Demanding the Angels’ Share: 
Intellectual Property and Spiritual Organization in the Urantia Foundation

Abstract: This article explores the role that intellectual property plays as it shapes the circulation and use of ‘The Urantia Book,’ a divinely revealed text published in 1955 and embraced by a community of believers. For many modern spiritual communities – of which the Urantian community is a telling example – their coherence no longer lies in a centralized institution like the church but instead in a shared dedication to sacred texts and other religious media. Thus, intellectual property has become an effective means to administer the ephemeral beliefs and practices mediated by these texts. This article explores a number of the Urantia Foundation’s cases to demonstrate how intellectual property law can be used to maintain and adjudicate social relations rather than simply determining the proper allocation of ownership over a contested good. This project uses the legal battles of the Urantia Foundation as an opportunity to examine how religious communities ethically justify forms of ownership in religious goods and to highlight the incongruities between theories of authorship, originality and ownership within spiritual communities and those embedded in the law. Further, by focusing on intellectual property in the religious world, I seek to answer the question: does religion belong to the public domain?

Keywords: Intellectual property, Public Domain, Spirituality, New Religious Movements, Authorship, Commodification,