

Undertaking a Personal Study of The Urantia Book

Dr. Jeffrey Wattles

Introduction

Reading *The Urantia Book* is like attending a conference. Many authors speak in sequence, covering a variety of topics. They speak in great accord, though they do not march in lockstep uniformity. Differences in specialization and personality are evident. To some extent, the earlier speakers anticipate the later ones, while the later ones show that they are aware of what has been said previously.

Studying the facts, meanings, and values of *The Urantia Book* engages the entire personality. There is so much that is new, so much that we cannot yet confirm for ourselves; many a sentence eludes us, and even the full meaning of the gospel is beyond our grasp. As Jesus explained, "You are but finite, mortal men, and that which I have taught you is infinite, divine, and eternal."

The importance of excellent study is implied by the fact that inadequate study was implicated in a failure of response to epochal revelation.

"The Jews entertained many ideas about the expected deliverer, and each of these different schools of Messianic teaching was able to point to statements in the Hebrew scriptures as proof of their contentions. Many of their reputed Messianic predictions, had they but viewed these prophetic utterances in a different light, would have very naturally prepared their minds for a recognition of Jesus as the terminator of one age and the inaugurator of a new and better dispensation of mercy and salvation for all nations."

The last paragraph of the foreword brings hope to the reader. Despite the "impossibility of fully translating the language of the concepts of divinity and eternity into the symbols of the language of the finite concepts of the mortal mind," the Thought Adjuster and the Spirit of Truth "conspire to enable material man to grasp the reality of spiritual values and to comprehend the philosophy of universe meanings". This comment suggests a purpose in reading and a challenge: How can we facilitate this conspiracy?

We are told that study is a major activity for ascenders; for example, on Jerusem there are three basic types of activity, "work, progress, and play. Stated otherwise, they are: service, study, and relaxation"

What clues about reading are contained in the Papers themselves? How can we avoid overdeveloping the intellectual factors in ourselves as we read this massive book? How can we raise the spiritual quality of our study?

We can read *The Urantia Book* as a school of thinking, feeling, and doing in anticipation of the schools we will enter on the mansion worlds. If we obey the truth so as to follow the suggestions given in the Papers as they arise, our personal study will be greatly enhanced. This does not mean that each reader must dedicate him or herself to every project promoted in the Papers. This does not mean that the reader must go forth and execute every command Jesus gave to his apostles. We must always remember the need to translate the import of what Jesus said to a particular group on a specific occasion to our own situation. The context gives clues that help us understand what was going on at the time and what makes Jesus' response so timely. For example, Jesus made no provision for self-examination; yet he did review the apostles' impurity of purpose -- after a failure in their ministry.

Some Spiritual Priorities in Study

Regarding the study of the Hebrew scriptures, Jesus advised looking for "eternally true and divinely beautiful teachings" (1769.3). What passages have you found especially helpful in your life? A few additions enrich this method of study. One may learn such passages by heart; and we know that many truths cannot be comprehended except by living them. The fruit of the most complex study is enhanced ability to live such gems in spiritual simplicity.

Reading a revelation takes an extra investment of time and the most profound receptivity of which we are capable. Reading is not only an act of the mind: "Even to approach the knowing of a divine personality, all of man's personality endowments must be wholly consecrated to the effort". After exhausting the human intellectual capacity for comprehension, a quieter, more spiritual phase begins. Sometimes this is directly called for in the text. The authors of *The Urantia Book* tell us to "stop and ponder the solemn fact that God lives within you." We are urged to "meditate on the revelation of these divine attributes which was made in loving service by your own Creator Son" "Let the sublime knowledge of the mortal life of Jesus of Nazareth sink into your souls" -- Why don't we establish a custom of obeying when we read these admonitions? There is a meditative dimension of reading, but meditation means taking time to think things over, not entering into an abnormal, mystic state.

Priorities and Secondaries in Balance

Balance in study does not imply a bland and indifferent equivalence of emphasis on whatever chances to come before us. What should we emphasize? "The narrative of human ascent from the mortal spheres of time to the divine realms of eternity...should be the supreme study of mortal man". Later, toward the close of Part IV, we read, "Of all human knowledge, that which is of greatest value is to know the religious life of Jesus and how he lived it."

In The Urantia Book, priorities are balanced by secondaries:

"It is not enough that the ascending mortal should know something of the relations of Deity to the genesis and manifestations of cosmic reality; he should also comprehend something of the relationships existing between himself and the numerous levels of existential and experiential realities, of potential and actual realities. Man's terrestrial orientation, his cosmic insight, and his spiritual directionization are all enhanced by a better comprehension of universe realities and their techniques of interassociation, integration, and unification."

To probe such a primary "topic" as the Universal Father carries the reader well beyond Papers 1-5. "The providence of God consists in the interlocking activities of the celestial beings and the divine spirits who, in accordance with cosmic law, unceasingly labor for the honor of God and for the spiritual advancement of his universe children".

Overcoming One-Sidedness

Balance avoids the pitfall of abstraction, "the practice of focusing the attention upon one aspect of reality and then of pronouncing such an isolated aspect to be the whole truth".

"It is just because the gospel of Jesus was so many-sided that within a few centuries students of the records of his teachings became divided up into so many cults and sects. This pitiful subdivision of Christian believers results from failure to discern in the Master's manifold teachings the divine oneness of his matchless life. But someday the true believers in Jesus will not be thus spiritually divided in their attitude before unbelievers. Always we may have diversity of intellectual comprehension and interpretation, even varying degrees of socialization, but lack of spiritual brotherhood is both inexcusable and reprehensible."

Students of *The Urantia Book*, upon achieving a balanced appreciation of the many sides of a particular issue, should be able to comprehend empathetically the basis of one-sided positions, and should be able to remain in spiritual brotherhood even while dealing with other differences as circumstances may require.

Seeking the Creative Design

There is another group of techniques to enhance interpretation and enliven study. Normally we read sentence by sentence, paragraph by paragraph, without pausing to explore the design of the text; however, "the wise philosopher will always look for the creative design which is behind, and pre-existent to, all universe phenomena".

How shall we go about finding such creative design? One way is to explore sequences. The authors are compelled to present conceptual structures in the linear sequences of words, sentences, paragraphs, paragraph groups, sections, papers, groups of papers, and parts. We can always inquire why things are sequenced as they are.

There may be lessons in the order of items in a list. Some lists have explicit indications about time-sequence (e.g., the levels of interpretation of the golden rule) and sometimes not (e.g., the rules of prevailing petitions). Why are the items in a given list presented in the order in which we find them? In exploring the structure of a Paper, consider that creative design involves a purpose. Study to discern clues to the author's purpose in writing a given Paper. Then look to see how the way in which the sections are constructed and sequenced advances that purpose.

Study in Jesus' Life

Students of *The Urantia Book* should be pioneers in study, inspired by Jesus, whose study was academically strong, but focused neither exclusively on the scriptures nor even on reading. His main study was to know human beings--of all ages and races. As a child, he acquired a marvelously balanced education in nature, crafts, languages, available arts, and science (Papers 123 and 124).

From age seven to ten, in the synagogue school, he "committed to memory, by the method of repeating aloud, the deeper teachings of the sacred law". Jesus' ability, later in life, to draw on clusters of scriptures relevant to particular questions suggests that he did "topical study." (See , e.g., The Lesson on Contentment).

"As a child he accumulated a vast body of knowledge; as a youth he sorted, classified, and correlated this information; and now as a man of the realm he begins to organize these mental possessions preparatory to utilization in his subsequent teaching, ministry, and service."

During his two crucial years, his fourteenth and fifteenth years, Jesus painstakingly worked through the forest of problems associated with his future mission and its relation to various Jewish expectations. In addition to his scriptural reflections, he also read apocalyptic books; and "truth he never hesitated to embrace, no matter from what source it appeared to emanate". At Alexandria, Jesus and Ganid attended university lectures and engaged in a thorough study of the world's religions. During his twenty-seventh year, he again had an opportunity to study many books in addition to the scriptures. "At the Capernaum synagogue he found many new books in the library chests, and he spent at least five evenings a week at intense study".

Observe the different study projects Jesus organized for others. He established schooling for the girls in his family to provide equal educational opportunity. He began a philosophic discussion club. Once he began his public career, Jesus led his six chosen apostles and his brother James in study.

"In explaining that they should spend three hours every evening in study and preparation for their future work, Jesus further said: `We will all remain hereabout until the Father bids me call you. Each of you must now return to his accustomed work just as if nothing had happened. Tell no

man about me and remember that my kingdom is not to come with noise and glamour, but rather must it come through the great change which my Father will have wrought in your hearts."

As Jesus prepared his followers for interaction with the people among whom they would initially be working, he discussed the various groups they would be dealing with and had them spend two evenings a week in the study of the scriptures. What would it be like to study with Jesus? If Jesus were on earth today, would he lead us only in the study of The Urantia Book? Observe that former students became teachers for a week of intensive training for the new apostles. Later, there was "a new school of the prophets" for five months, training the evangelists, a school which was "conducted on the plan of learning and doing"; at this level of education, the "doing" involved contact with the public.

"Jesus had high standards of reading, listening, and remembering. Some of his standards he invoked only with those who were intellectually strong. After disclosing to his apostles the evolution of the God concept in the Hebrew scriptures, Jesus said, "And you would have known these truths had you read the Scriptures". He challenged Thomas, "But why do you refuse to comprehend the meaning of the record...and why do you refuse to interpret the meaning of the record...?" To Nathaniel he said that "there is much in the Scriptures which would have instructed you if you had only read with discernment." On another occasion, he said to Nathaniel, "Do you not remember that I once told you...?" He bluntly replied to the mischievous questions of the Sadducees, "You all do err in asking such questions because you know neither the Scriptures nor the living power of God".

Jesus' ultimate standard in hearing/reading is addressed to everyone:

"Think not only of the multitudes and how they hear the truth; take heed also to yourselves how you hear. Remember that I have many times told you: to him who has shall be give more, while from him who has not shall be taken away even that which he thinks he has."

Methods of Study

The classic method of study is to read the book from cover to cover, beginning with the Foreword. We are told the importance of starting at the top, so to speak. Each Part has its own contribution to the sequence of perspectives offered in the revelation.

Another important method of study is topical study. Topical study begins with a question or a special focus. Human experience, we are told, is "an interplay between an active and questioning self and any other active and external reality". A topic of great importance merits an entire reading of The Urantia Book with sustained attention to this topic. It is all too easy to let a few favorite quotations take the place of a balanced and thorough study.

We often observe that Jesus or an author of a paper introduces a theme with a few selected quotations; doing so presents the results of a topical study, collecting illustrations to lead the mind by humanly familiar steps into the teaching at hand. In Jesus' readings of the scriptures in the synagogue, he carefully selected his passages so that he did not need to comment on them. "He was skillful, so arranging the order of the reading of the various passages that the one would illuminate the other".

Topical study is to play a crucial role in the realization of spiritual brotherhood, since tensions can be reconciled by finding their unity in Jesus' life. "When you study the career of the Master, as concerns prayer or any other feature of the religious life, look not so much for what he taught as for what he did".