



Our Inaugural booth in Denver; David Kantor on the left. Byron Belitsos in the center.

## Presenting the Urantia Revelation to the Academic Community

A Personal Statement (2022)

Byron Belitsos

I was delighted to lead an effort to create a formal presence at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion (AAR) held in Denver in November 18-22, 2022. The largest conference of its kind in the world, the AAR had in attendance nearly 8,000 professors and researchers in religion, theology, and biblical studies. For the first time since this was attempted once back in 1985, a group of us exhibited the *UR* along with other materials of interest to academics, including translations and selected secondary works. And while this effort was rather daunting, it was made easier because the Urantia Fellowship funded the expenses and supplied books.

One of my cohorts at the booth, David Kantor, assisted me all three days. Looking back on the experience, he has written: “It was a real privilege, a thrill, to represent the revelation in this dynamic milieu. While we did not have a high volume of traffic through the booth, the traffic we did have was very high quality. The majority of visitors I spoke with were professors of new religious movements. For the most part, their interest was academic rather than personal . . . This approach of promoting of the book for *academic* rather than *personal* interest is part of the strategy which Byron is trying to pursue. He also had a number of significant seed-planting conversations.”

**Planting seeds for future scholarly study**

Yet another reason I wanted to exhibit at the AAR in 2022 was, at the same time, rather personal. Recently I earned a masters degree in theology at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. While a student there, I was disappointed, but not surprised, to learn that none of my professors had ever heard of the *UB*. Plus, I found *no* scholarly articles about the *UB* in the vast online scholarly indexes used by theology and religion scholars. The school's library of over 800,000 volumes carried only two books of interest: an old edition of the *UB*, and Martin Gardner's inaccurate debunking book, *Urantia: The Great Cult Mystery*. It is my hope and prayer that *UB* students attending universities or seminaries in the future (or any future scholars interested in the *UB*) should not have to face this sort of deficit of scholarly coverage of the revelation.

To this end, I obtained permission at the seminary to cover the *UB* in just one chapter in my thesis, with the hope the thesis might be published. I have since been fortunate to attract a mainstream academic publisher, Wipf & Stock, who published my revised masters thesis as a book entitled [\*Truths about Evil, Sin, and the Demonic\*](#) (2023). with two full chapters on the *UB*. This book's purpose is to examine how "the problem of evil" has been conceived by Christian theologians over the centuries—a discipline now know as *theodicy*. I cover the theodicies of such thinkers as Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Leibniz, Kant, and many modern theologians. I then compare and contrast their most compelling ideas and models with those offered in the *UB*. I found that the *UB* offers essential solutions to many of the mysteries of evil that have confounded theologians over the last two millennia.

I also have a goal of filling another gap in academia. So, I obtained funding to create a textbook entitled [\*Reason and Revelation: Scholarly Writings about the Urantia Book\*](#) (Origin Press Academic, 2024). It provides in one introductory volume a set of high-quality scholarly essays. These materials have been selected for the anthology because they (1) showcase genuine scholarship, (2) interface with contemporary knowledge outside the *Urantia* text, and are (3) suitable for readers who are new to the revelation.

I believe these initial works will stimulate future scholarly encounter with the revelation in books or essays by established academics. But to make that happen we'll need to reach out to them with a hearty effort over many years.

[See also the account of our booth at AAR in 2024, at [this website](#).]