

Preparing for Spontaneity

The Necessary Work to Avoid Sounding Crazy

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We have a problem in the Urantia Community. We are in danger of becoming an isolated tribe on an isolated world. If we do not constantly adapt the language we use to the cultures around us, then we will further isolate ourselves and fail to bring the true teachings of Jesus to the world.

I am a philosopher by training. My favorite course to teach was Introduction to Philosophy. Introductory courses translate a subject's ideas into common language, while in-depth courses teach you a new language to better develop these ideas. I liked the idea of taking what might literally be a lifetime of work and dedication and cutting it down to one hour's worth of reading and one hour's worth of lecture. You have to provide enough of a hook to each subject that it might grab the attention of a student, enough depth that it will show the worthiness of dedicating a career to its study, enough hints at future studies to give those students paths forward, but also enough of a structure and closure that the 99% of students who listen and are not fascinated can still recall later in life, "Oh, yeah, utilitarianism. It's great for group decision making but I think it's flawed as an individual moral system."

I believe that the same structure ought to be applied to *The Urantia Book*. We are so enthused by these teachings that we want to treat every person as if they are the one person in one hundred who are going to latch onto it and fold it into her life's pursuit. We end up doing a disservice to the vast majority of people who we could leave with a vague notion about *The Urantia Book*. "Urantia. Yeah... Direct relationship between people and God, an organized universe. I've met some people who are into that. They're normal."

That should be the first goal for every outreach effort we have: Urantia Book students are normal. What "First, do no harm" is to the Hippocratic Oath, we should have a similar warning, "First, do not sound crazy."

Every faith discussion is different. There is no value in outlining a step-by-step checklist. The audience is different if we are in front of a small group, a large classroom, a single stranger, or a couple of friends over dinner. I do, however, advocate that we can all have starting points, go to phrases that help us get into the proper mindset for discussing Urantia teachings with non-Urantia students.

In order to prepare for these discussions, we need an honest examination of our beliefs and our linguistic pitfalls, an examination of our audience and what our goals for that audience is, the languages that other communities use, and the linguistic bridges to connect your Urantia teachings to your audience. This paper and the associated presentation will be a glimpse of one person's attempt to conquer this path.

The Weird Words We Weave

The Things I Believe Sound Crazy

In 2013 the Foundation, Fellowship and Association coordinated to hire a Media Training Team to come to Chicago and give us a brief analysis of our pitfalls as a community. Psychology tells us that we get seven seconds to make a first impression. What can we do or stop doing to sound normal for seven brief seconds? One lesson: stop referring to yourselves as human beings! We do it all the time at Urantia conferences and in Urantia publications. "Human motivations" "Human rationale" "Human relationships" From the Fellowship's FAQ: What is *The Urantia Book*? "It is a book about our world. It describes the origin, history and destiny of *human beings* in a friendly and well-ordered universe that is sustained and upheld by a loving God." Most people do not refer to themselves as "human beings." We refer to ourselves as "people." By calling people "humans" it is as if we are differentiating ourselves from humans, "humans" are a THEY not a WE. Of course, we don't mean to come across this way. We say "human" to differentiate ourselves from the Divine. When we say "Human Relationships" we don't mean "Human Relationships vs. Our Relationships" but instead we mean "Human Relationships vs. Divine Relationships." And in Urantia circles, this goes without saying. This is part of the linguistic shorthand that we have developed over the last 60 plus years. But if we make the simple linguistic mistake of conflating "Urantia conversations" with "religious conversations" then we run the risk of sounding crazy to the general public.

Here is one more example: What do we mean by "Readers" or "Urantia Readers?" We mean it literally, we READ a book. But in a spiritual discussion, the general American public hears "Reader" as "Palm Reader" or Horoscopes, or some other mystic corner. By calling ourselves "Readers" the general population unconsciously categorizes us with a host of fraudulent mystics. We only get seven seconds, which is not enough time to differentiate what we say and what we mean. We get dismissed because of one word we use all the time. At your next conference, count how many times your hear the word Reader in one day.

I believe in Midwayers; in Thought Adjusters and Thought Controllers; in Major Sectors and Super Universes; in Machiventa and Trinity Teacher Sons, etc. The list could fill a few pages. But each of these terms is a barrier between myself and my audience.

So what do I believe? Can I take the basic tenants of my faith and translate them into the standard language of my culture, in my case American English? I believe we each have a direct relationship with God. I believe that life continues after death, but that death adds nothing to our souls. I believe that a God knowing person is compelled to serve others. I believe that science, philosophy and religion are all paths to Truth, and they do not contradict each other.

We all need to sit and think about what we believe and state it in standard language. We need to have these beliefs at the tips of our tongues, because the next time your cousin asks you “What is Urantia?” you need a less crazy answer than “Planet 606 of Satania.”

Just What We Need: A System to Further Divide People

Identifying Our Audience

There are innumerable ways to categorize a large population, including education, wealth, age, health, or religion. These divisions can be useful for organizational planning, but are less useful when we get down to the individual. That said, I propose the following divisions of the entire world’s population. Furthermore, I believe our Urantia organizations should dedicate different outreach programs for each of these groups:

1. Those who have neither heard of *The Urantia Book* nor been touched by one of its teachings

Here is you base group. They probably have heard “Urantia-like” teaching in their life, but perhaps they have not yet had that “A-ha!” moment. I am stealing this example from Jeff Wattles who might be stealing it from someone else, but there are two versions of Jesus that are emphasized in Christianity. One is that of Jesus on the Cross who is sacrificing himself for the sins of the world. The other is the Jesus who cleansed the temple, who chased away all those who stand between Man and God. It is this second Jesus who Dr. Wattles would emphasis in his classes, and for me this was a great A-ha! realization about the ways I can reach American Christians. Surely they knew of Jesus and the temple, but perhaps they had not yet had it emphasized as an important part of their own religion.

There are many of these A-ha! bridges in our culture. Whether it's Norman Lear Sitcoms or Star Trek or J.J. Benitez or basic moral philosophy. It's out there in the ether, it just has not yet been shaped in a religious way. We can help do this.

2. Those who have never heard of *The Urantia Book* but has been touched by one of its teachings

There are millions of people who are grasping onto some Urantia-like teachings and are searching for significance in what they have grasped. They might have heard Pope Francis say, "Thank you to those who have brought us joy with their art, with beauty, which is the path to reach God. Beauty brings us to God. And a true testimony brings us to God, because God also is the truth, He is beauty, He is goodness, and a testimony given to serve is good, it makes us good people, because God is good. It brings us to God. All that is good, all that is true, all that is beautiful brings us to God. Because God is good, God is beautiful, God is the truth." (This is from his speech in Philadelphia September 27, 2015, but really just search the internet for "Pope Truth Beauty Goodness" and you will get a lot hits.)

Or they might have read Rob Bell say, "... there's something in the air, we're in the midst of a massive rethink, a movement is gaining momentum, a moment in history is in the making: there is a growing sense among a growing number of people that when it comes to God, we're at the end of one era and the start of another, an entire mode of understanding and talking about God is dying as something new is being birthed." (What We Talk About When We Talk About God, chapter 1, but if you are only going to read one Rob Bell book, read Love Wins.)

These ideas have taken root in their minds and they are thinking about them, they are praying about them, they are searching for others who can help bring meaning to these truths. And we can help. We can be like Jesus and ask questions and help them vocalize these believes they already have and to *own them* as important truths in their lives.

3. Those who have heard of *The Urantia Book*

Maybe it is their friend or sister who studies this book we love. Maybe they heard a podcast about it, or saw something on the internet. Maybe they met a random person at a coffee shop or live in Boulder, Colorado. What do they think about *The Urantia Book*? Do they think we are normal? Or weird? Or hippies? Or mystics? Or a cult? (from the Media Training

experts, “Don’t say Cult. Don’t ever say the word Cult. If they use the word, don’t repeat it. Don’t ever say Cult.”)

These are people who have heard of *The Urantia Book* but for some reason have never read any of it. What is that reason? Most likely it is simply because they have not had enough interactions with *The Urantia Book* yet. People who work in sales say it is process to get to sale and the process involves three positive interactions with the idea of making the purchase before they buy (or maybe five interactions or maybe twelve depending on who you ask and what you are selling.)

Your conversation with this person is another opportunity to leave them with a positive interaction with the idea of “*The Urantia Book*.”

4. Those who have read a little of *The Urantia Book*

There have been about one million Urantia Book distributed, but only about 25,000 unique names on our database rolls. Even discounting those of us who own a dozen books (my wife and I each own about a dozen or so) there seems to be a large number of people who have read some of *The Urantia Book* but have never contacted the organizations or pursued the Urantia Community.

And they are out there. My wife was reading *The Urantia Book* in a coffee shop and was approached by a man who owned a Urantia Book but had never read much of it, even though he liked it. A few weeks later they meet again and he had pulled out his book and was reading it again. Those updates have continued for the last year, but he has never showed up for a study group.

5. Those who are active Urantia Book students, but not involved in the Urantia Community

There is a group of unknown size who are active students of *The Urantia Book* but who nonetheless do not engage the Urantia Community. A 2012 survey conducted by the Foundation, Fellowship and Association found that 65% of respondents had never attended a study group. And these were people who were engaged enough and invested enough in *The Urantia Book* to be willing to take 15 minutes to respond to an internet survey!

6. Those who attend Study Groups

“Study Groups” here is an open term I mean to symbolize “minimum engagement in the Urantia Community.” Maybe they attend a physical study group, or participate in a internet group. Or perhaps they are engaged in online discussion forums or attended yearly events if not weekly events. But these are the people we know.

7. Those who are active in Urantia Community

These people attend seminars and conferences. They might serve on an organized committee from time to time. They vote in elections and let their opinions be known.

8. Hyper-Active in the Urantia Community

These people will donate a significant amount of time to a Urantia project. They might serve on Councils or Governing Boards. They are willing to donate time each week for years at a time toward the Urantia Community.

9. Ultra-Active in the Urantia Community.

These are our organizational leaders who are going to dedicate part of nearly every day to the Urantia Community for years at a time.

Note: This seminar is not focused on groups 4 -9. But I would parenthetically add that our organizations should encourage people to freely move between these groups. We need good leaders to step forward a volunteer to be Hyper-Active or Ultra-Active for a set amount of time and not be pressured to never leave. There will always be a small group who will never step down, who will trade project for project and will dedicate their lives to the promotion of *The Urantia Book*, and we need those people! But a healthy community has shared leadership responsibilities and a mosaic of voices. It takes active dedication to maintain this rotation of leaders that our organizations rely upon.

If we are to have a random conversation at a coffee shop, or to engrain Urantia teachings into non-religious scenarios, or to give a religious presentation that may or may not mention *The Urantia Book*, we need to know our audience and what our goals are for that group. Obviously things are different for each individual, but as a group I suggest that our goals should be, first, not to sound crazy, and second, to move them “up” one level. If they have never been touched by a Urantia-like teachings, then try to feed them an “A-ha!” thought. Our approach changes when our goal is not to “talk about *The Urantia Book*” but instead to highlight some higher ideas and ideals that they are already involved with and naturally our word choice will change as well.

If they have that “A-ha!” thought, then let them know about *The Urantia Book*. This is perhaps the place of biggest error for us and where we need the most training. We meet someone with a great Urantia-like thought and we mistakenly try to convert them into full fledged members of the Urantia Community. We skip too many steps! Just as a good teaching might float over one person’s head but become an “A-ha!” thought for another, so too must reading *The Urantia Book* be *their idea that they have for themselves*, not your idea that you hammer into them. This is where Introduction to Philosophy training comes into play. You don’t get one hour’s worth of reading and one hour’s worth of lecture. You get seven seconds. That’s how long you get to make a first impression. If you master that first seven seconds, you might get another thirty.

You have seven seconds to provide a hook that will grab their attention and leave them wanting more information, but at the same time provides a complete story that might stick in the heads of the 99% who will not get hooked, so they can recall it if they ever hear the word “Urantia” again. And you must not sound crazy. (“Urantia. Yeah, I met one of those people once. They seemed normal.”)

And if you are given another thirty seconds, can you speak for that long about basic Urantia teachings without going overboard? You need a beginning, middle and end, a hook that might attract more questions, but a complete narrative for those who do not.

Did it work? Do you get to speak some more? Now you get three minutes. Now what do you say? My advice is to stop talking about *The Urantia Book* and instead tell a personal story that connects one of your core believe to real life. I am a parent and so I go to a story about faith and love and parents and children, but it is different for everyone.

This is basic outreach training. It is the duty of each of us to prepare for this, and the duty of our social organizations to provide basic training.

You Talk Funny

Group Outreach

Yes, the Urantia Community has developed our own shorthand language, but so too has each religious community and interest group. No one person can be expected to learn all of the special languages. The best we can do is to learn a few that interest us. After years of hosting booths at book fairs, mind/body/spirit expos, and other events where we hope we might spark some interest, our community has some idea of which events bare the most fruit. I have been told that our most successful expos are UFO/Alien/SciFi events. These are our people! Alas, I do not speak that language. But, I do speak Philosopher. I often describe my path to knowing God in the terms of Descartes. Because I speak Philosopher, I also speak Atheist, which is to say that I can speak to those who value Reason and Logic above Faith. I am also an Air Traffic Controller so I also speak that language (short sentences. no excessive details or words. nouns are probably unnecessary. I have never met an adverb that I like.) I recently joined our local Presbyterian Church and am learning to speaking their Christian dialect.

And Christian is an interesting language, very different from the Philosopher's language. I attended this Bible study where they have us read selected passages from all over the Bible. So they took this passage from the Book of Isaiah, which if you haven't read it lately, take it out and give it a spin. It's kind of like a scene from the Godfather where God is the mean, violent mob boss, and Israel is the humble baker. God says, "I am powerful and have you seen all these people I have killed, these tribes I have crushed, these lands I have scorched? But you, Israel, oh, you are my friend. I want you to be happy, and your children to feel safe, because you are my friend. Of course, if your weren't my friend I could devastate you and your entire line and mangle you until you are nothing but dust. But I won't do that, because we are friends, so how about a nice sacrifice every now and then?"

So in this Bible study, the paragraph they have us read just has God saying, "You, Israel, oh, you are my friend. I want you to be happy, and your children to feel safe, because you are my friend." Which seems completely out of context. But in this church's language, it's not really. The church emphasizes the new testament and Jesus' concept of God as a loving Father in Heaven. And when you have this revelation, you naturally read the prior scriptures in the light of this loving father. It's hard to turn off a revelation. And, yes, it's hard to turn off *The Urantia Book* when I read the Bible, but this is about learning their language. This is their vocabulary.

We all speak different cultural languages. And with practice, we can learn to translate.

Building Short Bridges

Start Translating

Short bridges connect small distances. Big bridges can span a much larger gap, but they are also harder to build and present unknown challenges. In Prague there is one bridge called the Suicide Bridge, because it's the only bridge in town that is high enough that if you jump off of it you will actually die. It's safer to build small bridges. You and your life do half the work. Yes, it is too much to ask any one person to bridge all communities, but you move freely between several communities throughout your day, from your profession to your church to friends to your hobbies to your Urantia studies. You need only to build small bridges to connect these groups and the languages you already speak.

Building a bridge is not an easy task for everyone. Some can do it naturally, but for most it is a conscious task that takes practice. Do you know the language of your own faith? Do you know the language of your audience? Can you translate between the two? Are you willing to practice?

If nothing else, most everyone speaks generic American English. If you can translate key tenants of your faith into standard language, then you can communicate your inner life with others.

The Urantia Book tells us that, "The doing of the will of God is nothing more or less than an exhibition of creature willingness to share the inner life with God..." (Paper 111 Section 5) If you believe, like I do, that our relationship with God leads to service to others, and if doing God's will is to share our inner life, then can we agree that part of our service to others involves sharing our inner life with them?

I could cut and paste quotes from *The Urantia Book* making the case that Jesus naturally followed a method similar to the one discussed in this paper, that he was the one person able to bridge all communities, that he went out of his way to learn the cultural language of all communities, that he would probe people to determine where they were in their spiritual life and to offer them a small lesson that would lift them to the next level. Instead, I'll end with four paragraphs from Paper 132 "The Sojourn at Rome" Section 4 "Personal Ministry." It says in one page what I would in ten.

Jesus did not devote all his leisure while in Rome to this work of preparing men and women to become future disciples in the oncoming kingdom. He spent much time gaining an intimate knowledge of all races and classes of men who lived in this, the largest and most cosmopolitan city of the world. In each of these numerous human contacts Jesus had a double purpose: He desired to learn their reactions to the life they were living in the flesh, and he was also minded to say or do something to make that life richer and more worth while. His religious teachings during these weeks were no different than those which characterized his later life as teacher of the twelve and preacher to the multitudes.

Always the burden of his message was: the fact of the heavenly Father's love and the truth of his mercy, coupled with the good news that man is a faith-son of this same God of love. Jesus' usual technique of social contact was to draw people out and into talking with him by asking them questions. The interview would usually begin by his asking them questions and end by their asking him questions. He was equally adept in teaching by either asking or answering questions. As a rule, to those he taught the most, he said the least. Those who derived most benefit from his personal ministry were overburdened, anxious, and dejected mortals who gained much relief because of the opportunity to unburden their souls to a sympathetic and understanding listener, and he was all that and more. And when these maladjusted human beings had told Jesus about their troubles, always was he able to offer practical and immediately helpful suggestions looking toward the correction of their real difficulties, albeit he did not neglect to speak words of present comfort and immediate consolation. And invariably would he tell these distressed mortals about the love of God and impart the information, by various and sundry methods, that they were the children of this loving Father in heaven.

In this manner, during the sojourn in Rome, Jesus personally came into affectionate and uplifting contact with upward of five hundred mortals of the realm. He thus gained a knowledge of the different races of mankind which he could never have acquired in Jerusalem and hardly even in Alexandria. He always regarded this six months as one of the richest and most informative of any like period of his earth life.

As might have been expected, such a versatile and aggressive man could not thus function for six months in the world's metropolis without being approached by numerous persons who desired to secure his services in connection with some business or, more often, for some project of teaching, social reform, or religious movement. More than a dozen such proffers were made, and he utilized each one as an opportunity for imparting some thought of spiritual ennoblement by well-chosen words or by some obliging service. Jesus was very fond of doing things — even little things — for all sorts of people.

