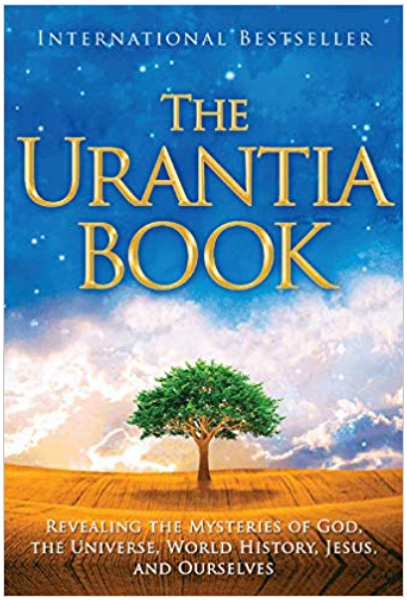
The Urantia Book – A Biblical Worldview Perspective

Dr. Michael Gleghorn takes a hard look at the claims of The Urantia Book *and finds it lacking in substance and evidence.*

This article is also available in Spanish.

Introduction to *The Urantia Book*



Not long ago a woman wrote to me about a very painful episode in her life. About fifteen years ago her husband embarked on a spiritual quest that ultimately destroyed their marriage and family. He began reading *The Urantia Book*, a massive tome of 2,097 pages that was allegedly revealed by celestial beings from higher universes. He also became involved in various occult practices such as channeling and astral projection. Eventually, she and her husband divorced, leaving both her and her children hurt and confused.

Of course, it would probably not be fair to blame all of this family's difficulties on *The Urantia Book*. Although my correspondent's experience was quite negative, others describe their own encounter with *The Urantia Book* in very positive terms. If you visit the official Urantia Foundation Web site you can read many of these testimonials for yourself.{1} One woman wrote, "I have found *The Urantia Book* to be the most enlightened source of wisdom I have ever come across." And another person declares *The Urantia Book* to be "the most conclusive and inspiring book on our existence."

So what is *The Urantia Book*? Where did it come from and what

does it teach? And how do its doctrines compare with those of biblical Christianity? These are just a few of the questions that we want to consider in this article.

The Urantia Book claims to have been revealed by superhuman personalities from higher universes. The word "Urantia" is simply the book's name for Earth. The book consists of 196 papers and is divided into four major parts entitled: 1. "The Central and Superuniverses," 2. "The Local Universe," 3. "The History of Urantia," and 4. "The Life and Teachings of Jesus." The alleged "authors" of these papers refer to themselves by their order of being with such glorious titles as Divine Counselor, Perfector of Wisdom, Brilliant Evening Star and Chief of Seraphim. Although originally written in English, the book has since been translated into Dutch, Finnish, French, Korean, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish. In addition, translations into a number of other languages are currently underway. These include Arabic, Chinese, German, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Polish, Romanian, and Swedish—-just to name a few.

Although devoted Urantians are absolutely convinced that every part of *The Urantia Book* was revealed by celestial intelligences, there are a number of problematic issues that need to be addressed. We'll consider a few of these later in this article. Before we do so, however, it is first necessary to give some account of the origin of *The Urantia Book*.

The Origin of the Urantia Papers

The Urantia Book was first published in 1955. But the alleged "revelations" from extra-planetary personalities apparently began early in the twentieth century.{2} Who received these "revelations"? And who wrote them down in the massive volume that has come to be known as *The Urantia Book*?

While there is not space to specifically mention everyone who

played a role in this process, two individuals were key in the reception and recording of this "revelation." The first, Dr. William Sadler, lived from 1875 to 1969. He was a psychiatrist, teacher, and prolific writer. The other individual's identity cannot be known with certainty. Dr. Sadler referred to this person as the "contact personality" and the "sleeping subject."{3} In a manner similar to that of Edgar Cayce, the so-called "sleeping prophet," the "sleeping subject" of our story was the vehicle through whom the celestial visitors supposedly communicated their revelations to Dr. Sadler and others. This small group of people, known as the Contact Commission, "was the focal point for the production of . . . the final text of The Urantia Book."{4}

Although members of the Contact Commission were sworn to secrecy regarding the identity of the "contact personality," Martin Gardner has made a strong case that the evidence points to Wilfred Custer Kellogg, Sadler's brother-in-law and a relative of the famous Kellogg family.{5} Of course, not everyone agrees with Gardner's conclusions. Ernest Moyer, a Urantian researcher, while acknowledging his inability to determine the identity of the "sleeping subject," is nonetheless convinced that it was not Wilfred.{6}

Although the identity of the "sleeping subject" may never be known with certainty, we have a fairly good record of how the Urantia papers came into being. Although there is some debate about the precise date in which Dr. Sadler first became aware of the "sleeping subject," it was probably in the summer of 1912.{7} "In 1923 the Sadlers began to invite twenty or thirty friends over for Sunday afternoon teas to discuss religious topics. At about the fourth meeting Sadler began telling the group, which came to be called the Forum, about the sleeping subject and his startling revelations."{8} He invited Forum members to help prepare questions for the celestials. The following Sunday members returned with hundreds of questions. "Shortly thereafter," Sadler wrote, "the first Urantia paper

appeared in answer to these questions . . . This was the procedure followed throughout the many years of the reception of the Urantia papers."{9} By the time this process was over there were 196 papers, consisting of 2,097 pages of material, that had allegedly been channeled through the "sleeping subject."

Problems with *The Urantia Book*

In his article, "A History of the Urantia Movement," Dr. Sadler stated, "The [Urantia] Papers were published just as we received them. The Contact Commissioners had no editorial authority. Our job was limited to 'spelling, capitalization, and punctuation.'"{10} But is this really so? There is actually ample evidence for questioning this statement.

Urantian researcher Ernest Moyer has carefully documented that Dr. Sadler made changes to the text of *The Urantia Book.*{11} The unsettling thing about these changes, at least for loyal Urantians, is that they were made after 1935, the date that Dr. Sadler claimed *The Urantia Book* was "completed and certified" in its entirety.{12} The evidence for such changes is compelling. Matthew Block, another Urantian researcher, discovered that human sources published after 1935 were later incorporated into *The Urantia Book*. For example, a book by Charles Hartshorne, published in 1941, lists seven possible meanings of "absolute perfection." Block discovered that these same seven meanings were reprinted in *The Urantia Book* almost word for word. This is merely one of several examples that could be offered of human sources published after 1935 that were later plagiarized in *The Urantia Book*.{13}

But not only were changes made after the book had been "completed and certified," they were also made after *The Urantia Book* was first published in 1955. Many examples could be offered, but let me simply mention two. First, both Martin Gardner and Ernest Moyer point out that in the first printing

of *The Urantia Book*, toward the end of the account of the Last Supper, Jesus is said to have addressed the twelve apostles. However, as the context makes clear, only eleven of the apostles were currently present. Judas had already left the group. According to Gardner, "in later printings 'the twelve' was replaced by 'the apostles,'" thus eliminating the error.{14} Second, both Gardner and Moyer also note that in the first printing of *The Urantia Book* the wise men are said to have visited the newborn Jesus "in the manger." However, according to a later passage in *The Urantia Book*, this visit must have occurred when Jesus and his parents were in a room at the inn. Gardner notes, "When this contradiction was noticed, the words 'in the manger' were removed from the next printing."{15}

What are we to conclude from such known and acknowledged errors, contradictions and plagiarisms in *The Urantia Book*? Such problems clearly raise doubts about the integrity of this "revelation." Wherever the information in *The Urantia Book* has come from—whether extra-planetary personalities, human beings, demonic spirits, or some combination of these—the source of this information is not entirely trustworthy. Moreover, it is not entirely biblical either.

The Bible and *The Urantia Book*

In his appendix to *The Mind at Mischief*, Dr. Sadler stated that the information imparted through the "sleeping subject" was "essentially Christian."{16} Since this information is allegedly contained in *The Urantia Book*, we would expect the contents of this book to likewise be "essentially Christian." But are they?

If we compare the teachings of *The Urantia Book* with those of the Bible, we quickly discover that *The Urantia Book*, far from being consistent with biblical Christianity, actually denies or distorts almost every fundamental doctrine of the Christian

faith. For example, contrary to the testimony of Jesus in the New Testament—that the Scriptures are the word of God (Matt. 15:3-6), inspired by the Holy Spirit (Matt. 22:43), and completely true and accurate in all details (Matt. 5:17-18; Luke 24:44; John 17:17)—*The Urantia Book* has Jesus declaring to Nathaniel, "the Scriptures are faulty and altogether human in origin" (*UB,* 1767).

The rejection of the Bible as a fallible human document sets the stage for the rejection of many other biblical doctrines as well. For example, *The Urantia Book* rejects the Bible's views about God, Christ, man, sin, and salvation. Contrary to the biblical position that there is only one God (Deut. 6:4; Isa. 45:21), *The Urantia Book* espouses polytheism, the belief in many "Gods." Martin Gardner points out that the term "Gods" (a capitalized plural) "appears more than a hundred times" in *The Urantia Book*.{17} For instance, on page 364 we read, "We are all a part of an eternal project which the Gods are supervising and outworking." Although *The Urantia Book* does acknowledge the existence of one supreme God, it rejects biblical Trinitarianism in favor of its own view that there is actually a "Trinity of Trinities" (*UB*, 1170-73). But this is only the beginning. According to Gardner, there are so many "gods" in *The Urantia Book* that its polytheism "puts Greek and Hindu mythology to shame."{18}

The view of Jesus presented in *The Urantia Book* is equally disturbing and unbiblical. To begin, the virgin birth is rejected. Jesus was simply born of Joseph and Mary (*UB*, 1344-45). Nevertheless, although he had human parents, he is also presented as the incarnation of Michael of Nebadon, the creator of our universe and one of "more than 700,000 Creator Sons of the Eternal Son."{19} This clearly conflicts with the New Testament's view of Jesus, which reveals that He was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary (Matt. 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38). Furthermore, John tells us that Jesus is the one and only eternal Son of God in an absolutely

unique sense (John 1:1-2, 14; 3:16). He is *not* merely one of more than 700,000 other Creator Sons; He is truly unique.

These doctrinal differences are only the tip of the iceberg. There are many other differences between *The Urantia Book* and the Bible. However, due to space considerations, I can only mention the following.

The Urantia Book declares, "There has been no 'fall of man.'" (*UB*, 846). This explains, at least in part, why there is also no need for any blood atonement for sin (*UB*, 60). *The Urantia Book* tells us, "The whole idea of ransom and atonement is incompatible with the concept of God as it was taught and exemplified by Jesus of Nazareth" (*UB,* 2017). The notion of "substituting an innocent sufferer for a guilty offender" is dismissed as a "childish scheme" (*UB*, 2017). What, then, was the meaning of Jesus' death on the cross? According to *The Urantia Book*, "We know that the death on the cross was not to effect man's reconciliation to God but to stimulate man's *realization* of the Father's eternal love and his Son's unending mercy" (*UB*, 2019). Obviously, these teachings strike at the very heart of the Christian message.

Genesis 3-5 and Romans 5 make it quite clear that there has indeed been a "fall of man" into sin and rebellion against his Creator. The entire race was ruined and condemned because of Adam's disobedience. Paul tells us plainly that "the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men" (Rom. 5:18). The ideas of ransom and substitutionary atonement are not incompatible with Jesus' view of God. Indeed, Jesus Himself stated that He came "to give His life as a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28). The Bible tells us that "all have sinned" (Rom. 3:23), but it also tells us that "Christ died for our sins" (1 Cor. 15:3). Contrary to *The Urantia Book*, Jesus did not die merely to stimulate man's *realization* of the Father's love; He died to reconcile us to God (Rom. 5:10; Col. 1:22). It is because Christ died for our sins that God can now offer us salvation as a free gift (Rom. 6:23). We cannot earn this

gift; we can only gratefully receive it through faith in Christ (Rom. 3:22-28; Eph. 2:8-9).

The Urantia Book proclaims a different God, a different Jesus, and a different Gospel than the Bible. Its message, allegedly revealed by higher spiritual beings, is fundamentally at odds with biblical Christianity. In light of this, it's sobering to think of all the biblical warnings about lying and deceptive spirits (e.g. 1 Kings 22:22-23; John 8:44; 1 Tim. 4:1; Rev. 20:7-10). Dr. Sadler once wrote that if there was anything supernatural about mediumistic phenomena, it was probably demonic.{20} But when he actually encountered someone whose channeling he thought genuine, he did not resort to this hypothesis. He embraced the revelations and eventually helped publish *The Urantia Book*. It's a pity he didn't stick with his original hypothesis. Who knows? It may have even been true.{21}

Notes

- See "What People Are Saying About *The Urantia Book* . . ." at http://www.urantia.org/about.html#What (Dec. 2, 2003).
- Martin Gardner, *Urantia: The Great Cult Mystery* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1995), 114.
- William S. Sadler, "A History of the Urantia Movement," at http://www.urantia.org/pub/ahotum.html.
- "Where Did *The Urantia Book* Come From?" at http://www.urantia.org/about.html#Where (Dec. 2, 2003).
- Gardner, *Urantia,* 97-134.
- See Ernest Moyer, *The Birth of a Divine Revelation,* chapters 16-17, at http://www.world-destiny.org/tocp.htm.
- Gardner, *Urantia,* 114-122.
- Ibid, 116.
- Sadler, "A History of the Urantia Movement," at http://www.urantia.org/pub/ahotum.html.
- Ibid.

- See Moyer, *The Birth of a Divine Revelation,* chapters 34, 37, and 43 at http://www.world-destiny.org/tocp.htm.
- Sadler, "A History of the Urantia Movement," at http://www.urantia.org/pub/ahotum.html.
- For more information, see Gardner, *Urantia,* 321-57.
- Gardner, Urantia, 126. See also Moyer, *The Birth of a Divine Revelation,* chapter 43, at http://www.world-destiny.org/tocp.htm.
- Ibid.
- Gardner, *Urantia,* 125.
- Ibid., 25.
- For example, see Sadler, *The Truth About Spiritualism* (Chicago: McClurg, 1923), 207-08 and *The Physiology of Faith and Fear* (Chicago: McClurg, 1912), 467.
- Sadler made a distinction between mediums and seers. He viewed the former as those who claim to communicate with the dead; the latter, as those who might genuinely be in touch with some sort of divine reality (see Gardner, *Urantia,* 109). Although Sadler thought it possible that demonic spirits might be behind some mediumistic phenomena, he believed the "sleeping subject" was a seer—not a medium. Nevertheless, if demonic spirits actually exist, and if they can impersonate the spirits of the dead, then why couldn't such spirits also impersonate celestial beings from higher universes?

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