

Our Major Responsibility: Disseminating the Fifth Epochal Revelation

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Our major responsibility in the Urantia movement, in my judgment, is disseminating the Fifth Epochal Revelation throughout our world. The authors of *The Urantia Book* project two venues in which this will take place:

1. *By establishing a new cult (religion)*. "Regardless of the drawbacks and handicaps, every new revelation of truth has given rise to a -new cult, and even the restatement of the religion of Jesus must develop a new and appropriate symbolism ... The new cult must, like the old, foster sentiment, satisfy emotion, and promote loyalty; but it must do more: It must facilitate spiritual progress, enhance cosmic meanings, augment moral values, encourage social development, and stimulate a high type of personal religious living." (p. 966)

2. *By leavening traditional religions, special attention is directed toward Christianity*. "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 faiths, not the gospel about Jesus, but the living, spiritual reality of the gospel of Jesus." (p. 1041)

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

The Historic Resistance to New Revelation

The first thing that converts of a new revelation do is to try to share it with traditional religions, especially with the religion out of which these converts came to the new spiritual paradigm. The history of religion shows that this new spiritual vision is never able to "win over" or reform the older religion. Spiritual reformation, when it comes, is the product of later evolutionary development.

My own experience confirms this historic observation. When I first read *The Urantia Book* over forty years ago, I immediately recognized that its superior teachings were very close to the theological positions of the leading thinkers on the growing edge of Christianity. I saw the Fifth

Epochal Revelation as the great hope of a revitalization of the Christian faith. Leading theologians, I assumed, would give the book a careful and critical examination—and, if they did, they would recognize its high quality. They would be the leaven that would start a renaissance in the Christian Church.

I intentionally followed the pattern of Jesus' ministry. Early in his public ministry he went to the most prominent leader of Judaism, Annas, in the hope of interfacing with the leaders of Judaism. Even though he met with coldness, Jesus continued his ministry, when possible, in the synagogues of Judaism. The unreceptiveness of the power structure of Judaism made it necessary to conduct an independent ministry to disseminate the Fourth Epochal Revelation.

For more than forty years I have conducted an interface ministry with the leaders of mainline Christianity. This ministry is detailed in a paper entitled "A Personal History of Interface Ministry" that includes contacting theological professors in 85 seminaries belonging to the American Association of Theological Schools, sending 8,000 personal letters to ministers in the United Church of Christ offering a loan book, contacting 5,000 members of the American Philosophical Association inviting critical research on *The Urantia Book*, presenting the paper "*The Urantia Book* and Religious Studies" at the national meeting of the American Academy of Religion in 1985, publishing *The Spiritual Fellowship Journal* for six years that interfaced between *The Urantia Book* and mainstream Christian clergy and was circulated to all of the ministers in the United Church of Christ, the Disciples of Christ, Unity ministers, and the United Methodist clergy in Indiana.

Although results of this ministry have been positive, it is very modest. Even the most progressive leaders of the Christian Church have too much at stake to seriously consider becoming involved with the Fifth Epochal Revelation. It will be generations before *The Urantia Book* will be recognized as an acceptable resource for preaching and teaching in the Christian Church. After forty years of testing the relevance of the experience of new spiritual paradigms in the history of religion and finding its confirmation regarding the Fifth Epochal Revelation, I believe it is time to change our direction and mission. We may be slow learners, but our love and concern for the Christian Church seemed to require this patient but essentially futile attempt to stimulate a renaissance in the Christian Church.

The Necessity of New Religious Groups

The viability of the Fifth Epochal Revelation must be established through indigenous religious social institutions. The authors of *The Urantia Book* recognize that although religious institutions increase the possibilities for evil, they are germane to the survival of religion in society. The Brilliant Evening Star who authored the paper "*The Ghost Cults*" and the Melchizedek who authored the paper "*Social Problems of Religion*" speak of the necessity of a new cult being formed around the Fifth Epochal Revelation and give us guidelines for its creation. This new spiritual paradigm must evolve social religious groups to carry its message to the world.

The first step in evolving indigenous religious structures at the grass roots of society is the formation of study groups. This we have done for over forty years. But study groups at best are transitory groups. Only bona fide religious groups minister to individuals and families from birth to death and establish value orientations from generation to generation. In my discussions with Dr. Sadler I saw that he recognized this, and that is why he structured the Brotherhood/Fellowship Constitution denominating the leaders of the Urantia movement as ordained teachers and started a school to train and ordain such teachers. This is also why I have advocated and encouraged the formation of such religious groups during the past forty years.

The next step that a significant segment of the Urantia movement needs to take, in my judgment, is to intentionally recognize the basic importance of religious institutions in the dissemination of the Fifth Epochal Revelation throughout the world and structure resources to encourage and promote *an appropriate symbolism and socioreligious expression of the Fifth Epochal Revelation*.

Those who have a sense of calling to this venue through which the Fifth Epochal Revelation will make its way throughout the world need to intentionally shift the vision and policy that has characterized the dominant view of the Brotherhood/Fellowship identity during the past forty years:

- 1. First, we need to recognize that the overriding negative attitude toward institutional religion that characterized most of the early students of *The Urantia Book* and the deletion of the term "ordained teacher" from the Brotherhood/Fellowship Constitution is counter productive to the highest purposes of Jesusonian (*Urantia Book*) evangelism.

2. We need to structure a philosophy and policy within the Urantia movement that encourages and promotes the establishment of religious groups within the movement. Such an outreach mission will eventually encompass the following activities:

a. Drawing up constitution resources.

b. Composing suggestive rituals.

c. Revising and composing hymns.

d. Training for ministry.

e. Composing a manual for ministry.

f. Outlining legal procedures for incorporation and nonprofit status.

g. Developing procedures for initiating and organizing new congregations.

- 3. We need to publish a theological-religious journal that will serve as a platform for theological, philosophical, and polity discussions and the encouragement of the development of Jesusonian groups throughout the world,

The Spiritual Fellowship Journal of which I am currently the editor, with the approval of our Board of Trustees, plans to restructure its format and redirect its mission from an interface with mainline Christian ministers to the promotion and discussion of theological, philosophical, and polity ideas within the Urantia movement. We believe this new Journal has great potential for the augmentation of religious developments in the Urantia movement.

An Evolutionary View of the Fifth Epochal Revelation

The form of the Fifth Epochal Revelation is different than all previous epochal revelations-it is a book. Its format, I think, is particularly designed to cope with the series of misfortunes that our world has experienced. Its design is more stable and permanent than that of previous revelations and it is ideally suited to the long term educational process of presenting an integrated picture of planetary and universe history and cosmology appropriate to our era of evolutionary development. It has an appreciation of all of the religions of the world and will be a powerful inspiration toward world wide ecumenical fellowship and worship.

Just as it took around 1800 years of evolutionary development to precipitate Reformed Judaism that is very close to the reforms that Jesus tried to contribute to the spiritual understanding of the Judaism of his day, so there will come a time within Christianity that the Fifth Epochal Revelation will contribute the same type of up-stepping contribution within Christianity. Hopefully, it will not take 1800 years. At that time scholars will look back and marvel that the Christian leaders of today did not recognize the significance of the Fifth Epochal Revelation just as we today look back and wonder that the leaders of Judaism did not recognize the quality of Jesus' teachings. The Fifth Epochal Revelation will eventually contribute the same up-stepping influence to all of the religions of the world. On an evolutionary world it takes a great deal of time for a new spiritual paradigm to make its way into the culture. But, happily, new religious institutions need not be handicapped by this lack of spiritual insight