

Dr. William S. Sadler: Skeptic, Believer, Inspiration

Presented by Carolyn Kendall at 533 Diversey, Holiday Social, December 9, 2006

One of the great treasures of the early Urantia movement was its leadership. Persons of outstanding character took initiative, made decisions and assumed amazing responsibilities. Dr. William S Sadler was the leader of the contact commission, a select group of five or six humans who received the Fifth Epochal Revelation and then brought it to the attention of the larger group known as the Forum. Dr. Sadler; his wife, Dr. Lena Sadler; her sister and brother-in-law—Anna and Wilfred Kellogg; as well as Emma Christensen and William S. Sadler, Jr — all lived here at 533 Diversey at various times in their lives. The Doctor purchased the building in 1921 for his medical and psychiatric practice, and for his personal residence.

It has been my opinion that in the early years of the 20th Century the revelators searched the North American continent for a particular type of individual who could carry out their long-range plans. Why America? For the same reasons that the Holy Land was the best location for the bestowal of the Creator Son: geography, indigenous religion, quality education, family values and physical safety. The superhuman supervisors of our world needed a man, or woman, who had a requisite level of experience, wisdom and initiative to facilitate and coordinate the coming fifth epochal revelation on this world. It wasn't required that he or she be a theologian, an anthropologist, or an historian. Nor would he have to exude a lofty spiritual persona. He simply had to possess a unique combination of skills and abilities they could work with.

In 1900 B.C. the planetary observers waited for a human family in the Middle East who could play a supporting role for the third epochal revelation, Machiventa Melchizedek's bestowal. They were looking for "intelligence, initiative, sagacity and sincerity." Abraham met these qualifications. (P. 1018) Recall that Moses in 1200 B.C. led the Hebrews who later formed the genetic foundation for the bestowal of Christ Michael. Moses exhibited "versatility, adaptability and outstanding leadership."

In our time they settled on a man who was one of the most versatile individuals of his generation. Young William Samuel Sadler started out as a breakfast cereal salesman in Battle Creek, Michigan. From an early age he was a student of the Bible, and he went on to become an ordained minister. When he decided to study medicine, along with his wife Lena, he took a part-time job with the Pinkerton Detective Agency to provide income for their tuition. He had such a knack for investigation that he was offered a permanent position with the agency. As a detective he exposed fraudulent mediums and became a noted debunker of psychic phenomena. Sadler went on to become a physician, surgeon and psychiatrist.

He and his family signed on with the Chautauqua speaking circuit which took the latest medical knowledge directly to the public. He was a dynamic orator, being the second highest paid speaker on the circuit, after William Jennings Bryant. Dr. Sadler authored 42 books. He was a populizer of health issues and wrote a column for Redbook Magazine. Sadler was listed in Who's Who in America for 25 years, and in Who's Who in England. He was professor and chairman of the department of pastoral psychology at McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago for more than 25 years.

I had the privilege of knowing him during the last 17 years of his life. I was employed as receptionist in his office from 1952 to '54, and again in 1956. Dr. Sadler was not a "couch psychiatrist." He had been a student of Sigmund Freud's in Vienna, and had rejected many of Freud's principles of psychoanalysis. Patients suffering from depression would come into the office with their chins on their chests, and after listening to his inspirational exhortation for an hour, left his office walking on air. He lifted their spirits just as Jesus had, when he delivered the rousers to the young man who was afraid on the island of Crete. Afterward, Doctor ambled out of his office with a twinkle in his eye and a pleasant expression on his cherubic face.

I learned another fact about him: He was a Chicago Cubs baseball fan who never missed a game on the radio. We could not schedule patients on game days, or during the World Series. The Cubs lived at the Rienzi Hotel

down the street in the 1930's and '40s, and reportedly, Doctor used to go sit in the lobby reading his newspaper, waiting for the players to return.

My husband, Tom Kendall once remarked, not disparagingly, that Dr. Sadler had a “great-man complex.” Baseball, notwithstanding, he was not a trivia-minded personality; he had originated ideas and accomplished great things. He claimed to have performed the first surgery using a piece of animal bone to attach two broken bones together. He coined terms in general use in psychiatry today.

Introduction to a Strange Phenomenon

William and Lena encountered the man who became known as the contact personality in the first decade of the 20th Century. The circumstances of their meeting and collaboration have been documented in several histories and books, including his own book, “The Mind at Mischief.” He wrote that he hoped eventually to get to the bottom of the baffling phenomenon. He didn't know whether the man was self-deceived, or if some outside agency had concocted an elaborate hoax. Finally, after 30 years of testing and observing the man, and studying the written material, when the paper describing the Twelve Apostles arrived, he capitulated. As a professional in the treatment of the human mind he realized that no other human could have gotten inside the heads of those twelve diverse associates of Jesus. The authors were indeed superhuman! He was hooked.

This late-arriving enlightenment came at a good time. By 1935, Forum members were flexing their independence muscles. Predisposed to American democracy, certain Forumites were demanding their “rights.” They wanted a voice in how the proposed Urantia Brotherhood and Urantia Foundation would be organized. The revelators wanted experienced hands to guide the social organization and Urantia Book in their early stages. They were the prompters and behind-the-scenes censors of radical behavior. All the wisdom that William Sadler possessed was brought to bear upon his rambunctious associates.

The Sadlers had prior experience with an alleged revelation. They had been actively involved with the Seventh Day Adventist religion during a time when the spiritualist channel of that group Ellen White came under fire for having plagiarized other writings. Young William Sadler was one of her challengers. This had left him with lasting skepticism about individuals and groups claiming revelation as their basis.

In the mid-1940s, after Lena's death, a dangerous situation arose. Newly inducted Forum member Harold Sherman, a Hollywood scriptwriter, arrived with a secret plan to gain possession of the manuscript and get it published by a company owned by a famous New York woman psychic. The Doctor's handling of the situation left several members of the Forum resentful, sowing the seeds of future rebellion against the Foundation.

“Old Soldiers Never Die, They Just Fade Away.....”

Once, when I privately pointed out an apparent contradiction between two sections in the book, he said there were certain areas of the book he wasn't completely familiar with. He admitted he had spent so many of the early years trying to solve the mystery of the origin of the Papers. He suggested I talk to Marian Rowley, who was the real scholar of the Papers.

He was a dynamic speaker in front of a large group, and the best story teller I ever knew. When he led a class of the Brotherhood School, or summer study sessions, he could take the roof off the building when his engines were running at full throttle. Unfortunately, the only tape recordings of Doctor Sadler's voice, delivering a series of lectures, burned up in a fire in Phoenix six years ago.

In the years after publication when the Doctor's practice declined and he faded into old age, he was accorded the role of elder statesman. He did not look down upon the faltering efforts of new, young teachers of the Urantia

Papers. Instead, he graciously complimented each person who had the temerity to get up in front of the First Urantia Society and lead a paper.

According to Tom Kendall, who served on the Brotherhood Executive Committee at the same time as Dr. Sadler, who was chairman of the Committee on Education, the Doctor spoke little and proffered advice only when asked. He rarely spoke of the guidance provided by the revelators regarding their preferred direction of the movement. As long as his associates proceeded in relative wisdom and judgment, he kept quiet. He had learned an important lesson in the Sherman crisis: not to use heavy-handed tactics when dealing with sensitive humans.

Dr. Sadler died at home at the age of 93 on April 26, 1969. Probably the most important advice he ever passed along was that the revelators did not want this movement to be burdened with a galaxy of saints, i.e., a Ste. William, a Ste. Lena, or a Ste. Christy. No human names were listed in connection with the first printings of The Urantia Book; the printing company's name did not even appear on the book. Something to think about.