

## **Conflict: An Essential Experience**

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### *Introduction*

Life is a challenge to us all. We all have our own individual means of coping with the challenge of living; we all have our own reactions to the difficulties faced in life. For our primitive ancestors the primary challenge was simply survival. The planet we live on is not wholly hospitable. There are climatic, geographical and disease conditions to overcome. These three natural difficulties kept our ancestors fully occupied and led to the Darwinian theory of the "survival of the fittest". These factors greatly aided evolution and technological advances.

Today modern man has largely overcome these natural difficulties through the inventions of shelter, transportation and medical science. Modern man feels powerful and often believes that he has "dominion over all that he surveys". Yet modern man is very restless, he is somehow ill at ease with what he has done to the planet which supports him and, like a spoilt child, he is now beginning to perceive that all that he has done is not good. He has been careless with the precious gift of life and with his planet. He finds himself searching for a rationale for his actions--a purpose in life.

This urge has led to the development of philosophy, psychology and a great many religious beliefs. But, to date, none of these fields of endeavor have yielded the answer that man is searching for. It is my belief that the reason for this failure is that the search has been directed towards the outside material world for too long, in the hope of finding physical explanations to the questions posed.

It is my view that the answers we search for are to be found in the inner, spiritual, world of the human soul. It is within, that the search must begin, with a deepened understanding of our human nature, our desires, our faults and our true personalities. In my own search I have found the contents of The Urantia Book greatly helpful. The contents of this book cover all the topics touched on above in great detail and I have found that following the principles of the book has enhanced my daily life and enriched my spiritual experience.

Man can discover the Father in his heart, but he will have to search for the Supreme in the hearts of other men (P. 1290).

The ultimate goal of human existence is to discover the Father, and to stand in his presence on Paradise. This goal is supremely difficult to achieve particularly when you start at the mortal level here on Urantia. The difficulty arises from the fact that we are a quarantined planet, one of the many which took part in the Lucifer Rebellion. We suffer now the consequences of the ill-fated decision that Caligastia took when, together with Lucifer, he entered into conflict with the Father's will. Caligastia and Lucifer were both high sons of God, belonging to the third order of universe sonship, the Lanonandeks, and had the full benefit of connections with the universe circuits. Yet they failed in their search to know the Father, they did not find it possible to have faith in his truth, beauty, and goodness. How much more difficult it is for us to accept, in faith, all that we hear about the Father. How much more difficult it is for us to find him. But here in this quotation we learn that we can discover the Father in our own hearts, that he is ever present within us. This comforting news was the central message of the teachings of Jesus Christ during his sojourn on this planet, and the end of his life in the flesh signaled a great out-pouring of spiritual endowment on the humans of Urantia. It marked the end of a dispensation and inaugurated the era in which every normal human mind is endowed with the Spirit of Truth and with a Thought Adjuster, the divine fragment of God.

These events led us into an age of spiritual equality. We all have the same spiritual potential, the same potential career ahead of us, a career of discovery, experience and service, which can lead us to the achievement of our goal, to the very personal center of all creation, the personal presence of the Father.

But, while we all enjoy this spiritual equality, we were not all born equal. We all have a unique personality with its attendant talents and faults. Our qualities are not always exploited to their best effect, and society does not always hold them in high esteem. Thus we as individuals often find it difficult to live in society as we

find it, and we enter into conflict with our fellow men, feeling aggrieved by a lack of understanding, or a lack of acceptance of our abilities as they are.

But we cannot expect to be able to live in isolation from our fellow creatures. It is precisely for this reason that we find ourselves on such a planet, in such social groupings. The plan of the Father is founded on the knowledge that the difficulties of living side by side with others is precisely the experiential situation required, by us, to start the long ascent to Paradise.

These struggles and conflicts which exist, from the personal level outwards to the international, interracial and inter-religious levels are the means by which we learn the true values and meanings that we will require for the future stages of our existence and the future assignments we shall have to undertake. We have the opportunity here and now, to begin to overcome differences in our abilities, in our points of view, to learn to work as a team, to surmount the difficulties attendant on mortal existence. It is through the experiences won in these struggles that we contribute to the unfolding revelation of the Supreme; it is through our contacts with others that we can discover the Supreme.

This presentation might be described as a lament for the dismal efforts we make in our daily lives towards the attainment of these noble goals. We shall examine the various forms of conflict in which we engage and the various reasons for them. This shall be followed by an overview of the value of conflict in the light of the fact that it seems to be through conflict that we learn most. Finally we shall see why conflict can become evil and why it is essential to experience conflict on our way to the discovery of the Father.

What do we mean by conflict in the context of this essay? There are many forms of conflict, some or all of which we will experience during the course of our lives. The main conflicts which we shall address here can be summarized as follows:

1. Inner Conflict--that principal challenge we all face in the attempt to reconcile the two natures inherent in our being. On the one hand, there is our animal nature, which we have carried through with us from the time of the dawn mammals and which has served us so admirably in many a tight situation in the past. On the other hand we have our spiritual nature which has been a gift to us from the Father. The influences of this part of our nature derive from the action of the seven adjutant mind-spirits and of the Thought Adjuster. The co-existence of these two very divergent influences within has always been a cause of difficulty, anxiety and conflict for all humans. But it also presents us with a great opportunity for valuable learning experiences--experiences which will stand to us, not just now in our lives, but through the ages, right through to the moment we achieve our long yearned for goal of enjoying the actual presence of God. The Urantia Book speaks of this very conflict: In every mortal there exists a dual nature: the inheritance of animal tendencies -and the high urge of spirit endowment. During the short life you live on Urantia, these two diverse and opposing urges can seldom be fully reconciled; they can hardly be harmonized and unified; but throughout your lifetime the combined Spirit ever ministers to assist you in subjecting the flesh more and more to the leading of the Spirit (P. 381). We should not allow ourselves to be discouraged at the prospect of a lifelong struggle which is seldom reconciled. Indeed we should be encouraged by the fact that this struggle is continuously monitored by our Thought Adjuster and known to the Father; that it is this struggle upon which we propagate the emerging soul which will be with us for all time.

2. Outer Conflict--unlike the solitary personal conflict described above, outer conflict is a form of social interaction. It is an interaction which, depending on the mode of expression, may be good or evil. We all recognize that competitive sport is a form of highly regularized conflict. This form of conflict we would probably all agree is good. It can bring out the best in mankind in that it takes self and group discipline to succeed. It takes fitness and athletic prowess. It takes courage and skill. It is uplifting to the community to witness high standards of performance and it has the power to unite diverse personalities behind a cause where it is possible to express, peacefully, our natural competitiveness and to gain satisfaction from victory without humiliating the defeated. Competitive sport can bring out all these qualities and it has long been recognized that it is good to encourage the young to learn a sporting skill and to put a lot of energy into it, thus channeling youthful competitiveness and aggression in a positive way. The benefits of competitive sport that have been outlined here have much in common with those The Urantia Book lists as the social value of war, which is the violent expression of outer conflict: War has had a social value to past civilizations because it:

1. Imposed discipline, enforced co-operation.
2. Put a premium on fortitude and courage.
3. Fostered and solidified nationalism.

4. Destroyed weak and unfit peoples.

5. Dissolved the illusion of primitive equality and selectively stratified society (P. 785).

The emphasis in The Urantia Book's discussion of the social value of war is firmly placed on the fact that these benefits no longer attach to the carrying out of war. The authors are most insistent in the repetition of this point: War has had a certain evolutionary and selective value, but like slavery, it must sometime be abandoned as civilization slowly advances.... Ancient warfare resulted in the decimation of inferior peoples; the net result of modern conflict is the selective destruction of the best human stocks (P. 785-6). At one time physicians believed in bloodletting as a cure for many diseases, but they have since discovered better remedies for most of these disorders. And so must the international bloodletting of war certainly give place to the discovery of better methods for curing the ills of nations (P. 786). Old-fashioned war did select the innately great men for leadership, but modern war no longer does this.

To discover leaders society must now turn to the conquests of peace: industry, science, and social achievement (P. 786).

When these points are put so eloquently we must ask ourselves why do we continue to plunge into violent conflict with our neighbors? We need only look at the daily papers to see that dozens of barbaric wars are being waged at this very moment in all the corners of the world. To those of us whose natures are predominantly passive and to whom the expression of aggression through violence is abhorrent, it is hard to understand these conflicts. But they can be linked back to our personal inner conflict: War is an animalistic reaction to misunderstandings and irritations; peace attends upon the civilized solution of all such problems and difficulties (P. 783).

The link contained in this phrase with the personal conflict we endure in our lives is in the word "animalistic!". It is the evolved animal in us that reacts violently to certain difficult situations. The violent reaction is often the first, impulsive reaction and, just as often, we regret those actions after the event. We often only complicate issues by the adoption of violent means of resolving problems as we add layers of further misunderstanding on top of a first difficulty which might have been easy to resolve through negotiation at the outset.

This pattern of conflict attends upon a great many events in our lives, from the small misunderstanding, at the office which may escalate to a situation where we must resign or be fired, to a dispute over territory which can escalate to world war! Always there is somebody who perceives themselves as the aggrieved party, who feels that they have been the victim of an injustice and who set about "rectifying" the situation unilaterally. Seldom are we willing to express our discontent over an issue when it occurs--we find it humiliating. We prefer, in general, to lock it up inside, to brood on it and to wait for the right moment to gain our revenge. All these reactions seem to me to derive from the animal in us. A spiritualized reaction would be to talk through our grievances with the perceived aggressor --before our animal side allows us to plant the seed of hate and revenge in our hearts. It is a common experience to find that the perceived aggressor is wholly unaware of the hurt he has caused or is willing to try to change as necessary to overcome the difficulty.

This process would, it is fair to say, be more commonly experienced in inter-personal conflict than in international conflict where the aggressor is usually very conscious of his actions and of their potential consequences. It is in such situations that a fast response from a global moral force could have a powerful influence. Our United Nations is our second attempt at the creation of such a global moral force and it has had great successes in the past. Currently it is more involved than ever in peace missions and is going through a serious testing time. Let's hope and work for its success as this is an institution upon which we can build for the future. In its discussion on international conflict and on the usefulness of global organizations The Urantia Book says the following: You cannot prevent nations going to war as long as they remain infected with the delusional virus of national sovereignty. Internationalism is a step in the right direction. An international police force will prevent many minor wars, but it will not be effective in preventing major wars, conflicts between the great military governments of earth (P.1489).

But global wars will go on until the government of mankind is created. Global sovereignty will prevent global wars--nothing else can (f. 1490). These last quotations are not intended to introduce a downbeat tone to this discussion. Rather it is intended to introduce realism to the debate. We face serious challenges in our life here on Urantia, challenges which we must strive to overcome. It seems evident that we can learn most through difficult experiences, and it is because of this that conflict is good. We all dislike conflict and would, in general, rather not face a conflictive situation. It seems to us to be easier to avoid the situation, to turn our

attention to something else, to try to forget about it; but it always comes back and we eventually have to face the music and resolve the difficulty. We suffer during the period of resolution, directly through the pain inflicted by the situation, and in fear that it will never end. But if we are resolute and work our way through the hard times we will look back later and realize that valuable lessons were learnt, generally about ourselves, our character and about others. A test shows each of us up for who and what we are. Remember--it is under extreme pressure that the diamond is formed.

So what is the strength within which guides us through a difficult, conflictive situation? Few of us, as students of The Urantia Book, would hesitate in finding an answer to this question--the Thought Adjuster is that inner strength who guides us through those extremely difficult times and who helps us to draw conclusions and learn lessons from our experiences.

Our reasons for drawing this conclusion are, to us, straightforward. The Thought Adjuster is the divine gift of the Father to each of his mortal children. The Thought Adjuster is given to be a moral force, forever urging the human onward and upward toward greater spiritual achievement. The Thought Adjuster, having descended from the Father takes a long-term view of the situations we must experience and formulates his influences from this viewpoint. He is always on the look out for what has eternity potential in our lives and will do his best to help us view our life from a similar standpoint. This, we would argue, is what is good in conflict. We find within the suffering, gems of wisdom, realizations; about ourselves and about human nature which we feel will stand to us in the future, and when we examine history we see that just such results have sometimes grown from conflicts in the past.

The Urantia Book informs us: In past ages a fierce war would institute social change and facilitate the adoption of new ideas as would not have occurred naturally in ten thousand years (P. 785). Society, as we know it, is the result of a great many wars and of the continuing need, over centuries, to be constantly ready and willing to defend that which is valuable to us. Through the necessity of defense we have invented and created systems of government, modes of social organization and ways of living which have led us to the relative civilization in which we now find ourselves. We have, over the ages, learnt something of the value of peace and this probably only because of the contrast with times of war and of the horrendous experience it is to live through a war. It has been in the peace intervals that progress was made in past ages: The first peace group was the family, then the clan, the tribe, and later on the nation, which eventually became the modern territorial state. The fact that the present-day peace groups have long since expanded beyond blood ties to embrace nations is most encouraging, despite the fact that Urantia nations are still spending vast sums on war preparations (P. 788). We have been slow to get to the stage at which we now find ourselves.

How much longer until the process is ended and we live on a planet where peace reigns perpetually? We have just seen that conflictive situations have been very helpful to mankind over the centuries, yet when we talk of current conflicts we often think of them as being evil or as being perpetrated by evil people. The concepts of evil, sin, and iniquity are defined in a particular way in The Urantia Book- Evil is the unconscious or unintended transgression of the divine law, the Father's will. Evil is likewise the measure of the imperfectness of obedience to the Father's will. ... Sin is the conscious, knowing, and deliberate transgression of the divine law, the Father's will. Sin is the measure of unwillingness to be divinely led and spiritually directed.... Iniquity is the willful, determined, and persistent transgression of the divine law, the Father's will. Iniquity is the measure of the continued rejection of the Father's loving plan of personality survival and the Son's merciful ministry of salvation (1660).

We are taught, through the teachings of Jesus, that if we are reborn of spirit, we leave evil, sin and iniquity behind us. The higher urge of the spirit supplants the evil tendencies which arise due to our mortal origins, tendencies which, though natural, must be mastered if we are to approach closer to the Father. It is my view that the expression of natural tendencies, which may sometimes be evil, is not necessarily sinful or iniquitous. It is when these evil tendencies are willingly embraced that they turn from evil to become sinful or iniquitous. It is a measure of the immaturity of a personality--of his distance from the Father--when we witness this kind of attachment to evil-doing. Having come to an understanding of these aspects of our nature, we should examine what it is we can do to make the journey through these trials easier. It seems to me that the first best step is to look inward, to seek the guidance of the Thought Adjuster. We must first learn who we are, as individuals, we must face ourselves and grow to love ourselves, before we can turn outwards to our fellow man and our society and begin to sow peace and harmony in the community. This requires a determined effort of self-disciplined inward examination where recriminations are not sought and faults are bravely acknowledged and accepted as part of ourselves. Having assimilated all that we learn from such a period of introspection and

communion with the Thought Adjuster we will find ourselves ready to look out from ourselves with love to our neighbors.

It is for this stage in our development that the new law of love was given by Jesus during his lifetime on this planet when he said: "Love your neighbors as you love yourself". Jesus had, during his early manhood, many seasons of solitude and introspection and had put much effort into gaining an understanding of his fellow men as they lived at that time. He grew to know himself and having reached the pinnacle of self-development he turned his attention to "doing the Father's will" and so his public career began. He is the sublime example which we must follow if we are to overcome this stage of our evolution which is so dogged by conflict.

Steve Dreier, in his keynote speech at Snowmass in 1990, stated that, given an eternity, each of us will meet everyone else present at this moment. We will therefore be given the opportunity to love everyone, as Jesus loved all with whom he had contact. Looking around the room now we would say that it is improbable that we could grow to love everyone present, yet that is what we must do. The resolution of even the most major conflicts begins with inter-personal contact between individuals. It is from the courageous individual that peace grows. When each of us is willing to accept the next person with whom we have contact for what they are, to accept his personality, his differences and his strengths as something to be treasured then we will be on the threshold of perpetual peace. We will grow to realize that Urantia is big enough for us all and that its resources are plentiful enough to be shared with our neighbors.

Wise government can grow from individual realizations which accept that each person has qualities to be treasured and shared, that everyone has similar physical and emotional needs and that true peace begins with the individual.

In conclusion, it is evident that, due to the wisdom of the Father's plan, we are in a great school of learning- which we call Urantia. The curriculum is varied and consists in the experiences of daily life and all that that entails. Not least among these experiences is conflict which is experienced at many different levels. Our goal in this school is to understand the purpose of our experiences and, in so doing, to come to the realization. that it is necessary to live in peace together, to learn to cooperate one with the other before we can be received into the presence of God. The Father has given us the one gift which is sure to lead us along the path to this goal-- the Thought Adjuster. In giving each of us this divine gift he knew that through all the trials and tribulations of our mortal existence this part of himself would be a constant beacon of truth and goodness guiding us ever forward in our lives. Because the Thought Adjuster is a gift to the individual it is clear that it is with the individual, ourselves, that progress will be made, that conflict can be brought to an end. Let us resolve to start today.