences in "cyberspace," which are created for him by a revolutionary new computer technology known as "virtual reality."

In my view, *Lawnmower Man* is highly prophetic on the future relation of media and spiritual values. This film warns us that the God of the future—a future which belongs to the new revelation—must be a God who not only inhabits the sacred space of Paradise and the inner space of worship, but also a new and artificial space of interior experience known as cyberspace. A theology of the CyberChrist would address this new interiority.

A science fiction horror plot built around the "educational" use of virtual reality (VR) technology is the main subject of *Lawnmower Man*. Stephen King is the author of the story. The plot portrays the first human subject (Jobe) to journey out to the far reaches of the mind-expanding capabilities of VR.

For background, we should say that VR is the next step beyond interactive multimedia computing and computer graphics. And it is a far step. VR equipment is complex but worth understanding. It includes: a "headmount," which is a high-tech helmet that produces stereo sound and holds in place small TV screens that cover each eye, rather like miniature binoculars; a "rendering engine," or, the software and hardware that generate stereoscopic full-motion computer-generated images to the video eye-pieces; head and body tracking equipment, for sensing the motion of the body parts so that the positioning of the computer images projected to the eyes coincides with bodily movements; and the "data glove" and

"body suit," or, slip-on coverings with multiple sensors that represent the hand or body within the cyberspace.

So what then is cyberspace? Gazing into the stereoscopic computer-generated images in the headmount gives the distinct illusion of being "inside" an artificial 3-D world. Like Walt Disney-style animation, the virtual worlds seen from inside the headmount are almost infinitely flexible, since they are created, in this case, by software designers. Just as thousands of videotapes can be rented today for playback on VCRs, thousands of VR disks will some day be available that will take the viewer inside artificial worlds of great variety and beauty.

Future VR entertainment programs will be as diverse as today's computer or video arcade games, but permitting far more dramatic and real-life qualities of experience. Educational applications will also abound. VR programs could take users inside the Sistine Chapel, amidst the ruins of Hiroshima, or, on an exploration of the Parthenon.

VR tools and utilities are being created—3-D pull-down menus, if you will—that will allow users to create personalized virtual worlds. For example, create a space full of hundreds of red spheres extending out to infinity; under them place a black-and-white checkerboard floor; color the sky azure; now make the red spheres bounce in unison from floor to sky. Project your body into this scene and fly toward the nether horizon, navigating around the spheres. Now save this world to disk and return tomorrow to explore and alter it with a friend. Without doubt, new realms of imaginative freedom will unfold in cyberspace. But what role will spiritual values play in this new world?

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My first experience in a VR environment was two years ago in a lab at a California computer company. Since then, the clarity of presentation of objects in VR worlds has greatly improved, as designers master new techniques, and as equipment prices plummet. Actually, the pace of technological change has been stunning. VR objects now have all the formal and experiential qualities of real objects in natural space: shape, shading, perspective, movement, and color. Cyberspace technicians can also now create the illusion of sounds emanating from any location within the artificial space; others are making breakthroughs in creating the sense of touch using the sensors embedded in the body suit and data glove.

VR is rapidly entering the commercial marketplace. Eighteen months ago VR was discussed almost exclusively in computer-oriented academic and trade journals. Today it is the subject of a major motion picture; one commercializer reports that its entertainment-oriented VR booths, installed in shopping malls around the country, are attracting lines that are two

and three hours long. I believe that we will some day be going to VR theaters where participants all don headmounts to view interactive 3-D movies or documentaries. These will be far more powerful experiences than what we find today in movie theaters.

So what of the implications of VR for spiritual ministry? Perhaps most important is the collaborative nature of VR. VR "worlds" can be experienced and even inhabited by groups, or what will come to be known as "virtual communities." Here's how it works: users with a "body suit" can have their precise body shape projected into the virtual space. (*Lawnmower Man* is the first occasion that the public will be able to see this awesome spectacle of virtual bodies consorting in cyberspace, especially the romantic liaison of Jobe and his girlfriend.) An audio teleconference creates a virtual space for its participants; VR creates this sense of the telepresence of others in living color. New, "consensual," virtual worlds to serve almost any purpose could be created and explored by the participants.

Cyberspace worship environments could create worlds of wonder and sacredness akin to those referred to Plato in his description of ideal Forms.

How would you come "dressed" to a VR gathering? VR graphical tools will allow users to "paint" their virtual body representation to make it realistic—or more fanciful. Their actual movements will be reflected in an artificial image. Sacred dances, initiation ceremonies, even liturgies, could be held in cyberspace. The backdrop for the ritual action could be the Rocky Mountains, a Tibetan temple, or a Pentecostal Church in Oklahoma. What sort of virtual ministry world would you design, given the chance?

One can only imagine the uses of VR to facilitate worship, or consciousness of the sacred. In *The Sacred and Profane*, Marcea Eliade spoke of the sacred as a quality of experience that emerges from awe-inspiring and mysterious discontinuities in space and time. "For religious man, space is not homogeneous, he experiences interruptions, breaks in it, some parts of space are qualitatively different from others." Perhaps the conditions of cyberspace could allow for what Eliade calls a "hierophany, an irruption of the sacred that results in detaching a territory from the surrounding cosmic milieu and making it qualitatively different." Cyberspace worship environments could create worlds of wonder and sacredness akin to those referred to by Plato in his description of ideal Forms.

Unfortunately, the other side of VR's potential is perhaps easier to grasp, as illustrated in the movie *Lawnmower Man*, (as well as in *Neuromancer*, by William Gibson, the preeminent novel about cyberspace). VR is fertile ground for a Stephen King-style horror plot. Without doubt, the unleashing of the human imagination through the ability to simulate sensory experience with unlimited freedom—this has diabolical implications.

In Stephen King's plot, the new-found freedom of VR causes everything to go off the rails. The protagonist Jobe is a robust but moronic young man who works as a gardener and mower of lawns. Through a variety of twists and turns, he becomes the first human subject of secret educational VR experiments. In the experiments, three-dimensional images—projected directly at the subject in cyberspace—are used in conjunction with neural drugs in such a way as to directly stimulate various dormant faculties of Jobe's mind. (Of course, this is just one of many possible courses of application of the technology for education.)

In brief, Jobe progresses quickly from a half-wit to a genius whose intelligence surpasses the scientist who created the experiment. At one point he emerges from behind the headmount claiming that he has "seen God." (Among the images the VR program projects toward him in 3-D space are sacred symbols of the world's cultures.) Soon after, for reasons too complicated to explain here, Jobe's forward progress in intellectual growth spins out of control, and he begins to confuse himself with God. Jobe now becomes completely identified with his electronic "virtual self," and attempts to dissolve himself into the VR rendering engine. He concocts a messianic plan to distribute himself from there into the computerized telephone network, thereby linking him and his "messages" to the whole planet—by telephone contact! Many other strange and diabolical events also occur as a result of Jobe's transformation.

We're all just beginners at this, but we need to raise ethical and spiritual questions about virtual reality now, before the technology becomes widespread. Only a new philosophy of cosmic scope, one that integrates science and religion in an unbroken explanation, can contain the implications of VR. Passionate VR users—our children in a few short years from now—will need to dwell in a philosophical container that is wider and deeper than any of their virtual reality programs. This new philosophy must permit them both the freedom to explore cyberspace without fear and prejudice, while at the same time pointing the way to increased self-mastery through its use. This same challenge can apply to many other emerging technologies that are based on the microchip.s

While providing many lines of praise of technology and its potential, *Lawnmower Man* gives some idea of the almost endless variety of abuses—and uses—that are possible with VR. To paraphrase the scientist who watches in horror as Jobe turns into an information-age Frankenstein: "Virtual reality will be the most important technology of the 21st century, but only if its uses are tempered with wisdom."

Byron has been a journalist and television producer and is now a consultant in the telecommunications industry.

MUSIC IN WORSHIP

This column addresses the concern for contemporary aids to worship. We welcome material which you may be inspired to write and share.

The Pageantry of Christmas

By the time of the publication of this column the Advent season will be long behind us. The scents of Christmas cooking, the sounds of caroling, the joy of giving will be yet another memory of a special season.

As I replay the scenes of past Christmas events in my mind, there are nagging memories which disturb and concern me: that 1000th hearing of *Silent Night* in the aisles of the supermarket, the pervasive "Ho, ho, ho" of Santa Claus ringing in the ears of my children, and the constant mythologizing of the birth of Christ. Year after year, I have endured sermon after sermon admonishing us not to forget the true meaning of Christmas while the ever increasing din of materialistic ceremonializing drowns out the Advent message.

I realize that it is not culturally popular to attack the holiday season that even "non-believers" enjoy; but I believe that we need to take a look at the pageantry of Christmas and see what it is telling us. Most ministers are painfully aware of the secularization of the Advent season, but we seem to be losing the spiritual battle. With the increasing sophistication of the market place, Christmas has been over-shadowed by economic indicators—a litmus test of our national prosperity, and the "make or break" desperation of the retail season.

Christmas has become a commercial pageantry larger than life, and the event itself has been mythologized beyond recognition.

Christmas has become a commercial pageantry larger than life, and the event itself has been mythologized beyond recognition. It is not just that we have lost the historical accuracy of the timing of the events themselves. The incarnation story has become a mishmash of myth, legend, fable, folk tale, and bedtime story. This process of the secularization and enculturation of spiritual celebrations can be well illustrated in music. It has been studied and well documented in the field of Ethnomusicology.

The scenario of the cultural absorption of spiritual celebrations has parallels in the secular world of music. When a new musical style breaks on the scene there are a few adherents who proselytize its virtues to the public. As that music becomes accepted and popularized, it undergoes an

evolutionary process whereby it changes into a "watered down" version. At this point many of the self-proclaimed prophets of the new music will drop away and no longer embrace it as their own. As this begins to occur, the public will absorb the musical style into a simplified version that is their own. Although basic elements of the original music will remain intact, the initial meaning is generally lost.

A recent example of this musical evolution occurred in "rap" music. Initially the music was a form of social and political protest, and used extraordinarily strong language for its message. As the form became popularized in the media (M TV and other shows), the popular artist took up rap and transformed the lyrics to the traditional popular forms generally centering around romance, social acceptance and popular social issues. The rap music of today has become a mild, popularized, homogenized second cousin of its originators, and has lost much of its meaning for the inner city poor from whence it came.

Although it is a long step from rap to Christmas carols, I contend that exactly the same process has occurred on a much larger scale in relation to our Christmas music. Indeed, the gargantuan appetites of the Advent music producers have gobbled up many of the more obscure carols and hymns. Imagine my amazement at hearing a syrupy rendition of *Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silent* while passing the cut meat department! It was this event that caused me to say, "enough is enough!"

I believe that Christians need to take a hard look at the Advent season. We need to examine what has happened to the very foundation of our faith. As a religious institution, the church has failed miserably in the preservation of the true Advent message. What can be done to recover the spiritual message of the Incarnation?

First of all, we need to recognize that it is difficult to reconstruct history. The cultural Christmas with its pageantry is here to stay in the foreseeable future. Let us celebrate this Holiday Season with enthusiasm and magnify its message of hope, good will and love for all. It has much to contribute to the common good.

Happily, information in *The Urantia Book* presents us with the possibility of a creative alternative. It tells us that Jesus was born on August 21st, the time of the year some scholars have hypothesized his birth took place. This date gives us an opportunity to develop a celebration that would focus on the spiritual meaning of the Incarnation: the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of humankind. What a fortuitous opening this could be to highlight the central message of Jesus' mission to our world! Here is a foundation for the greatest possible pageantry of Advent: God's presence in our world!

-Jack Rogers

Psalms Today

The psalms of yesterday, as beautiful and moving as they are, often reflect egocentric or provincial attitudes.

Our society hungers for spiritually mature expressions of praise to God and a universal appreciation of truth, beauty, and goodness. These contemporary psalms may be inspired by a traditional psalm or may be independent creations. We believe these psalms should be an expression of the human spirit and, therefore, may or may not carry the names of their authors. They may also be submitted under a pseudonym. In time, we hope to publish a book of Psalms Today. Please send us your contributions to this collection.

A Creation Litany

O God, your praise is the litany of all creation.

You have clothed the earth with a rich profusion of microcosmic undergarments and dressed its appealing contours of mountains and valleys with innumerable vestments of usefulness and beauty.

You have crowned the skies with countless jewels of infinity which inspire awe.

The mighty chorus of humanity shakes the earth and fills the heavens with your praise and adoration.

You, Primal Father, have designed the entire universe as birth place and training ground for your mortal children.

You have fashioned our minds and personalities to reflect your truth and love.

You have chosen us as your sons and daughters and given us freedom to accept or reject your loving guidance.

For those who so choose, nothing in all the universe can prevent our coming to your Paradise abode.

Gracious Father, you understand our finitude,
our animalistic tendencies,
and our lack of spiritual courage.

Our imperfection leads us into evil and our self-will into sin.

Our waywardness and misdeeds detour us into the valley of depression, guilt, and loneliness.

We live with a sense of inferiority, self-rejection, and fear.

We strike out in defensiveness and anger, stumbling toward the pit of despair.

In this dark night of the soul, you abide with us in infinite patience, understanding, and mercy.

You reach out to us in never ceasing love.

Nothing we do can remove us from your parental affection and concern.

Always do you hold out the vision of a better way and a new beginning.

Through suffering and enlightenment we are opened to your saving hope and empowered to choose the way to life and salvation.

Our motives are transparent in your sight.

We are not changed by half-hearted wishes coming from the top of our mind; but by whole-hearted decisions originating in the depth of our soul.

The moment we turn from our error and sincerely desire to follow your will, our forgiveness is complete.

You see us in our true spirit potential,
facing your light and your truth,

becoming new people in your kingdom.

Our spiritual liberation is replete; our gratitude is all-consuming; our joy is overflowing.

O God and Father of us all, your praise is the litany of all creation.

A mighty chorus of humanity shakes the earth and fills the heavens with anthems of your praise and glory!

The Philosophy of the Spiritual Fellowship Journal

1. The Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of all people is the guiding principle of the Fellowship. We acknowledge and welcome as kindred spirits all individuals from any tradition who affirm this truth. Recognition of the religion of Jesus as the ultimate ideal of living is central in our thinking, but we seek to avoid all forms of coercive literalism and legalism.

2. The Fellowship is, therefore, ecumenical and nonsectarian in orientation. We invite into our Journal community all who recognize the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of humanity.

3. The Fellowship recognizes the key role of evolution and becoming in the development of individuals and congregations and seeks to encourage the positive growth of both. We should like to stimulate each person to visualize, articulate, and actualize supreme purposes and goals of living in accordance with their spiritual guidance.

4. The Fellowship seeks to foster the most inspiring intellectual, emotional, and service sentiments in each individual and religious community. We strive to facilitate spiritual growth, encourage a truly universal perspective, and stimulate the highest expression of personal religious living.

5. The Fellowship encourages the recognition and enhancement of the home as the key institution where the highest values of living are learned and the community in which the most loving and supportive relationships are experienced and nurtured.

6. The Fellowship seeks to promote the development of ritual and ceremony that symbolizes and celebrates the highest expressions of truth, beauty, and goodness, along with the supreme values of love and social service. These ministrations should dramatize spiritual loyalties, stimulate warm fellowship, and inspire a wise outreach ministry to the world.

7. The Fellowship affirms the mystery of *personal* and *epochal* revelation. We stand in awe at the incomprehensible love which God has for us imperfect, finite beings in bestowing a part of his own spirit essence to live with us and guide us toward reality and eternal life. We are confronted by the inexplicable efficacy of intercessory prayer and the mysterious integration and coordination of persons and events. We are challenged by the potential of the spirit mastery of our animal drives and urges and the reality of spiritual transformation. We believe *The Urantia Book* is one of the best expressions of this philosophy on our planet.

Urantia Book Resources

The rich mine of universe knowledge and spiritual wisdom found in the 2097 pages of *The Urantia Book* tends to overwhelm the reader with its encyclopedic profusion. A detailed table of contents helps make the book manageable, but one soon realizes that reference tools are needed to find information hidden in its pages.

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

The Urantia Book reader also discovers information in many sections of the book which parallels Biblical material. Numerous young friends of the editor did not become interested in the Bible until they read *The Urantia Book*. The two books are mutually enhancing. Recognizing this close relationship, Dr. Duane L. Faw, Professor of Law emeritus of Pepperdine University School of Law, spent six years compiling a parallel and harmony of *The Urantia Book* and the Bible. The *Paramony* was published in 1986 and contains 25,000 cross-references revealing the similarities and differences between the facts and concepts of these two great books. Dr. Faw has been a teacher of adult Bible classes for 40 years and a certified lay speaker in the United Methodist Church for over 25 years. The *Paramony* is an essential reference tool for studying relationships between *The Urantia Book* and the Bible. A long time scholarly reader of *The Urantia Book* describes the *Paramony* as, "a well-structured volume, indispensable for those engaged in serious hermeneutics, particularly of the gospels."

If your local bookstore does not carry *The Urantia Book*, it can be ordered from The Urantia Foundation, 533 Diversey Parkway, Chicago, IL 60614. The *Concordex* and *Paramony* can be purchased from the Good Cheer Press, 1790 30th Street, #400, Boulder, CO 80301.