

Chapter 5

Founding of the Forum

Melchizedek's Announcement—The Contact Commission and

The First Urantia Papers, 1924 to 1929

Beginning of the Forum

The Sadler couple, together with their son Bill, lived primarily in rented apartments in Chicago and nearby suburbs in their twenty-five years of marriage so far (although they had purchased a home in LaGrange, Illinois in 1908.)¹ They moved into a three-story building at 533 Diversey Parkway, Chicago, Illinois, around October 1, 1922, closing on its purchase in March 1923.² The Kelloggs usually moved nearby whenever the Sadlers changed their residence.

After many years of investigating the patient and studying the fascinating materials transmitted through the anonymous man, either the idea occurred to the two doctors, or a proposal was presented to them by the unseen beings, that they form a discussion group in their new home and office building. In January 1923, Dr. William Sadler was traveling in Kansas delivering a series of lectures on Gestalt psychology when he wrote a letter to his 16-year-old son Bill back home in Chicago:

1-22-23 Junction City, Kansas

Dear Bill: I send you some jokes I picked up today. How are things coming? I was going to hear from you every day. Say, let's start a Sunday evening Forum at our house. I'll answer and direct discussion on Philosophy, Religion, Ethics and Race Betterment. We would keep open house and invite our friends and patients to come when they felt like it. We don't go to church any place and we ought to set aside that much for our own improvement. Talk it over with mother.

Yours, Dad³

When Dr. William Sadler arrived home on Sunday, February 11, 1923, he found that Dr. Lena had invited thirty people to attend the first open house. After this, meetings were held every Sunday afternoon from three to five o'clock. For the first two years attendance at the "forum" discussion was open; former patients brought family members and invited their friends to join and participate in the group.⁴

The two doctors chose the subjects to be discussed during the first hour of each meeting. After light refreshments the guests asked questions during the second hour. One early forum member recorded in his diary some of the subjects discussed during the first two years of the forum: Primary Emotions and Instincts; Genetics; Chromosomes Determine Characters; Darwin, Variation, Heredity, Environment; Mendelism; Are Acquired Characters Transmitted? and Eugenics. These were contemporary topics during the early 1900's. On Sunday, November 23, 1924, the discussion was titled: "False Mediums and Related Phenomena."⁵ There was no prohibition against taking notes about these topics. Sessions were entirely open to friends and family members.⁶

Dr. William had gained considerable experience investigating trance mediums and cases of alleged spirit visitations. The meeting on November 23rd led to continuing discussions of the differences between false mediums and the possibility of genuine contacts from spirits. One participant in the forum asked whether any so-called trance mediums could actually be receiving messages from spirit beings, such as angels. The doctor mentioned an exception to cases of delusion or fraud in the phenomena he had been investigating, which intrigued the group. Sadler described the case he and his wife had been observing for a period of years. Dr. Lena was out of town that week. When she returned, she was taken aback that he had "spilled the beans" about the investigation they had been engaged in for almost 20 years. Here-to-fore the Sadler couple had not revealed their experiences with the gentleman who was receiving material from an unknown source. When she returned the following Sunday she brought some notes she had taken during the evening encounters with the human subject. This presentation greatly interested those in attendance.⁷ This growing social group would play a vital role in the development of the revelation that was soon to be inaugurated.

The Melchizedek Announcement

At the December 14, 1924, forum meeting, Dr. Sadler revealed that earlier that year, on February 11, 1924, an invisible being named Machiventa Melchizedek had arrived at the evening encounter with the Sadler-Kellogg family group, along with the secretary and the sleeping subject. According to a forum member's diary entry, Machiventa announced that our world "will be receiving a wonderful new revelation."⁸

The **second phase** was launched when the Melchizedek Son arrived to announce to the family group the plan to initiate *The Urantia Book*, a most unusual form for a revelation in our local universe. Although *The Urantia Book's* credits show that Gabriel authorized Parts II, III, and IV of the book, Urantia movement historical records do not indicate that Gabriel was present for the 1924 announcement. Machiventa Melchizedek represented Gabriel, who acts in behalf of the Master Son, the creator of our local universe, Christ Michael.

These eldest [Melchizedek] Sons of a universe are the chief aids of [Gabriel] the Bright and Morning Star in carrying out the mandates of the Creator Son. When a Melchizedek goes to a remote world in the name of Gabriel, he may, for the purposes of that particular mission, be deputized in the name of the sender and in that event will appear on the planet of assignment with the full authority of [Gabriel] the Bright and Morning Star.⁹

This high Son was accompanied by "A-B-C," the leader of the planetary secondary midways. The February announcement was the first time that the small group of contact commissioners learned the purpose of their intensive preparation of nearly twenty years.¹⁰

Formalizing the Human Sounding Board

By 1925, the group of former patients and friends who attended the forum discussions each week had become quite cohesive. They had been called a "forum" since the first meeting in 1923, but the revelators asked for greater commitment:

We were instructed to form a “closed group” requiring each member to sign a pledge of secrecy and to discuss the Papers and all matters pertaining thereto with only those persons who were members of the Forum. Membership tickets were issued and the Charter membership numbered thirty.¹¹

Incidentally, the group’s name was capitalized after it was formalized. Each individual who chose to join this group, the Forum, was asked to sign a pledge that stated:

We acknowledge our pledge of secrecy, renewing our promise not to discuss the Urantia Revelations or their subject matter with anyone save active Forum members, and to take no notes of such matter as is read or discussed at the public sessions, or make copies or notes of what we personally read.¹²

The *1960 History of the Urantia Movement* attributed to the contact commission gives the date of this organization as September 1925; however, the diary of one Forum member indicates the ticket system was initiated some years later:

February 19, 1928: They originated the ticket system. Dr. S. re-read part of the paper on the Universal Father.¹³

The earlier 1925 date would reflect the wishes of the revelators that the Forum observe confidentiality concerning the material being transmitted from near the beginning of the revelation. Four years later, on February 26, 1928, Forum members were asked to stand, give their full names, and relate to the group their business or profession. Whether in 1925 or 1928, it was apparent to the Forum members that they were fortunate to be participants in the unfolding of an epochal revelation. On May 19, 1929, the Forum completed the reading of the last of the 1,700 pages of the “first series.” There was a spontaneous “testimonial meeting” in which each expressed how much the papers had come to mean to them.¹⁴

This group in Chicago was not the only one being considered as the sounding board for a new revelation. One Forum member remembered:

*We had reason to believe in those old days that there were several groups in the United States that were being checked and tested. We were quite certain that there was a group in Omaha that was being tested, checked, probably to see whether or not the leader of the group was the kind of person who could be trusted with such a revelation, and whether or not the members were also the type that would react rationally and reasonable.*¹⁵

Transition from “Family Test Group” to “Contact Commission”

The period of preliminary contact between the unseen visitors and the patient continued until February 11, 1924, when the *celestial* revelatory commission formally established the *human* contact commission to facilitate the project described as “a wonderful new revelation,” for the betterment of human society.¹⁶ The time between February 1924 and January 1925 was occupied with setting up the revelatory commission-contact commission partnership. From then on, only the contact commission worked closely and directly with the revelatory commission and the human subject; no outside consultants were allowed to participate or to observe:¹⁷

*Only the contact commissioners attended “contacts” and received written communications through the contact personality.*¹⁸

Excluding the patient, now formally known as the “contact personality,” the contact commission was comprised of four other persons who were related to each other, and their recently chosen secretary.

They were: the two leaders of the group, physicians William Samuel Sadler and Lena Celestia (Kellogg) Sadler, a husband and wife; her sister Anna Bell Kellogg, a “trained nurse” married to Wilfred Custer Kellogg,¹⁹ who became the business manager for both doctors;²⁰ and Emma Louise “Christy” Christensen, the secretary whom they came to love and accept as a “foster daughter.” Christy was not legally adopted by the Sadlers, as some writers have claimed.²¹ She was the stenographer and typist of the material transmitted through the human subject: the Urantia Papers.

Later, the doctors' son, William S. "Bill" Sadler, Jr. was mustered out of the U. S. Marine Corps on February 16, 1928 and was appointed to the contact commission in the 1930s. He specialized in posing questions to the revelators about the Supreme and Absolutes, thereby expanding the content of the revelation in their answers. Bill also developed skill in teaching and organizational development. When Lena Sadler died in 1939, she was not replaced.

The contact commission thus functioned as a *group* of six, or five, until the organizations (Urantia Foundation and Urantia Brotherhood) were established, and *The Urantia Book* was published. As *individuals*, they functioned as contact commissioners for the rest of their earthly lives.²²

The revelators, the human commissioners, and the contact personality functioned in the following manner:

1. Contact commissioners were always present together when oral dictation of the papers from the revelators occurred through the unconscious subject.
2. The unconscious human subject was always involved in transmitting written material even on rare occasions when the contact commissioners were not in his presence. Twenty years of investigation by the commissioners had satisfied them of the authenticity of the subject's role in the process.
3. The unconscious human subject was always involved in the transmittal of written materials, and most of the oral communications, until his death on an unrevealed date in the mid-1950s when the transmission of written materials ceased.
4. The oral messages not intended for the text of the book continued by "direct, externally audible voice" from the celestial beings until the death of the last contact commissioner. These voices were heard by one or more contact commissioner and even by others in the rare instances when other persons happened to be nearby. In these situations the voices came from any location in a room, even in other locations such as Pine Lodge at Beverly Shores, Indiana,²³ and Culver City, California.²⁴

Development and Presentation of the Papers--The First Series

While the revelation was first announced in February 1924, the unseen visitors did not challenge the small contact group until January 1925 to begin asking more intelligent questions instead of the trivial questions they usually asked. They wanted questions that would be of great benefit to all mankind. They also invited Dr. Sadler to ask the fifty-two questions he was holding in his mind. This surprised Dr. Lena who hadn't known what he was planning to ask the celestial visitors. "Why, Will, you haven't such a list in your mind, do you?" she asked.²⁵

William Sadler admitted to his wife, and later to the Sunday Forum group, that he had compiled a collection of fifty-two questions in his mind. He was endowed with a photographic memory and could easily memorize such a list. The revelatory commission directed the contact commissioners to invite the Forum "to join us in the preparation of questions."²⁶

We decided to start out with questions pertaining to the origin of the cosmos, Deity, creation, and such other subjects as were far beyond the present day knowledge of all humankind. On the following Sunday several hundred questions were brought in."²⁷ Some of them were silly: "How old is God?" or "Who built the Mexican pyramids?"²⁸ but others were profound: "Where is God?" "What happens to us when we die?"²⁹ We sorted out these questions, discarding duplicates, and in a general way, clarifying them.³⁰

They ended up with a list of about 180 questions which they organized and the secretary typed.³¹

Shortly thereafter, the first Urantia Paper appeared in answer to these questions.³²

The first paper about the "Godhead" was read to the Forum on January 18, 1925.³³

What happened was this: one day the questions were gone and where the questions were kept was the first of the Urantia Papers and was entitled, "The Universal Father."³⁴ (Bill was not in the vicinity when the first papers came; he was in the U.S. Marine Corps.)

For the next four years, from 1925 to 1929, in response to the Forum members' questions, the first series of papers comprised consecutive subjects, although they were much condensed compared to the present text. The first eight papers dealt with the Universal Father (two papers), the Eternal Son, Universe arrangement, the Conjoint Actor, the Central Divine Universe, the Universe of Universes, and the Seven Superuniverses. The next nineteen papers covered personalities from Paradise to the super universe level. Fifteen papers covered the physical evolution, administration and personalities of the local universe, constellation, system and planets, including the Lucifer Rebellion and the mansion worlds. The next nine papers presented the Edenic regime, its downfall and racial evolution, followed by two post-Melchizedek papers. Three papers concerning the Bestowals of Christ Michael, the Thought Adjusters, and Seraphic Guardians completed the first series of fifty-six papers by May 1929.³⁵

The Forum "*re-read the Foreword*" on Sunday, March 21, 1929, indicating that some type of introductory material was included in the process. This totaled fifty-seven papers. Typewritten papers were anywhere from nineteen to thirty-eight pages in length, and the total number of typewritten pages was 1700. Forum member Clarence Bowman recorded in his diary page numbers of typewritten papers heard or read between March 1, 1925, and January 1929. His attendance after 1931 was intermittent because he had married and moved to Ohio.³⁶

The contact commissioners wrote:

*We would read a Paper on Sunday afternoon and the following Sunday, the new questions would be presented. Again these would be sorted, classified, etc. Fifty-seven Papers were received by this method between 1925 and 1929. This program covered several years and ultimately resulted in the presentation of the 196 Papers as now found in The Urantia Book. From first to last, when Papers appeared, the questions disappeared. This was the procedure followed for the many years of the reception of the Urantia Papers. No questions, no Papers.*³⁷

In Oklahoma in 1962, Bill Sadler told the group:

At the end of each paper was a note suggesting the next title on which questions should be asked. This is how they led us through the first time. They were read to the

*Forum and they generated more questions and over a period of years this book accumulated.*³⁸

Responsibility for the Papers

The contact commissioners were charged with the responsibility of gathering up the questions written by the Forum. They also had the responsibility for comparing the typewritten text with the handwritten manuscript of the final version. From the beginning, the contact commissioners were custodians of the manuscript, “keeping a carbon copy of the typewritten papers in a fireproof vault.” They were also charged with full responsibility of supervising all the details connected with the publication of the book as well as securing the international copyrights and protection of the name Urantia.³⁹ Throughout this long and eventful period, the members of the human contact commission were faithful in all their duties.

Meanwhile, they carried on their professional careers, even in some cases enjoying the fame that accrued as a result of their wide-ranging speaking and writing activities. They were not wealthy, though the Sadlers had a thriving medical practice in the mid-years of their professional service. Dr. William Sadler engaged in numerous fascinating side-ventures because of his curious nature. He once told an associate: “I had trouble settling down to just one profession because I had ability in so many different fields.”⁴⁰ Dr. Lena Sadler was a heroic figure in the effort to seek safety, security, and access to good health services for women and children. She served in administrative posts in many women’s medical and public service organizations. Simply stated, the Sadlers were dedicated to saving the lives and souls of their fellow human beings.

END NOTES FOR CHAPTER 5, THE FOUNDING OF THE FORUM

¹ Moyer, Ernest P., *The Birth of a Divine Revelation*, (Self publ. 2000), p. 110.

² Peregrine, Jay, Report from Urantia Foundation records.

³ Christensen, E. L., Brief biography of William S. Sadler, M.D. Undated.

⁴ Sadler, W.S., M.D., Oral interviews with Forum applicants, 1951 – 1955,

⁵ Bowman, Clarence .N., Forum member (1923-1959), Personal notebook listing these areas of genetics research similar to entries in his diaries noting forum subjects.. See Appendix IX

⁶ Urantia Foundation 50th Anniversary book, *The Golden Years*, by Barbara A. Newsom, Carolyn Kendall and Urantia Foundation staff. (Publ. by: Urantia Foundation, Chicago, Il., 2000) .

⁷ Sadler, W.S., M.D., Oral interview with Forum applicants, 1951 – 1955. At the mention of such phenomena by Sadler in 1924 the Christian pastor who brought my father into the forum terminated his attendance at meetings immediately.

⁸ Bowman, Clarence N., From personal diary, 12/14/1924. This announcement by Machiventa Melchizedek noted in CNB's diary is backed up by other early forum members, including Clyde Bedell, Edith Cook and others. Author (CBK): "All of his notations about the papers were in ink written in Gregg shorthand. I studied the rudiments of Gregg so I could decipher the titles of papers or communications. He did not include content of papers other than partial titles, numbers of the papers or typewritten page numbers. Page numbers were helpful in identifying the first and second series. Later, Bowman attempted to treat many of the notes with ink eradicator, but the words and numbers bled through, becoming readable."

⁹ (p. 386) [35:02.05] by the Chief of Archangels.

¹⁰ Christensen, Emma L., contact commissioner. oral recitation of experiences with A-B-C to Barbara Newsom. The Bowman diary did not indicate Gabriel was present at the February 11, 1924 meeting with Machiventa, though it mentioned A-B-C, the midwayer as being present.

¹¹ Contact commissioners' 1960 *History of the Urantia Movement*. See Appendix II.

¹² [Ibid.]

¹³ Bowman, C.N., Forum member (1923-1959, diary)

¹⁴ [Ibid.]

¹⁵ Bedell, Clyde, Member of Forum. Knowledge of the Omaha group came to light during objections to the 1943 plan for the future Urantia Foundation and Urantia Brotherhood structures. The Omaha group was mentioned in a 1924 message from Tabamantia. The revelators stressed unity and study rather than preoccupation with organizational matters.

¹⁶ The revelatory commission was known to be comprised of at least two leaders of the Seraphim of Selection: "Angels of Progress" and "Angels of the Churches;" leaders of primary and secondary midwayers; and the Melchizedek chairman, Mantutia, for Parts II and III. For Part I, the Orvonton Chief of the Corps of Superuniverse Deities, a Divine Counselor predominated. Part IV was comprised of twelve midwayers, previously attached to the Twelve Apostles, plus Mantutia Melchizedek.

¹⁷ Christensen, Emma L, contact commissioner, oral comment to Barbara A. Newsom, 1976, who was assisting Christy with her supporting papers for the contact commissioners' history.

¹⁸ Contact commissioners' 1960 *History of the Urantia Movement*.

¹⁹ Kelloggs were half-cousins (same grandfather; different grandmothers). He moved to LaGrange in 1912.

²⁰ Anna and Wilfred Kellogg were married August 28, 1912, at the home of William and Lena Sadler in LaGrange, Illinois. Announcement in Battle Creek (MI) *Daily Moon Newspaper*, 8/29/1912; also noted in *The Birth of a Divine Revelation*. Book by Ernest P. Moyer, (2000) p. 184.

²¹ Lapham, Joyce, a close confidant of Christy's, clarified that, although Christy would have liked to be adopted, it did not happen.

²¹ Urantia Foundation 50th Anniversary book, *The Golden Years*. (Publ. by Urantia Foundation, 2000).

²³ Pine Lodge was the summer property owned by Dr. Sadler in Beverly Shores, Indiana.

²⁴ Culver City, California was the home of Julia Early (Fenderson).

²⁵ Sadler, William S., M.D., contact commissioner; oral interviews with Forum applicants 1951 – 1956. Personal memory of author (Forum member/Sadler employee). Sadler or other contact commissioners personally interviewed all prospective Forum members until the Forum became First Urantia Society, June 17, 1956.

²⁶ [Ibid.]

²⁷ Contact commissioners' 1960 *History of the Urantia Movement*. See Appendix II.

²⁸ Sadler, Jr., William S. "Bill", transcription of oral remarks at Oklahoma City, OK, group, 2/18/62.

²⁹ Sadler, W.S., M.D., oral interviews with Forum applicants, 1951 – 1955.

³⁰ Contact commissioners' 1960 *History of the Urantia Movement*. See Appendix II.

³¹ Bowman, C. N., Forum member, (1923-1956), diary.

³² Contact commissioners' 1960 *History of the Urantia Movement*; See Appendix II.

³³ Bowman, C. N., Forum member, (1923-1956), diary.

³⁴ Sadler, "Bill", transcription of oral remarks at Oklahoma City, OK, group, 2/18/62.

³⁵ Bowman, C.N., Forum member, (1923-1956), diary. See Appendix VII.

³⁶ [Ibid.]

³⁷ Contact commissioners' 1960 *History of the Urantia Movement* . See Appendix II.

³⁸ Sadler, "Bill", transcription of oral remarks at Oklahoma City, OK, group, 2/18/62.

³⁹ Contact commissioners' 1960 *History of the Urantia Movement*. See Appendix II.

⁴⁰ Sadler, W.S., M.D., oral comment to author, 1954.