

The Standard Reference Text of *The Urantia Book*

This essay is intended to be a somewhat fuller description of the origin and purpose of the Standard Reference Text (SRT) than was contained in the official report of the Standard Reference Text Committee published at the conclusion of its work in 2009. If successful, it will more clearly answer the question “What is the Standard Reference Text?” than previously available articles. The present work is not the product of the committee, though I have freely made use of the committee’s original report as needed in what follows.

The other committee members have my deepest appreciation for the endless hours of tireless effort expended on the creation of the SRT.

--Merritt Horn

The Standard Reference Text Committee members and their organizational affiliations when the committee was chartered:

Chair: Seppo Kanerva, former Chairman of the Board of Trustees of Urantia Foundation.

Liaison-chair : Marvin Gawryn, member of the Executive Committee of Urantia Book Fellowship.

Marilynn Kulieke, Trustee of Urantia Foundation

Nancy Johnson, former General Councilor of Urantia Book Fellowship.

Jay Peregrine, Executive Director of Urantia Foundation.

Merritt Horn, member of Urantia Book Fellowship.

Introduction: The background of the work of the SRT Committee

In the years since the first edition of *The Urantia Book* was published in 1955, editors have made a number of minor changes to the text to standardize spelling and to correct perceived typographical errors. Inadvertent typographical errors have also periodically occurred, constituting a second general class of variants from the 1955 edition. Containing approximately one million words, it is not surprising either that there were errors in the first edition or that there have been occasional errors in later editions, but neither of the two current publishers were satisfied with the situation, so they decided to work together to eliminate known typographical errors and to create a standard text which both could publish with the assurance that it was as close as possible to the text originally composed by its authors.

So, in 2007, the two publishers of *The Urantia Book*, Urantia Foundation and the Urantia Book Fellowship (Uversa Press), together created a joint editorial committee of six longtime readers including several with extensive experience in typesetting and printing *The Urantia Book* and other works. This committee was tasked with:

1. Documenting the differences between the 1955 first edition of *The Urantia Book* and later editions by both Urantia Foundation and Uversa Press;
2. Determining the nature and purpose (if intentional) of each known change in the text;
3. Recommending whether each intentional change should be retained or the text returned to its original published form;
4. Standardizing spelling and capitalization as appropriate;
5. Reviewing and resolving various formatting questions which have been raised over the years but which do not involve the text itself;
6. Examining the book's Table of Contents and proposing a format consistent with the reasoning used in other text and format issues, and
7. Proposing a standard reference numbering system for identifying passages within *The Urantia Book*.

The publishers have uniformly adopted the committee's decisions regarding the text and the referencing system, and that text has been denominated the Standard Reference Text of *The Urantia Book*.

The formatting of elements not strictly a part of the text, including the Table of Contents, were submitted as optional recommendations by the committee because they are concerned with the distinctive trade dress of the publishers, and the publishers have decided to implement those recommendations differently according to their own stylistic preferences.

The committee continues to meet periodically, considering any new items submitted by readers. Undoubtedly, the vast majority of typographical issues from the first edition have long since been discovered, but previously unrecognized issues do occasionally arise so the publishers have agreed to keep the committee active to be called into session as needed.

Methodology

The method employed by the committee to make its determinations, described in more detail below, was designed to not simply correct problems in the 1955 text by any suitable revision, but to provide solutions based upon an attempted reconstruction of the manuscript behind the printed edition using a conservative approach consistent with the standards for necessary and appropriate conjectural emendations which have been developed within the field of textual criticism.

An editor of *The Urantia Book* is not faced with the manifold challenges of attempting to reconstruct an ancient text from fragmentary or contradictory copies made hundreds of years after the original manuscript was written, but the text of the first edition is no better than a copy of a copy of a copy of the original manuscript, and at various points there may be several more generations of copies between the original and the first edition. Each time a text is revised or copied, there is an opportunity for errors to become incorporated into it even when the work is undertaken with the greatest care. Further, there is some evidence from contemporary reports that the first copy of the manuscript of some parts of the book may have been transcribed from dictation, which creates yet another opportunity for errors in transmission.

The types of problems presented to the committee fell into various categories described below, but all had to meet two criteria for action by the committee:

First of all, no matter how else an issue might be classified, it must represent a true anomaly—something that arrests the attention as being uncharacteristic of the author. This judgment is made based on assessments of the author's purpose, style, familiarity with other literary works, knowledge of the various social and physical sciences and relationship to other aspects of the historical and cultural context. This background knowledge is essential for differentiating between what might be unusual or even unique in an author's writings from what is truly anomalous in a given passage within a particular work.

Secondly, the problem must be amenable to solution by positing the operation of ordinary transcriptional or typographical processes. This rules out the consideration of any issues which, however inconsistent with the known characteristics of the author, cannot have come about because of errors arising

during the normal processes involved in preparing a work for publication. This is a somewhat fluid distinction, as some problems may be regarded as impossible of typographical resolution until someone posits a novel solution which does rely only on ordinary typographical mechanisms.

Reference Works

In the work performed by the committee, a number of reference authorities were used, but primarily those dating to the first half of the twentieth century which would have been available to the authors and original editors during the period when *The Urantia Book* was written and first published. These resources were consulted to determine first, whether or not the item was consistent with usage elsewhere in *The Urantia Book*, next whether the item was in conformance with contemporary rules of usage; and then, if an item was in fact problematic, these reference works were used to establish the range of alternative resolutions available. All resources are listed in the References section of this document, but the primary ones used were:

1. The first printing of *The Urantia Book*. As the earliest extant version of the text, the 1955 edition is the most authoritative source for insight into the authors' thought and compositional style, so the greatest weight was always given to the usages found in that edition.
2. Subsequent printings of *The Urantia Book*. The second and later printings were not used as sources for the authors' intentions, but were a help in generating alternate readings for some problems.

Though every printing from both publishers was consulted to confirm the existence and track the history of each known issue, the committee did not systematically search each of those printings for previously unknown issues. Nevertheless, some new items were discovered in the course of its work. For the most part, the problems it considered had been raised by readers over the course of fifty years and had either already caused an earlier editor to modify the published text, or had not yet been considered by either publisher.

3. The rules for spelling, grammar, and punctuation were taken primarily from *Webster's New International Dictionary, Second Edition* of 1934 and the several editions of the *Chicago Manual of Style (CMOS)* in use during the period from 1933 through 1955. Numerous supplementary resources in this area were used, most importantly the *Oxford English Dictionary* of 1933.
4. The Bible translation commonly denominated the *American Standard Version* of 1901. This is the translation available at the time of the writing of *The Urantia Book* which most closely reflects the translation choices made by the latter's authors, and was used as the primary

resource when considering issues related to biblical passages, though the original texts in Greek and Hebrew were consulted as needed. Many additional English Bibles were also used as secondary sources.

Classification of problems in the text

To begin its work, the committee first considered several different ways of classifying and organizing the issues to be considered. The preliminary schema grouping items by numerous technical error types, as described in the committee's final report, was eventually superseded by a simpler system which classified each item considered in two dimensions: the type of problem involved in the proposed edit, and a yes/no classification by significance—whether or not the proposed edit could possibly affect the meaning of the passage under consideration. All such significant items of whatever problem type constituted one group and were considered as a separate class by the committee. To promote consistency in its conclusions, all non-substantive items were organized by type and all issues of a given type were considered by the committee before moving on to the next type. The table summarizing the committee's findings includes these two dimensions as its first two columns.

These were the classifications by type (with the codes found in the summary table):

1. DP — Deity pronoun capitalization
2. C — Other capitalization issues
3. F — Italics and other formatting issues
4. N — Number values and formats
5. H — Questions of compound, hyphenated, or open word forms
6. W — Spelling and other word form issues
7. T — Transliterations
8. G — Grammar
9. P — Phrasing & punctuation
10. M — Multiple factors

The specific types of issues included in each of these categories were:

1. Deity pronouns-- The 1955 text includes both capitalized and lowercase forms of pronouns referring to Deity, primarily Him/him and His/his, many of which are quotations from the Bible such as, "In Him we live and move and have our being." Generally, lower case forms are used throughout the text, so earlier editors had changed a number of the capitalized instances to lowercase on the assumption that the capitalized instances were inappropriate archaisms

that had been unintentionally edited into the text at some point before publication.

This is a matter of the correct and consistent application of rules of style. As noted above, the primary resource for making decisions in this area was the *Manual of Style* published by the University of Chicago Press. All editions of that work address this issue and give consistent guidance on appropriate usage, so each passage in question was evaluated in light of that guidance. It was found that in every case the 1955 text conformed reasonably to the recommendations of the *CMOS*, so all pronouns that had been changed over the years were returned to their original forms.

2. Capitalization of words and phrases other than deity pronouns involves questions of both style and interpretation. Geographic names, personal titles, and other general classes could be handled by the consistent application of rules from the *CMOS*, but there were also a number of cases which could not be decided exclusively on the basis of rules of style or even by a rigid analysis of the author's typical style, because there could be some difference in meaning which the author had intended to be conveyed by the different word forms. (This possibility must also be considered when analyzing other types of word-form variants.) If the committee thought that there was any possibility of different intended meanings, it took the conservative course and left the word as found in the 1955 edition.
3. Issues involving the use of italics usually consisted of simple typographical errors where a word in italics had been incorrectly followed by a punctuation mark in regular (Roman) type. There were also a few cases of inconsistent usage of italics which required attention.
4. Questions of correct formats for expressions involving numbers, such as times of day, were generally easily resolved by reference to the *CMOS*.

There were also some items which concerned the *values* of numbers which were inherently more complex. For a numerical value to be considered for correction by the committee:

- a. It had to be demonstrably inconsistent with specific internal evidence from elsewhere in the book, or, in a single case, a known historical event, because of a single erroneous digit, had been attributed to the wrong year in the first edition.
- b. The evidence had to weigh in favor of a particular option—if two numbers were obviously at variance, there had to be a basis for choosing one over the other. The committee's goal was to correct typographical errors in the text, not to remove inexplicable inconsistencies by any means.

- c. The resolution of the problem had to be consistent with the postulated operation of some kind of reasonable typographical or editorial corruption process.
5. The single largest group of items involved the consistent and correct use of hyphenated, open, and closed versions of individual words and word pairs. These kinds of problems are extremely common and in a work the size of *The Urantia Book*, it is not at all strange that such inconsistencies existed. Variances were, whenever possible, resolved by standardizing on the predominant form found in the text.
6. Spelling—a small number of words were not spelled consistently in the 1955 edition. The first decision in each of these cases was to determine whether or not there could be any differential in meaning which might account for the differences in spelling, and if such a possibility existed, the variant forms were left intact. If there was no possibility that different spellings might represent different meanings, then the committee applied a standard spelling to all examples of the word in the text. As with decisions about hyphenation and open or closed word forms, the choice of forms was based on preponderance of usage in the text and the acceptability of the variants—whether or not particular word forms were in use at the time of the writing of the book. In general, the authors' preferences were followed as long as the spelling was not otherwise unknown in English. If there was no evidence of preferred usage (two or more spellings without preponderant usage), then the committee normally chose the form which had the strongest support in the reference dictionaries.

There were a couple of cases in which the word form chosen by the authors has since gone completely out of use for the meaning intended, but remains in use for another meaning, thus causing undue confusion for the reader; so in those few situations, the committee chose to adopt a more modern spelling. Because of the evolution of the language, this situation will periodically arise and further modifications to the original text will no doubt be needed as other word forms fall out of use for particular meanings.

7. Establishing consistent transliterations of non-English words and names. There were only a few of these and the work proceeded along the same lines as that involving the spelling of common English words: the authors' preferences were followed if precedents existed in usage elsewhere.
8. Questions of grammar. There were about two dozen items which involved grammar. The resolutions adopted by the committee for these, as for all other items, were consistent with simple typographical errors. Typical instances included sentences with missing short connectives, and correctly spelled words that were incorrectly used because they represented the wrong

form of that particular word. In almost every case, the error could be corrected by removing, changing, or adding a single letter.

There are some grammatical situations, analogous to the instances of obsolete spellings indicated above, in which certain constructions, though correct and reasonably common at the time of the writing of *The Urantia Book*, have since become so rare that they seem incorrect to readers of current English. The committee was very conservative in such cases—making only a few edits—but similar problems will continue to develop over time because of changes in common usage. Even now, there are a few constructions left in place by the committee which are obsolescent, and which will no doubt become completely obsolete in the near future, thus requiring some small adjustments to conform them to modern usage so as to remain understandable by reasonably sophisticated readers of English.

9. Phrasing and punctuation. Misplaced and missing commas comprised the vast majority of these, though there were a few problematic uses of most other punctuation marks. Phrasing and punctuation, though guided by rules of style, may nonetheless be employed in different ways to suit the purposes of the author, so every attempt was made to allow the original to stand if it was reasonable and led to no confusion.
10. Multiple factors. Many of the more difficult issues could only be classified as embodying several different kinds of problems. An error of this type might be, in the end, diagnosed as a simple spelling, capitalization or punctuation error, even though the perceived problem with the original passage could not be classified in that way. This type of problem may be easier to illustrate by example rather than description.

The first sentence of the paragraph at 102:8.4 reads this way in the first edition:

Ethics is the eternal social or racial mirror which faithfully reflects the otherwise unobservable progress of internal spiritual and religious developments.

There is nothing obviously wrong with the sentence except that it doesn't really make any sense. What exactly is "an eternal social or racial mirror"? The revised sentence in the SRT is:

Ethics is the external social or racial mirror which faithfully reflects the otherwise unobservable progress of internal spiritual and religious developments.

Now the structure and meaning of the sentence is clear. In abbreviated form:

Ethics is the external mirror which reflects the progress of internal spiritual developments.

Though the original *eternal* was not, technically, misspelled, it was the wrong word. At some point in the preparation of the text, the letter x was unintentionally dropped from *external* leaving the correctly spelled, but incorrectly printed *eternal*.

Each problem in this class was different. The items in the group sharing only the quality that each could not be reasonably placed in only one of the other categories.

The Referencing System

Over the years, a number of different referencing systems have been developed for *The Urantia Book*, each with its own strengths, but none of which were suitable for consistent adaptation to multiple languages and to various electronic and print formats. After consultation with a number of readers long involved in both electronic and print production of the text of *The Urantia Book*, the committee decided to recommend the incorporation of a standard internal reference system down to the paragraph level (in addition to the existing print edition paginations used by the two publishers). It is important that the logic of the reference system be clear to readers, and that it provide a sound logical basis for machine processing of the text. This is desirable for accurate reference in scholarly writing, the creation of study aids, the coordination of secondary works with the text itself, and for accurate correlation of translations to the English text and to other translations.

In addition, if an effective internal reference system could be universally established, it would make work in emerging electronic formats much easier and more accurate.

Before discussing the systems considered and the committee's reasoning and recommendations, it is important to note the distinction between the *method of counting* paragraphs and lines within the text, the *method of notation* which is used to reference that count, and the *method of display* which is used to indicate that count in a published version of the text:

1. The *method of counting* determines the identification of a paragraph within the reference system. Most of *The Urantia Book* is plain text consisting of standard paragraphs; counting those paragraphs within a section or on a page has formed the basis for most systems of reference numbering developed over the years. The difficulty has always been how to consistently count text which is not naturally divided into paragraphs—most notably numbered lists such as the

Mota at the end of Paper 48, the extensive outline of personalities in Paper 30, and the several passages which are formatted as poetic verse in the text.

2. The *method of notation* refers to the format of references. The reference to a particular section of text, as determined by the chosen method of counting, could be formatted in a number of different ways. For example, paragraph 3 of Section 6 of Paper 2 (the first paragraph on page 41 of the 1955 text) could be displayed as 2:3.1, 2.3.1, P2S3p1, p41:1 (if counting by page and paragraph rather than by Section and paragraph), or in any one of the many additional notational systems which could be devised.
3. The *method of display* is chosen by the publisher to track the reference system in a given edition of *The Urantia Book*. The choice of display formatting is part of the trade dress presented by a given publisher, the primary requirement being that it clearly and consistently provide the necessary guidance to the reader to determine the correct reference number of any given passage.

After substantial consultation, the committee recommended the following set of guidelines for counting and referencing the elements of the text in a way that can be satisfactory both for scholarly purposes, as well as for machine reading and processing:

Counting—

Within the body of the text of *The Urantia Book* there are two types of text: title text and body text. Title text may refer to paper titles or section titles.

Any text that is not title text is body text. The smallest unit of body text which should be identified for referencing is the paragraph. Most paragraphs for counting purposes are identical to those blocks of text which would commonly be identified as paragraphs by any reader. However, in order for the definition of a paragraph to be consistently applied within the reference system, it must be enlarged and identified by its typographical characteristics rather than by its role in the compositional structure of the text.

For the purposes of the referencing system, **individual paragraphs begin with an indentation of any length, and continue until the beginning of the next indentation or occurrence of title text.** (A multi-line section title is considered a single line of title text.) This definition of a paragraph, for counting purposes, thus separately identifies each line of a list as well as each line of poetry that is separated from the preceding and following lines by a “hard return.” That is, if the text block were wide enough to contain any line of verse without “wrapping” to the next line, then each of those lines would be counted as one “paragraph.” An illustration will no doubt be helpful. In Paper 48, Section 6, we find the version of the 23rd Psalm shown below. According to the adopted numbering

system there are eleven lines which would be counted as “paragraphs,” while five of the lines are simply wrapped text from the line above and would not be separately numbered because they might, or might not, exist as separate lines depending on the width of the column in which they are printed. This passage is thus identified as 48:6.9-19.

The Gods are my caretakers; I shall not stray;
Side by side they lead me in the beautiful paths and glorious
refreshing of life everlasting.
I shall not, in this Divine Presence, want for food nor thirst for
water.
Though I go down into the valley of uncertainty or ascend up into
the worlds of doubt,
Though I move in loneliness or with the fellows of my kind,
Though I triumph in the choirs of light or falter in the solitary
places of the spheres,
Your good spirit shall minister to me, and your glorious angel will
comfort me.
Though I descend into the depths of darkness and death itself,
I shall not doubt you nor fear you,
For I know that in the fullness of time and the glory of your name
You will raise me up to sit with you on the battlements on high.

Notation—

The notation selected by the committee uses, a colon and period to separate paper, section, and paragraph numbers. Thus, for example, paper 3, section 2, paragraph 4 would be represented as 3:2.4. Sections 5 through 7 of paper 42 would be indicated by 42:5-7 and paragraphs 2 through 9 of section 6 of paper 134 would be referenced as 134:6.2-9. A more complex reference can also be clearly indicated with minimal notation, such as the third paragraph of the first section of paper 160 through the eighth paragraph of section five of the same paper: 160:1.3-5.8

Display---

Displaying the numbering for every indented line of body text can result in aesthetic problems in poetry as well as in lists. How to display reference numbering in these special situations is a question which must be answered by each publisher according to its own stylistic preferences. A publisher may well decide not to indicate paragraph numbering within the text itself, but to simply track it in headers or footers, again according to its own preferences.

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