

CHAPTER SIXTEEN Sprunger on Origins

Over the next few chapters I shall discuss personalities who were peripheral to the Revelation, but who had some influence on the course of events, or who provided information pertinent to this report.

The first person I shall consider is Meredith Sprunger. Meredith was born April 16, 1915 in Woodburn, Indiana. He has excellent academic credentials. He received a Bachelor of Arts from Lakeland College, Wisconsin in 1937. He went on to earn a Bachelor of Divinity from United Theological Seminary in Brighton, Minnesota in 1940. From there he went to Princeton Theological Seminary where he received a Masters in Theology in 1941. He then proceeded to a Doctor of Philosophy from Purdue University in 1947.

He married Irene Sherry on June 30, 1940. They had two daughters.

He was Pastor, United Church of Christ in Mulberry, Indiana from 1941 to 1950, a teacher in the Department of Psychology, at Elmhurst College, a United Church of Christ school in Elmhurst, Illinois from 1950 to 1951. He was Pastor of the United Church of Christ in Culver, Indiana from 1952 to 1959.

He then became a member of the teaching staff at Indiana Institute of Technology in Fort Wayne, Indiana from 1959 to 1977. While there he became Head of the Department of Psychology, and Chairman of the Division of Liberal Arts. He has engaged himself as a professional psychologist in private practice with a certificate from the State of Indiana. He did psychological testing and consulting for industry. Meanwhile he became Pastor of the United Church of Christ in Plum Tree, Indiana from 1964 to 1979.

Meredith became President of the Urantia Brotherhood in 1970 for one three-year term.

Meredith spent untold hours with William Sadler in private conversation where he learned many facts about the origin of the Papers. He repeatedly told me his relationship with Sadler was one of teacher-disciple. He would listen while Sadler talked. Upon my inquiry of different areas of interest concerning the Revelation he told me he never asked direct questions but rather let Sadler reveal facts as Sadler saw fit. On these grounds Meredith probably was privy to more details than any other person outside the Sadler family, or the other Contact Commissioners.

During his tenure at Indiana Institute of Technology Meredith was an aggressive exponent of *The Urantia Papers*. He introduced his students to the fact of their existence and gave interested individuals survey papers on their origin and content.

My path of introduction to the Papers was through Meredith. While I was employed at Communication Satellite Corporation in Washington, DC in 1967 I met Wilfred Maillet, who had been a student of Meredith's at Indiana Institute of Technology. Wilf knew of my keen interest in celestial affairs and told me about the Papers. Coincidentally, a few years later I was employed at American Chain and Cable Company in Frederick, Maryland where I met Sam Brown, another student of Meredith's who also had an interest in *The Urantia Papers*.

In 1993 I asked Meredith if he would relate the manner in which he first heard of *The Urantia Papers*. I received this reply dated November 30.

In December of 1955 Irene and I were visiting Dr. and Mrs. Edward Brueseke (Dr. Brueseke was pastor of Zion United Church of Christ in South Bend, Indiana), and Ed showed me a copy of The Urantia Book which had been given him by one of his members, Judge (Louis) Hammerschmidt. We were not impressed with the table of contents.

At that time I was vice-president of the Indiana-Michigan Conference of the United Church of Christ and Judge Hammerschmidt was the lay member of the Conference Board. On the way to a Board meeting early in 1956, Hammerschmidt said he had a book which he would like to have me read and tell him what I thought of it. He sent a copy of The Urantia Book and, in time, I read the *Life and Teachings of Jesus* section. I did not find the esoteric material I expected to find. Because of its exceptional quality, I read the rest of the book. Its universe view of reality effectively integrated science, philosophy, and religion and it was essentially harmonious with Biblical teachings. I, therefore, decided to investigate the origins of the book.

My first meeting with Chicago people associated with the publication of The Urantia Book was a luncheon with William Sadler, Jr. Sometime later Bill (Sadler, Jr.) invited me to the Foundation and Brotherhood offices at 533 Diversey Ave. where I met Dr. Sadler. During the next decade or so we spent numerous week-ends with Dr. Sadler and Christy. Dr. Sadler was a very perceptive person with great integrity. He was honest and open. If he could share information — such as the name of the individual whose Thought Adjuster was used in the production of *The Urantia Papers* — he would say so. Dr. Sadler had significant writing and speaking abilities and a great sense of humor. He loved to tell stories out of his extensive and varied personal experience.

I don't think it wise to discuss some of the things he shared with me regarding the origins of the book in this summary as they would be out of context. Someday, if I can find the time, and it seems wise to do so, I hope to write an account of these early experiences.

As far as I am aware Meredith has never produced a formal document detailing the many items of conversation he had with Sadler. He has produced several brief brochures, but none which specifically relate all the facts revealed to him by Sadler.

Among his published materials Meredith wrote *Our Task*, explaining his ideas on how we should disseminate the Papers to the world, *Leavening Our Religious Heritage*, in which he shows how he believes the Papers will enrich our traditional religions, and *The Church, Problem or Potential?*, with a sub-title *The Role of Religious Institutions in Society*. He also wrote other pamphlets including *The Origin of The Urantia Book*, *Pioneers In The New Age*, and *A Gift of Revelation*. The closest he came to revealing the full gamut of his knowledge about the origins was in *The Historicity of the Urantia Book*, in which he summarizes certain aspects of the presentation of the Papers. *The Urantia Movement, A Brief Personal Historical Overview*, and a paper

to answer questions asked by philosophy students at Indiana Institute of Technology I wrote this philosophy class lecture in the mid-1960's, also presented several items on the origin of the Papers.

Meredith wrote a book entitled *Spiritual Psychology*, published by Jemenon, Inc in Willamette, Illinois. He also publishes semi-annually *The Spiritual Fellowship Journal*, designed to interface with mainline ministers who have both the theoretical and practical background needed to critically evaluate the (Urantia) book's content. He presented a paper on *The Urantia Papers* to the American Academy of Religions in Anaheim, California in November, 1985. Although Meredith has written this book and short papers and discussions, he has never produced a significant theological treatise derived from the Papers.

As an indication of Meredith's interest in discovering the origins of the Papers I offer the following from his paper on *The Historicity of The Urantia Book*.

In the middle and late 1950's a group of United Church of Christ ministers made a serious attempt to evaluate the book and answer the question of origin. Among the various resources consulted, we asked Dr. Robert V. Moss Jr., who was at that time Professor of New Testament Studies at Lancaster Theological Seminary and President of the United Church of Christ, to evaluate the book. We met with him in South Bend, Indiana, October 6, 1958, and engaged in a spirited and fruitful discussion. Dr. Moss, although he did not read the entire book, remarked that the treatment of biblical material in *The Urantia Book* was essentially in harmony with the best scholarship of the day and observed that the book had many inspiring passages. On October 13, 1958, he wrote saying:

"It occurs to me that we did not deal with one basic question. As you know, Christianity is an historical religion and because of that the bases of revelation can be tested by scholarship. It seems to me extremely important that the source of the Urantia 'revelations' be set forth in any serious discussion of its claim. To say there is no historical basis for the 'revelations' is to say that it differs radically from the biblical understanding of the way in which God acts."

Dr. Moss articulated a crucial point in the recognition of revelation, or for acceptance of *The Urantia Papers*. There is no historical bases for the Revelation. It comes from God, not through human religious institutions. It definitely differs radically from the biblical understanding of the way in which God acts, at least as understood by Christian theologians. Mankind has not been given a divine revelation since the days of John's *Apocalypse*.

Moss's point is based on traditional Christian ideas for testing revelations. Time and tradition, with many episodes of theological debate over two thousand years, have placed a respectability upon the theological acceptance of biblical books, regardless of how much they may exhibit human fallibility. Paul's letters were human, as he himself so strongly emphasized.

Revelations are not subject to authentication by human scholarship. God does not ask humankind if his revealed material is correct. If the bases of revelation were subject to test by human scholarship it would not be revelation. Revelation inherently implies that it is new, imparting information not before humanly known, and therefore outside the gamut of human understanding. The manner in which it is received is not the criteria of its validity, except to verify that it did not come from evil or secular sources. If revelation were to become subject to endorsement by Christian theologians it would subject God to man, an obvious contradiction, even for the most erudite Christian theologian. Therefore the ultimate test is not in how human scholarship regards a Revelation, but rather how it serves God's purpose in unfolding planetary destiny. Since man is so ignorant of the full gamut of God's plans, even though brave attempts have been made in Christian theology to understand such programs, revelations cannot be subject to the criteria of two thousand years of theological tradition.

Meredith, faced with this theological dilemma, later took the position that it was the content of the revelation, and not the mechanism by which it came, which made it trustworthy. As Sadler stated, we do not need to know the authorship of a musical symphony to enjoy it. The final test is in the human heart, and not in intellectual criteria deriving from two thousand years of blindness.

Sadler was the first to struggle with the authenticity of the Revelation. For more than thirty years, into the late 1930's, he did not consider it more than an unexplainable phenomenon, although certainly of exceptional quality. He knew it was not channeled and did not come through the subconscious or marginal mind of SS, but he was entirely uncertain how to classify it. Because of his dependence on the passage in *The Urantia Papers* on page 1258 which speaks of midwayer mind penetration to the Thought Adjuster of the Contact Personality, he assigned the process to some form of superconscious (not subconscious) mind activity. Sadler reached the conclusion that superconscious mind activity was not subject to psychological testing. Meredith relates Sadler's personal dilemma.

On May 7, 1958, our group of ministers had an appointment with Dr. Sadler to discuss phenomena associated with the origin of *The Urantia Book*. When we arrived he had prepared a paper for us listing every imaginable form of subconscious mind or psychic activity. At the bottom of the outline he had a note saying, "The technique of the reception of *The Urantia Book* in English in no way parallels or impinges upon any of the above phenomena of the marginal consciousness." He went on to tell us that as nearly as he could determine, the appearance of *The Urantia Papers* was associated with some form of superconscious mind activity.

Dr. Sadler candidly discussed any questions we asked him, but he would not talk about two things: the name of the individual whose superconscious mind was used in some way in the materialization of *The Urantia Papers*, and the details associated with this materialization. He said they were asked to take vows of secrecy regarding these two things. When we asked him why these restrictions were imposed on them, he gave the following reasons:

Sadler then goes on to give the two reasons we discussed in an earlier chapter.

Meredith continues with the story of Sadler's conversion.

Since it was obvious that Dr. Sadler started as a professional researcher and skeptic and turned into a believer, I asked him why he changed his mind. He replied that as they read the early *Urantia Papers* he observed that many of the group known as the Forum — which Drs. William and Lena Sadler had started (in order) to discuss medical topics but was now engrossed in examining *The Urantia Papers* — were becoming highly impressed by their content. He was particularly concerned about his wife. So one Sunday he made a speech about the importance of objectivity and a critical approach to the material. The response he got was a kind of testimony meeting. The essence of their reaction was, "We don't care who wrote the papers, they simply make more sense than anything we have read along this line."

But Dr. Sadler thought his professional reputation was at stake. He had publicly declared there were no genuine mediumistic phenomena, and he wasn't going to allow one baffling case to change his mind. As time went on, however, he was increasingly impressed with the consistency and high quality of the material. He was satisfied in his own mind that the subject involved in the materializations could not have produced the material as he did not have the qualifications or abilities to do so. By this time he also was convinced that he was dealing with genuine phenomena and not some clever trickery. Finally, he told me, when the paper evaluating the personalities of the twelve apostles came through, he threw in his intellectual towel. He said, "I'm a psychiatrist, and I think I know my business, but this paper was a real blow to my pride. If I had a half-dozen of the world's best psychiatrists to help me and years to prepare it, I was convinced that I could not fabricate a paper with this ring of genuineness and insight.

So I said to myself, I don't know what it is, but I do know that it is the highest quality of philosophical-religious material that I have ever read." From that time on, Dr. Sadler became not only the professional director of the group but also its dedicated leader.

This statement provides some insight into the course of events with the Forum. Many of the members, and his wife Lena, were becoming so impressed with the content of the *Papers* he was concerned about their acceptance of material which he wasn't sure was truly divine. Thus his Sunday afternoon lecture about objectivity. The response of the Forum was immediate and without reservation. They were convinced it was divine. It could not be anything else. But Sadler, with his scientific training and habits of objective inquiry, was as yet unwilling to accept it as such.

This Sunday speech probably took place sometime between 1929, since he still holds to a clinical attitude about SS in *The Mind At Mischief*, published that year, and the actual Revelation in 1935, while the Forum members and Lena were reaching conclusions about the source of the Revelation.

Since the *Jesus Papers*, with their portrayal of the twelve apostles, were not revealed until 1935, Sadler could not have had them as a basis for his personal conviction prior to that time. In fact, that may have been the true reason the Revelators withheld them until that late date. If they had been presented earlier Sadler may have reached his conviction earlier and thus disturbed the natural maturing of the relationships with the Forum and the consequent security of the Revelation.

In addition, some time would have been required to read through the *Jesus Papers*. With the assumption that one Paper was read per week, it would have required at least twenty weeks to get to Paper 139, *The Twelve Apostles*. Sadler may have taken still more time to reach his conviction. Therefore, the full conversion of Sadler would have been no earlier than 1936, and even perhaps 1937 or 1938.

Meredith goes on to another remark that adds additional insight into the process of securing the Forum members to loyal dedication.

Occasionally, after papers were read and placed in the office safe, they disappeared. When the contact commission inquired about this disappearance, very little explanation was given beyond the fact that it was their decision to withdraw the paper. Other papers were altered after being read to the Forum. For instance, one of the papers stated that the apostle Nathaniel had a good sense of humor for a Jew. The members of the Forum chuckled at this comment. The next time they obtained this paper from the safe, they discovered the phrase for a Jew was deleted. The assumption was that they were required to read these papers to the Forum so that these higher beings could observe human reaction to the material presented. In this manner the papers composing *The Urantia Book* were received in the mid 1930's.

Again I emphasize that spirit personalities do not have such meager understanding or recognition of human behavior, or of patterns of mortal thought, nor do they lack deep insight into human kind. They know us inside out. This process with the Revelation was not done because they do not know what is best for us, but because they were building a strong human trust in the Revelation, and dedication to its preservation. What better way than to make the members of the Forum believe they were an integral part of the process, that they were participants in a dynamic and living interchange? Many of the Forum members came away from this episode believing they had contributed to the process of the revelation. They held strong feelings about its care and ownership.

As part of his contribution to public information about Sadler and *The Urantia Papers* Meredith wrote a brief introduction to Sadler in a small booklet entitled *The Evolution of the Soul*. The booklet reproduces a lecture Sadler gave to the Plymouth Congregational Church in Lansing, Michigan on November 18, 1941, fourteen years before publication of *The Urantia Papers*. A note on page 27 of the booklet states the following:

In the case of some of my borrowed concepts which are unpublished, I desired to give credit to the original source. While permission to make use of this material was granted, the request to accord acknowledgment was denied. Thus Sadler admits the existence of *The Urantia Papers* and their influence upon him in a public statement in 1941, although he does not identify their existence.

In his introduction, Meredith uses phrases which unconsciously display a great veneration for Sadler. These phrases were also used by G. Vonne Meussling in her doctoral thesis on Sadler, certainly from the influence of Meredith.

Meredith states,

When Dr. Kellogg's brother, William K. Kellogg, began manufacturing health foods, Sadler was employed as a salesman to grocery stores. He was so successful the factory had trouble keeping up with the orders.

This is not an accurate portrayal. John Harvey Kellogg began his health food operations in 1877, when Sadler was two years old. They were immensely successful, being promoted by word of mouth by former patients at the Battle Creek Sanitarium. This informal advertising led to an ever increasing volume of production. W. K. Kellogg was in charge of those operations for his brother, until he founded his own commercial operation in 1906. By the time Sadler appeared in Battle Creek the Kelloggs had two factories in operation and were building a third. Therefore, it is obvious that Sadler did not, single-handedly, bring such success *that the factory had trouble keeping up with the orders*. He may have

contributed to the dynamic operations at Battle Creek, but he certainly was not the prime mover of sales. Therefore, Meredith was confused about Battle Creek operations.

Meredith further states that Sadler, after moving to Chicago to the Seventh Day Adventist Mission operations,

took training at the Moody Bible Institute and graduated with the highest grades in the history of the school.

School records show that he did not graduate, but dropped out. Again, Meredith has an error of fact, based on rumor. I asked Meredith why he would want to say highest grades in the history of the school. Why not a more mundane phrase like, an all 'A' student? Were there no other all 'A' students?

In still another remark Meredith states,

Sadler was asked to teach Exegetical Theology at the Seventh Day Adventist Seminary in San Francisco.

Once again there is a misrepresentation of fact. The Seventh Day Adventist Church did not have a Seminary in San Francisco. A listing of Church institutions and schools shows no such operation. Furthermore, Sadler, with his lack of formal education, was not qualified to teach Exegetical Theology at any mainline seminary.

Yet again, in another paper, Meredith refers to Sadler as

the father of American psychiatry.

While Sadler was highly respected, and had an influence on psychiatric thinking and perhaps on practice, he most certainly was not the father of American psychiatry. To assign such a noble role to Sadler once again displays ignorance of the development of psychiatry in America, and creates a misrepresentation of fact.

And still again Meredith demonstrates lack of knowledge of true facts. He states that Sadler consulted Sir Hubert Wilkins, the famous Arctic explorer about his opinion on SS. Sir Hubert Wilkins met Sadler through Harold Sherman in the 1940's and could not have been a consultant for Sadler during the earlier phases of the revelation.

Meredith also has another curious error for one of his credentials, and for one who was so intimate with the Sadler family. On a caption beneath a photograph of Lena Sadler he has the name Leona Sadler, Lena's daughter-in-law. This name switch probably is not a simple typographical error, but was mistaken by the person who formatted the booklet, and was not corrected by Meredith.

I offer these illustrations to show how easily one may produce myth around human figures. I call Meredith's statements anecdotal adoration. When I was ignorant of many of the facts about Sadler, Meredith's remarks misled me into a false picture of Sadler and his abilities. Although Meredith's representations are honestly motivated they demonstrate a surprising lack of care in investigating facts, especially for one of his credentials. It is quite likely that Meredith's adoration of Sadler, with a true believer's belief in the Revelation, blunted his scholarly discipline.

As of this date Meredith continues to live in Fort Wayne, Indiana with his wife Irene, where he is dedicating his time to a work on the biblical Psalms.