Study Groups: Actualities and Potentialities—
The Glorious Good News
By David Glass

Greetings and sincerest, heartfelt brotherly regards to all you sons and daughters of God assembled here today—my brothers and my sisters in the Father's family of everlasting life and divine love. You are my cohorts in the project of promoting and enhancing the formation and cultivation of many, many study groups across the landscape of Urantia. It is a special privilege for me to speak to each of you at this time about what I call: "Study Groups: Actualities and Potentialities—the Glorious Good News."

As I begin, I would like to ask you to participate with me in a little exercise—something which Albert Einstein, the scientist who revolutionized our thinking about the nature of time and space, would call "a thought experiment." This "experiment" actually calls for a little time-travel and probably some imaginary space-travel as well.

What I want to ask you to do with me now is to take the book that is called "the autobiography of my sojourn on Urantia" and turn back through the pages of your memory—file back through all the events and thoughts and emotions and personalities who have come through your life and consciousness and bring back as vividly as possible to mind: the time in your life—the day, if you can recall—and the specific location and circumstances of the moment or the period of time when you first realized the genuine, real, honest-to-God and honest-to-you, true and authentic nature of what you had been reading in the Urantia Papers—including, if you can—that *instant of recognition* in which what may have seemed like the most outlandish claim of the book, that it was indeed the next, great, grand installment in a historic series of epochal revelations from the administrative hierarchy of the universe to all the populations of *our planet*—"Earth," as we had always known her—now "Urantia"—that curious and intriguing word on the front cover of this mysterious tome.

Whether you found the book in a bookstore, at the home or hand of a friend, in a library, or whether you are among those second- or third-generation readers who grew up with *The Urantia Book*—whatever the scenario—if you have traveled back to that moment of discovery, simply pause there for a minute and attempt to bring back the impact and the astonishment of that moment. You may have been a little younger or much younger, searching or browsing, in quest of a better understanding of reality. You may have been in spiritual conflict or confusion, or worse: in agnostic doubt, in existential despair, in outright atheism or even in the doldrums of nihilism. Or: You may have been in a cheerful disposition, simply keeping your mind open for whatever you might find next. You may have still been in the religious context of your upbringing or had begun to question or even reject some of those beliefs and set out on your own personal quest for viable answers.

When you've arrived at a recollection of such a time and circumstance, please close your eyes and take about 20 seconds of silence to bring back and consider as much of that time and place as you can. (Eyes closed? Okay.) Please begin, now: . . . . . Thank you!

Perhaps some of you remember having seen the movie, "Contact," based on the book by Carl Sagan. "Contact" is a fictional story based on the truth that astronomers had been "listening in" on the universe on multiple wavelengths, hoping to catch a message from another, remote, extraterrestrial civilization. In the film, *suddenly* a message is received and detected by an astronomer, played by Jodi Foster. What a triumph it seems for humanity—in the movie!

Now, *in real life,* YOU come along and somehow you encounter *The Urantia Book* which lights up the night sky like a rocket with an even greater brilliance, revealing—not simply one more world—another "pale blue dot in space"—but upwards of five trillion inhabited planets with seven trillion in prospect, innumerable celestial personalities, and even a hidden perfect, eternal universe revolving around the stationary Isle of Paradise at "the geographic center of infinity."

"Let's get this on the evening news!!" your human mind blared into your brain. Or so mine did mine. Perhaps, like me, you wrote a letter to Urantia

Foundation, abrim with superlatives and exclamation points. And perhaps, like me, that was not enough, so you visited "533," only to be confronted with the disheartening news that those at Chicago headquarters had adopted a policy of relative containment and slow, quiet, gradual growth. Only, time, experience, and reflection would reveal to you and to me the necessity for and the wisdom of slow, stable growth. Further study of the book revealed that the pace of cosmic evolution is exceedingly slow; that Jesus was never in a hurry; and that a premature and over rapid introduction of the book would be gravely counterproductive to the long-term success of its mission.

Nevertheless, the recollection of that instant of revelation-recognition is, I believe, a crucial, critical experience, one which I think we should often call to mind, perhaps as often as we approach the study of the revelation, either individually or collectively—as in a study group. The wonder, the awe, the stunning realization, even the possible bewilderment of that moment of realization can, and perhaps should be, renewed as often as you read *The Urantia Book.*

I say this because it is preeminently important for us *not* to become too casual in our relationship to the book and what it represents: a point of celestial contact, a focal concentration of a dramatic spiritual down-reach, a vital communication from the universe to planet 606 of Satania. Re-encountering *The Urantia Book*, even for the "umpteenth" time, is the closest thing we Urantia humans have to being able to survey the universe broadcast services which a normal post-Bestowal Son planet would be enjoying. Reading the words of the revelators, we are admitted into the consciousness of our cosmic superiors—administrators and leaders in the universe—among whose duties is the ongoing supervision of this planet and of the revelatory process which they initiated a century ago as it ripples out through the thinking minds of the human personalities of our semi-civilized society.

One of the reasons why I emphasize this scenario is because I believe it is among our tasks in study groups to help other new or early students of the revelation to experience that same initial, breath-taking discovery-moment for themselves. Such an experience constitutes a profound instance of *personal religious experience*, one of the central themes of the book and the essence of the religion of Jesus. It is among my central contentions in this speech that we need to

address ourselves over and over to re-kindling that spark, that illumination, that epiphany which we might call revelation-appreciation, cosmic consciousness, or which the revelators call "the reality response."

We need to bring vividly to our own and to other students' attention the realization that many of the revelators hail from extremely high-ranking positions in the universe, and that these celestial personalities, in turn, point to or describe personalities even higher than themselves, all the way up (or "in") to Paradise. Think of the Paradise-origin Creator Sons and Spirit Daughters, the Stationary Sons of the Paradise Trinity, even our own indwelling Deity-fragments, the Paradise Thought Adjusters, dispatched from the shores of Divinington … *the implications are profound for you and for me and for the people of our world*. The Papers introduce us to and integrate us in the real universe. I contend that we ought to be repeatedly challenged, even startled, by the personality updraft of being summoned into the benign companionship of such cosmic personalities and influences each time we open *The Urantia Book*.

Okay. That's my first point. Now: Going on.

The entire series of our planet's epochal revelations have been cumulative in influence and in effectiveness. In *The Urantia Book* we have a recapitulation of all of the previous four as well as the complete text of the fifth. Thus it behooves us to see our outreach efforts not only as expressions of our *own* enthusiasm based on our response to the fifth revelation, but as revivals and expansions—as furthering the continuations—of the heroic efforts of the Vanites, of the bold, dedicated, and courageous Sethite priests and missionaries, of the intrepid and adventurous Salemite messengers, and even of the incomparable apostles and disciples of Jesus, who responded to *the call to service* while facing very real and perilous, even appalling, dangers of virulent persecutions and the likelihood of an excruciating and ignominious death. It is clear that we are to draw strength, courage and zeal from the experience of conjoining our efforts with such illustrious predecessors!

We study group hosts need to see to it that our study group members are aware of our magnificent spiritual legacy, this distinguished and serviceful spiritual nobility of our planet's revelatory heritage—not overlooking or forgetting the

tremendous service to us of our forebears in the 20th century who were a part of the nexus of events which produced the Urantia Papers and put them into our hands and onto the shelves of our bookstores.

When I step back and survey the lengthy stretch of the earth's millennia of development, and then think further back to the aeonic ages of pre-Urantia creative labor and cosmic evolution which have brought us to this privileged moment in the unfolding story of our world, *I am thrilled to the core of my being* by our abundant opportunities for service and impelled to enlist whatever abilities I possess in promoting this momentous adventure, this *now international* "business of helping mankind find God." We represent, we are, the spearhead of a cosmic vector of supreme evolutionary progress which is literally trillions of years in extent.

I believe we should apprehend the service of forming and fostering study groups for the fifth epochal revelation in its broadest cosmic and evolutionary context, *for what it is*—a rare and privileged opportunity to come on board, still almost at its inception, on a venture which is destined to make more differences in this world than any war which has ever been waged, any social, political, economic, moral, cultural, or scientific reform or movement in all of human history.

Furthermore, serving as a study group host is a part of our response to the Master's injunction to go into all the world proclaiming the ***glorious good news*** of *man's eternal sonship with the Universal Father—the God of all creation,* and the twin truth of man's brotherhood with man, and indeed with every other sentient being in the universe—and even beyond: our cosmic brotherhood includes even the Eternal Son of Paradise. He, too, is our brother in the universal family of God. We have enlisted in a gigantic cosmic enterprise, more purposeful and significant in its ultimate consequences than we can now appreciate or foresee.

Always remember: "Mankind is [already] on the march toward a new and unrevealed planetary destiny." (99:1.1) When we look at our study groups, let us hear again these words of Jesus to the apostles: "This small beginning of twelve commonplace men shall multiply and grow until eventually the whole earth shall be filled with the praise of my Father." (140:1.7) Viewed objectively, study groups may appear to be a modest undertaking, but they carry that same promise of the Master—to eventually transform the planet by providing a study

context in which *"the great change in the heart of man,"* described by Jesus, can be formulated, fostered, and fueled. Study group hosts help plant the seeds that can one day grow into a benign Army of Believers who will someday "conquer an empire of materialistic secularism and overthrow a world sway of mechanistic naturalism." (195:9.2)

Now—if you please—let's engage in one more "experiment": Everyone put a smile on your face and then look all around the room at everyone, all the revelation students here, who you can comfortably see from your position without standing up. You are looking at the vanguard of the leadership of the *Urantia Book* community of our era (along with many in absentia) who are charged with the solemn responsibility of carrying the light of life across our world and into the hearts and minds of all Urantians who will receive the message of divine sonship with God. You are looking at the Vanites and the Sethite priests of today, at the Salemite missionaries of our generation, at the Jesusonian apostles and disciples of our era. You yourselves are now among the "spiritual nobility" of this fresh incipient epoch, this brave new world of possibilities and promise.

When it occurs to you that the *Urantia Book* community or some *Urantia Book* reader should do a certain thing, *get up and do it!* Because what you now see is what you get—what you *are* is what you get! The activities and vitality of study groups—and in part—the destiny of the planet—are in your hands.

That was my second major point. So, let's take a one minute stretch break, right in position where you are, please. … Thank you!

So now, what, really and ideally, are study groups—in actuality and in potentiality?

Well, almost by definition, study groups provide a community context in which persons can become familiarized with the experience of delving into a vast and compelling source of cosmic knowledge and spiritual wisdom. And just as by living with Jesus, the apostles found it was both pleasant and profitable to associate with divinity, so study group members gradually (or suddenly) become

acquainted with the revelation's life-altering truths from on high. They, too, acclimate to living with divinity.

In study groups people learn about their heavenly Father, his unconditional love, and his merciful, forgiving and progress-supporting nature and influence. Revelation students are enabled not only to find their place in life—to discover meaning and value in the context of their earth-experience—but also to find clarity in their cosmic orientation and in their spiritual direction toward their Paradise destiny.

These truths can be not only *life-transforming*, but even *life-saving* for an ardent seeker of truth—bewildered or blinded by the plethora of paths, the jungle of jargon, the miasma of methods and the oversupply of oracles to be found in the modern metaphysical media market. Study group members are to be *congratulated* for their spiritual discernment in having found their way to the greatest outlay of celestial treasure since Jesus' life bestowal. But we <u>also</u> need an active and aggressive *outreach program* to contact the confused minds the revelators speak of, and to minister to the humanly dislocated citizens on a planet of rapidly shifting social, economic, and political conditions. *******

And thereby, there arises for study group hosts the *responsibility* of meeting the challenge of providing *whatever further guidance or leadership* they can for the novice-reader—or for the somewhat-experienced reader who has not been really or personally touched by the Father's liberating presence.

Let's consider some of the possibilities and potentials for study group hosts who accept this significant responsibility.

I have observed a wide range of the acceptance of leadership and responsibility by study group hosts which have sometimes been dictated by circumstances and which have sometimes grown out of the dedication and creativity of such hosts.

At the simplest level, study groups may form spontaneously from an association of people all, or almost all, of whom are *new* to the book: There is no obvious leader—only a host who is willing to provide a time and place for meetings. Such groups often jump around in the book initially (or for a longer period of time) just to get acquainted with its contents. They may then elect to read Part IV about

Jesus' life and teachings, or Part III in order to familiarize themselves with the story of our world. For my part, I can entertain the idea of familiarizing oneself with the first five Papers on God or with Papers 100-103 about personal religious experience or some of Jesus' teachings or the nature of the ministry of angels or the specifics of the process of surviving the death of the body or the immediate survival experience on the mansion worlds—parts of the book, among others, which are of immediate significance and interest to the individual—even to the new reader.

Sooner or later, however, I believe a study group host should at least consider (all study groups being ultimately autonomous) inviting the group to read *through* the book as it was written, *from beginning to end*. Study group newcomers should at least have explained to them that the quest of comprehending *The Urantia Book* is a long-term—even a lifetime pursuit—and that faith, perseverance, commitment, and self-application are essential to comprehension, even though many of the ideas and facts are immediately easy to entertain or understand; self-evident to the reader; or already a part of his or her belief system. It should be early pointed out that the book introduces and then explains its own novel terms, nomenclature and parlance somewhere in the entire book, and that putting the parts and personalities of the book together to achieve a general understanding of the whole is part of the fun and fascination. Thus, *The Urantia Book* is not only a gift outright, but a challenge or assignment to be voluntarily taken up by the somewhat spiritually precocious.

Also as a part of early information for readers, I believe Jesus would emphasize, or even insist, that they first be taught that they are the sons or daughters of a loving, wise, and merciful heavenly Father. Truth-seekers need to be shown, by some miracle, how they can become son-conscious, aware experientially of their own sonship with Deity. Take the truth-candidate into the temple of sonship before discoursing on the nature and features of that temple, Jesus might have said. Jesus emphasized, *"Seek first the kingdom of God,"* the kingdom of heaven within you, the realization of the presence of the inner spirit, as a first step in the fulfillment of the desire to know more about God and reality.

Mercy, patience, tolerance and love are qualities of successful hosts. A spiritual attitude of *fatherly love* should prevail both in the host's leadership and in the group's attitude. All hosts should remember that the one who assumes the role

of teacher or leader maintains his credibility and integrity by ever remaining a learner himself. Remember: Everyone is destined to become a student-teacher in the ascending educational regime of the Paradise career. Thus even relatively new readers should be encouraged to restate their understanding of statements or passages from the book in their own words. Hosts and groups might be surprised at what proceeds from their hearts and minds.

Further characteristics of successful hosts would include: a constantly improving personal knowledge and comprehension of the revelation; a supreme dedication to the mission of Michael and to the (partially apprehended) eternal purpose of the Universal Father; an awareness of the assistance of revealed and unrevealed spirit ministers of revelation who can contribute to study group success; a mindfulness of participation in a spiritual heritage stretching back through Jesus and Melchizedek to such early spiritual geniuses as Onagar, Onamonalonton, and Enoch; an approximated appreciation of the scope and awesomeness of creation; a cheerful attitude of generosity and good will; and an implicit reverence for the divine. Hosts would do well to openly acknowledge their own and their group's reliance on the ministry of Michael's Spirit, the Holy Spirit and the Father's Adjuster-Spirits should be introduced, discussed, and utilized in study groups.

Hosts should realize that study groups, like the educational regimes of the universe, exist *for the promotion of the spiritual progress of* ***the individual***, *and not as ends in themselves.* Thus, when the dynamics in a study group change due to the introduction of readers new to the book or new to the group, adaptations should be gladly and readily made, while striving to maintain a balance of loyalty to the needs of the pre-existent members of the group*. This is an art which only experience can improve*. Remember that "the meaning of life *is* its adaptability; even as the value of life [and of study groups] *is* its progressability." (130:4.7)

I believe it is in the best interests of hosts to visit other study groups if at all possible, to correspond with other hosts (easily done in this age of the internet), and to be creative in seeking additional means of promoting inter-study group cross-fertilization. If an area is blessed with more than one study group within convenient driving distance, accommodation should be made, in my view, to relate the groups or to co-produce opportunities for the general socialization of all the groups' constituent members. Joint multiple-study group projects can be very socializing and educational—enlightening, illuminating, and fun!

Isolated groups would benefit from relating to other groups. We recall that Jesus' early messengers were greatly cheered and encouraged by learning of the activities of other groups of kingdom builders.

I believe that—just as Jesus' ministry was free from political entanglements, economic injunctions, or social directives—so should study groups focus, as did Jesus, on spiritual matters, or at any rate, on the topic of the Paper being examined and perused. Simply by keeping the study group on topic, such detractions can be avoided.

Dealing with study group pathologies of misbehavior or misdirection are matters to be worked out, in my opinion, by each host and the group's constituent members. However, recourse can be made to the opinions of other study group hosts or to the leaders of reader organizations for seasoned wisdom in this regard.

I believe it is a good idea for each study group collectively to compose and write down a mission statement, which could certainly be amended as time progresses or as the values, meanings, or emphasis of the group changes or evolves.

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In the middle range of effective study groups are those groups which proceed well and efficiently, reading and discussing Paper after Paper. These groups may achieve whole readings of the book, even multiple readings. However, such groups should be impressed with the truth that there is always more to learn, integrate, and admire; and that "the progressive comprehension of reality is the equivalent of approaching God." (196:3.3)

Conceptions of the nature of study groups which may be helpfully entertained by hosts and members include:

1. Outposts of Light and Truth—portals through which the revelation may be extended into and throughout the planet.
2. Centers for Cosmic Learning—emphasizing the groups' potential for educational enhancement.

3. Truth-Seeker Personality Integration Centers—socialization with other believers integrates and balances the personality; and reading together creates an expanded and shared sense of the reality and truth of the revelations in the Papers.
4. Practical Living Learning Centers—the wealth of *practical* knowledge in *The Urantia Book* forms a great feature of its appeal and value.
5. Centers for prayer, meditation, and worship. Often study groups will begin or end with a moment of silence, an articulated individual or group prayer, or opportunities for group worship.
6. Reinstatement or creation of a planetary headquarters or of lost centers of learning from previous revelatory regimes. Without the Lucifer Rebellion, Dalamatia—as a planetary center—would have been complemented by about one hundred Adamic centers all over the planet. In their absence, we can now construct a global network of mutually aware, potentially interactive study groups.
7. Centers for creative outreach projects. Larger study groups may have the material and human resources to devise outreach or enrichment seminars, expos, mini- or full-fledged conferences, publications, and/or artistic performances.

I come now to the consideration of the more advanced or larger study groups which have formed urban or city-wide even statewide or regional associations and which may have regular organizational meetings, formal constitutions, and membership in reader organizations.

For the most part, I have lived in cosmopolitan centers with multiple study groups within driving distance and such groups can and have been associated for exponentially expanded potentialities and creativity.

The electronic media are introducing Skype services into study groups so that readers not physically at the study group location can participate as though they were. Also, *Urantia Book* study groups have been formed entirely through Skype with no readers at all being together in the same geographic location. Skype services are now global, bringing international study groups into the realm of possibility.

Skype services can make available study group participation to isolated rural or small-town readers who have no access to other readers. What a difference such technology can make in such readers' lives!

The bestowal of the fifth epochal revelation upon Urantia is now an objective historical fact. The planet has been contacted by its cosmic administrators. The universe has done its part for our new epoch—in the astounding act of giving us the epochal revelation itself. And now it remains for us to assist humanity in taking note and taking advantage of the tremendous potentials represented by this new systematic book, an outpouring of universal information, spiritual inspiration, and divine love.

All of this potential realization should be directly reflected in how we regard study groups, for study groups are at present the critical communications location, the cosmic contact point, and the sacred-secular places where we work out the practicalities of the teachings in ways that can foster great achievements.

The study group is the moist soil whereupon the footprint of truth can become lastingly imprinted—a place where its truths can be engraved in the hearts of an assembly of believers. Such "faithers" forgather in groups to exponentially multiply their receptivity capacity and qualitative comprehension. Every time a study group meets in any city, town or hamlet, that location becomes a "city of divine visitation."

Study groups provide a sanctuary where some spiritual aspirants can become endowed with the superhuman insight and super-planetary knowledge which can potentially change the world. Study groups are the cradles of credulity wherein leaders of the spiritual renaissance can be re-born—leaders who can direct us in our ever-advancing persistent "march toward a new and unrevealed planetary destiny." (99:1.1)

As custodians of spiritual truth and as stewards of the revelation, we cannot permit ourselves to become truth-misers. The world is too hungry. We are most privileged to share these teachings because we have a link with the consciousness

of the cosmos. This work of outreach is challenging and sometimes requires that one sacrifice of one's comfort zone, but the satisfactions of service are unsurpassable experiences in creature life; we must offer it to mankind. Perhaps we could engender a healthy rivalry between study groups to excel, to grow, and to become more effective in outreach and spiritually productivity?

Perhaps, we can collectively *catch the vision* of a living network of illuminated truth-outposts, *a worldwide system of study groups*, which would represent the efforts of the generations of our age and the next to respond to the incredible moral trust implicit in our having become beneficiaries of a cosmic revelation. Such a vitalized network of study groups could be activated by communications systems which are already in place through the global internet and other similar media systems. A centralized intelligence-gathering community or committee could become responsible for sharing the findings and achievements of many individual study groups with other, perhaps newer or more isolated study groups. A global internet connections system between study groups could be a fifth epochal revelation's parallel to David Zebedee's messenger service.

We have heard the clarion call of the Divine Counselor of Uversa, who proclaims:

"The religious challenge of this age is to those farseeing and forward-looking men and women of spiritual insight who will dare to construct a new and appealing philosophy of living out of the enlarged and exquisitely integrated modern concepts of cosmic truth, universal beauty, and divine goodness. Such a new and righteous vision of morality will attract all that is good in the mind of man and challenge that which is best in the human soul." (2:7.10)

Jesus' stirring words as he addressed his apostles and disciples continue to reverberate today:

"You are the first volunteers of *a long line of sincere believers in the kingdom* who will *astonish all mankind* by their **heroic devotion** to these teachings. *No armies of the world have ever displayed more courage and bravery* that you and your loyal successors who shall go forth to all the world proclaiming the good news—the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man." (143:1.7; my emphases)

We know the truth of what the midwayers tell us:

"The call to the adventure of building a new and transformed human society by means of the spiritual rebirth of Jesus' brotherhood of the kingdom should thrill all who believe in him as men have not been stirred since the days when they walked about on earth as his companions in the flesh." (195:10.6)

So: Our assignment as I would articulate it today is for us to respond to these challenges by the revelators by providing study groups for other students of *The Urantia Book* and for truth-seekers in general. Such a program of study group creation represents one of the preeminent services to humanity available to us at this time. We can strengthen ourselves (first) by consciously conjoining our efforts with the throng of revelation-disseminators of previous epochal revelations, (second) by accepting the Master's invitation to go into all the world proclaiming ***the glorious good news*** of man's eternal sonship with God, and (third) by zealously returning to our study group duties with renewed vigor, with an eye single to the discernment and doing of the Father's will, and with a strengthened vision of our common service to our shared and supremely valuable revelation. For all time, Jesus has pronounced the everlasting summons to represent him in the world even as he represented his Father who is also our Father, when he said, "*As* the Father sent me into the world, *so* send I you!"

David E Glass. Dallas, TX. May 29, 2014.