

Beyond Urantia Book Fundamentalism

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Christian fundamentalists believe in the literal inerrancy of the Bible. They are so impressed with the spiritual truths of scripture that they assume the 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 which should be distinguished from the scientific and historical facts which may accompany this spiritual insight. The main body of Christianity has achieved the spiritual maturity to differentiate these abiding spiritual truths from the passing and sometimes erroneous material facts and conditions accompanying these insights.

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 inerrancy of *The Urantia Book*, even though the authors of the book take great pains to warn us against such assumptions. While affirming the truths of the Fifth Epochal Revelation, they remind us: "But no revelation short of the attainment of the Universal Father can ever be complete. All other celestial ministrations are no more than partial, transient, and practically adapted to local conditions in time and space." [92:4.9] 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*." [101:4.2] They recognized that many of their statements about the physical sciences would soon need revision.

The science of the 1930's and 1940's was used for the material setting of the book. In 1957 as an aid to help my evaluation of 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 scientist of that time, or was about to be discovered or recognized.

Many other guards against infallibility concepts were included in the Urantia Papers. They speak of the difficulty of presenting enlarged concepts and advanced truth using our circumscribed and

limited language. To be effective, the authors point out, all revelation must not be too far removed from the thought and reactions of the age in which they are presented. In order to achieve this relevancy they tell us, "... we have selected as the basis of these papers more than one thousand human concepts representing the highest and most advanced planetary knowledge of spiritual values and universe meanings." [0:12.12]

The chairperson of the commission authoring the Jesus papers states, "The memoranda which I have collected, and from which I have prepared this narrative of the life and teachings of Jesus—aside from the memory of the record of the Apostle Andrew embrace thought gems and superior concepts of Jesus' teachings assembled from more than two thousand human beings who have lived on earth from the days of Jesus down to the time of the inditing of these revelations, more correctly restatements. The revelatory permission has been utilized only when the human record and human concepts failed to supply an adequate thought pattern." [121:8.13] The extensive research of Matthew Block has located many of the human sources of *The Urantia Book*. Matt points out that they invariably improve on the human source, and sometimes even change the conclusion of the human author.

The Urantia Book authors further discourage any "literalism" concepts by stating that the angels of the churches and the angels of progress disagreed on how to report Jesus' teachings at Urmia because of the great difference in planetary affairs at the time the lectures were given and twentieth-century religious and political conditions. At various places in *The Urantia Book* the authors will inject a phrase like "stated in modern phraseology," or "in terms of modern thought," or "from the standpoint of the twentieth-century." They discourage any assumptions of infallibility by remarking, "we do not know," "we surmise," "we conjecture," or "we are of the opinion." The authority of revelation is not established by dogmatic assertions of "literal inspiration" or "infallibility," but by its truth recognition in the minds and hearts of people.

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, at the time it was indited, to show the integration of science, philosophy, and religion under the overcontrol of the First Source and Center of all things and beings. These celestial personalities used material, sometimes taken out of historical context, to teach spiritual truth. 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 coordination of fact, truth, and value, and, I believe, the most reliable and authentic view of Reality available to humankind.

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 in human experience.