

THE ARENA

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THE MIND ARENA OF CHOICE

"Mind is your ship, the Adjuster is your pilot, the human will is captain." (p.1217)

Editorial

We all have our own story to tell about how we got to be true believers; how we got to the point where we could say: "Yes, I have faith." For some of us, faith may have come to us like a rude awakening, for others, a gradual dawning. No matter how we got there, once we realized we had reached that point, we knew that it was just the beginning. For those of us who've either found faith through an association with the stunning truths gleaned in *The Urantia Book*, or have had our faith reassured, revitalized, and renewed because of the book, we know that it isn't enough that we believe; we know that to have faith means that much will be required of us. When we get to the point where we can say, with all sincerity, from the depths of our hearts and souls: "Father, you've given me so much, what can I give in return?" we've taken a big step along the path of selflessness. We have embarked upon the journey of selfless, loving service. The altruistic urge has been born!

This is where we'd better hold on tight because when we reach this stage of our journey, that's when the real fun begins. This is where we get the opportunity to see what we're really made of. Why? Because suddenly we're confronted with a vast, rich array of choices—of service opportunities. In fact the choices are so great it becomes a real challenge to decide just how best we can serve the endless needs that confront us.

As we start to look around us, we become more aware of our fellows, of the fact that we and our fellow human beings and are all in the same boat. That each and every one of our fellows is struggling with all the same impulses and problems that we've had to endure. We realise that God, being a parent, wants the same thing for all of his children. We get a sense of family—of the Brotherhood of Man under the Fatherhood of God. We begin to fall in love with the human race. We know that the same spirit of our loving Father indwells each one of us. We're all equal in the eyes of God. We start to take more of a genuine interest in our fellows. We take time to befriend them, to get to know them. Once we get to know them we begin to understand them. Once we understand them we begin to love them.

This experience of love for our fellow man and for the human race holds infinite potential for service. The love

In this issue...

IUA News

<i>ANZURA Conference 2001</i>	2
<i>News around the world</i>	2

Articles

<i>Avoiding the Subtleties of Extremes</i>	5
<i>My first time through The Urantia Book</i>	7
<i>How I Found The Urantia Book</i>	8
<i>Living With The Urantia Book</i>	12
<i>Study Groups in Australia & New Zealand</i>	12

for God from within our being spills over to become a love for mankind without. Gradually we start to understand what it's all about—that the love we hold for our fellow man is one and the same as our love for God. **Therefore, to serve God is to serve mankind.**

And to serve mankind is to live according to the will of God which inevitably bears the fruits of the spirit. We must be *yielding* the fruits of the spirit. We must be *doing* the Father's will. We must be *living* our faith. We must be *sharing* ourselves with our fellows. Note the emphasis on the action words *yielding, doing, living, sharing*—if we're not putting our faith and belief into practice then it's dead, it's meaningless—it has no value at all. The value is found in the *product* of our belief and our faith—in the fruits of the spirit.

*Religion is not a technique for attaining a static and blissful peace of mind; it is an impulse for **organizing the soul for dynamic service**. It is the enlistment of the totality of selfhood in the loyal service of loving God and serving man. (The Urantia Book p.1096:6--editor's emphasis.)*

*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 his 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.** (p.2090:4--editor's emphasis.)*

ANZURA Conference 5th to 8th October, 2001

Theme: “Organising the Soul for Dynamic Service”

Religion is not a technique for attaining a static and blissful peace of mind; it is an impulse for organizing the soul for dynamic service. It is the enlistment of the totality of selfhood in the loyal service of loving God and serving man. (The Urantia Book p.1096:6)

Continuing on from last year’s conference in Canberra where we focused on the big picture and explored the real purpose for the gift of the Urantia revelation, readers from the Sydney and Central Coast study groups, who will be hosting this year’s ANZURA conference in Sydney, have been asking themselves: “OK, what theme would be appropriate for this year’s conference that would follow on the heels of last year’s amazing discussions and presentations?” While last year’s looked at the wider implications of the revelation to our planet and for our ascension careers, this year’s will take a 2-pronged approach and explore some of the more fundamental, practical day-to-day issues of how we can bring an awareness of the revelation to the world at large.

The first prong will be to look at how individual believers get to that point where they are inwardly motivated to begin to “organise their souls for dynamic service.” What was Jesus’ secret? The second prong will be to look at what avenues of service we can utilize, both on individual and group levels, to help bring the teachings into the lives of spiritually hungry people. Presentations, workshops, study and brainstorm sessions will be some of the activities at this up-coming conference, as well as socialising with one another and enjoying our surroundings.

The conference will be held at the Sydney Lakeside Narrabeen Park, which is located on 27 hectares right on the beautiful Narrabeen Lake and just minutes from North Narrabeen beach. A number of luxury 2-bedroom villas have been booked, all fully self-contained with bathroom, kitchen, living room, and verandah. The conference centre is surrounded by wide verandahs, looks straight onto the lake-front, and is just a short stroll from the villas.

So the Sydney and Central Coast study groups invite all readers to take some time out from your busy schedules over the weekend of October 5th to 8th and treat yourselves to a weekend filled with meaningful and valuable exchanges with fellow believers. The entire weekend will only cost around \$220, which includes food and accommodation, so mark your calendars and come and help us kick-start the next phase of Urantia’s fifth epoch.

More details and registration information will follow in due course. For enquiries please contact ANZURA, PO Box 609, Narrabeen, NSW 2101, Australia. Phone: +61-2-9970-6200, fax: +61-2-9970-6201, or email: anzura@urantia.org.au

News around the world

USUA National Conference July 19-23, 2001

The Zebedee Guild of The United States Urantia Association cordially invites readers of *The Urantia Book* to attend our 2001 national conference. This year’s gathering will take place in the picturesque setting of Saint Mary College in Leavenworth, Kansas, located just north of Kansas City among the verdant rolling hills along the Missouri River.

Conference Theme: We hope to provide conference attendees with a unique and interactive experience based on relationship building and the cultivation of teaching and leadership skills. It is our desire to stimulate service-related planning and to motivate individuals and groups to actively incorporate these plans into their daily lives.

For further information call Lynn at +1-573-294-7350 or Email: serviceguided@yahoo.com

IUA International Conference—France 2002

The next international conference for the IUA will take place in France. Tentative dates have been set for August 3rd to 7th, 2002 with the usual business meetings for the IUA and Foundation on August 1st and 2nd.

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PO Box 609, Narrabeen, NSW 2101, Australia

Email: anzura@urantia.org.au

Web: <http://www.urantia.org.au>

Phone: + 61 2 9970 6200

Fax: + 61 2 9970 6201

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A comfortable site has been found at Dourdan which is a small and beautiful medieval village 40-50 kilometres south of Paris.

The general theme will be “Vivre le plan divin d’ascension dans l’expérience humaine” –“Living the Ascension Plan in Human Experience.”

Six secondary themes will be developed and proposed soon and given to each National Association (or at least to each continent). The organisers wish to give an international dimension to this next event by allowing each National Association to express and share in its own way.

More details and information will be available in the middle of this year. Mark your calendars now for this exciting bi-annual event.

Libraries in Korea, China, and Burma Receive *The Urantia Book*

Urantia Foundation’s Roving Field Representative, Mark Bloomfield, who is responsible for hand delivering 1,500 *Urantia Books* to libraries throughout India, has recently been visiting libraries throughout South Korea, China, and Burma to donate *Urantia Books*.

China:

Here’s what Mark reports about China:

All fifty-five of the major Chinese universities that actually use English as a secondary language of instruction now have a copy of The Urantia Book. Both Catholic and protestant churches have been presented with the revelation at their highest levels. The major public libraries of China, some of which are among the largest in Asia, also now have the book. The learning centres of Taiwan have copies on their way to them.

Around a quarter of all Chinese university library books are in English, and in Shanghai library, about 40 percent. Of all libraries visited, not one refused to take it. The librarians I met gladly and unhesitatingly accepted not only the book, but also its message. I never had a single refusal, every place I offered a book to accepted it gladly. The short conversations I had with what librarians spoke passable English all confirmed that the book’s teachings were very close to the Chinese heart. I couldn’t help slipping in ‘universal comradeship’ sometimes as well as universal brotherhood.

The churches are closely watched by the authorities and have to call themselves ‘patriotic churches’ though after talking with some of the high rollers within the Chinese Christian community, there’s no shortage of old-time Christian spirit within them. I received an email from a minister of a Beijing church that received a book in the mail. He told me how his little church on Christmas day had several thousand citizens visit it many of whom

waited for hours in the freezing cold to come in. Four services were held back to back in order to contain them all. That tells us something about what’s going on over there.

Korea:

In Seoul, South Korea Mark placed 97 Korean *Urantia Books* in college and university libraries, and 250 books to university and college Christian clubs. He arranged for 35 books to be distributed to the major regional public libraries by the Chief Librarian of the National Library, and, with the help of Korean readers, has mailed 231 books to university and college libraries outside of Seoul. If the regional public libraries respond positively to the book, the Chief Librarian of the National Library has agreed to distribute the book to the remaining public libraries on our behalf.

Burma:

Against risky odds, Mark managed to take 30 books into Burma as part of his personal luggage. Here’s what he had to say about his Burmese adventure:

Now there aren’t many libraries in Burma. As knowledge is power, the powers to be have little to gain by educating the people and lots to lose. With the 30 books I had with me, I was able to cover all the important bases, and had I have had another 50 or so with me, I could probably have cleaned up. The presence of big brother is never very far away. Foreigners are prohibited from entering university campuses so needless to say, all the universities I visited ended up as a story in itself. At Rangoon university, I finally managed to befriend the guards who eventually escorted me to the librarian. He happily accepted the book, then showed me next door to the Universities Central Library, the headquarters of the entire Burmese university library system where I had a wonderful long talk with the lady librarian, who was a devout Buddhist. We had much in common, especially the notion of universal brotherhood. At Dagon University on the edge of Rangoon, I waited at the main gate for over an hour whilst a steady stream of guards shuffled between me and the librarian relaying message after message. Eventually she came out herself to receive the books which she did cheerfully and good naturedly. In another university, I walked straight in and just as I found the library, (which in this case was too small and specialized for the book) I was suddenly surrounded by 5 men who politely though purposefully marched me off the premises.

*Life is but a day's work--do it well. The
act is ours; the consequences God's.
(p.556:13)*

Russian Revision Ready to be Printed

The second printing, and first revision of the Russian translation of *The Urantia Book* has been re-edited and formatted in the smaller size and is being prepared for printing as the initial supply of 5,000 copies printed in 1997 have almost been exhausted.

Some interesting facts about the Russian translation and Russia:

It cost US\$12.48 per book to print, and its retail price in Russia has been the equivalent of US\$10.00 of which only US\$4.50 is received by Urantia Foundation, and even that is being spent in Russia for office, book fairs, and other administrative expenses. In addition, numerous books have been given away as gifts to libraries, bookstores, study groups, and to the poor. The sad state of the economy in Russia has made it necessary to lower the price of the book to less than half of its production cost in order to make it just barely affordable for the Russian people.

After much trial, error, and expense, the Foundation now has a distribution company, who is willing to be the port-of-entry for the importing and distribution of books in Russia. The Foundation has been in the process of establishing a Russian branch office in St. Petersburg since 1997 and has recently succeeded in establishing it with the government authorities. The Russian people are finding the book in bookstores, readers are coming together in study groups, and through these efforts the revelation is taking root in Russia.

The Russian people are ripe for *The Urantia Book* and hungry for new truth. For decades religion has been suppressed and discouraged in Russia. The timing of the introduction of *The Urantia Book* may be ideal, now that the population is relatively free to pursue educational and spiritual interests. This good news is substantiated by the fact that, since the Foundation has had reliable representation and a working distribution system, books have been sold very quickly.

We in the industrialized countries will need to provide funding for the translation until we find Russians of means to be able to assist with the printing costs. The Russian readers are not well endowed enough, or numerous enough to do it themselves—they need our assistance so the Foundation is calling on readers to assist in raising the funds needed for this printing. Any help you can send them will be greatly appreciated.

New Printings

Urantia Foundation is printing four new editions of *The Urantia Book* as stocks have run out. In addition to the preparations for the second printing of the Russian translation, the 2nd printing of the Spanish paperback and hardback have been completed. Also the large English classic “study edition,” as it is becoming known among readers, is being reprinted. It will be the same size as the

1955 edition. It remains a popular item and is ordered so often by the distributors, and is so readily accepted by librarians for their collection, that the Foundation is hesitant to discontinue it. It will be exactly the same white classic dust jacket design as the 11th printing.

Library Placement in Honduras

100 hardcover Spanish books have been sent to the National Library of Honduras. A Honduran reader has made the arrangements with the National Library to place the 100 books in its collection and to be distributed throughout the library system there.

Avoiding the Subtleties of Extremes: “Personal Religious Attitudes” verses “Organisational Functions”

Trevor Swadling, Australia

What causes dysfunctional organisations? There are many factors that come into play, but I would particularly like to focus on one that may not be obvious to us, that is: personal religious attitudes verses organisational functions.

Throughout history much confusion and organisational difficulties have arisen, and will continue to arise, among religionists as they come together to function and organise as groups to provide dynamic service to their fellow man. I believe one of the main reasons for this unfortunate disharmony is the failure of individuals within the group to separate certain of their individual religious attitudes from becoming the policy framework for the functional responsibilities of the organisation; the failure to separate “state and church” so to speak.

While our collective ideals and attitudes are essential for forming fair and just policies, not all of our personal attributes can or should be adopted into our democratic framework. We must apply practical wisdom in the creation of our organisation’s charters and bylaws, and in the election of our administrators and leaders. The evolutionary experience of governing bodies has shown us that this is essential for the group to maintain order and direction to effectively and safely achieve the desired common goals of its members.

Many of our personal religious attitudes and attributes, such as a universal attitude of love to all, non-judgment of spirituality, personal forgiveness, mercy ministry, tolerance, and a personal desire to do good to all others, should, in most cases, be kept separate from becoming group policies as such. “Have you faith? Then have it to yourself.”

With the passing of “might is right” as our civilisation advances, individual maturity is now becoming the essential ingredient to successful teamwork.

As individuals, we have attitudes and these attitudes have attributes. These attitudes and attributes can be positive or negative. We are not perfect; we are growing so we need to protect ourselves and our organisations from our incompleteness and imperfection. We do this by education and by the way we construct our charters and by-laws (or our rules and modes of conduct.) This is the watermark that is behind all successful and cooperative organisations.

We know that groups are not personal. In the main they should only have functions that protect but preclude certain of our individual attitudes. If religious groups over formalise personal attributes that belong to the sacred domain of the individual, then these groups may become judgmental and cultic. Maintenance of growth of the group may become more important than the achievement of its goals.

With the passing of “might is right” as our civilisation advances, individual maturity is now becoming the essential ingredient to successful teamwork.

As a group, and when functioning as a group, the group should be perceived from the outside and from within as having common goals and functions, even though the individuals that make up the group certainly do have a diversity of attributes and attitudes. The group should be wisely structured and organised to achieve and protect its goals and functions. To varying degrees it is inevitable that the group will be perceived from the outside as having a persona of some kind.

But if the persona of the group is adopted by the individual members as being their personal code of conduct, the individuals may take on those attributes as their personal religious attitudes. When this goes too far it is a problem. This is the very root of the beginnings of religious group problems. Herein lie the seeds to the formation of different denominations, unproductive competition between religious groups—even religious wars—religious prejudices and bigotry. Statements like, “you are not being spiritual,” “you don’t think the same as we do” or “we think and feel this way and you don’t fit in,” are often heard amongst these differing groups that supposedly have common goals!

Following are two analogies that attempt to magnify the problems caused by the differences between the “individual’s stance” and the “collective/protective” function of organisation. These analogies are simple ones to highlight the danger of what happens when some of our individual attitudes become the very policies that attempt to direct the functioning of the group. In all our

world affairs, until the age of Light and Life, group functions and responsibilities must, and should be clearly defined and protected. It is not the right of individuals to disrupt and pervert the function of the group by asserting that the group must adopt the persona of the individual’s attitude.

For example:

1. In an evolving imperfect world advanced cultures must provide a fair and sound framework to protect and foster the very culture that allows its individual citizens to practice and express their personal religious attitudes. Just imagine the disaster to this civilization if the advanced individual’s religious attitudes of non-violence towards any other individual were to be adopted as the policy of the government of that nation, whereon their very doorstep there was a belligerent neighbouring nation that was bent on conquering and destroying this very civilization. If this government took on the individual attitude of non-violence as its collective action, then its advancing civilisation of peace-loving citizens would be completely destroyed and pass into the annals of history. Therefore, religious, humanitarian, and political idealism must always be balanced by the sound common sense of a clear appraisal of the given status of our imperfect realities.

2. The sincere individual religionist experiences a profound simple spiritual truth: “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” Then other sincere religionists experience the same or very similar spiritual truth. Then these religionist come together and form a religious group based on their like-mindedness. They then make the mistake of judging other individuals, nations, cultures, groups, and organisations by what they deem to be the right individual and group attitude that one must have to be spiritual. Religious intolerance is born. The group’s attitudes crystallize and religious prejudices are subtly indoctrinated into new members. Some of the bloodiest wars in history have been, and are still being fought over religious dogma of this kind.

If religious groups over formalise personal attributes that belong to the sacred domain of the individual, then these groups may become judgmental and cultic.

We must bear in mind that organisations are subject to the combined personal wills of its members and are non-personal. Therefore the members of any executive branch of an organisation should be guided by, and follow the rules and charter of the group. They should not overly use their positional powers to further their own personal attitudes and agendas, especially when this may hamper the established goals of the group.

Our individual value systems are based on our experiential foundations and our personal relationships

with our Creator. As religionists we all strive for a life of love, mercy, and ministry. As a group we base our actions on goals, and administer justice and power. If we did not perform these duties in our evolving imperfect world, would not the self-centred free will of anarchy emerge? Also, we should bear in mind that the moral aspects of the policies of an organisation need not become the personal attributes of individual members.

From the Paradise Trinity right on down to the Seraphic Planetary Government the importance of organisation and the separation of personal attitudes in relation to group functions become apparent after reading *The Urantia Book*. In my mind, to enhance optimum success in the dissemination of *The Urantia Book* and its teachings, it is important that group efforts and functions of *Urantia Book* readers do not become an institution of religious attitudes.

So to end, let us take a peek at a little of what *The Urantia Book* says about the differences between the attitudes and functions of individuals and their relationship and interaction within the group. After all, as the book says on page 1434:6 “The meaning of life is its adaptability;...”

The Trinity is an association of infinite persons functioning in a non-personal capacity but not in contravention of personality. The illustration is crude, but a father, son, and grandson could form a corporate entity, which would be non-personal but nonetheless subject to their personal wills. (p.112:6)

Justice is not the attitude of the Father, the Son, or the Spirit. Justice is the Trinity attitude of these personalities of love, mercy, and ministry. No one of the Paradise Deities fosters the administration of justice. Justice is never a personal attitude; it is always a plural function. (p.114:3)

The personal Deities have attributes, but it is hardly consistent to speak of the Trinity as having attributes. This association of divine beings may more properly be regarded as having functions, (p.113:2)

For example: The Master, when on earth, admonished his followers that justice is never a personal act; it is always a group function. Neither do the Gods, as persons, administer justice. But they perform this very function as a collective whole, as the Paradise Trinity. (p.1146:1)

Genuine religion renders the religionist socially fragrant and creates insights into human fellowship. But the formalization of religious groups many times destroys the very values for the promotion of which the group was organised. (p.1089:9)

Just as certainly as men share their religious beliefs, they create a religious group of some sort which eventually creates common goals. Some day religionists will get together and actually effect co-operation on the basis of unity of ideals and purposes rather than attempting to do so on the basis of psychological opinions and theological beliefs. Goals rather than creeds should

unify religionists. Since true religion is a matter of personal spiritual experience, it is inevitable that each individual religionist must have his own and personal interpretation of the realisation of that spiritual experience. Let the term “faith” stand for the individual’s relation to God rather than for the creedal formulation of what some group of mortals have been able to agree upon as a common religious attitude. “Have you faith? Then have it to yourself.” (p.1091:6)

Religion is the revelation to man of his divine and eternal destiny. Religion is a purely personal and spiritual experience and must forever be distinguished from man’s other high forms of thought, such as:

1. Man’s logical attitude toward the things of material reality.

2. Man’s aesthetic appreciation of beauty contrasted with ugliness.

3. Man’s ethical recognition of social obligations and political duty.

3. Even man’s sense of human morality is not, in and of itself, religious. (p.2075:6)

Thus did Jesus teach the dangers and illustrate the unfairness of sitting in personal judgment upon one’s fellows. Discipline must be maintained, justice must be administered, but in all these matters the wisdom of the brotherhood should prevail. Jesus invested legislative and judicial authority in the group, not in the individual. Even this investment of authority in the group must not be exercised as personal authority. There is always danger that the verdict of an individual may be warped by prejudice or distorted by passion. (p.1764:1)

If one man craves freedom—liberty—he must remember that all other men long for the same freedom. Groups of such liberty-loving mortals cannot live together in peace without becoming subservient to such laws, rules, and regulations as will grant each person the same degree of freedom while at the same time safeguarding an equal degree of freedom for all of his fellow mortals. If one man is to be absolutely free, then another must become an absolute slave. And the relative nature of freedom is true socially, economically, and politically. Freedom is the gift of civilization made possible by the enforcement of LAW. (p.1490:4)

Religion makes it spiritually possible to realize the brotherhood of men, but it will require mankind government to regulate the social, economic, and political problems associated with such a goal of human happiness and efficiency. (p.1490:5)

We are not perfect; we are growing so we need to protect ourselves and our organisations from our incompleteness and imperfection.

My First Time Through *The Urantia Book*

Gary Mullinix, USA

My first time through the book was not one so much stunted with a thousand questions, it was more an absolute fascination at every page and the dynamic complexities of humanity and deity the book describes; warts to perfection. The questions came later and not so much from a need to validate or to find purchase to defend the book, but more from a need for clarity, so I might come closer to God and find his will. I had little reason to redefine my opinion of Christ, as I had never embraced the blood atonement theology of Paul, even though I had been fully exposed to the doctrine. I never had a belief system to dismantal. I had only been an information gatherer until *The Urantia Book* became my first source of spiritual information.

I remember gaining great solace and peace from some very odd sources such as the books of Alan Watts with his enlightening east meets west theology and the books of Carlos Castenada with his vivid tales of self discovery with Don Juan the Jaquai (sp) Indian. They were once my Bibles. One thing I always knew was that God exists and that his ways are far removed from our ways. *The Urantia Book* with its complete exposure of the person and divinity of Christ gave me new hope for our ability to make God's way our way in this life and in the life to come. The reality of his life here and the presence of his Spirit empower us to do that which I formally thought undoable, merely a fantasy; to be in and do his will. As we model his character and live in faith, others are drawn to him.

We can embrace a new life in him not because we found him; he was never far from us, but because he found us in our incompleteness and has patience with us as we search the "isms" of our day. With love and humility we need to share his truth with others as we progress thru the finite realm, and never allow our intellectual analysis of our own position deceive us. I think it was a Tao master named Po who said something like, "When considering enlightenment, it is true that those who say don't know and those who know don't say."

The Urantia Book with its complete exposure of the person and divinity of Christ gave me new hope for our ability to make God's way our way in this life and in the life to come.

How I found *The Urantia Book*

Frances Potter. Sydney, Australia

It is not surprising that the story of how each of us first encountered *The Urantia Book* is a tale well worth reading. It counts as one of those life-altering events which ensures that we will never be the same again. It is similar in its effect to one of those moments when we are shocked out of our daily routine by hearing about the accidental death of someone famous, when a stockmarket crash wipes away half of our wealth, or when an inexplicable coincidence reunites us with someone we had thought we would never see again. Discovering *The Urantia Book* is even more significant than any of these things because it usually marks the end of a long and gruelling search for those of us consumed by the desired to know the truth about life on this planet.

Possibly the most compelling aspect of my teenage existence was the desire to understand exactly what we are all doing here on Earth, and what life is really supposed to be about. Being an intelligent, studious and highly enquiring girl growing up in an unhappy religious household, I had always felt different from the majority of my peers and family and had never been satisfied with the endless cycle of reproduction as an explanation of our existence. I think that even in those early days I really was an uncompromising truth-seeker, and my unwillingness to settle for the accepted "truths" of the groups I was part of not only alienated me from my fellows but burdened me with an unrelenting, lonely and unrewarding search for answers which nobody else seemed to need.

My difficulty with the religion I was brought up with was, as it no doubt is for many of us, that many of its claims seemed totally absurd, even to my 13 year old logical mind, and it demanded allegiance to values and precepts which I could not even respect, let alone support. How could I respect a distant and dominating father, whose authoritarian rule of the household caused nothing but misery and unhappiness for me and my sister? Was his iron-fisted and selfish control of the family (supported and deferred to by my mother and supposedly justified by the dictates of "discipline" and "respect for one's elders") really what God required?

My unwillingness to co-operate with this unloving family system led to endless battles of will between my father and I as I attempted to break the stranglehold of the rigid rules which controlled our family. I spent many a day arguing with hostile adults, convinced that if this is the way God wanted things to be then he was no friend of mine. I am sure my parents considered themselves to be following the Ten Commandments and saw me as nothing more than a disrespectful rebel. I spent a lot of time telling them that I hated them, and that they were "ignorant."

However, in fairness to them, they were no worse than all the other people who were attempting to indoctrinate their children with the confusing and contradictory

mandates of Christianity. We would all troop along to church every Sunday to receive the impractical admonitions of a well-intentioned pastor, to sing the hymns and say the prayers, and sometimes to stay for tea afterwards with a selection of good-natured old ladies relying on the church for their sense of community. But nobody ever seemed to really want to decipher how we were supposed to live out Christian teachings (which we supposedly all believed in) in a harsh, violent, competitive and materialistic world.

The youth service was little more than a dating game, and nobody seemed as keen as I was to really explore what we were being taught, and to get real answers to the practical questions which kept burning in my mind. "Why weren't Cain's offerings as good as Abel's?" "How could Cain and Abel find wives if Adam and Eve were the only people God had created?" "If God is so powerful then why is there so much suffering?" "Why do all the religious people just accept their places in this greedy unjust world at the same time as they profess to be loving one another and living according to Christ's message?" "How can I respect my parents when I am so unhappy living with them?"

My quest to reconcile the religious ideas which had been presented to me with what I could discover about the workings of the world, and to make those things fit with my painful experience of family and social life, continued through my fledgling adult years. I was ultimately tipped out of school and my sheltered but intimately painful home environment into the world of pointless academic achievement. I had no idea of what I wanted to do in life but because I was always "bright" a university degree was the only option presented to me, even though I had no idea of what purpose it would ultimately serve. I chose Psychology over Japanese and spent the next 3 years studying rats in cages, doing experiments and dissecting brains as well as writing essays in slightly more interesting areas such as ethics, metaphysics and political science.

I now realise that my choice of subject was driven fundamentally by that same desire to understand myself, life and what we might be doing here - something I could have spared myself if there had been anything available earlier in my life to answer the burning questions I had about my existence and its pains. However I had never received satisfactory answers from anything I had deduced from my family life, what I had been taught at school and church, nor my observations of how the world really worked.

At that time I remember sitting in class one day drawing a triangle which had psychology on one side, philosophy on the other and religion on the third, and thinking that THAT was what we really needed to be learning - by themselves each of those disciplines were lost, I thought. They all needed each other. And as for the real, hard, practical world in which I was trying to exist with all my burdens of confused thought, alienation and rebellion, it

looked like nothing more than a hypocritical, unjust, incomprehensible mess to me. I felt imprisoned in an alien body, trying to live in a dangerous, unfair and hostile world and I despaired of ever making sense of life's madness, let alone finding a place where I might fit in or feel at home in the world.

After I completed my degree I escaped to Australia, the Mecca of many a New Zealander in the 70's and 80's. The extravagant wealth of Sydney overwhelmed me. The fact that the nuclear threat was also being heralded at every turn meant that my first few years in Sydney were spent in a state of utter confusion and despair. I fully expected to be blown away in a nuclear bomb blast at any moment and I blamed men and "the patriarchy" for it all. The utter madness of the (male) world rulers, and my powerlessness to do anything about it aggravated my difficulty in reconciling the reality of life on this terrible planet with the idea of any kind of supposed God. In fact, as I understood that this oppressive arrangement was supposedly sanctioned by, and in fact had been created by God, I rejected religion as a mechanism of oppression and injustice in an unfair and discriminatory world. Furthermore as God was supposedly a male, the idea of "him" being loving was laughable, in fact I saw him, as I did all men, as my absolute enemy.

Such was the depressing scenario which unfolded before my eyes as I struggled through my 20's. I sought refuge and company where I could find it, mostly amongst the lesbians I had happened to meet, who were largely intelligent and interesting women as unwilling as I was to submit to the heteropatriarchal oppressive social order. I remained confused about whether I was truly one of them or not, but in the meantime I got what help and guidance I could in coming to terms with my troubled existence through counselling and secular "self help" courses. Although many of these courses acknowledged a spiritual basis for human life, they were never very clear on what that basis might actually be. I could never graduate past the unacceptable patriarchal concept of God which had been given to me by my family and church experiences.

Eventually I found other sources of guidance, often in quite unlikely places. My one relative in Australia was typical of many Australians: a big car, plenty of sport, meat and beer, a double garage and a holiday house up the coast represented the extent of their aspirations. The shallowness of such a goal, and the way my cousin adulated her uncommunicative, overweight husband and lazy obnoxious sons horrified me and guaranteed that I would outstay my welcome there within a very short time. However her neighbour, a laconic and humorous woman with an alcoholic husband, took an interest in me, and the few conversations and nice times we had together represented my first glimmer of hope that there might be a place for me in life where someone cared and life could be kind.

Then on a bus one day I met a recovered alcoholic who observed me intently listening in as he discussed

with a friend the paradox of someone who was supposed to be in the business of helping others (a priest) who couldn't help himself (he was an alcoholic.) He caught my eye as I glanced around at him, then asked me firstly for directions, secondly for coffee, and thereafter sent me metaphysical poetry through the mail for months on end. He had his own idiosyncratic notions about God and "the nature of the mind" and was the first person who ever gave me a description of God which I could accept, if not comprehend.

I can't remember it now but it had nothing to do with institutionalised religion (he used to say "funny isn't it, how the Christians are the ones with all the atom bombs?") He was adamant that God worked through the agency of humans, and could not be held responsible for all the evil in the world, much of which was carried out by people. At the time that was a revolutionary concept for me. I found more solace and wisdom about how to see this world and live in it in the company of this humble man, who made his living out of the garbage on the city streets, than I had found anywhere else in my life.

Subsequently I managed to graduate past the view that God was male and therefore deserving of my utmost hatred for the way in which he had set up the world. I came across a wonderful book by Jane Roberts called "The Nature of Personal Reality" which was my first encounter with a channelled work. It was the first book I ever read (apart from some feminist literature) which described much of my own personal experience accurately and accordingly it gave me some hope that perhaps there was an interpretation of life out there which, if I could ever find it, might enable me to make sense of everything. That book opened my mind to the idea of the existence of spiritual personalities and orders inaccessible to me which might nonetheless be part of the greater reality of life.

I continued to be plagued by the troublesome concept of God, which I managed to make tolerable by deducing that "he" simply must be "pure energy," or in any event, I concluded that that was the expression of "his" existence in the world. That seemed to me to be a fundamental element of reality which just "existed," caused and underpinned all life, and was devoid of any human (male) attributes.

At about that time I started driving taxis for a living, and I learnt much about people from my experiences with my passengers. Occasionally I would get into long and interesting conversations with them about "the meaning of life" which would give me new perspectives and ideas. I had one very significant encounter with a woman called Patricia Brennan who got in my cab one day. She was leading the movement to introduce the ordination of women within the Anglican Church at that time. We had an excellent conversation about the church and its workings, and I aired my dissatisfactions with everything to do with the patriarchal institution of religion, its hypocritical teachings and their unworkable application at length. In return she told me about a monastery some

hours up the coast from Sydney where there was a wonderful nun called "Sister Angela." This nun had apparently built the monastery with her bare hands, was an unconventional force to be reckoned with and Patricia thought I should meet her. She said Sister Angela was a wonderful woman whom I should talk to about my experience of Christianity, because she might be able to make it make sense to me.

It took some time before I got to the Stroud monastery, but in one of my intermittent travels out of Sydney I did stop there. Sister Angela was as good as Patricia's description, welcoming me with open arms and sweeping me unbidden into the guest quarters to stay for a few days. She had indeed built the delightful mud-brick monastery which the nuns lived in themselves, with no more resources than mud, straw, a tractor and recycled doors and timber. She was a wonderful and impressive character, possibly only the second person I had ever met who appeared to be truly living the Christian life as it had been taught by Christ. (Only one other person who professed to be Christian had ever come anywhere near that degree of authenticity to me - mostly I found believers to be unthinking, unquestioning, shallow and hypocritical in their purported beliefs.)

I stayed for a number of days at this haven of peace, tranquillity and relative spiritual authenticity in the middle of the Australian bush. I attended the services and found some solace in the very slender sense of belonging and community they gave me, though my dissatisfaction with all the trappings of organised religion remained. Sister Angela herself was food for my soul, patiently answering my questions in her own energetic and eccentric way, giving me tasks to do around the monastery, openly recounting stories from her own experience, and expressing unshakeable faith in God in the face of significant personal adversity. She provided me with at least one example of someone who seemed to believe rationally, full-heartedly and authentically in a religion which I myself found hypocritical, oppressive and unconvincing. That counted for something even if I saw little value in the ritualised religious practices, formalised writings and superficial observances of the vast majority of its adherents.

However the real value of my visit became apparent when another guest arrived, a sculptor from Sydney called Tom Bass. As we were sitting around the fire one night in our quarters Tom produced a copy of *The Urantia Book* and I was immediately intrigued by the sight of this huge blue book with its thin onion-skin pages. I questioned him about it and although I can't remember his response in detail, he told me that it was divided into sections explaining the universe and that he had resolved to at least read Part IV before he died, which was about the life and times of Jesus. Needless to say I was even more intrigued upon hearing this, and as he was quite happy for me to have a look at the Book, of course I picked it up and had a flick through to see what it was all about.

I can't remember the exact passage which my eye first

fell on, but I can most certainly remember the impression it had on me. My jaw dropped, my eyebrows headed ceilingward and I remember thinking “My God, what have we got HERE!!!!???” Whatever those first paragraphs were, I had never read anything before which spoke with such conviction and seemed so pervaded with a sense of absolute truth. I had never come across anything which recognised, validated and purported to explain in absolute detail so much of my own experience of life on this planet. For such a confirmed truth-seeker as myself it felt as if I had finally found the “holy grail,” something which really had the answers I had been seeking for all these years. It was a truly stunning moment.

Over the next few days I continued flicking here and there through the Book, savouring even its table of contents like a starving beggar suddenly finding herself reading the menu in a 5 star restaurant. From my first brief delvings into its pages, the thing which struck me most about it was the way in which it matter-of-factly and dispassionately discussed the often painful, difficult and unjust nature of human reality, with complete authority and yet without any moralistic judgments. Its air of factual uncontentiousness - not polemic in the least, dispassionate and overall quite neutral - was unlike anything I had ever read which purported to deal with the fundamentals of life on this planet. It was not judging, it was simply explaining. It was not condemning, it was just informing.

After all the theories, adjurements, instructions and hypotheses I had been faced with over the years through all my exposure to psychology, religion, political theory, counselling, fiction writing, feminism and of course my struggles with the Bible, this book made me feel as if I had come across an oasis after years of walking through a desert. The Book spoke without rancour and without speculation. It offered no directives, no punishments, no threats, it simply said “THIS IS HOW IT IS,” this is what you are doing here, this is what life is about, this is how the universe is organised, now take it or leave it - the ball’s in your court. The portrayal of Jesus’ life and teachings seemed complete, vastly superior and was far more acceptable to me than the biblical version which seemed so primitive and inadequate by comparison.

The significance of the Book’s effect on me can be gauged by the fact that even though at that time I was not working, was finding most of my clothing on the street, living in the back of my campervan to save rent and had no worldly possessions of great value, immediately upon my return to Sydney, I went to the Adyar Bookshop (which was the only place you could get it in those days) and paid the unthinkable sum of \$65.00 for my very own copy.

Even today that is a lot of money to me, but that was back on August the 18th 1986. The Book immediately became my most prized possession, and as I continued to flick through it I was constantly amazed by the candid simplicity and straightforwardness of the writing, even though many of its concepts were absolutely beyond me. Their very complexity was reassuring, as even though I

didn’t understand them, I could see that here at least was something which not only purported to be, and said it was, but also looked as if it really MIGHT be “the real thing,” pure and straight from the source. At the very least, it was vastly different to the watered-down, mythic and corrupted version of “reality” which the religious indoctrination I had received earlier in my life represented, and that alone made it worthy of attention.

However once I had it in my possession, I often felt somehow quite daunted by *The Urantia Book* and not quite sure what to make of it. On one hand I felt as if I “had the answer to life” within my grasp, and so I could relax knowing that all I had to do was read it one day - I didn’t have to look any further. But on the other hand I was perturbed by some of its statements, which seemed even more outlandish than some of those contained in the Bible.

The fact that the Book incorporated many of the characters and myths dealt with by the Bible could indicate a superior understanding and interpretation of these factual events. Conversely, if I took a sceptical view, perhaps this was nothing more than a very clever fraud, utilising names and stories commonly known to most Christians all the better to deceive us with. I showed the Book to one of my Christian friends to get his opinion, and he returned it to me with a warning to “be careful.” The notion that Adam and Eve were members of an “order” of celestial beings, while highly explanatory and therefore welcome in one sense, did read as much like science fiction as absolute truth. Were these statements really believable?

The description of the Lucifer rebellion also had significant explanatory power - however at the same time it could possibly be interpreted as no more than a complicated elaboration of a well-known story plucked from the Bible. And as I continued to read it, here and there I found the Book’s account of the structure of the universe quite disturbing - it seemed to represent little more than a version of the public service which could have been modelled on our civil government. It certainly seemed equally complicated and if it was as oppressive as I had experienced the organisation of this world to be then perhaps its teachings were not so welcome after all.

Ultimately I felt unable to evaluate the Book, and so I put it down, having established that there was a Foundation with an office in Sydney, and having resolved to read it properly one day. But for the moment I was unable to make it sit with the existing beliefs I had and which I was diligently trying to correlate with my observations of the world. I decided to put the book away, but not before I had written a note to myself saying I hoped I would not forget that this book contained the truth and urging myself not to forget to study it! I closed the note up in the Book and then faithfully stored it in various people’s garages while I continued travelling.

Whenever I returned to Sydney I would open it and flick through, never really grasping its structure but often writing paragraphs of commentary in the margins. My comments ranged from affirmations of my feeling that I

was reading the absolute truth about life in the pages of a wonderful revelation, through doubts at the credibility of some of its statements, to outpourings of angry expletives at the description of the various celestial orders - most particularly the respective roles of male and female entities in the higher planes of existence. (Many of these descriptions offended my feminist sensibilities and still do cause me some difficulty, as it seems that the men are the bosses all the way to the top, and I have great problems accepting that idea).

Ultimately it was another 14 years before I made contact with the Foundation office here in Australia, started going to the fortnightly study groups and then, at the beginning of 2000, made a consistent effort to read the entire book. Now, at the very end of the year, I can say that I have read the Book once in its entirety. Now that I have finished it and come to the end of the initial experience, the mystery and the expectation, it means that I really have to come to a view on what the Book really is. Do I really think it is a complex and clever fraud, or do I really think it contains the answer to every fundamental question I have ever had about "life, the universe and everything?"

The Book itself is clear and uncompromising. It demands that I take a position. There can be no dilly-dallying, no wishy-washing, no obfuscation, no partial acceptance, it either is what it says it is or it is not. There are no two ways about it. The Book itself acknowledges that a leap of faith is necessary, and provides a plenitude of highly detailed background information which explains why such a leap is necessary. That information is really sufficient - there is nothing which can entirely obviate the need for taking that leap. On the other hand I really don't want to be fooled by a persuasive fraud, and accordingly I have applied my analytical mind as carefully as possible to the Book's claims in order to see if I can trip it up on a point of internal consistency, as that is the only tool I can really use to test it rationally.

I fully intend to read it thoroughly a second time now that I am more familiar with it, to put it to the test again in the light of my increasing familiarity with it.

My conclusion, following my first reading, is that I cannot find anything suspicious enough to really force me to dismiss it as a load of unconvincing rubbish. So far, for every occasion where a leap of faith is needed, or some seemingly outrageous claim is made, the explanation suggested by the book itself COULD be true. Until I can satisfy myself that there is something in it which can ONLY be explained by fraud, rather than the mandate of the revelators, the limitations of my finite mind, or an unlikely but nonetheless true reality which I cannot hope to decide about, the possibility must remain that this Book is indeed what it says it is, and that in an incredible volume of 2,097 pages I do in fact have the answer to all my questions.

So far I have managed to perch on the fence, existing in a kind of safe no-man's land of half-hearted adherence to the Book's teachings. Perhaps, as it says itself, I am one of the modern thinking men and women who are reluctant to let religion truly take hold of me for fear of what it will do to me. Some days I feel committed to finding and following the Father's will for me and other days I rant and rail at the celestial beings, cursing in protest at the parameters of life and vowing I will never do what is required. If God has dictated that the parental model is to be a fact of life and "the way of the transgressor is hard" then I'll go down fighting and will gladly choose non-existence at the end. I still have my difficulties with many of the brute facts of animal life, which although perhaps made plainer by *The Urantia Book*, are not made any more palatable merely through improved understanding.

The Book is written so coherently that it is difficult to imagine such a work could be concocted by a group of arrogant American intellectuals, even though that possibility must be considered. But in the final analysis, the fact is that it COULD be true. That possibility alone, combined with the benefits I have personally felt from reading it, makes me feel that even if it can be lambasted for some of its most outrageous claims or criticised for its presentation of some topics - in fact even if it is a complete fake, nonetheless it's probably the most important book I have ever read.

The truth is that over this last year, as I have been reading this incredible book thoroughly and with full attention, my life has already been changed. My quest for understanding has been all but laid to rest, a few quibbling murmurs being virtually all that remain of the vast edifices of doubt which previously stood before me. Whether I SAY I accept and adopt the teachings of the Book or not, the fact is that reading it has already changed me. Even if it is a complex fraud, it makes more sense of life than anything else I have ever read. It has brought me a measure of understanding and a degree of peace and satisfaction which nothing else ever has.

At this point my conclusion is that even if *The Urantia Book* is a fraud, it can do nothing harmful to me. At worst it can turn me into a quaintly religious eccentric whose handicaps in pursuit of purely materialistic goals are even greater than they were before. I don't know if that is really worth worrying about. And at best the Book can do something for me, even to the point of laying my search for peace and understanding to rest by totally accounting for my existence here on this planet. In other words it can give me an answer to my most pressing concern.

I fully intend to read it thoroughly a second time now that I am more familiar with it, to put it to the test again in the light of my increasing familiarity with it. I may find this time around that my relatively few concerns about its veracity are fundamental enough to compel me to discard it. Conversely it may continue to grow on and influence me, and perhaps I will ultimately feel even more compelled to follow its teachings. Even if that doesn't happen, I

Contacts in Australia and New Zealand

If you would like your study group listed here, or if details have changed, please contact the Editor.

have read it once, it is part of my experience like it or not, and having discovered it, the fact is that I have been irrevocably changed.

These are all rather impressive consequences no matter what my rational conclusions about it might ultimately be, and they lead me to acknowledge that no matter what this Book actually is, it has the power to radically transform and benefit anyone who is compelled to read it.

Living with *The Urantia Book*

Trevor Hughes, Nth Queensland

Dear Editor,

When I went to my first *Urantia Book* readers' conference in Canberra the subject of "truth" arose. Some people started asking, "What is truth?" I got up after others had spoken and said: "There are 2 kinds of truth; there is dead truth and there is living truth." Knowledge is dead truth. This includes all books written including *The Urantia Book* revelations and that's all they are, revelations. Great revelations, yes! Mind blowing revelations, yes! But only a truth about a truth—a virtual reality.

Living truth on the other hand is much more subtle. It is something that we experience through *living*. For us who have chanced to peruse *The Urantia Book*, we need to learn to live with the book and that may not be easy. We are going to have to *live* the teachings in the book, accept it and not try to pass it onto others like some kind of hot potato. Let us not fall into the mistakes that some religionists fall into and think that the only truth there is comes only from their beloved books.

I can only hope that *The Urantia Book* never becomes a bible or a religion. The greatest teacher of all is *Life* so let's be honoured to live it. Life is good! May the Force be with us always.

In God, man lives, moves, and has his being; there is nothing which man can give to God except this choosing to abide by the Father's will, and such decisions, effected by the intelligent will creatures of the universes, constitute the reality of that true worship which is so satisfying to the love-dominated nature of the Creator Father. (p.22:5)

Bob Reynolds
Wheelers Hill, VIC
03 9562 0111

Gerhard Neuwiller
Boronia, VIC
03 9729 2523

Georg Sepp
St Albans VIC
03 9364 4667

Mr & Mrs C. Billington
Bairnsdale, VIC
03 5153 0319
cbilling@b150.aone.net.au

Joyce Turner
Bright, VIC
03 5756 2617

Trevor & Kathleen Swadling
Narrabeen, NSW
02 9970 6200
urantia@urantia.org.au

Valerie Billington
Baulkham Hills, NSW
02 9862 8749
valeriejo@optusnet.com.au

William Wentworth
Towamba, NSW
02 6496 7139
wentwrth@acr.net.au

Rita Schaad
New Lambton, NSW
02 4956 2272
scharita@castle.net.au

Rex Merrett
Bateau Bay NSW
02 4385 6596
rexmerrett@ozemail.com.au

Alex King
Narara, NSW
02 4323 6995
kings@myplace.net.au

Ralph Bartley
Nutral Bay, NSW
02 9889 2001
ralphb@cherry.com.au

Michael Symonds
Woodbury, TAS
03 6255 2066

Paul & Gosia Jaworski
Pooraka, SA
08 8359 1369
pmjaworski@optusnet.com.au

David Shannon
Clayfield, QLD
07 3256 1525
David&roz@ozemail.com.au

Joe Hausler
Stanthorp, QLD
07 4681 3872

Ken & Betty Glasziou
Maleny, QLD
07 5494 2503

Brian Squire
Hervey Bay, QLD
07 41284172

Trevor Hughes
Kuranda, QLD
07 4093 7105

Elizabeth Eaton
Victoria Park, WA
08 9355 1248

Peter & Sue Webb
Yanchep, WA
09 9561 1417

Edward & Nora Kendrex
Sorrento, WA
09 9447 1666
kenrex@opera.iinet.net.au

Vern Verass
Duffy, ACT
02 6288 4043
vern@designnd.com.au

Nigel Nunn
Belconnen, ACT
02 6214 1465
nnunn@ausport.gov.au

Marion Steward
Manukau City,
Auckland NZ
09 263 5800
joemarion@paradise.net.nz

Colin Hemmingsen
Wellington 5, NZ
04 476 4868
Rhmu@xtra.co.nz

Elizabeth Brown
Central Otago NZ
02 535 8232

Susan Hemmingsen
Karori, Wellington NZ
04 476 9949
susan@rhmu.govt.nz