



UAUS Messenger

The Newsletter of the Urantia Association of the United States

Winter 2004

UAONE Study Group Planning and Strategy Meeting

Dear friends in IUA,

In June 2003, the Council of Local Presidents & Vice Presidents (CLP) of UAUS, consisting of the presidents and vice presidents or their proxies from each local association in the United States, passed a resolution that UAUS form an Ad Hoc Committee for the Formation of Study Groups. The UAUS Governing Board has appointed the entire Urantia Association of New England (UAONE) to function as this subcommittee. I also wish to add that the International Service Board (ISB) has also created a study group committee that will be ongoing, chaired by Rick Lyon of GLMUA. On behalf of UAONE, I have been asked to forward the following message.

Appreciatively,
Lee Armstrong
President, UAUS

* * *

Dear Urantia Book Reader:

On Sunday, January 18, 2004, eleven readers representing all of the New England States gathered in Canton, Massachusetts, for the Urantia Association of New England's Study Group Planning and Strategy Meeting.

The meeting was quite fruitful. After a period of explaining the goals of our study group project, we all sat down and essentially brainstormed ideas for developing study groups, working with exist-

ing readers and finding new readers. (Prayer was certainly one of the foremost ideas.) We actually ran out of time but we documented these ideas. Because this meeting was so successful in generating ideas and observations we have already decided to hold another planning and strategy meeting in March. The thought is developing that this may become an ongoing process as we begin to implement some of these ideas.

Why are we trying to support the formation and nurturing of study groups? Jesus said to Peter: "Feed my sheep, take care of my flock." Jesus' comments to Peter should be a guiding light for our group, a proper attitude to being of service.

Other readers in New England have expressed a desire for assistance and direction in forming or finding study groups. It was mentioned that The School of Meanings and Values is getting a lot of calls inquiring about "How do we start study groups? Many of these were international calls."

We have been cautioned to "Be wary of too much organization. Many people will shy away from bureaucratic organizations. Readers are very independent minded. Avoid the overuse of rules, guidelines and too much structure."

In keeping with the Urantia teachings, "We will not give advice unless asked." We do not intend to impose ourselves on groups or individuals if we are not wanted. We are simply offering our services.

A common pattern in the formation of new study groups is cross-pollination—readers with study group experience sharing their knowledge and experiences

by traveling to assist in the formation of other study groups. Individually we must remember, "The Father must be at the center of our lives and our work."

"Forming a study group can be as simple as one person sitting down and sharing the book with another reader. This is one of the reasons for traveling to attend other groups, especially in the formative stages."

"Readers in New England must not feel stranded and alone. We need to create spiritual kinship by sharing ourselves with each others and by bringing people together." "Study groups provide an opportunity to share insights from varied backgrounds and experiences." "Participants develop a sense of family. This will truly create a brotherhood of readers."

Why participate in a study group? "Readers are influenced by their previous experiences, and can develop misunderstandings of the teachings in isolation. By inter-association, you can challenge your assumptions. Other readers can gently correct erroneous thinking within a study group." "There is such a thing as group wisdom, and even new readers can bring forth new insights." "There are two ways to read the papers. One can read the book linearly, quickly; or slowly and with deliberation and insight." "Study groups provide the opportunity to share ideas and ideals; sharing 'makes it real'."

"There is a time for personal study. For some people it is necessary for them to study by themselves. This is a great point, because we need to respect the needs of individuals who desire to study by themselves."

"On the other hand, some

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people are either so busy (or have complex domestic situations) that the only time they have to read the Urantia Book is in a study group.” “Study groups are the first step in socializing the teachings, moving beyond personal, independent study.”

“Study groups can be a great way for people to be introduced to the book. As a spawning ground, one of the purposes of study groups should be to facilitate introducing the book to new people.”

“Study groups provide an opportunity to make study aids available that many readers are not aware of, and represent an environment in which to train teachers and leaders.”

What makes a successful study group? “Some people get passionate when they discover living truth - and need to share that passion.” Unlike much of the world at large, “Study groups offer warmth, acceptance, and love. People will come back as long as they are accepted.”

“The Urantia Book was meant to be shared one on one. This is the very best way to share the book. No mass marketing.” “There is a readiness today that wasn’t there twenty, thirty years ago.” “Plant seeds, like Jesus did when he was the ‘the scribe of Damascus’.”

“The foremost thing we should focus on is attaining the fruits of the spirit. This is what we should all get out of the study group. We should actually live what we are learning.”

“Jesus always thought that the person standing in front of him was the most important concern. Likewise, when a new reader calls with questions, you should take plenty of time with them. This is extremely important in that it can build an initial bond which may last forever.”

“Good study groups and their leaders create spiritual gravity. When the spiritual bonds are strong, people will come.”

What are the basics of starting a new study group? “Start with a host who is willing to commit to regularity, consistency, and lon-

gevity.”

“When you get together for the first time, plan the night that is best for the most, as long as it works well for three or more people. Plan your day, time schedule, and frequency - then stick with it. A consistent schedule and a regular location are important. Plan to keep the schedule and don’t skip.” This way participants and potential participants do not get confused, and others can join in when they are ready.

“It is best to plan on a weekly meeting and maintain this schedule. Some people will come once a month, others will come every week. But oftentimes some will feel they are missing out if they only come once a month, and eventually they will meet with you every week.”

“Establish a time frame for starting, stopping and socializing. Don’t overstay your welcome. Two hours is typically best.” “Let the group chose a format for their studies.”

“When reading something really heavy, take a break with some lighter reading from the Jesus papers.” “When dealing with newer readers who have come to your study group, you may want to ask them where they would like to focus.”

Since we barely scratched the surface during this meeting, it became obvious to us that the Study Group Planning and Strategy objective must be an ongoing process. Additionally, only hours before this gathering we were notified that the Governing Board of the Urantia Association of the United States (UAUS) appointed UAONE to serve as an ad hoc committee to study ways to foster and nurture study groups. We gladly accepted this position, knowing that our efforts would have the support and attention of a much wider audience than the New England Readership.

The clearest path to initiating new study groups is for those of us who have participated in study groups to attend the early meetings of a new group, sharing our insights and experiences. Further, we have contact with many readers,

and can help connect the readers in geographic proximity who express a desire to begin socializing the teachings. The members of UAONE’s governing board, and several other longtime New England readers are committed to assisting upon your request.

We thank you for your interest, and welcome your comments and suggestions. Please let us know if you wish to be on our mailing list and if you live in the New England region.

Phil Taylor
Vice President, UAONE

P.S. For more information on study groups, please contact the following UAONE representatives:

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*“If, therefore,
you serve me
with a whole heart,
make sure that you are
devoted to the welfare
of my brethren on earth
with tireless affection.
Admix friendship
with your counsel
and add love
to your philosophy.
Serve your fellow men
even as I
have served you.
Be faithful to men
as I have watched
over you....”*

[2049:1]

Comparing Conversion Narratives from Evangelical Christianity and a “New” Religion

[Note: This is a paper I wrote for a graduate seminar in content analysis—a way of analyzing text quantitatively to answer a question one has about the authors of the text or the audience of the text. I spent several weeks agonizing over a topic for one of the required papers, but nothing excited me. Finally, in the middle of one sleepless night, I thought of using Saskia Praamsma’s book *How I Found The Urantia Book and How It Changed My Life* and comparing those stories to how evangelical Christians talked about their conversion experiences. I got really excited about the project, and enjoyed it tremendously. In addition to writing the paper, I also had to do a 10-minute presentation to the class, so my fellow students also got a little exposure to *The Urantia Book*. Several people approached me after class wanting to know some more about the book.]

I thought about rewriting the paper in a less formal style for this publication, but I decided if you can read *The Urantia Book*, you certainly can understand this paper! The results surprised. Since I sampled only a small number of texts, you could argue that the results don’t reflect reality. You be the judge. If you have specific questions, my email address is at the end of the paper, along with some further comments.]

* * *

Most people remain in the religion that they were raised in—even if that religion is atheism (Bryant & Lamb, 1999). However, about 10 percent of the population become disenchanted with their native religious understanding and seek answers and understanding from other religious traditions. When they experience a wholesale acceptance of a different religious worldview, they are considered converted. Their conversion experiences, which represent a paradigm shift in their worldviews, may reflect elements from both their religious backgrounds and their newly assumed religions (Alexander, 1983; Bryant & Lamb, 1999). Analyzing the first person narratives of conversion experience may produce insight into the elements of particular religions that appeal to converts.

Literature Review

Conversion experience is typically a western and particularly Christian phenomenon. In many places, people embrace more than one religion and don’t feel any contradiction between them. Some religions, such as Zoroastrianism, do not allow conversion. A person may assume the philosophy and worldview of Zoroaster, but an outsider will never be inducted into the rituals because membership is through birth only. On the other hand, Judaism and Hinduism both accept converts, but they do not actively promote conversion (Bryant & Lamb, 1999).

The Christian worldview teaches that there is only one way to God, and that is through Jesus. Although

some Christian churches mitigate this harsh message in some ways and respect the beliefs and teaching of other religions, many evangelical Christian churches promote the conversion experience as a true sign of one’s being saved. Thus the personal testimony of each individual is important because it verifies his/her status as truly saved and is used as a means of witnessing (proselytizing) to others about the joy and grace that comes from accepting Jesus. These stories of personal conversion are part of Christian literature, with such stories dating back to the times of the New Testament and the early Christian church.

Researchers have studied these conversion stories and found that they usually follow a pattern that includes certain elements. Alexander proposed that the process of religious conversion included four identifiable steps (Alexander, 1983):

1. Complacency Shattered: Usually this experience is ordinary in an objective sense. It may include illness, social evil, the experience of an insight, or a surprising conclusion to a logical process. What is different is how the narrators interpret or describe the experiences. Sometimes it may involve some supernatural experience such as a vision that confuses them.

2. Struggle between Two Worlds: Usually a sudden grasping of a new philosophy does not occur. What happens instead is that there is a period in which the person struggles between choosing one over the other. This period is marked with confusion and anxiety. Some narrators may characterize the struggle as between good and evil, possibly personified as God and Satan.

3. The Miraculous Moment: This is the actual moment when the person experiences a sudden interior revelation, sometimes experienced as supernatural contact or intervention.

4. The New Consciousness: This stage is characterized by a radical change from previous consciousness. The narrators experience the world as a safe rather than hostile place. They feel energized for a new role in the world and strike out in new directions, enjoying a new life of liberation.

A more detailed model of conversion was proposed by Rambo and Farhadian (1999). The seven components in their model may occur in a particular sequence or may cycle through different sequences several times.

1. Context: This is the overall environment in which change takes place and may include the world at large, the individual’s circle of friends and family, or interaction between the two, such as local governments and religious institutions.

2. Catalyst for Change: Something happens externally or internally that changes the narrator’s former consciousness and sets him/her seeking.

3. Quest: The narrator begins to actively seek a new answer to life’s predicaments.

4. Encounter: The narrator meets the advocate of the new answer in a particular setting, such as a private interview or a religious gathering.

5. Interaction: After the conversion experience, the

person continues to interact with the religious movement. This interaction can include partaking in rituals, changing personal relationships, or employing the specific rhetoric of the group. In addition, new converts may assume new service or leadership roles in the religion.

6. Commitment: The convert makes a public pronouncement of his/her transformation.

7. Consequences: After the conversion experience, the convert reports that life has changed in some way.

Purpose and Research Question

The 20th century in the United States was a time of religious turmoil as many people began to question their traditional religion and turned to other religions to resolve their religious longings. In Christianity the evangelical movement preached a more active kind of relationship with God, and many evangelical ministries sprang up that were not associated with particular denominations (Bryant & Lamb, 1999). However, other people felt that Christianity somehow did not answer their questions or provide a worldview that was consistent with scientific discoveries and their personal experiences. They turned to other kinds of religions, welcoming various gurus and religious leaders from the East, examining primal ethnic religions, and in some cases creating new religions. Most of these movements were led by charismatic leaders who preached or wrote on new insights and actively sought new converts (Bryant & Lamb, 1999).

In the 1930s, mostly unknown and unadvertised, another religious movement began with a new revelation, which appeared in print in 1955. Unlike the other movements of the 20th century, however, this movement had no religious leaders, no charismatic person promoting the religion through the force of his/her personality and dynamism. What was different about this movement, was that its revelation came in the form of a huge 2097-page book, *The Urantia Book*. Although over 250,000 books have been sold in a variety of languages since 1955, at present the movement still does not promote a particular creed, and it eschews the formation of specific rituals, other than reading the book and forming study groups. Having no flamboyant proponents, the movement has not received a lot of publicity. Since it does not consider itself a religion, it has no formal or official name. Devotees call themselves simply “Readers of *The Urantia Book*.” For the purposes of this paper, I will refer to this group as “The Urantia movement” and will use the word “Urantia” or “Urantian” in the same way I use “Christian.”

Most of the members of this new religious movement in the United States have grown up in a Christian culture, where conversion narratives can be heard on the TV, radio, and the Internet, as well as on the street corner or in their home church. Many Urantians report having been reared in traditional Christian homes. Therefore, when they make the decision to embrace this new religion, to shake off their former beliefs—or disbeliefs—do they experience the same stages of religious conversion that are reported by converts to

Christianity?

The purpose of this research project was to analyze the conversion narratives of both evangelical Christians and Urantians to discover what the conversion experiences have in common and how they are different.

Method

To compare these two kinds of narratives, I did a quantitative content analysis. From the Rambo and Farhadian (1999) framework, I developed a coding system for specific elements reported in conversion narratives. These include the catalyst for change, the identity of the purveyor or advocate, the setting of the conversion, and the consequent interaction in the religion. In addition, I wanted to explore whether there were textual signals of conversion specific to each religious group, so I counted the number of references to deity and to written revelation in each narrative.

Sample

The sample was assembled using a multistage approach (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 1998). First, since this study compared two specific kinds of conversion narratives, I chose only those narratives that were relevant, namely from evangelical Christian converts or Urantian converts. First, I located a convenience sample of Urantian narratives published as a book, *How I Found the Urantia Book and How It Changed My Life* (Praamsma, 2001) which contains 324 conversion stories varying in length from one paragraph to several pages. The narrators in these stories were ordinary people. None of the narratives are from people who would be recognized as celebrities outside the movement. The collection itself is organized by year of conversion. I chose to sample texts equally from the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, so as to approximate the same years of conversion as in the Christian stories that I assembled. Including only narratives from people who lived most of their lives in the United States, I analyzed a sample of 44 narratives of Urantians for this study.

The sample of Christian conversion narratives was also a convenience sample, but not as easily located. Printed collections of Christian conversion narratives usually include well-known people—either religious or public figures—who wrote lengthy conversion stories for specific publication. Collections are available from various time periods such as from 1600 to 1980 (Alexander, 1983). However, I wanted to find texts that were similar to the Urantia narratives: solicited under similar conditions, of similar length, from approximately the same time period, and from similarly ordinary people who had lived in the U.S. most of their lives. Therefore, I turned to a number of Christian websites on the Internet where people have posted their individual stories. These websites, accessed between February 14 and March 4, 2003, are listed in Appendix A. I analyzed a sample of 42 Christian narratives for this study.

Procedure

I developed a codebook and trained the coders in several sessions. First, we reviewed the codebook, coded several texts individually, and then compared results. We adjusted the rules to clear up ambiguities. Then we each coded several more texts from each group and again compared our results. We discussed the differences and clarified our rules until we reached agreement.

Specifically, the process followed this procedure:

1. The coding unit was the whole narrative (Krippendorff, 2002; Riffe et al., 1998), except where the actual conversion took place in several related sub-events. Then the sub-events themselves were unitized and numbered SE1, SE2, SE3, etc.

2. Each sub-event was coded for setting of the encounter (religious gathering; private setting; encounter in a public place; encounter at a private non-religious gathering, or unspecified).

3. Each sub-event was coded for the identity of the advocate/purveyor who directed the narrator toward a new religious solution (acquaintance/friend; stranger; family member; spirit being; media; none).

4. Each whole narrative was coded for catalyst for change (internal, external, not mentioned).

5. Each whole narrative was coded for consequent interaction in religious activities (rituals, rhetoric, roles, personal relationship, unspecified).

6. The number of times deity-words were used in the narrative was counted.

7. The number of times written revelation words were used in the narrative was counted.

The context unit for steps 1, 4, and 5 was the whole narrative; for steps 2 and 3 it was the sub-event, and for steps 6 and 7 it was the sentence (Riffe et al., 1998).

Results

After coding, all the results were tabulated for comparison and are reported in Table 1 at the end of this report.

Catalyst for Change

Conversion narratives usually report some disturbance in the narrator's life that provides a catalyst for change. These catalysts were coded as external (EX), internal (IN), or not mentioned (NM). External events included elements in the life circumstances of the person, including drugs, marital discord, unemployment, illness, etc.

"My ex-girlfriend and I broke up after a long relationship, and I was really tore apart inside . . . I started getting heavy into smoking pot. I would look forward to going home just to get high." (EX)

Although the narrator might mention internal factors, if external factors were mentioned, then the catalyst was coded as EX. On the other hand, internal events included things such as searching for God or the Truth, or feelings of loneliness, despair, or anguish. IN was coded only if no external events were mentioned:

"God was just an entity that was always there in

the background, but that I never spent much time thinking about. . . . Eventually I actually began looking at other religions." (IN)

Some narratives did not mention a catalyst for change, and they were coded (NM).

The two groups differed noticeably on this category. Christians reported many more external catalysts (29 compared to only eight for the Urantians). Urantians on the other hand, reported mostly internal catalysts (26), as well as a large number not mentioning any catalyst (ten). Many of the Christian narratives described in lurid detail external problems such as sexual abuse, homosexuality, unemployment, broken relationships, drinking, and drugs, whereas only a few Urantian narratives mentioned these things—and usually not in such detail.

Setting and Purveyor/Advocate

Conversion stories usually begin with some background information about how the narrator grew up and what events led up to the conversion. This background narrative may make up more than half of the narrative. The part of the narrative that tells of the conversion itself is usually signaled by words such as "finally," "one day," etc. When the conversion itself took place in one step, it was easy to code. But many narratives reported a conversion that took place in several steps, separated from each other by change in both setting and people present. Thus we unitized sub-events in narratives so that we could code setting and purveyor/advocate in each sub-event. More than half of the narratives in both the Christian and Urantian groups contained only one sub-event as part of the conversion process. Similarly, only one narrative from each group reported four sub-events. Urantian narratives had a total of 69 sub-events (including the single ones), while Christians had a total of 71 sub-events.

Setting

Sub-events were coded into five categories for setting. Religious gathering was coded when the sub-event happened at a public or private gathering of more than two people for the expressed purpose of engaging in a religious discussion or worship. This could include church services and study groups. Private setting was coded when only the narrator, alone or with one other person, was in a setting where others were not invited and could not enter. This could include the narrator's home or car or a room in his/her house. Public setting was coded when the sub-event took place in public where there were other people around—even if they did not interact with the narrator. The public setting had to be non-religious in nature. Some examples of these include attending a business seminar in Chicago, visiting a booth at the Whole Earth Fair, and walking on the street. Private gathering was coded when the sub-event took place when people were gathered together for non-religious reasons in a private home. For example, one narrator told of meeting an unknown couple at a child's birthday party. Unspecified was coded when the narrator did not make clear exactly when and where it hap-

pened. For example, one narrator reported simply “In 1984 a friend of mine mentioned a book that she thought would interest me.”

Both religious groups reported sub-events that were set in private/solitary settings as the principal setting (34 for Urantian, 37 for Christians). But Christians reported 22 sub-events that took place at religious gatherings, while Urantians reported only five. Nine Urantians reported sub-events taking place at private gatherings, while only two Christians did. Only five Urantians and three Christians reported unspecified settings.

Purveyor/Advocate

In religious narratives the idea that a religious solution or alternative exists is usually suggested by someone. This advocate may be a friend or acquaintance, a stranger, or a family member. We coded for acquaintance or friend when it was indicated by the narrator, or it was indicated that the person was unknown at initial contact, but contact continued and a relationship grew over some amount of time. We coded for stranger if the advocate was unknown to the narrator before the contact and remained unnamed in the story. In some cases the person was reported as “never heard from again.” However, sometimes the narrator reported contact with what they perceived as a real person in that they could physically feel, see, or hear them—but it was not a physical flesh-and-blood person. These persons were coded as spirit beings. For example, one narrator spoke of clearly hearing an audible voice while driving in his car alone. Another reported feeling hands on her back that kept pushing her toward a church.

In some narratives, instead of another person, some form of media pointed the way. For example, some reported seeing a Bible on the table or finding *The Urantia Book* at the library. Others saw posters or advertising for a church or study group. Several Urantians heard about the book on a TV program called *Strange Universe* or on a talk radio program.

Finally, some narrators reported only a strong internal desire to seek God or to find a particular book. They narrated these stories making it clear that they did not physically hear this voice, but experienced it internally. In other cases, no purveyor or advocate was reported. The person just decided to turn to God. In all these cases we coded NO purveyor.

Urantian narrators reported an acquaintance or friend as advocate in 42 sub-events, while only 19 Christians reported them. Christians more often reported NO purveyor, indicating that it was an internal urge that urged them to make a change (22 sub-events). Also, Christians reported eleven sub-events with spirit beings, while only one Urantian reported contact with a spirit being.

Consequent Interaction in Religious Activities

After people experienced a religious conversion, their lives and their participation in religious activities changed. Specifically, people reported that they participated in religious rituals, sought specific roles in

the religious movement, or initiated or continued personal relationships with people in the movement. We coded the change as rituals when the narrators mentioned attending worship or study groups or reading scripture/revelation privately or with others on a regular basis. We coded roles if they mentioned assuming a specific leadership position, such as study group leader, deacon, or minister. The most common personal relationship reported was finding a spouse that embraced the religion, but they occasionally reported that they turned away from old friends or simply found new friends who were involved in religion. We coded either kind as personal relationship. We coded for rhetoric by how they told their story. For example, Christian rhetoric used specific words, such as *saved, born again, miracles, sin, forgiveness, accept Jesus, Lord, Satan, the devil, angels* or quoted passages from the Bible. Urantian narrators similarly used specific words, such as *Midwayers, Thought Adjuster, angels, Mansion Worlds, Urantia, Nebadon, Central Universe* and quoted passages from *The Urantia Book*.

The category Unspecified was coded when the narrator asserted that his/her life changed in other ways, but did not elaborate or mention specific categories. Additionally, if a narrator did not claim any change at all, Unspecified was coded because by the very fact of making their conversion testimony, they were asserting that something changed. Unspecified in this respect was coded only two times. Narratives often reported more than one subsequent religious interaction and thus could be coded in all five categories.

The two groups differed significantly in two categories. All Christian narratives evidenced Christian rhetoric by frequent references to such concepts such as being saved and God’s grace. However, only four Urantian narratives could be identified as using specific Urantian rhetoric. On the other hand, 41 of the 44 Urantian narratives reported participating in religious ritual (in most cases, reading the book), whereas only 27 of the 41 Christian narratives reported participation in any kind of ritual (including reading the Bible). Both reported some change in personal relationships, nine for Urantians and eleven for Christians. The difference in these groups is that the eleven Christians reported that they found Christian spouses, whereas most of the nine Urantians reported that they developed new friendships. For the other categories, the two groups reported similar numbers of assuming roles and unspecified.

Use of Deity Words and Revelation Words

Deity words included all those words that referred to the deity or some form or understanding of deity. Included were *Father, God, Jesus, Christ, Holy Spirit, Supreme Being, Lord, Michael, Savior*, and many others. Revelation words included the titles of the written revelation (Bible, *Urantia Book*) and words or phrases that specifically referred to that revelation or part of it, such as books of the Bible or specific papers in *The Urantia Book*. In the Urantian narratives, we also counted references to the Bible. *The Urantia Book* was not mentioned in the Christian narratives.

The two samples differed significantly on these two counts. Urantians mentioned deity words 130 times, compared to 529 times for Christians. All Christian narratives mentioned deity at least three times, while ten Urantian narratives did not mention deity at all. The narratives with the highest number of deity-words contained 43 for the Christians and only 17 for the Urantians. By contrast, Urantians were much more likely to use revelation words, mentioning them 237 times compared to only 113 times for the Christians. Only two Urantian narratives failed to use revelation words, compared to 15 Christian narratives that did not mention revelation.

Implications

All the narratives analyzed for this study exhibited at least some of the components of religious conversion that Rambo and Farhadian (1999) outlined. At the same time, the differences between the two groups indicate that people reported conversion experiences that differed in ways influenced by the new religion that they embraced. For example, since the Urantia movement does not promote rituals except reading the book and studying it with others, the revelation was mentioned more and almost all narrators reported continuing to read the book. On the other hand, Christianity promotes worshiping with others and testifying to others, as well as reading the Bible. Therefore, those narrators reported a mixture of ritual activities in which they participated.

Christian narrators were more likely to report external conditions that caused them to seek religious answers, while Urantians were much more likely to report internal conditions. These differences may reflect several things: First, evangelical Christian outreach often targets those people marginalized in society by external conditions such as drug and alcohol abuse, violence, unemployment, etc. In addition, the traditional way of giving Christian testimony emphasizes how the Lord can save people from the most horrendous circumstances. By contrast, the Urantia movement has no unified ministry, is spread by word of mouth, and does not emphasize the power of the faith to release the convert from material struggles. Second, different people are attracted to each movement. Since the principal means of participating in the Urantia movement is reading a huge book that requires dedicated study to understand it, people seeking immediate release from external conditions will not be attracted to it.

Both religions believe in spirit beings that may contact humans and influence human events. A notable difference between the two groups, however, was the presence of spirit beings in the conversion narratives, with 15 percent of the Christian sub-events reporting spirit beings, compared to less than two percent of the Urantian narratives. This difference may reflect the selection process of the webmasters and book editor rather than a real difference between the two groups.

Content analysis may prove useful for analyzing narratives of people's religious experience, providing

data that can be compared to draw inferences about different religious motivations and attractions.

* * *

[Post-script: This study helped me to clarify in my own mind how people who read *The Urantia Book* are different from people who are attracted to evangelical Christian groups. Most readers are called to the book because they have internal conflicts and unanswered questions. We cannot preach *The Urantia Book* as a solution to severe external problems unless we are willing to offer the social support and services that help alleviate those problems. A person who is undergoing severe repercussions from bad lifestyle choices cannot settle down into reading a 2097-page book (or even a shortened Part IV). So if we truly want people to recognize the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man, we must preach it and live it—which has almost nothing in common with trying to give everyone a book. You know Jesus' words on the matter:

"You cannot reveal God to those who do not seek for him; you cannot lead unwilling souls into the joys of salvation. Man must become hungry for truth as a result of the experiences of living, or he must desire to know God as the result of contact with the lives of those who are acquainted with the divine Father before another human being can act as the means of leading such a fellow mortal to the Father in heaven. If we know God, our real business on earth is so to live as to permit the Father to reveal himself in our lives, and thus will all God-seeking persons see the Father and ask for our help in finding out more about the God who in this manner finds expression in our lives."
[1466:2]

I welcome your comments: cmp9q3@yahoo.com.

Carrie Prentice
Missouri, USA

*Such a genuine
religious experience
far transcends
the philosophic objectification
of idealistic desire;
it actually
takes salvation for granted
and concerns itself only
with learning and doing
the will of the Father
in Paradise.*

[1141:3]

Table 1: Results of Content Analysis

	Urantian	%	Christian	%
Number of Sub-events				
1 SE only	24	54%	22	54%
2 SE only	15	34%	9	22%
3 SE only	4	9%	9	22%
4 SE only	1	2%	1	2%
Total narratives	44		41	
Setting of Sub-events				
Private/Solitary	34	49%	37	52%
Public	16	23%	7	10%
Religious Gathering	5	7%	22	31%
Private Gathering	9	13%	2	3%
Unspecified	5	7%	3	4%
Total Sub-events	69		71	
Advocate/Purveyor by Sub-Event				
Acquaintance/Friend	42		19	
Stranger	2		4	
Spirit Being	1		11	
Media	14		9	
Family Member	5		6	
None	5		22	
Consequent Interaction				
Rhetoric	4	9%	41	100%
Ritual	41	93%	27	66%
Roles	7	16%	4	10%
Personal	9	20%	11	27%
Unspecified	23	52%	16	39%
Words				
Deity	130		529	
Revelation	237		113	

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What is termed the “birth of religion” is not directly associated with so-called conversion experiences which usually characterize religious episodes occurring later in life as a result of mental conflict, emotional repression, and temperamental upheavals.

[1131:0]

Appendix A
 Christian Websites Used as Sources for Conversion Narratives
 Accessed February 14, 2003—March 4, 2003

<http://alb007.christiantestimonies.org/testimony.htm> (8 stories)

http://www.jesse.comm-unity.net/my_papers/fall194/youth/conversionstory.html

<http://www2.netdoor.com/~terry135/testimony.html>

<http://www.ccwonline.org/testimony.html>

<http://www.thecornerstoneconnection.org/view1article.aspx?350>

<http://www.thecornerstoneconnection.org/view1article.aspx?78>

<http://www.born-again-christian.info/cheryl.htm>

<http://www.christian-faith.com/testimonies/cori-healing-from-sexual-abuse.html>

<http://www.christian-faith.com/testimonies/singlemotherfindsgod.html>

<http://www.christian-faith.com/testimonies/keithlongtin-falselyaccused.html>

<http://www.christian-faith.com/testimonies/sherrie-hypnotherapy.html>

<http://www.christian-faith.com/testimonies/fromdrugstohearingGod.html>

<http://www.christian-faith.com/testimonies/jason-gray.html>

<http://www.christian-faith.com/testimonies/dorrie-powerofgod.html>

<http://www.christian-faith.com/testimonies/family-tragedy.html>

<http://www.christian-faith.com/testimonies/godsmercy.html>

<http://www.behindthebadge.net/jimcop.html>
 (there were several stories from this site)

<http://www.breadsites.org/in1100h.htm>

<http://web.mit.edu/fwchen/www/testimony.html>

<http://www.geocities.com/markwaltersoklahoma/testimony.html>

<http://www.christian-faith.com/testimonies/marriageandlifesaved.html>

<http://www.christian-faith.com/testimonies/unwanted.html>

<http://www.christian-faith.com/testimonies/finallyfree/html>

<http://www.christian-faith.com/testimonies/religiouspride.html>

<http://www.christian-faith.com/testimonies/fromdrugculturetojesus.html>

<http://www.christian-faith.com/testimonies/fromunbeliefandphilosophytojesus.html>

<http://www.christian-faith.com/testimonies/fromsatanismandsexto redemptioninjesus.html>

Set free from evil—coming to the lord after much hurt
 Delivered from homosexuality
 Healed from depression at the brink of suicide
 Trusting God for a mate

<http://www.christian-faith.com/testimonies/tanya>

Spiritual Loyalty in Human Experience

“The ultimate goal of human progress is the reverent recognition of the Fatherhood of God and the loving materialization of the Brotherhood of Man...” [1608:1]. Every individual who knowingly or subconsciously responds to the indwelling light and spiritual life forces of Jesus Christ is a member of the family of God. On the mansion worlds, we will learn that loyalty is the fruit of an intelligent appreciation of universe brotherhood; one could not take so much and give nothing. As you ascend the personality scale, first you learn to be loyal, then to love, then to be filial, and then may you be free; but not until you are a finaliter, not until you have attained perfection of loyalty, can you self-realize finality of liberty [435:4].

As future universe citizens on the worlds to come, we must first face the challenges we encounter as spiritual journeymen in **this** life. Through the integration of peace, goodwill, and harmony, our fondest hopes of developing a sincere spirit helps to create the discipline of loyalty. Of course, for the purposes of which I speak today, spiritual loyalty is also being faithful to those personalities of authority under whom we as cosmic citizens are obligated to defend or support. In *The Urantia Book* a Melchizedek teacher makes it clear that while loyalty is admirable it cannot be built upon feelings. The meanings and values derived from loyalty can only be brought about by those experiences which enhance insight and create spiritual awareness and growth (1104-1105).

I have found that experiences are there for the taking. The prayers that we pray, the affirmations we make, all serve as spiritual probes for the creative imagination of the mind. In the Bible it says, “Every imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth” (Genesis 8:21, KJV). Spiritual loyalty in human experience constantly evolves as Solomon is taught to know God and serve him with a perfect mind and willing heart. “For the Lord searches all hearts and understands the imaginations of thoughts” (I Corinthians 28:9, KJV).

A Melchizedek of Nebadon teaches us that *[i]n physical life the senses tell of the existence of things; mind discovers the reality of meanings; but the spiritual experience reveals to the individual the true values of life [1098:1].*

Presently, and in years past, I have seen my life and the lives of others seem to receive an abrupt start upon the occurrence of some critical event. Happy, wonderful things or tragic, unbelievable ones create questions of “where do we go from here?”

Feelings help some to be aware through intellectual perception how to think and believe. The dictionary definition of feeling, when unqualified in the context, refers to any subjective reaction, pleasurable or unpleasurable, that one may have to a situation, and usually connotes an **absence of reasoning**.

I have been blessed at this point and time in my life to not be totally derailed by my feelings, but it wasn’t always so.

When you don’t feel well there is the tendency to become sensitive and irritated, and to interpret something the wrong way. Prayer really helps me to be more understanding and less selfish. Prayer helps me to see

things as they really are regardless of what I hope they would be.

Being on the sidelines does have a few advantages. I watch a lot of TV at night. One of my favorite programs is National Geographic. As I watch those programs on the races of man, from the Australian outback, to the Himalayan peaks, to the jungles of South America, I am amazed, enthralled even, to see and learn the state of backwardness (compared to what I have experienced) that exists in these almost forgotten people. Their customs and traditions have not changed in hundreds of years. In the last twenty-five years or so, many of the people have just made contact with the outside world. Different people, different places—but the common denominator among them all is the desire to **understand** their environment. For the vast majority there is no modern medicine or education. They live almost oblivious to modern standards of civilization. The value of what something is worth depends on how best it helps or hinders the group’s survival. What is so interesting is that while we all developed along the same time line, these races of people have remained separated and lost in time by our standards. As technology advances and we are better able to observe the world around us, I get goosebumps knowing that we are being observed in the same way.

I better understand *The Urantia Book* wording or phrasing that is sometimes used to describe material levels of human advancement. Social principals, goals, or standards—that which is more or less desirable for growth—are not **value judgments placed on the spiritual souls of men**.

Loyalty to particular regimes, to national or traditional customs, may prohibit the immediate change of the many even in this age. Everything must evolve gradually, in its own way and time.

Think about this. No matter how dire the situation, or how backward we see the civilization, the Thought Adjuster experiences all the challenges and becomes better equipped to expand the spiritual consciousness of mankind. The one who has the greatest advantage may be thought to be the superior, but the one who is able to grasp the true significance of spiritual love may become greatest among them all.

God is truly amazing. Only he can make the crooked straight.

Little insights such as this, even if based on something I watched on TV, are still an experience that I was meant to have. I can't go to those places but I can take advantage of what is given to me. My Indwelling Spirit is willing to help me be creative in discerning truth.

I have also found that a large part of my life has been like my earlier experiences of trying to read and play music.

While I have managed to pull it all together to produce a good sound, the rudiments yet escape me. Exploring and reproducing the themes of harmony comes easily. Theory, like higher levels of math, do not formulate in my mind. I just can't see it, I can't picture it, but I can hear it, and I know if it's harmonious.

Until I read *The Urantia Book*, I was not aware the Adjutant Mind Spirits were encouraging, guiding, and molding me. In spite of all the shortcomings, or what appeared to be lacking, they too neutralized errors and

stimulated truth. They help me to perfect harmony in how I function. I know this because I have changed; I seek balance in my life. I can feel if a thing is right or wrong. I don't always make the right decision, but something deep inside urges me to want to know righteousness.

The urge to play and create beautiful music has brought much meaning to my life.

I had to audition for the section and chair I would occupy in the high school band. I fared well, and won a high seat in the clarinet section.

Later in the year, the orchestra was lacking a violist, and I was asked to learn to play. I progressed well and joined the orchestra in a short time. One day the teacher was helping me with a difficult place. "Play that A in the seventh measure again, it sounds flat." After nine years of playing an instrument, it was discovered that I couldn't read the music. I learned by remembering the shape of the note and its place on the instrument, but I didn't know the names of the notes. I also played by ear. It had been my goal to learn correctly but the notes appeared as so many dots and symbols scattered across five lines and spaces on a page. I just had to learn because my mind kept being influenced by music's beauty. Without being able to read notes, my conscious self somehow experienced the ways and means of changing those dots and symbols into the value of musical expression. I still have the Letter that I won for musicianship at graduation.

Isn't it interesting that with just seven basic notes, sharps, and flats we still haven't run out of music, and the great musician *The Urantia Book* speaks of is still to come. He or she will have the talent to bring many people together in harmony.

I strain to hear the melodies of truth that ring out in *The Urantia Book*, the Bible, or other people's inspired thoughts. I desire to believe, trust, and have faith in the reality of a **first mind**, the First Source and Center, the author and finisher of this song in my heart. "*Love is the greatest of all spirit realities. Truth is a liberating revelation, but love is the supreme relationship*" [1608:1].

I truly desire to be spiritually loyal to The Paradise Father, even though many of the rudiments of application still elude me. My unseen friends are helping me to become spiritually creative as I strive to become like my creator, and through the imagination of my heart, I will become that which I most desire.

The process of integrating spiritual and material realities in the mortal life reveals that although we can have many beliefs, a truth or two, and some apparent facts, they don't necessarily lead to truthful spiritual conclusions.

An Archangel teacher shares this truth in the discussion on disappointment.

We are often taught to view crisis as punishment, denial, or a transgression.

As a child I was taught that, "You do not **need** anyone." That statement didn't ring true but I didn't feel comfortable enough to ask for more insight. My lack of experience, constant disappointments, and struggles of mortal living locked me into the same conclusions of those who taught me.

Step by step, I progressed to learn that it is not that we don't need anyone, but that we will *suffer less through sorrow and disappointment, first, by making fewer personal plans concerning other personalities...*

[555:4]. It is our perceptions that cause us to take ourselves too seriously. It may appear that the seriousness of our problem is greater than someone else's, but no one owes us anything.

Over time, it really has been my **disappointments and failures** that have helped me make the decisions to want to be loyal to God. Many people respect the Father because they fear him. I am loyal to the wisdom of Jesus because I have developed the faith to love and respect him. Today is not forever, yesterday is gone, and tomorrow has not yet appeared.

How we respond to spiritual cues determines whether we will continue to make beautiful melodies and **live** or throw it all away to negative selfish feelings.

As I attempt to work through great material, emotional, and physically crippling dilemmas, I find great joy in attempting to remain loyal to those attributes found in the Fruits of the Spirit (2054:3).

“Do you love me now?” becomes the clarion call of many in crisis.

We call upon God and everyone who will listen. To the church it may be: what is your obligation to me as a member? To family: how will you support me? To friends and society: what is your social duty to me?

In spirit-filled individuals, loyalty will abide. Having realized God, we will strive to find ways to be like Him, in spite of circumstances. All anyone can do is the best that they can. It is a lesson that we will learn.

During these tests that try men's souls, as spirit citizens of the realm, our most disappointing disappointments will become our greatest blessings (555:4).

Fear will give way to trust.

Worship and service will fill our hearts with desire.

Comfort Ye, Oh my people, and the King of Glory will come in.

As I walk my path, I continue to pledge allegiance to spiritual realities. Loyalty to Jesus has been a step-by-step, hard-won process of wants vs. needs. Some people wonder if they can have a relationship with him too. I know that they can.

I also have not seen this Creator Son, but I have been blessed by faith to know him.

I was attracted to God because someone said that he could transform my life. I remain attracted to him because he has.

My limited vision often leads to a partial understanding of things, but in retrospect I have experienced my thoughts changing, adjusting, and being better controlled. If I, as one person, can experience the spiritual wonder of a changed mind, so can others.

It is a spiritual reality that I am one with the presence of the Paradise Father.

I heard a minister on TV the other day state that “as Christians we must **change our thinking** and realize that we are Spiritual Ambassadors of Jesus Christ to the world.”

In the Bible, the prophet Isaiah states:

“Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth.

The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind,

But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create” (Isaiah 65:17-18, NIV).

To those beliefs, truths, and spiritual insights, I say Amen, Amen.

Voyette Perkins Brown
North Carolina, USA

A Chat With My TA Friend

*The color of Azure
is the light of my Savior's eyes.
In the moments of my awakening,
through the quickening in my soul,
this light has become my life.*

*The Lord in all of his mercy
bathes my soul with his love—
Even as my body and mind disagree
one with the other,
and there is little compromise,
For the toil of the years
is wearing down
the building blocks of life.*

*The greatest need
is that of more Faith
and Courage.*

*Only God is good.
His righteousness perpetuates
all the potential of the potentials,
And Yea, my soul does know
that His compassion fails me not,
and I will not be left barren.*

*Through every cry of pain,
tears of joy spring forth as well.*

*Faith reveals
that I have completed the circle.
We are complete,
for I came from God
and already He has taken me
back into Himself.*

*Intricate pulsations weave
through the imaginations
of my heart—
As little by little, piece by piece,
the world and the things of it
are being slowly stripped away.
I thought that I would want
to fight harder to hold on.*

*Then I discovered: there is no rush
to walk new paths,
Just rediscover what was missed
along the old ones;
To see now what was impossible
to have seen then—*

*Like the color of Azure
in the light of my Savior's eyes,
the color of His joy,
the light in my soul.*

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Benet Rutenberg

GLMUA is pleased to announce

URANTIA 2004

This summer's IUA study conference under direction from UAUS and IUA will be held in the beautiful Chicago suburb of River Forest, ten miles west of downtown Chicago and eight miles south of O'Hare International Airport. The campus of Dominican University, which is superbly suited for study and reversion, will host a variety of activities designed to challenge and uplift all students of the Urantia Book. The conference theme is:

"The Mind Arena of Choice...Open the Portal of Eternity."

Early registration post cards shall have been mailed by publication of this article. Interested persons may contact us by e-mail at iua2004@urantia.org, or by phone at 773-525-3319. Copies of the early registration form may be obtained at www.urantia.org/iua/pdf_files/Urantia2004.pdf.

GLMUA will have its annual membership meeting and elections on March 6, 2004 at 11:30AM at Urantia Foundation, second floor, 533 Diversey Parkway, Chicago, IL 60614. There will be a carry in/pot luck luncheon immediately following. The conference committee will meet for its monthly meeting just after the luncheon. All members and readers in the GLMUA area are encouraged to attend. E-mail RUTABL@aol.com for questions, and use GLMUA or URANTIA in the subject heading.

Warm regards to all,

Benet Rutenberg, GLMUA President