

PARLIAMENT OF THE WORLD RELIGIONS

Urantia Book readers share the revelation in Cape Town, South Africa

THE READERS I knew who attended the second Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago in 1993, without exception, said it was one of the most powerful spiritual experiences of their entire lives. So, as I departed the U.S. for the third Parliament, I was prepared for something special. But it far surpassed my expectations. Up until these eight days in Cape Town (Dec. 1-8, 1999), I knew with my mind that all the people of Urantia were my sisters and brothers. But in Cape Town I was immersed in the living truth of God's diverse family on this remarkable planet.

The depth of the conversations with Parliament participants was breathtaking. They moved almost immediately to how we each experienced the inner encounter with God, how the paths were many and the Truth one, how we all were sisters and brothers in one family, beloved children of God, at home in a universe filled with undreamed-of opportunities for service and growth.

The Fellowship's booth attracted a steady flow of visitors. We also offered a panel presentation, featuring members of both the IUA and Fellowship, which was quite effective. Over the eight days we gave away all of the Fellowship's eighty books to people who agreed to read it themselves first, and then to place their copies in public or organizational libraries.

I was amazed at how people immediately recognized the unusual nature of the book. The record for brevity probably goes to the leader of the Muslim Youth Education Association. Dressed elegantly all in white except for his black turban, accompanied by one of his wives (wrapped in flowing black silk from head to toe except for her expressive eyes), he

proven to be good "bait" with other passers-by. When Mike MacIsaac came by an hour later he found two young men, security guards, scribbling furiously, trying to copy the entire section into their notebooks. They said they had never seen such a book, and asked "How can we get one?" Ten minutes later they left with faces shining, each with a book. The next day one of them came back

saying, "Did you realize this is an incredible revelation?" We all laughed and embraced.

Halfway through the Parliament, a woman who had received a book on the first day came back to the booth with profuse thanks. She said she had not been able to put the book down for three days.

And then there was the young girl from Cape Town, a student at an all-girls high school, who sat quietly at the back of the booth reading some suggested sections for

two hours while I chatted with others. She was so sweet, asking, "How long can I read this book before I place it in my school's library?" "Of course, as long as you wish," I replied. She was beaming as she walked away, book in hand.

One woman explained how her husband, a wealthy aquatic engineer living in Spain, had had a remarkable revelation of Jesus, "the Master." He subsequently wrote several books, and together they had started a worldwide ministry. After looking at several sections in *The Urantia Book*, the last being the passage where Jesus and



Out on the town, African style. From left to right: Kneeling: Moussa N'Daiye, Harry Menton. Standing: Michael MacIsaac, Travis Binion, Sam (interfaith minister from Kansas City), Doudou N'Daiye, Paula Thompson, Alistair Bywater (a local Cape Town reader), Christilyn Biek, Gard Jameson, Marvin Gawryn.

looked intently for a full minute at the front cover with its pictures of Jesus, an angel, and the earth floating in space. Flipping it over, he read the back cover, opened the book, read briefly, shut the book and said, "I want this. How much is it?" I explained the library placement program's free book offer. He looked me full in the eyes, smiled broadly, filled out the form, and left holding the book tightly with both hands.

One day I left the booth for a while, with one of the books opened to Jesus' "Discourse on True Religion," which had

Ganid ministered to two ladies of the night in Corinth, she pulled her husband over and read him the section out loud, both with tears in their eyes. When she finished, they looked at each other in amazement. They left a little later, both expressing great excitement at the prospect of reading the entire book and sharing it with others in their travels.

The leader from the Cao Dai sect in Vietnam was most appreciative of the gift of the book for their main library. Their founder was a great teacher who received a powerful revelation in the 1920s, centered on all people being children of God in the heavenly Father's universal family, while all religions were paths to the one truth. Their group has been expanding rapidly in many parts of the world, with more than six million adherents.

We had an outstanding exchange with the Executive Director of the Legion of Good Will, the leading spiritual and social ministry organization in Brazil. They minister to more than three million people annually, and are working closely with the top leaders of the Brazilian government on many projects, including introducing a multi-faith spiritual curriculum to all of the public schools in Brazil. He was fascinated with *The Urantia Book*, and took two copies back to place in the main libraries in Brasilia.

Each of us at the Parliament had so many of these rewarding encounters. Steve Rohrbach was able to get a copy of the book to Nelson Mandela, and Gard Jameson was able to give one to the Dalai Lama.

My favorite response to the book came from an envoy sent by the Scottish parliament to invite the Dalai Lama to address that body. After reading several sections, this cheery fellow exclaimed in a thick Scottish accent, "I thought *A Course in Miracles* was a doorstopper! But this really takes the biscuit!"

Here is one last story. One day I had an extensive conversation with a young woman from Johannesburg, an enlistee in the South African armed forces, who was overjoyed at being able to receive a copy of the book. Later that day I was talking with another woman, who introduced herself as the first woman's sister. She said she could not believe their good fortune at having a copy of the book. She had been by the booth the day before, and wanted



ABOVE: *University of Cape Town, where most lectures and many performances were held.* BELOW: *Christilyn Biek and Les Jamieson enjoy the warm night with some Sikh friends.*



so much to read through the book's descriptions of the afterlife. But she was convinced she could never afford the price of such a fine volume, and so she left without ever inquiring. Her eyes brimmed with tears as she told of how her sister burst into their room to share the news that they both could now learn the truth from this great revelation.

Our attendance at the third Parliament of the World's Religions was successful in so many ways. The next such gathering is planned for 2005. Hopefully many more readers can attend, and so enjoy a remarkable opportunity to share truth and love with thousands of sincere religionists from around the world. *Marvin Gawryn is Chair of the Fraternal Relations Committee of The Urantia Book Fellowship.*

FROM GARD JAMESON:

I would like to share a few reflections on a recent trip to Cape Town, South Africa, to the Parliament of the World's Religions to provide you with a brief flavor of a glimpse of light and life.

I am providing some of these reflections the day after Nelson Mandela, Madiba, addressed the Parliament saying, "We commend the Parliament of the World's Religions for its immense role in saying the common ground is greater and more enduring than those aspects which divide." The same day a beautiful brother from Senegal, Moussa N'daiye, and a small group of Yankees, including Travis Binion, Marvin Gawryn and Paula Thompson, spoke similar sentiments to an assembled group of interested spiritual seekers at the

University of South Africa in presenting *The Urantia Book*. In a land where division has created immense problems a genuine spirit of dialogue has created the opportunity for immense solutions.

My experience in Cape Town, and in other interfaith venues, convinces me that *The Urantia Book* is to serve as a leaven to the great traditions of the world; and so it is serving. As we are witnessing firsthand at events such as this, the power of its vision is so much greater as a leaven. As a Methodist, I am able to share the great truths of the book so much more effectively. As a Muslim, my brother, Moussa from Senegal, is able to share the great truths of the book so much more effectively. Christians, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, indigenous traditions, and many others here have been drawn to *The Urantia Book* by understanding and appreciating that leavening vision. We have sold or given away every book brought to South Africa.

As we have been interfacing with these many traditions, we have been witness to the power of the Holy Spirit as it is moving through these brothers and sisters, in their expressions of faith, in their expressions of planetary service and in their deep sense of solidarity with members of other faith traditions. It is truly inspiring to see all of the service projects that have been undertaken by group after group after group. One such group whose outreach has been truly inspirational is the Boulder Women's Corps who have helped to sponsor Sali Randel in her work with the Zulu people in South Africa. Sali and a number of Zulu children brought the entire audience to their feet in excitement as they danced to traditional drums with great joy and energy on the main stage the first evening of the Parliament. There are so many gifts of service that are emanating from so many different directions. It is a time full of hope and promise. What is required during these times is that all planetary citizens have the courage to allow their commitment to dialogue and service to transcend their irritations, to see how much larger is our common ground and to be thankful for that common ground. This Parliament is witness to the power of that commitment. Madiba, Nelson Mandela, is a personification of that power to bring unity where once there was

division. His inspiration for The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa provides a model for peacemaking that all groups who find themselves divided might learn from.

Though he is no longer President of South Africa, the people here still call him President; he is their spiritual leader. In his "retirement," Madiba is quite active in bringing resolution to ongoing tensions between the indigenous people.

HH Dalai Lama XIV provides another equally compelling example of a

peoples of Tibet. One can literally feel his sense of deep compassion when in his personal presence. During his presentation at the Parliament he spoke of the need to move our inner commitments and experiences of the divine out into a world of immense need and suffering.

Another great spiritual leader, among the many in attendance at the Parliament, was Mahaghosananda, Buddhist leader of the Cambodian people. During the time of the Killing Fields, the genocidal war in Cambodia, it was Mahaghosananda and his small



ABOVE: *One of our Urantia booths. From left to right: Marvin Gawryn, Travis Binion (behind), Gard Jameson, Christilyn Biek, Harry Menton, Moussa N'Daiye, Doudou N'Daiye, Les Jamieson.* LEFT: *Our lecture entitled "The Urantia Book and our Guiding Institutions." From left to right: Travis Binion, Marvin Gawryn, Paula Thompson, Moussa N'Daiye.*

person, of a people, who were able, in truth, to separate the ideology of their "enemies" from those personalities and to love them truly as brothers and sisters. By developing a deep compassion for his "enemies" the Dalai Lama has been successful in sharing the insights of Buddhism with many, many people. By blessing and engaging the "enemy" in dialogue, the Dalai Lama has helped many more people and, I'm convinced, one day will free the

troupe of monks who would literally walk through the middle of a battlefield, through the middle of enemies who were shooting at one another. These enemies would usually stop their shooting while the monks passed through. When the monks arrived at the far end of the battlefield, they would turn around and walk back through the middle, until the two sides, exasperated, would quit the battle and return to their camps. Mahaghosananda and his troupe became known as the Third

Force, a powerful force of engaged compassion. To experience Mahaghosananda's smile is contagious in much the same way that Jesus' smile was transformative.

In the course of the Parliament there were many wonderful seminars put on by all the faith traditions. Most interesting to me was to learn more of the deep spirituality of the indigenous peoples of Africa. As one teacher put it, "In the West you say, 'I think therefore I am.' In Africa we say, 'We belong, therefore we are.'" This message and the understanding he provided of their indigenous traditions was very attractive. Many of the seminars focused on common values and themes shared by the great traditions. The great scholar of comparative religions, Huston Smith, was there and gave a seminar on the mystical aspect of

the great traditions. He indicated that what fascinated him with respect to the great traditions was not so much their social patterns, their creeds or their rituals, as their call to transcendence, to a genuine experience of the divine mystery.

During one of our days we had an opportunity to see the townships outside Cape Town, to see some of the progress that is being made and the great needs that exist in their society. We learned about the history of apartheid, the work of Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu. We saw firsthand how South Africa deals with its own multicultural identity.

Perhaps the most exciting aspect of the Parliament for me has not been so much the programs, nor the symposia, nor the plenary presentations, nor even the

presence of Nelson Mandela—all wonderful—but the deep connection that I now have with two dear brothers from Senegal, Moussa and Doudou. We in America have much to learn from the deep wisdom of such brothers. Their gracious manner and their genuine excitement for *The Urantia Book* was an inspiration to all of us in attendance. I say "gracious" because they were exceedingly kind to me as I slaughtered the French language in their presence. As the Master informs us, and as we know from our own experience, there is no greater joy in the universe than to get to know such brothers and sisters. What a joy and inspiration South Africa has been! Thank you, Madiba! ■

Gard Jameson is a Urantia Book reader and a Trustee of Urantia Foundation.

EXCERPTS FROM A LETTER FROM LES JAMIESON, 12/4/99:

This event is similar to a big Expo atmosphere in that we have two booths, one from Jesusonian representing the Fellowship and the other from the Foundation. We are exposing the UBook to many, many people who have never seen or heard of it before. Overall, there is a great interest in it. In some cases people are even passionate about what they are finding in this book! We have business cards and brochures with the urantia.org web address which is great to hand out to people. The Internet is transforming the transfer of knowledge worldwide and this is fully recognized by all. There are even swamis and yogi masters here from remote areas who have email addresses!

Two of our community's younger members, Harry Menton and Michael MacIsaac, are representing the youth contingent. They are very involved with the conference as well as networking with young people working in the interfaith arena. They are also very active in promoting activities with the younger generation of UBook readers and have valuable contributions in the works. Also, Steve Rohrbach and Sali Randel are doing volunteer work in running the conference, so we have readers functioning in various other activities as part of the logistical personnel. Ron and Shirley Rivas came all

the way from Anchorage, Alaska, folks! How's that for going the extra mile? Peter and Eileen Laurence are also here. Peter is giving a lecture on his campus interfaith program at Wellesley College.

This experience is making profound impressions on me and raising powerful questions. Right now, as a movement we are so tiny in proportion to the major religions. Some of them have been around for thousands of years and are deeply established in their cultures. So, my first impression is overwhelm. However, I'm reminded that, above all, the UBook is to be a leaven, and as such it can find its way into all the major religions. The teachings of unity absolutely support everything that this Parliament is about. All other religionists who have recognized the need to highlight our commonality and relatedness can be drawn to the UBook if it's introduced to them in the appropriate manner. The appeal of the book to sincere truth seekers is unmistakable. So, I can feel strongly that the future looks promising.

We've had the great pleasure of meeting two amazing gentlemen from Senegal who speak mainly French, were born into the Muslim religion, and have been reading the UBook for many years. One of them, Moussa N'Daiye, has been reading for 27 years! He actually teaches the UBook in a classroom format to lots of students. They study every day! Norman Ingram stayed with him for a month

during his trek through Africa.

Another impression is that a large part of all of the major religions is based on age-old rituals that the believers are very committed to. They seem to use these rituals to "act out" their religion, as if there is a need for going through various motions in order to experience their spirituality. These take place in the form of memorized prayers combined with things like hand clapping, chants, playing instruments, dances or movement, and singing. The Buddhists use yoga as part of their way of practicing religion. It seems that all of the Eastern religions utilize various forms of meditation as part of their practice. We are getting to witness many of these in the plenary sessions. I am conveying all of this because I am making the observation that we, as a movement, haven't yet developed anything in the way of practices which give us a unique identity. The fact is that Jesus really didn't leave us much in the area of ritual. However, this leads me to look at what he did leave us. He left us a way of living, a direct relationship with the Father, the concept of service, the mandate to love one another, the kingdom of the spirit which we enter through living faith, the concept of doing the Father's will, and a sublime example of how each of us can achieve the level of spiritual awareness and mastery that he achieved.

Les Jamieson is Vice President of the Urantia Book Society of Greater New York.