

Chapter 12

Creation of Urantia Brotherhood –1937 to 1956

Study and Preparation

The contact commissioners and the Forum members studied the Urantia Papers and prepared for the outreach efforts they hoped would begin in their lifetimes.¹ Julia Fenderson led a Los Angeles group of former members of the Chicago Forum. These readers described their activities as follows:

We gathered together every month for ten years before the books were published. During those times we studied the major religions of the world and [the small booklet, "The Evolution of the Soul," authored by Dr. Sadler in 1941].² What a special jubilee when the books finally arrived.³

The Need for a Simple, Basic Organization

In the 1960 history prepared by members of the contact commission, *History of the Urantia Movement*, its authors wrote,

It was inevitable that some sort of fraternal organization would grow out of the teachings of The Urantia Book. All interested persons could see that the Urantia teachings were opposed to the sectarianism of Christian believers. It was clear that it was not the purpose of the Urantia revelation to start a new church.⁴

Over time the contact commission received considerable guidance about the dissemination of *The Urantia Book*. **Phase six** began when the contact commissioners presented a first draft of the "Constitution of Urantia Brotherhood" to the Forum in 1937.⁵ The revelatory commission suggested the Constitution be revised. The early leaders were still revising it in the early 1950s.⁶

Beginning in 1942, while some of the Forum members were engaged in the intensive study program called "the Seventy," special written communications addressed to the Seventy from the revelatory commission began to arrive. These messages came to them via the human subject and the contact commission. The topics of the communications ranged from the dissemination of the revelation to guidance concerning the associated organizations:⁷ Most of these messages were later shared with the Forum. Some excerpts from these topics are as follows:

*The best government in the world is that which governs least, that the true purpose of government is to prevent government, and that government which prevents the most government is the best because it leaves the individual free—permits him his liberties and inalienable rights—but prevents predatory groups from interfering with these liberties. When people are all spirit-led, they won't need any more government than they have on Havona.*⁸

*If you undertake this work without an organization, you will have in the English-speaking world alone fifty other organizations springing up who will claim the right to use the name "Urantia," and each one claiming to be the "only true and original" Urantia Brotherhood. It would be the most disgraceful thing in the world since the early days of Christianity. Not since the gospel of Jesus has there appeared such a dynamic nucleus about which could be built so many organizations and which would attract so many differently motivated men—good, bad, and indifferent. You must create an organization whose major purpose is to prevent other organizations and, therefore, the most benign.*⁹

*You must carefully consider the organization Jesus created before he left the planet. It was an organization designed to prevent confusion, to ordain justice, to safeguard majorities against minorities. He did not leave the ecclesiastical hierarchy that subsequently grew up. But he did leave a simple, social organization that could carry on and prevent confusion.*¹⁰

In *The Urantia Book*, a Melchizedek adds these reminders:

While it is true that that the institutionalization of religion has usually detracted from its spiritual quality, it is also a fact that no religion has thus far succeeded in surviving without the aid of institutional organization of some degree, greater or lesser.¹¹

Organization of Urantia Brotherhood

In 1955, during one of its last meetings before the Forum became the First Urantia Society, Bill Sadler commented, “I hope we can make some new and original mistakes instead of making the same mistakes the apostles and some of the early Christians made.”

The preamble to the Urantia Brotherhood Constitution was read to the Seventy in December 1951. It states:

Inasmuch as it is our most solemn conviction that the comfort, happiness, and well-being of Man will be enhanced by the creation of an organization devoted to the purposes hereinafter expressed, and inasmuch as it is our considered judgment that the purposes hereinafter expressed may best be accomplished through the mutual assistance and association of a body of people working together for the common cause, we do hereby unite together as a voluntary association and fellowship under the name URANTIA BROTHERHOOD, and we do hereby adopt and establish this CONSTITUTION OF URANTIA BROTHERHOOD.¹²

Article II of the Urantia Brotherhood Constitution—Purpose—began: “The purposes of Urantia Brotherhood are the study and dissemination of the teachings of *The Urantia Book*. This is followed by language that is word-for-word the same as the principal Object of Urantia Foundation, thus uniting the two organizations in purpose.¹³

A review of the creation of Urantia Brotherhood was included in a 1970 Urantia Foundation newsletter:¹⁴

The Urantia Brotherhood was organized by the Trustees of the Urantia Foundation under the direction and guidance of the governing planetary authorities. The organization officially came into existence on January 2, 1955. The purpose of the Urantia Brotherhood is the study and dissemination of the teachings of The Urantia Book, and it was for these purposes that Urantia Foundation appointed the Urantia Brotherhood to act as the distributor of The Urantia Book with the assistance of the Urantia Brotherhood Corporation, the legal and fiscal arm of Urantia Brotherhood.

The Urantia Foundation is separate and distinct. Of The Urantia Book, the Urantia Foundation is the conservator; the Urantia Brotherhood is the promoter, acting under the egis of the Foundation. Therefore, though Urantia Foundation and Urantia Brotherhood work closely together they are two distinct and separate organizations, with different responsibilities, duties and prerogatives.¹⁵

Acting alone as individuals, the Trustees of Urantia Foundation organized Urantia Brotherhood. There are no records in the Foundation's files pertaining to the formation of the Brotherhood. Urantia Brotherhood and its societies were designed to be autonomous. The midwayers emphasized to the contact commission that there should be no apparent connection within the founding documents of the two organizations.¹⁶

Governing Body of Urantia Brotherhood

Thirty-six members of the Forum were selected to serve as the governing body of Urantia Brotherhood, the General Council. Beginning in 1955, the first General Council served for nine years, after which the thirty-six members were divided into three groups of twelve councilors who served three, six, or nine year terms. The method of electing General Councilors after the first nine years called for each Urantia Society to send a delegate and an alternate to a Triennial Delegate Assembly. The first Triennial Delegate Assembly occurred in 1964. At the first T.D.A.,

and every three years since, the T.D.A. has selected a slate of twelve Councilors to serve for nine years.¹⁷

The Organizational Meeting of Urantia Brotherhood

In a letter by the first secretary-general of Urantia Brotherhood to Julia Fenderson in Los Angeles, Marian T. Rowley wrote about the founding of the Brotherhood:

Sunday, January 2, 1955, at 12 o'clock there was a meeting of 36 people in the Forum room for the purpose of organizing the Urantia Brotherhood. First, Doctor read a communication directing how it should be done, then, Bill Hales presided and called each one of the 36 up to the front to sign the constitution. (After elections) the meeting closed with the Lord's Prayer, and the deed was done. Believe me, it was the most thrilling thing! We were all very much impressed—some were crying and I was shaking like a leaf. We've waited so long, and it just seemed hardly possible.¹⁸

Standing Committees of Urantia Brotherhood

Most of the nine standing committees began meeting as the date of publication came closer in order to plan how to be ready once the book was launched.

The Charter Committee: The Forum would transition to the First Urantia Society in Chicago, soon followed by the First Urantia Society of Los Angeles (FUSLA). Some of the Forum members in Chicago had long been planning to organize societies when the book was published.¹⁹

Fraternal Relations Committee: Members were not certain how a new revelation would be greeted by organized religions. After their investigation of contemporary religions of the 1950s, they concluded the following: The Roman Catholic Church would immediately place the book on its list of banned books, the *Index Liborum*. Fundamentalist Christians probably would not welcome a book that did not support all of its tenets and would warn members to be wary of the “devil-sponsored book.”²⁰

Domestic Extension Committee: Committee members created a list comprised of forty-one names of political figures, authors, and other influential national and international English-speaking personalities. The members would mail a complimentary copy to each person on the list. Domestic Extension collected information about how public libraries accept gift books. Another list included large public metropolitan library systems and university libraries to which the book would be sent.²¹

Foreign Extension Committee: The committee drew up a list of 100 libraries in the British Commonwealth to which *Urantia Books* would be sent. The organization offered expatriate American Forum members living in foreign countries discounts on books to distribute to libraries or churches.²²

The Urantia Brotherhood School

The Committee on Education was the most active of all the committees in the years prior to the book's publication. Urantia Brotherhood School was in the planning stages before the actual publication date was announced. The contact commissioners and scholars who attended the Seventy on Wednesday evenings wanted to extend its intensive study program beyond publication. While a few readers believed that the book would largely teach itself, they did note that all revelators on normal worlds establish educational programs and training centers. For example:

*The schools of the Planetary Prince are primarily concerned with philosophy, religion, morals, and the higher intellectual and artistic achievements. The garden schools of Adam and Eve are usually devoted to practical arts, fundamental intellectual training, social culture, economic development, trade relations, physical efficiency, and civil government.*²³

Readers assumed that Urantia Brotherhood would initiate a program of inquiry and training. In order to introduce the book and its teachings to the farthest corners of the earth, teachers first needed to be trained. The training would emphasize basic concepts of *The Urantia Book*, the doctrines of the book that are unique, and the book's more obscure and subtle teachings. The arrival of the revelators' Publication Mandate provided incentive to continue developing the Urantia Brotherhood School framework already under way.²⁴

The book belongs to the era immediately to follow the conclusion of the present ideological struggle. That will be the day when men will be willing to seek truth and righteousness. When the chaos of the present confusion has passed, it will be more readily possible to formulate the cosmos of a new and improved era of human relationships. And it is for this better order of affairs on earth that the book has been made ready.

*But the publication of the book has not been postponed to that (possibly) somewhat remote date. An early publication of the book has been provided so that it may be in hand for **the training of leaders and teachers**. [Emphasis added]*²⁵

The Committee on Education began operating informally even before the Brotherhood was officially established, an acting chairman appointed, and the curriculum set up. A faculty of ten teachers was appointed, seven of whom were professional educators; they began working on textbooks for the first year of operation.²⁶ The committee did not undertake the matter of organizing study groups.

At first, and for a few years, there was a quiet effort to begin the preparation of official interpretations of the teachings. But after re-reading certain selections in *The Urantia Book*, the idea was abandoned.²⁷

*When a member of a social religious group has complied with the requirements of such a group, he should be encouraged to enjoy religious liberty in the full expression of **his own personal interpretation** of the truths of religious belief and the facts of religious experience [Emphasis added].*²⁸

The beauty and sublimity, the humanity and divinity, the simplicity and uniqueness, of Jesus' life on earth present such a striking and appealing picture of man-saving and God-revealing that the theologians and philosophers of all time should be effectively restrained from daring to form creeds or create theological systems of spiritual bondage out of such a transcendental bestowal of God in the form of man.²⁹

The Brotherhood Constitution specified two levels of course completion: “Certified Leader” and “Ordained Teacher.” Degrees would be granted in both categories.³⁰ Courses were rigorous, and students took tests periodically and at the end of each course. Students were expected to attend all classes.

The committees that became more active after publication were: Judicial Committee, Finance Committee, Publications Committee, and Miscellaneous Activities Committee.

Unity of Purpose Fundamental to Success

Some individuals within the Forum had divergent views on some matters, but they were generally cooperative and respectful in resolving conflicts. The revelators continued to guide the contact commission and the Forum group during formation of plans for the organizations. Unity was often a theme of the revelators to the contact commission that was shared with the Forum. In 1946 they had advised:

*You cannot expect widespread acceptance of the Urantia revelation until 90% of the Brotherhood attains **unity of purpose**, just as there will not be peace in the world until 90% of the nations want peace. [Emphasis added]³¹*

Transition of Forum to First Urantia Society

The group was still called the Forum until June 1956. Almost a year and a half after the establishment of Urantia Brotherhood in January 1955, the First Urantia Society was chartered and installed at 533 Diversey Parkway, at 3:00 o'clock, on June 17, 1956. The thirty-four Founders were all longtime Forum members. One hundred twelve additional Forum members signed the membership role as charter members. The society adopted the Constitution and elected the new officers. Members made a pledge of dedication and were assured that membership in any other religious organization would not disqualify them from membership in First Urantia Society.³² Study continued in the same manner as the Forum. With the creation of First Urantia Society in Chicago and First Urantia Society of Los Angeles in the same year, the Urantia Brotherhood began to operate regionally and beyond its central organizational location.

ENDNOTES FOR CHAPTER 12, CREATION OF URANTIA BROTHERHOOD

¹ *100 Years of Revelation, A Historic Perspective*, by Barbara Newsom, Carolyn Kendall and Urantia Foundation staff. (publ. by Urantia Foundation, 2000)

² *The Evolution of the Soul*, by Dr. W.S. Sadler, (Publ. by William F. Ayers Foundation, Lansing, Michigan, 1941) dedicated to belief in growth of the soul.

³ Fenderson, Julia, Culver City, CA, correspondence, 07/18/82.

⁴ *History of the Urantia Movement*, 1960, by the contact commission. See Appendix II.

⁵ Sadler, William S., Jr., Memorandum, 1958.

⁶ Bowman, Clarence N., personal diary.

⁷ Messages. See Appendices VIII -XI.

⁸ Message from the commander of the Seraphim of Progress, August 1942. Re-read to the Forum, March 7, 1955 by Bill Sadler. See Appendix IX.

⁹ [Idem.]

¹⁰ [Idem.]

¹¹ (p.1083) [98.6.1]

¹² Urantia Brotherhood Constitution, adopted January 2, 1955, by General Council, at 533 Diversey Pkwy, Chicago, IL 60614.

¹³ *100 Years of Revelation; A Historic Perspective*, 2000.

¹⁴ Published and mailed by the Board of Trustees, Urantia Foundation.

¹⁵ Notarized statement by William M. Hales, first president of Urantia Foundation, 6/7/90. See Appendix V

¹⁶ Christensen, Emma L, oral remark to Thomas Kendall, 04/05/76.

¹⁷ The Urantia Brotherhood Constitution, Article VIII,

¹⁸ Rowley, Marian T., correspondence to Julia Fenderson, 01/03/1955.

¹⁹ Under the chairmanship of Ruth Burton.

²⁰ Report read by committee secretary, Albert H. Dyon at the first General Council meeting.

²¹ Chairman Everett Farwell reported several pending projects.

²² Chairman, James C. Mills report.

²³ (P. 587) [51.06.04]

²⁴ The Publication Mandate was read to the Forum in September 1952. See Appendix XI.

²⁵ [Idem.]

²⁶ Personal memory of author.

²⁷ [Idem..]

²⁸ (p. 1135.2) [103.5.12].

²⁹ (p. 1084.2) [195.10.2].

³⁰ Urantia Brotherhood Constitution. Art. XI, Sec. 11.14.

³¹ Revelator message, 1946.

³³ Personal memory of author.