

A Review of
Dr. Sadler and The Urantia Book
The Historic Origins of a Spiritual Revelation in the 20th Century
by Sioux Oliva Ph.D.

Full disclosure: This review is from a long-time student of *The Urantia Book* (1955), one who continues to dedicate himself to understanding the most difficult and inscrutable concepts that the papers have to offer. Nonetheless, this review represents a serious and sincere attempt to be as unbiased as possible. A book review must offer personal opinions in ways that are objective; I hope to achieve that also. Urantia Book references will be designated in this review as (P[age]a:b, [Paper] #:x.y). For example (P1343:3, 121:8.14) refers to: (page 1343:paragraph 3, Paper 121: section 8.paragraph 14). I use page numbers for the single-column original printing, and paper numbers to locate the same paragraph in the double-column version of the book.

To personalities living on Urantia, the terrestrial beginnings of *The Urantia Book* persist as one of the most curious (and sometimes controversial) aspects of this revelation. The differences distinguishing the teachings from the Christian dogma of the extemporaneously derived virgin birth of our local universe creator son (Michael-Jesus) are ironically a far less controversial subject for those who care about the origins of the text. Larry Mullins has stated: “The first and most common question about The Urantia Book is: ‘Who wrote this?’ Sometimes even a casual reader, with no intention of studying the material, is stimulated to curiosity.” (Mullins 2000). In paper 92, *The Later Evolution of Religion*, a Melchizedek of Nebadon makes an authoritative claim that *The Urantia Book* is an epochal revelation, but simultaneously disclaims infallibility, a unique approach in a revelatory text (P1008:2, 92:4.9). However, this uniquely juxtaposed claim is merely the tip of the cosmic iceberg. *The Urantia Book* contains over a dozen quite detailed statements (a few of them constituting lengthy acknowledgements) on the cosmic methodology that humanity’s “celestial” associates used not only to petition for, but also to obtain approval of, the “indicting” and delivery of the content as papers to humans. (P1:4, 0:0.4; P16:7, 0:12.10; P17:1-2, 0:12.11-12; cf. Paper 101: Section 4; P865:6, 77:8.13; P1208:6, 110:5.7; P1243:3, 113:2.6; P1258:1, 114:7.6; P648:6, 56:10.23; P32:1, 1:7.9; P1323:1, 120:0.1; P1343:1-3, 121:8.12-14; P1332:1, 121:0.1).

There are no “insiders,” no tangible “community,” no sacredly vested hierarchy of “believers” within what is frequently referred to as the Urantia “movement.” What most certainly does exist, however, is an unknown number of dedicated long-term reader/students who are dispersed throughout the planet, and who periodically convene to share ideas and discuss the contents of the papers during study group sessions and conferences. One could best refer to these individuals as “kindred allies.” Some of them bare their souls, so to speak, by writing and sometimes publishing their understandings and interpretation of the cosmology and other teachings found in *The Urantia Book*. Some have provided

songs with cosmic lyrics (Banton 2003). Sioux Oliva is one of those who have literally opened her soul to the world by writing and publishing *Dr. Sadler and The Urantia Book*. On the other hand, Dr. Oliva has woven the stories about Dr. Sadler around an interpretation of what appear to be prima facie facts, and this can only lead one to conclude that Dr. Oliva has openly suspended her belief in the cosmology of *The Urantia Book*.

If we consider some extensive research published by Mullins, Moyer, Gardner, Kulieke, and most recently by Professor Sarah Lewis in Lewis and Hammer's *The Invention of Sacred Tradition*, we can reasonably propose that kindred allies have reached a broad consensus about the terrestrial beginnings of *The Urantia Book*, to the effect that the specific characteristics of human involvement indicate they exist in the category of a known-unknown (Lewis & Hammer 2007). Ms. Oliva, in contrast, seems to have decided otherwise. Her book focuses primarily on Dr. Sadler, his wife Dr. Lena Sadler, and the Kellogg family, while including more tangential coverage of the Sadlers' son Bill Jr., the contact commission, and the forum. In the process, however, Dr. Oliva, as a long-term scholarly reader, has re-opened aspects that some readers consider a distraction to the cosmology.

Dr. Oliva claims that her book is a biography centered on information *about* Dr. William S. Sadler. Although she does present such information in ways that are objective and scholarly, I believe that Sioux's stated intellectual purpose (Cosmic Citizen 2015) departs quite substantially from the characteristics and key features that readers expect in a biography. Her book is certainly *about* Dr. Sadler, but it is also a book *about* *The Urantia Book*. On the other hand, except for a summary that appears in chapter eight, her book contains very little *of* the cosmology and other information that the authors of the papers provide.

For a long-term reader/student,¹ Sioux's book presents some significant challenges. First, Dr. Oliva derives a conclusion about Dr. Sadler that is supposedly based on analysis of objective factors: "After examining all of the evidence, the conclusion that makes the most sense is that [Dr. William] Sadler was the channel for *The Urantia Book*." Second, there are a substantial number of secondary artifacts about the origin of *The Urantia Book* that she alludes to as apocrypha. In effect, Sioux's claim about Dr. Sadler challenges the long-term student to evaluate whether these oral and written histories by secondary sources amount to distorted legends or "cover stories" that were intended to protect Dr. Sadler's impeccable reputation. (In effect, her conclusion demands this interpretation as a corollary.)

¹ In preparing this review, I used the Kindle edition of Dr. Oliva's work. Although the paperback version maintains page numbers, eBook versions cannot do that. On the PC, Kindle software provides locations that are not dependent upon text size. Where I refer to particular statements in the eBook (Kindle) edition, I identify a reference by using chapter and paragraph numbers in brackets [NN, nn].

A new or emerging reader can become confused, and this difficulty contributes to my conviction that her intellectual purpose has gone off the rails. Sioux conflates the roles of a scribe, an author, a channeler, a compiler, a collector, and an editor. In the Preface, for example, Sioux tells us that she intends to argue that “William S. Sadler was a religious genius, a prophet, and the ‘contact’ for the Urantia papers.” She goes on to declare that he: “acted as the scribe for these papers [by transcending] his normal functioning mind and became connected to the cosmic mind circuit of the universe.” Later in the book (in the section entitled, “Scholarly Findings”), there is an extensive discussion concerning computer analysis of authorship; this eventually concludes with the following statement by Christopher Smith, a graduate student in theology at Claremont Graduate School: “computer analysis is not a reliable way to test sacred texts because its authorship is usually a compilation of different sources, which is not easily tested.” At the end of “Scholarly Findings,” Oliva seems to accept that there is no way to prove authorship, but nonetheless states that the “midwayer author” provides evidence on *the question* of whether Dr. Sadler was “the contact and/or scribe.” At a minimum, this clear contradiction produces cognitive dissonance in any reader. And with an emerging student, the dissonance is subliminal, a difficulty serious enough to distract from the cosmology of the papers – which is contrary to her voiced purpose (Cosmic Citizen 2015).

In the introduction to Paper 121, “The Times of Michael’s Bestowal,” the secondary midwayer of onetime attachment to the Apostle Andrew begins by stating that he is “[placing] on record the narrative of the life transactions of Jesus of Nazareth as they were observed by my order of earth creatures, and as they were subsequently partially recorded by the human subject of my temporal guardianship.” Moreover, in the acknowledgement section of Paper 121 (which Dr. Oliva quotes as evidence), this same midwayer writes as follows: “In many ways I have served more as a collector and editor than as an original narrator.” (P1343:1-3, 121:8.12-14). The net implications are jarring, for a conscientious reader is left wondering whether Sioux has implicitly declared that a channeler can be also an editor. There can be little doubt, however, of her belief that Dr. Sadler has written surreptitiously (or with a cover story). Therefore, in her view, Dr. Sadler is the midwayer in disguise, and that makes him both a channeler and an editor.

In the role of book reviewer, what I find surprising is that the author has omitted even a bibliography reference to a significant scientific and scholarly paper by Dr. Ken Glasziou that was peer reviewed: *Science, Anthropology and Archaeology in The Urantia Book* (Glasziou 1996). In part III of that document (under the heading *Who Wrote The Urantia Papers?*), Glasziou responds decisively to the question “*Was Dr. Sadler an author?*” by citing statistical evidence that “rules out extensive authorship of the Papers by Dr. Sadler.” On the opposite end of the spectrum of opinion concerning content, Mullins extensively discusses the views of Glasziou and Professor Lewis, while analyzing them in contrast with the views of Martin Gardner (Gardner 1995). Professor Lewis reasons as follows: “Martin Gardner is one of the few people outside the Urantia Foundation who has undertaken research into the movement. ... Gardner

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believes that he has unearthed the identity of the ‘sleeping subject’ (he says it was a man called Wilfred Kellogg) ... But knowing the identity of the ‘sleeping subject’ does not at all prove that the Revelation was false” (Lewis & Hammer 2007, Mullins 2000). Oliva relies heavily, and apparently solely, on juxtapositions involving the insubstantial and non-scientific analysis of comparisons that Matthew Block developed (Block 2013) as the foundation of her new belief, formed while she was researching the book, that Dr. Sadler was not just the channeler, the sleeping subject, and an extensive editor, but that he also borders on being the sole “author.”

In no less than three previously well documented histories of the creation of the Urantia Papers, the consensus view is that the “Jesus Papers” (i.e., Papers 121-196) “materialized.” Previous narratives also indicated that the Foreword appeared as a complete document. Mullins quotes Kulieke: “The Life and Teachings of Jesus came all at once in 1935, and not in response to questions by the Forum. Probably, Part IV had been already authored by the Midwayers at the time permission was given to materialize it and insert it into the revelatory process” (Mullins 2000, Kulieke 1992). Oliva also records this event; she does that in four different locations in her book (194, 5528; 2207, 5528; 2316, 5528; 2332, 5528), while identifying her sources as Sadler himself in his 1960 history (Sadler 1960), as well as Kulieke (Kulieke 1992). Mullins quotes Bill Sadler Jr.’s description of this event based on an audio tape that recorded a 1962 study session with readers who belonged to a society in Oklahoma; Bill Jr. responded to a question about the voluminous manuscript that appeared on the desk of the contact individual. As both Mullins and Kulieke recount, in December 1924, as a result of submitting one hundred and eighty-one (181) written queries to the celestial beings, a *handwritten* set of over 500 pages was found on the subject’s desk. Bill Jr. said he thought that these pages must have been prepared by a secondary midwayer, since this would harmonize with the cosmology of the papers. Although Oliva acknowledges the descriptions of this materialization in several passages, she makes no reference to this rather specific event in any part of the analysis that forms the basis for her claim that the actual role of Dr. Sadler differed from the role portrayed in previous narratives.

At least² twenty-three super-human “authors”³ of the papers weave together enlarged concepts and advanced truth about cosmology in an extensive panoply of harmonious statements. As a kindred ally, I

² I use the phrase “at least” because there are a number of instances where a designated “author” of a paper (as identified in the original printings in the segment headed *The Titles of the Papers* that precedes the table of contents) is designated with the same word or words that are associated with an “author” of another paper. For example, there is no way to know whether a particular Divine Counselor is the same “author” as listed after the last section of another paper. Six papers (4, 17, 18, 19, 23, and 24) identify “a Divine Counselor of Uversa” as the “author” of that particular paper, doing this in the bracketed information that follows the last paragraph of text.

³ I use quotations around *author* to highlight the idea that various statements dispersed in over a dozen locations throughout the papers do not refer to *authorship*. To the contrary, terms such as “indite,” “sponsor,” and “narrate” appear in these locations.

have never questioned the authenticity of the so-called “celestial” personalities (the designation some of the authors use about themselves and others). It is reasonable to hypothesize that the revelators use this term because of the pejorative connotations that are associated with the word *extraterrestrial*. To remove some ambiguity, I recommend that we constrain the idea of an extraterrestrial so that the word solely refers to a human who hails from some planet other than Urantia (Earth), whereas the term *celestial* should be associated with a universe personality who is decidedly superhuman in origin and constitution. There are obvious exceptions. Although secondary midwayers originated on Urantia, they are neither celestial nor extraterrestrial; further, primary midwayers are hybrids. (cf. Paper 66: Section 4; cf Paper 77: Section 6)

I raise this issue because Dr. Oliva does not provide context concerning what Dr. Sadler may have meant when he used the term celestials, nor even a hypothesis in that regard. It would seem that any account of Dr. Sadler that portrays him as the “contact” and the “channel” ought to provide this context to the reader. Further, one really does not know what Sioux means when she continually refers to the book as if it were a sentient being. For example, at (2655, 5528), we find the phrases “*The Urantia Book* describes,” “*According to the Urantia Book*,” and “*The Urantia Book* asserted.” Wording of this type implicitly classifies the book as sentient, and that may be at least part of the problem that caused other reviewers to chafe at Sioux’s use of the word “sacred” when she was referring to the book. Thus, Oliva has implicitly personalized *The Urantia Book* as if it were a sentient entity, while simultaneously treating the fifth epochal revelation as if it were monolithic.

I agree with the following remarks that appeared in Anthea Kawakib Poole’s review of this self-published book: “The writing is mainly good throughout and seems to be well-documented with ample citations and an extensive bibliography; but it’s not without its problems. ... the book has a surprising number of typos and odd errors in sentence structure” (Poole 2014). It is reasonable to assume that either the rush to publish, or the actual method used to import the text into eBook format, is responsible for these errors that will presumably be corrected in the next edition. There are also a number of places where spaces between words are missing. Although this seems may seem trivial, it causes problems that pertain to searches, adding notes, and highlighting.

In addition, most scholarly works issued as eBooks provide footnotes as hyperlinks, so that one benefits from a convenient link back to one’s previous location in the text after reading the endnote or footnote. Unfortunately, this particular eBook does not operate this way, and this might be annoying for those readers who like to chase footnotes. One possible solution, of course, would be to buy the paperback edition instead.

There are a number of works listed in the bibliography that the author does not mention in the body of the book, and these bibliography listings do not include page references that might clarify why the author believed that a particular work was relevant. Although this limited amount of information does

not depart from relatively standard practice that is acceptable and conventional in other scholarly works, this reviewer would have preferred some elaboration that would at least have hinted at the reasons why certain books were listed in the bibliography. For example, the bibliography includes listings for Rupert Sheldrake's *The Presence of the Past: Morphic Resonance and the Habits of Nature* and for Dominic Pacyga's *Chicago: A Biography*. Page numbers, at least, would provide clues to an ardent research scholar about the connections that Dr. Oliva saw between those works and her own. The book *Chaos, Creativity, and Cosmic Consciousness* by Sheldrake and Terrance McKenna may contain some reasonable contemporary thinking from two of science's most out-of-the-box authors, but their concepts of cosmic consciousness pale when they are compared with the ways in which an Orvonton Divine Counselor, a Brilliant Evening Star, possibly two Melchizedeks of Nebadon, and a Solitary Messenger of Orvonton integrate and expand the topic into a cosmic array of gigantic proportions.

As a biographic work of narrative history, *Dr. Sadler and The Urantia Book* is a wonderful source of additional information about the Sadler family – William Sr., Lena, and Bill Jr. This family stayed the course for well over fifty years in order to bring *The Urantia Book* into print. They did all this while providing amazing service to other human beings, and that remark especially applies to Dr. Lena. Sioux Oliva has done the world a service by digging deep into records that were sometimes hard to find, to give us a deeper understanding of three extraordinary human beings who walked this planet at a crucial moment in its evolution. I, for one, do not consider *The Urantia Book* "sacred." On the other hand, we can surely agree that the Sadlers demonstrated unwavering trust in the process that led to publication of the fifth epochal revelation, and that this trust of theirs took on sacred proportions. In contrast, Sioux Oliva could have written her book without propounding prima facie theories about Dr. Sadler. For those who decide to read Sioux's book, I recommend ignoring the conclusion and just enjoying the story she tells about one of the most notable families that ever honored the cosmic beauty of Urantian humanity.

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