

THE CHRISTIAN CONNECTION

By Dick Bain 2006

Here is an important question an author will ask before starting to write a book or an article: Who is the target audience? Another important question is: Does the author intend to inform the readers, persuade them, arouse them, etc.? These are all questions we could ask about *The Urantia Book* and its authors. Can we determine who their target audience is? And what do they hope and plan to accomplish with this book?

The authors tell us that they are presenting us with a revelation to raise the spiritual level of our planet and to up-step our ideas of God, Jesus and other spiritual realities. Note that they never specifically identify the target audience, but it's not too hard to deduce their primary target.

The Urantia Book was revealed to a largely Christian group in a mid-western city of a predominantly Christian nation. Christianity and *The Urantia Book* have many theological concepts in common, but not all. The text contains at least a thousand quotes from the Bible. Duane Faw's *Paramony*¹ has over 132 pages of cross references between the *Urantia Book* and the Bible. The text also uses words and expressions familiar to most Christians. Some words are either the actual Christian term or derivatives of those familiar to Christians, such as Jerusem (Jerusalem), Edentia (Eden) and Salvington (Salvation.) There are numerous other examples of such terms and expressions we notice as we read through the book. The authors mention in several places the difficulty of translating names into English: "In recording the names of these beings of the spiritual world, we are confronted with the problem of translating into your tongue, and very often it is exceedingly difficult to render a satisfactory translation. We dislike to use arbitrary designations which would be meaningless to you; hence we often find it difficult to choose a suitable name, one which will be clear to you and at the same time be somewhat representative of the original." 18:4.2 It is obvious that the authors wished to give *The Urantia Book* a Christian flavor so it's more accessible and understandable to the majority of people in our culture. It makes good sense to use terms with which we are already familiar or terms that sound familiar. So it's no surprise that the authors favored Christian or Christian sounding terms and concepts.

There is evidence that the authors hope that this book—or at least the papers about Jesus—will not only be accepted by Christians, but will also transform Christianity. Consider the following statement: "Thus does the so-called Christian church become the cocoon in which the kingdom of Jesus' concept now slumbers." 170:5.4 But note that the authors don't think that the Christian church as it is will carry the message to the world: "The kingdom as Jesus conceived it has to a large extent failed on earth; for the time being, an outward church has taken its place; but you should comprehend that this church is only the larval stage of the thwarted spiritual kingdom, which will carry it through this material age and over into a more spiritual dispensation where the Master's teachings may enjoy a fuller opportunity for development." 170:5.4 The authors seem to be saying that the church will either be transformed or that something new will arise out of the Christian church. But they also hold up the possibility that a movement will arise outside of the Christian church to carry the message to the world: "Sooner or later another and greater John the Baptist is due to arise proclaiming "the kingdom of God is at hand"—meaning a return to the high spiritual concept of Jesus, who proclaimed that the kingdom is the will of his heavenly Father dominant and transcendent in the heart of the believer—and doing all this without in any way referring either to the visible church on earth or to the anticipated second coming of Christ."

The authors apparently are hoping that the life and teachings of Jesus contained in *The Urantia Book* will be accepted by many Christians and will be a catalyst in the church's renewal: "What a transcendent service if, through this revelation, the Son of Man should be recovered from the tomb of traditional theology and be presented as the living Jesus to the church that bears his name, and to all other religions! Surely the Christian fellowship of believers will not hesitate to make such adjustments of faith and of practices of living as will enable it to "follow after" the Master in the demonstration of his real life of religious devotion to the doing of his Father's will and of consecration to the unselfish service of man." 196:1.3

While the authors may hope that the coming spiritual renaissance will begin in a rejuvenated or transformed Christian church, they may have some doubts: "If Christianity persists in neglecting its spiritual mission while it continues to busy itself with social and material problems, the spiritual renaissance must await the coming of these new teachers of Jesus' religion who will be exclusively devoted to the spiritual regeneration of men. And then will these spirit-born souls quickly supply the leadership and inspiration requisite for the social, moral, economic, and political reorganization of the world."

The authors are not loath to point out some of the impediments to a renaissance in the church: "Christianity is threatened by slow death from formalism, over-organization, intellectualism, and other non-spiritual trends. The modern Christian church is not such a brotherhood of dynamic believers as Jesus commissioned continuously to effect the spiritual transformation of successive generations of mankind." 195:9

They know that the Christian establishment will not yield easily to change: "Does institutional Christianity fear the possible jeopardy, or even the overthrow, of traditional ecclesiastical authority if the Jesus of Galilee is reinstated in the minds and souls of mortal men as the ideal of personal religious living? Indeed, the social readjustments, the economic transformations, the moral rejuvenations, and the religious revisions of Christian civilization would be drastic and revolutionary if the living religion of Jesus should suddenly supplant the theologic religion about Jesus." 196:1.3

And they have a few strong words for the folks who occupy the pews: "Do professed Christians fear the exposure of a self-sufficient and unconsecrated fellowship of social respectability and selfish economic maladjustment?" 196:1.3

The Urantia Book has been with us for over 50 years now, and it has not made significant inroads into the Christian community in the U.S. Considering that many Urantians are also members of Christian churches, the book has probably been introduced to many of their fellow parishioners, but they were apparently not interested in it. I'm sure there are many factors, but I think that two of the biggest are comfort and fear. Many people are comfortable with a religion that doesn't make too many demands on them; they're content with the status quo. And there's fear: many people fear new ideas, especially spiritual ones. It takes a lot of courage to honestly examine our beliefs and thus take the chance that we may have to change our beliefs.

But I suspect that sometimes many of us in the Urantia community also suffer from fear. Have we sometimes been too timid to speak out about *The Urantia Book*? Yes! Are we afraid of rejection and ridicule if we tell people about this strange book? Yes! But unless we are willing to take reasonable risks, we will stay in our comfortable, well-worn grooves and the spread of *The*

Urantia Book and its teachings will remain in low gear. Today, most of the work is being done by a few pioneers, especially in other countries. How do we overcome our fears so we can do our part in spreading the teachings of this marvelous book? Knocking on doors is hardly the sort of evangelism with which most Urantians would be comfortable. There are less confrontational and perhaps more effective ways to spread the ideas and concepts of the book.

While many Christians might shrink from tackling a book the size and complexity of *The Urantia Book*, they might respond to the new vision of Jesus presented in the book. Should we be primarily concerned with spreading the book, or would it be wiser to confine our efforts to the life and teachings of Jesus? This is what the authors of part four of the book urge us to do: Present the story of Jesus as told in *The Urantia Book*. And I do not doubt that some people who read the life and teachings of Jesus will go on to explore the other sections of the book. So we need to get the word out to Christians and others.

How do we effectively get the word to Christians and others? Are you a writer? I believe books and articles about Jesus derived from the papers in part four of *The Urantia Book* will appeal not only to many Christians but also to many others in our culture. We in the Urantia community have spent 50 years telling each other how wonderful the concepts in this book are; shouldn't we tell the rest of the world? What great books and articles are waiting to be written! Can you put together presentations? I am part of a team that is presently putting together such a presentation on the early life of Jesus. When it is complete, I hope many people in the Urantia community will use it to acquaint people with Jesus as portrayed by the authors of *The Urantia Book*. Liberal Christian churches might be one place that such a presentation could be shown. The beauty of such a presentation is that it can have narration built in; the presenter only needs to introduce the presentation with a few words, and be willing to answer a few questions after the presentation. Yes, it will still take some courage to do this, but I think we'll have some help of which we may not be aware.

The following was supposedly communicated to the Forum: "The immediate fostering of the Urantia revelation — from decade to decade — (at least for the next one hundred years) will be entrusted to the Seraphim of the Churches."² If we're trying to present Jesus as seen in *The Urantia Book* to the Christian church, surely the Angels of the Churches will do everything they can to facilitate acceptance for presentations in appropriate venues. With a wise approach, and with such powerful allies, how can we fail? In fact, I believe that our help is essential to our unseen friends; I think they must work through us to move their programs forward. If we don't do it, who will? And we should rejoice in such an undertaking; it is a privilege. As the authors of one of the Urantia Papers tell us, "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." 195:10.1

It is important to feed the hungry and clothe the naked as Jesus commanded us, but it is just as important to foster the spiritual progress of our fellow beings. The values and ideas contained in *The Urantia Book*, especially those of Jesus, if disseminated and practiced, can be a catalyst in the spiritual transformation of the world.

Some will ask, "Is this the time to start promoting the concepts of the book to the public?" We may never know when "it's time." I don't think there'll be a hand writing on the wall in fire telling us, "It's time!" But the authors do tell us, "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.” 94:12.7 We have to use our judgment about the readiness and openness of people, but we also have to recognize that fear and apathy are our greatest impediment to moving ahead. Better to have tried and failed than to have sat on our hands. We live on a decimal planet, an experimental world, so let’s not be afraid to experiment!

It’s true that some past efforts at publicizing the book have not been very successful. Was the problem that the time was not yet right, or was it the approach used, or both? Have we considered and honored how important people’s beliefs are to them? Have we refrained from attacking their beliefs? Have we considered that some people may not want or need or be able to tackle such a large and complex book? Perhaps the teachings of Jesus are enough for them, or perhaps they’ll be receptive to the truths from the book without knowing the source. As Jesus counseled, we must be as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves.

I believe that just as Jesus expected his disciples to spread his Truth to the world of his day, our unseen friends expect us to present the story of the life and teaching of Jesus to our generations. Do we want to be pioneers in bringing a new vision of Jesus to the world, or do we want to sit back and wait for “...the coming of these new teachers of Jesus' religion...”? 195:9.4

“The act is ours, the consequences, God’s.” 117:5.5

(1) Duane Faw, *Paramony*, Duane L. Faw: Publisher, 1986

(2) Carolyn Kendall, “Plan for *The Urantia Book* Revelation” April 1966 from www.urantia-org/plan_for_revelation.htm

Quotes from the Urantia Book are noted as follows: Paper #: Section #: Paragraph #