

**Report of the Education Committee to the
1997 Triennial Delegate Assembly and General Council**
L. Dan Massey, Chairman

This document contains a history of Brotherhood/Fellowship efforts to mobilize educational services for the readership along with some commentary on constructive roles which the Fellowship might play within the developing readership community.

Forty-two years have now passed since the establishment of Urantia Brotherhood. During that period the role and vision of the Brotherhood's Education Committee has undergone almost as many changes as the Brotherhood itself. In the original Brotherhood constitution, the Education Committee was charged to "find, prepare, and train teachers of the Urantia Book" and to interest others in doing likewise. In addition, the original constitution charged the Education Committee to ordain Teachers of the Urantia Book.

The early committee took these mandates quite seriously and set about the creation of a Brotherhood School with a formal academic program leading to eventual ordination. As we look back at the training and teaching materials prepared by these early enthusiasts, their viewpoint of the requisites for training a religious teacher seem shockingly provincial. The work of the early Brotherhood School consisted, apparently, of examining paragraphs from the Urantia book, collected according to topic, and attempting to summarize the meaning of the paragraph in one's own words, while conforming the concepts to the standard established by the instructor, who was generally either Dr. Sadler or Warren Kulieke.

When we look at the limited record of these times we see little to indicate that the Brotherhood School students or their teachers were concerned with the relationship of the text or teachings to the larger body of human knowledge or to the cultural context of the revelation. The sole exception seems to have been some attempt to examine the Book in relation to the Bible and the Apocrypha. Anything a student acquired of ministerial, counseling, or teaching ability or training would have come from somewhere other than the Brotherhood School.

Eventually the Brotherhood School ceased operation, although a number of readers from the Chicago area had attended some of its classes and at least two readers are reported to have eventually graduated and been ordained as "Teachers." Agitation for reopening the school continued within some parts of the Brotherhood for a number of years; however, in 1976 the Education Committee, which was ultimately responsible for the school, announced in a formal position paper that the educational purposes of the movement would be better served by fostering enhanced educational programs in study groups and periodic regional, national, and international conferences. At the same time, the committee recommended amendment of the Brotherhood constitution to remove the provision for ordination of Teachers.

Concurrently with the operation of the Brotherhood School, there had evolved a tradition of holding an annual Summer Seminar at 533 Diversey, and it was on this tradition the committee relied as a vehicle for its constitutional charter. During the Forum and early Brotherhood years, summer picnics had been held on the shores of Lake Michigan. As these affairs came to include increasingly elaborate study sessions and grew in scope they were moved to the large front

meeting room on the second floor of 533. For several days each summer a number of students of the book would meet, by invitation, to ponder and debate the meanings of the book and, increasingly, the place of the text and its students in the larger world.

Beginning with the 1975 General Conference, and continuing with the 1976 International Forum, the Education Committee formally sponsored a multiday program of study groups and workshops open to any reader. With the establishment of the Summer Seminar at Lake Forest Academy (1979-80) and, subsequently, Lake Forest College (1982-92), the committee's focus became the conduct of these programs (during years when a General or International Conference was not held). Frequently, but not invariably, the committee also developed a significant part of the General Conference program (1975, 1978, and 1984).

The task of preparing Summer Seminar programs consumed most of the committee resources, although periodic attempts were made to provide a form of organizational outreach in which the most knowledgeable students of the book would attend regional conferences as presenters or participants to leaven the event. An unsuccessful attempt was made to launch a "Speakers' Bureau" to assist in scheduling such resources and most such efforts were limited by Brotherhood financial constraints. Only a few such "guest appearances" occurred under committee auspices.

In 1983, the committee held its "most popular" Summer Seminar at Lake Forest College, with over 160 in attendance. At the same time, the committee was apparently troubled that these events might be losing their educational focus in favor of a more conference-like atmosphere and determined to embark, for the next eight years, on a complete sequential study of the entire Urantia Book. During this period there was gradual decline in seminar attendance, prompting significant re-evaluation of the seminar program in planning for the 1994 event.

Attendance at Summer Seminars since 1976 has been completely open to all interested readers. The fact that these programs (except for 1976) were all held in the Chicago area somewhat limited the opportunities for attendance. In addition, the programs were mostly held during the week, so that full participation required attendees to take vacation time from work_time that might otherwise have been spent with family or in more recreational activities. It appeared that a considerable effort was being expended to develop and maintain this "educational" program, but that relatively few readers were being served thereby.

Throughout the Lake Forest period, the typical attendee would be someone with a serious, usually longterm, personal commitment to the Urantia book and the movement community. This generally included members of the General Council, TDA delegates, persons likely to be elected to the General Council, and other regionally active study group leaders and/or Society organizers. From one summer to the next, there would be a change of less than 20 persons in the roster of Summer Seminar attendees. In one sense, these people were selecting themselves, by their commitment to this process, as the teachers and leaders of the Urantia movement.

So it was entirely appropriate that the Education Committee seek to serve the needs of this group. Unfortunately, very many qualified persons who chanced to live inconveniently far from Chicago or who were unable to take the time or afford the expense of travel to Chicago were not

well-served by this arrangement. This was particularly true of the many readers in the far West and the international community. At the same time, the Brotherhood was undergoing the re-evaluation of its relationship to the Urantia movement that has led to its evolution into the present-day Fellowship.

Gradually, the decision-makers in the organization were coming to understand that its role should not be to direct what the readership did in service of the movement but to facilitate what the readership would do for the movement.

This changing attitude led to a shift in Education Committee priorities for the Summer Seminar program. Rather than hold the Seminar in Chicago, it was decided that it should be held in different parts of the country where there were significant numbers of readers. Rather than have the program defined and composed centrally, with speakers drawn from the small pool of chronic Seminar attendees, it was decided that program participation should be encouraged from the local group. Essentially, the committee determined that it would combine its efforts with the efforts of a local group preparing a regional conference to create a composite effort. The committee would offer its experience in planning and organizing educational programs to lighten the work of a local team.

By bringing councilors and TDA delegates to the augmented regional conference, we would foster a broadened exchange of ideas and understanding of the Book, as well as enhancing the connections of friendship between those working within the formal organization and those serving the revelation in other, local and regional capacities.

The first such Summer Seminar was held in 1994 in Oklahoma City. The Oklahoma group had taken responsibility for holding the Third Scientific Symposium and it was decided to combine this with a Education Committee program. The Education Committee worked with the Symposium sponsors and the local group to create an educational program that complemented the scientific program in theme and provided talks and workshops led equally by Oklahoma students and other movement resources.

In 1995 another, similarly planned seminar was held in Teaneck, New Jersey. Although this program was more modest in scope than 1994 (no Scientific Symposium was planned and this was not a TDA year), a similarly high degree of participation from the local community was achieved. For 1997 we have worked closely with readers from the Pacific Northwest to allow the current program to address regional needs and interests, while also serving as a prototype for portions of the 1999 International Conference. As part of this, we have also invited program input from the team working on the 1999 conference program. The 1998 seminar is tentatively planned for the Washington, D.C. area and will entail further programmatic exploration for 1999 as well as topical material organized with the collaboration of readers in the national capital region.

It is a bit early to evaluate the success of this type of organizational "outreach". So far we have learned that the concerns and attitudes of each region vary widely, and each seminar has presented its own unique requirements for integrating with local needs and desires. This summer the seminar has been given a far more "conference-like" flavor than ever before, without

compromising the opportunity for educational participation. I, for one, see no reason that, as it grows, our movement would not have annual large-scale conferences, with full educational tracks. On the other hand, considering the effort involved in such productions, and the limited volunteer resources of our movement, these events will probably not become so established for a number of years.

Concurrently with an interest in geographical "outreach," our committee also began to consider how it might serve the needs of readers with a less formally academic approach to mastery of the teachings. The Scientific Symposium, organized by an independent team of readers, had shown one type of such alternative program. The originators of these programs have indicated an interest in the continuation of such studies under the auspices of the Fellowship, and the Education Committee is considering how this obvious need and interest might best be addressed. There is a small scientific component in the current program and will likely be more a extensive one in the future.

For many years readers have urged greater recognition of the artistic and intuitive side of learning and spiritualization. We had thought it might be feasible to organize an "Artistic Symposium" at some future time, somewhat along the lines of the successful science programs. This summer's preconference artistic retreat is an initial undertaking to assess the feasibility of and reader interest in such a program. I hope to be able to report more fully on this matter in the future.

Some six years ago the Education Committee embarked on the Wrightwood Series of programs to promote in-depth study of topics from the Urantia book perspective. Three of these invited seminars were onducted, after which the participants prepared and presented program elements at International Conferences and published papers summarizing their discussions and deliberations. I believe this program has been quite successful. We have not been sufficiently energetic in the last few years in developing Wrightwood events and should work to facilitate additional programs of this type, possibly by following our own example and relaxing the amount of control we have insisted on in the past.

From time to time readers have urged us to prepare more general educational material based on the Book. Particular interest has been expressed in developing programs for parents to use in training their children in Urantian moral and spiritual principles. The Education Committee has always been most reluctant to embark on such an enterprise and has hesitated even to impose informal "educational" programs on children who attend seminars with their parents. This attitude stems in part from a belief that it is inappropriate to take advantage of a personal relationship to seek to coerce another to adopt one's own belief system. Children, of course, are especially vulnerable to parental authority and pressure. While parents have responsibilities for the education and training of their offspring to function effectively in society, and while the spiritual viewpoint is a major adjunct to this process, that obligation will not be well-served by coercive indoctrination.

We believe that the spiritual education of children is properly the province of parents in the home. While it is possible that programmatic material can be prepared to guide that process, yet retaining the requisite degree of ethical sensitivity, such an effort is almost surely beyond the

wisdom of a committee like our own, focused on the educational and intellectual process. In this respect we encourage the efforts of the ad hoc Family Life committee to draw on multiple sources of expertise and wisdom in working towards this end. The Education Committee will support the Family Life committee in its work, but recognizes the need for a broader perspective.

Another continuing concern of the committee is the role it should play in dissemination of information about the socialization of the revelation and the activities of the Fellowship itself. The constitutional charter of the committee has long been read very narrowly to apply exclusively to teaching the contents of the text of the Book. On the other hand, it is clear that the text does not exist apart from the movement, and that the traditions, history, and activity of the movement, while not changing the text at all, do affect the way in which successive generations of readers react to and interpret the text.

As a case in point, for almost eight years the Fellowship and its governing bodies and members have been the targets of an intermittent barrage of deceptive and deceitful negative propaganda foisted upon the readership by various Trustees of Urantia Foundation, acting in their official capacities, and by individual proponents of the Trustees' sociopathic and egocentric interpretations of their alleged rights and responsibilities under the Declaration of Trust. Throughout this entire period, the Fellowship has taken no actions (except when forced by Foundation-initiated litigation) to set the record straight or to instruct readers, confused and misled by the Foundation's activities, in the historical facts and organizational events of this period.

At the same time, increasing public awareness of the Urantia Book and its readership has begun to trigger opposition from the polar extremes of skepticism and fundamentalism. The well-known skeptical fanatic Martin Gardner has produced a highly colored and frequently inaccurate critique of the text and its origins. At the same time we can look forward to reading "UFO Cults and Urantia" from the radically fundamentalist Zondervan publishing house, if anyone can find a copy.

With the revelation and its socialization under three-sided attack from one of its own publishers, a popular science writer, and fundamentalist Christian cultists, the question of defense naturally comes to mind. One can argue, of course, that the appropriate response to this sort of thing is transcendence. However, organizations are not personal, much less transcendent beings. What one may do as an individual under attack does not necessarily apply to what an organization should do. In particular, the Fellowship must consider how its response (or lack thereof) to these events (and other, more serious ones surely to come) can best serve the readership.

If the Fellowship were a church or trying to be a church, there is little doubt that it would aggressively indoctrinate people in an "officially correct position" on all the matters raised by its opponents. On the other hand, if the Fellowship were a publisher exclusively concerned with printing an accurate text and not caring a bit for what happened next, it would be justified in completely ignoring these external events. I believe that the latter materialistic attitude, inherited by Urantia Brotherhood from years of close association with Urantia Foundation, is what has prevailed in our governing bodies and has been mistaken by its proponents for spiritual transcendence.

In actuality, the Fellowship is chiefly a social organization. It does not pretend to divine authority, although it may facilitate the acts of others in attempting to grow spiritually. It likewise should not ignore the social context of its work, although it may chance to publish a revealed text. As a social organization, the Fellowship could choose to help the readership learn the facts of the socialization of the revelation, just as it has chosen to help the readership understand the meaning of the text of the Book. Rather than present an official, dogmatic history and interpretation of events, the Fellowship could facilitate the work of other, interested parties in compiling this information and advocating their purely personal viewpoints.

At the same time, the Fellowship could serve the readership by providing a forum for the public discussion of these significant events.

I do not think such an initiative would contravene the purposes of either the Education Committee or the Fellowship itself, and invite you, as a councilor or TDA delegate, to consider your response to these thoughts.

Submitted for the Education Committee.

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