

Chapter 4

The Pre-Papers Period and the Contact Personality, 1900 to 1923

The Masterful Mystery

There has always been mystery surrounding the history and origin of *The Urantia Book* and it is likely to continue. The revelators, the high universe celestial beings who fostered the fifth epochal revelation, invoked secrecy about the origin, assuring their human partners that there was no satisfactory way it could be explained to human minds. The leader of the small group of humans who worked tirelessly with the celestial revelators remarked, “Every great religious movement has at its core some masterful mystery.”¹ *The Urantia Book* comments on this phenomenon:

Regardless of the drawbacks and handicaps, every new revelation of truth has given rise to a new cult. (M)odern men, as a group, adhere to the scientific attitude, eschew superstition, and abhor ignorance, while as individuals they all crave mystery and venerate the unknown. No cult can survive unless it embodies some masterful mystery and conceals some worthwhile unattainable [Emphasis added].²

One “great mystery” of the Urantia revelation is that, instead of just one individual or one unexplained phenomenon, there were a number of people who witnessed the events of those early years of the twentieth century. A group investigated the inexplicable phenomena surrounding the human “subject” and the techniques of transmission that would ultimately lead to the materialization of the Urantia Papers. In both the early years before the Urantia Papers began—the pre-papers period—and during the years in which the papers were received, there were many unknowns. “There were also a lot of surprises we didn’t anticipate,” reflected Dr. William S. Sadler, the human leader.³

History is not necessarily the same as origin; we can describe *what* happened; we can name the participants, but in this case we cannot explain origin: *how* it happened. The *how* would involve speculation, and the human partners were asked not to speculate—a fruitless endeavor.

The events about to be described in this, and following chapters, will seem like fantasy and magic to some young people and many older adults today. Yesterday’s children were raised on imaginative stories and movies that embodied cute, human-like animals that talked, sang, and

danced. In the 1940s and '50s, comic book action figures⁴ pursued their missions of making the world safe from the evil geniuses who threatened the peace and tranquility of the American way of life. More recently, a British school boy and his friends fought to protect their classmates and teachers with magic potions and by outsmarting their devilish enemies.⁵ These were the imaginary forces for good that excited the imaginations of children. Angels play a protective role in scripture dating back centuries but are taken only half-seriously in churches, and in our holiday decorations, today. Angels are mentioned hundreds of times in the Old and New Testament Scriptures. In a 1951 movie, *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, a Christ-like alien came to earth to warn of concerns by peoples of other planets about our war-like ways. It was the leading edge of alien films, but the genre is becoming more violent as time passes.

The method of the scientific age has diminished belief in angels and other forces of good and evil. Such beings are unlikely to exist in the minds of true scientists. How could there be *unseen* beings and spirits who watch over us, or who occasionally step in to adjust material things and the physical welfare of our world? In the scientific age we have been passing through recently, there is no room for fantasy and make-believe. Disembodied voices, strange writings, and manipulations of material objects? These things happen only in movies with special effects. This chapter challenges these beliefs. For a few dozen years, a small group of human beings believe they have actually experienced these phenomena. No tricks; no magic; just reality.

The Sleeping Neighbor

The **first phase** of the fifth epochal revelation began sometime in the first decade of the twentieth century. Two young doctors, William S. and Lena K. Sadler, husband and wife, were general medical practitioners who lived in a western suburb of Chicago.⁶ They encountered a married couple who lived on the floor below their own apartment. The wife knocked on the doctors' door late one evening. She was highly agitated because her husband was behaving strangely while he slept. The woman had heard that the new neighbors were doctors, and she asked if they could come immediately to their apartment. At his bedside they observed a middle-aged man who was sleeping fitfully. They were unsuccessful in attempts to wake him, though they tried every means possible.

When he finally awoke of his own accord, he was surprised to find strangers in his bedroom. After they explained their presence, he agreed to allow them to examine him and to ask questions. During the period of unconsciousness, he did not dream, he told them, and insisted he felt fine. The examination revealed nothing irregular, and his health appeared to be excellent.

Several weeks after they first witnessed the patient's strange sleep behavior, the doctors were called to his bedside again. The patient was unconscious, but this time he appeared to be trying to speak. Dr. Lena asked if there was something he wished to say. The voice that spoke was not the patient's voice; it was instead that of an unfamiliar individual who announced himself to be a student visitor from another world who had stopped to visit our planet on his way to another part of the universe.

The doctors were called to the man's bedroom many times over the next few years because of these persistent and unique spells. The sleeping patient appeared to be functioning as the unconscious conduit of information originating from a source outside of himself. In the years to come the doctors realized that celestial beings were the source of this new knowledge which was to be shared with a small human audience.⁷

A few years after the phenomenon began, Lena Sadler's sister, Anna Kellogg, a "trained nurse," and her husband, Wilfred C. Kellogg, an accountant and the doctors' business manager, moved nearby and were also invited to observe the patient. A secretary later started taking down in shorthand the words spoken by the unseen visitors while the man's wife hovered in the background.

Investigating the Phenomenon

During the early period, the two doctors investigated this case from a strictly medical and scientific point of view. Patient confidentiality played an important role in maintaining secrecy about the identity of the gentleman. Finally, with the patient's permission, they summoned other medical professionals, including physicians and a psychologist to examine the man.⁸

This group performed a series of tests on the patient that indicated the information being transmitted did not emanate from or pass through his mind. Although they were able to rule out

the patient's mind as the source of the material, they were never able to fully explain the mystery of these phenomena. They did determine that the patient was unconscious throughout each episode and relatively unconcerned with the proceedings.

This case did not fit the profile of trance mediums that Dr. Sadler had encountered during his earlier investigations of psychic phenomena. He invited other colleagues who were engaged in exposing mediumship and spiritualism to join the investigation. This group included magicians, handwriting analysts, and a detective.⁹ The surviving contact commissioners later wrote in 1960 that most of these experts had:

. . . considerable experience in the investigation of psychic phenomena. We early arrived at the conclusion that the phenomena connected with the personality was in no way similar to any other well-known type of psychic performance, such as hypnotism, automatic writing, clairvoyance, trances, spirit mediumship, telepathy, or double personality.¹⁰

At no time did the voices speaking with them claim to be deceased humans returning for a visit with living relatives and associates. Nor were they "ghosts" from ages past. They did not claim to be providing scientific information which would by-pass "earned" knowledge of their day.

The man's physical well-being was not adversely affected by his experiences. In fact, he felt a great sense of relief after each episode. One witness to the later episodes emphasized that this man's relative lack of concern about the phenomena did not mean he wasn't interested in the project.¹¹ He was very interested, but he simply wasn't worried about it.

In 1929, Dr. William Sadler authored a book, *The Mind at Mischief*, which dealt with paranormal psychological behavior. He described his observations of the patient in the Appendix of his book; he wrote:

I was brought in contact with it, in the summer of 1911¹² and I have had it under my observation more or less ever since, having been present at probably 250 of the night sessions, many of which have been attended by a stenographer¹³ who made voluminous notes.

At no time during the period of eighteen years' observation has there been a communication from any source that claimed to be the spirit of a deceased human being.

The communications which have been written, or which we have had the opportunity to hear spoken, are made by a vast order of alleged beings who claim to come from other planets to visit this world, to stop here as student visitors for study and observation when they are en route from one universe to another or from one planet to another. These communications further arise in alleged beings who purport to have been assigned to this planet for duties of various sorts.¹⁴

A secondary account of this case was provided by the Sadler's son, William S. "Bill" Sadler, Jr. During that pre-papers period he was not a participant, being an infant through seventeen years of age. In a 1962 gathering he stated:

Many years ago my parents, who were physicians, had brought to their attention this individual who had some rather strange things happening to him....These two physicians became interested in this case. The man would go to sleep and he'd talk and what came out was intriguing and different. He was never interested in the lost watch or the stock market or in talking to your Uncle George who had passed on; never anything practical. This was different; distinctly offbeat.

We tried everything we could think of to see how this was being done but were baffled. The text was entirely written in pencil, all in the handwriting of this individual who remarked that "if they ever wanted to draw on my bank account" his account would be drained because the bank would pay on his signature.¹⁵

Bill served in the U.S. Marine Corps for almost four years, from 1924 until February 1928, but his narrative, though based on secondhand information, is considered reliable.

Throughout the years Dr. William Sadler's interest in this case continued. By 1930 he had given up his general and surgical practice to become a psychiatrist. His text book, *Theory and*

Practice of Psychiatry, was a standard in many teaching institutions. His interests in psychology, religion, and spiritualism provided the background necessary to engage in an almost 40-year project to help bring a revelation to Urantia.

The patient became known as “the subject,” “the contact personality,” or “the contact” at the time the new revelation was announced, in 1924. In later interviews with prospective members of the Forum, he was described as “a business man who had a high school education and was successful in his business because he had a secretary who knew how to spell.”¹⁶ When asked about the contact many years later, Urantia Foundation Trustee, Emma “Christy” Christensen responded in one letter to an inquirer: “His was an exemplary and inspiring life else he would not have been chosen for such an important task by the revelatory commission.”¹⁷ And to another question, Christy wrote, “The only reliable information about the contact personality involved in the transmission of the Urantia Papers is in *The Urantia Book* itself.”

Oral and Written Communications

The group of humans who observed the sleeping subject, as well as the later Forum members who did not actually observe him, were asked not to speculate on *how* the transmission of information from the unseen celestial authors came about in association with the unconscious human subject, whether through the vocal mechanism or a facsimile of his handwriting. They did not try to explain it, nor did they encourage anyone else to offer opinions.

One cannot, at this late date, say with certainty what form all of the contacts took in the years before 1924. Dr. William Sadler’s writings and interviews suggest that much of the communication was oral; the unseen beings spoke with the humans in conversational exchanges when all or most of the contact commissioners were present.

At other times written material simply appeared. Upon waking one morning in the early period, the patient’s wife found a stack of paper on which it appeared her husband had handwritten great amounts of text. The doctors were unable to determine how this material was written. The patient denied writing it, yet handwriting analysts concluded that it was his handwriting. He was as mystified as was his wife. The writings were not all on one topic during any one session. None of the early material exists; it was destroyed at the request of the celestial

beings. Beyond those who were permitted to attend the sessions, no one else examined the early material.¹⁸

Contact's Identity Not Revealed to the Forum

Those participating in the later Forum after 1923 never met the contact personality, nor were they told his name. They were not given any information about his identity, date of birth, or family, either then or after he died. His date of death was never announced. In 1960 the contact commissioners wrote:

The main reason for not revealing the identity of the "Contact Personality" is that the celestial revelators do not want any human being—any human name—ever to be associated with The Urantia Book. They want this revelation to stand on its own declarations and teachings. They are determined that future generations shall have the book wholly free from all mortal connections—they do not want a Saint Peter, Saint Paul, Luther, Calvin, or Wesley. The book does not even bear the imprint of the printer who brought the book into being.¹⁹

According to Bill Sadler Jr, a further reason that the name of the subject was not revealed was that the man himself did not want to be known.²⁰ Forum members noted that few of the authors of the papers used their own names, only their order of being has been maintained. Those entrusted with it maintained secrecy surrounding this individual throughout the years.

Purpose of the Pre-papers Period

One answer to the question of why the pre-papers period spanned nearly twenty years is provided in the 1960 history of *The Urantia Book*.

It would seem that, during these early years, our unseen friends were engaged in a thoroughgoing testing of the contact personality, rehearsing the technique of communication, selecting the contact commissioners—in fact, in a general way—setting the stage for the subsequent initiation of the presentation of the “Urantia Papers”

During these early years we were introduced to many new and, to us, somewhat strange concepts of the universe of universes and as concerned man and his life on

earth. Our superhuman friends thus spent upward of two decades in extending our cosmic horizons, enlarging our theologic concepts, and expanding our overall philosophy.²¹

How surprising it must have been to those participating during this early period in the unfolding of the revelation to be exposed to so many new concepts and ideas! Here are just a few of those heard during the pre-papers period:

- *The idea of a far-flung cosmos with millions of other inhabited planets*
- *Evolution of humankind and of the cosmos*
- *The First Source and Center*
- *The central universe of Havona,*
- *Seven Superuniverses*
- *The Supreme Being*
- *The Seven Master Spirits*
- *Power Directors*
- *Numerous orders of angels*
- *Thought Adjusters*

We heard something about the Lucifer rebellion, but got little information about Adam and Eve. We did pick up a hazy idea that Paradise might be the destination of surviving mortals. We gained the impression that there were special reasons for Jesus' bestowal on Urantia, but we had little or no idea as to the nature of these unrevealed reasons. We listened to occasional references to Jesus' life and teachings—but they were very cautious about the introduction of any new concepts regarding Michael's Urantia bestowal. Of all the Urantia Revelation, the Jesus Papers were the biggest surprise.²²

The contact commissioners were thus primed for the fuller account of these fascinating concepts which would unfold in the next ten years, from 1925 until 1935. Their curiosity was piqued: their commitment was proven; their loyalty was established.

END NOTES FOR CHAPTER 4, THE PRE-PAPERS PERIOD AND THE CONTACT PERSONALITY

- ¹ Sadler, William S., M.D., contact commissioner; oral comment to Forum; various dates.
- ² (p. 966) [87.07.06&08]. by a Brilliant Evening Star.
- ³ Contact commissioners' *History of the Urantia Movement*. (Urantia Foundation, 1960). See Appendix II.
- ⁴ Superman and Wonder Woman, fictional characters, (D.C. Comics, 1938 and 1942) .
- ⁵ Rowling, J.K., *The Harry Potter* series of seven fantasy novels, (1997 to 2007).
- ⁶ The Sadlers lived in LaGrange, Illinois from November 1905 to December 1914, per Ernest P. Moyers's book, *The Birth of a Divine Revelation*, (Moyer Publ., 2000).
- ⁷ Sadler, W. S., M.D. "Six oral interviews with Forum applicants, heard by me while employed by Sadler between 1952 and 1956. He conducted interviews on weekends or at the end of a workday. He left his office door open so narration could be heard. These were in addition to my own interview Oct. 14, 1951" Author.
- ⁸ Case, James T., M.D., Close friend of Sadlers', radiologist, reported to have been consulted regarding patient. Meyer Solomon, M.D., Neurologist of Northwestern University indicated to author a long-time association with Sadler going back to 1920s. At social event in 1965.
- ⁹ Magicians were: escape artist Harry Houdini and sleight-of-hand master magician Howard Thurston. Thurston became a member of the Forum; Houdini was "interested in the phenomenon, not the content" according to Sadler. The detective was Harry Loose, a fellow speaker on the Chautauqua circuit, who also joined the early Forum. Identity of handwriting analysts is unknown.
- ¹⁰ Contact commissioners' *History of the Urantia Movement*. (1960), See Appendix II,
- ¹¹ Christensen, Emma L., Contact commissioner. Oral recitation of experiences to Barbara A. Newsom, 1976.
- ¹² Sadler, W. S., M.D., The Appendix of *The Mind at Mischief*, (Funk & Wagnalls Co., 1929) See Appendix III. The date 1911 of first meeting first appeared in the Appendix of the first edition. It was a publisher's error which was not corrected by the author and was allowed to remain in subsequent editions of the text. The actual date of first meeting of subject and physicians was sometime "during the first decade of the twentieth century."
- ¹³ Christensen was not the stenographer mentioned for all 250 of the night sessions; she did not become associated with the human contact group until 1922.
- ¹⁴ [Ibid.]
- ¹⁵ Sadler, Jr., William S. "Bill", Transcription of oral remarks at Oklahoma City, OK, group, 2/18/62.
- ¹⁶ Sadler, W. S., M.D., Oral interview with Forum applicants, 1951 – 1955.
- ¹⁷ Christensen, Urantia Foundation correspondence with reader, 1970.
- ¹⁸ Sadler, W.S., M.D., Oral recitation of experiences to Forum members.
- ¹⁹ Contact commissioners' *History of the Urantia Movement*. (1960) See Appendix II.
- ²⁰ Sadler, Jr., Transcription of oral remarks at Oklahoma City, OK, group, 2/18/62.
- ²¹ Contact commissioners' *History of the Urantia Movement*, (1960). See Appendix II.
- ²² [Ibid.] This is not the same list as one prepared by Dr. William S. Sadler in January 1959 and incorporated into his paper, *Consideration of Some Criticisms of The Urantia Book*. He listed seventy-five concepts that "are new

and original as presented in *The Urantia Book*, not to mention more than one hundred additional narratives which represent enlargement, amplification, and clarification of existing knowledge.”