

MEMO TO EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE ON CLAYTON EVENTS

11/10/83

FROM: Meredith J. Sprunger

TO: Executive Committee

DATE: November 10, 1983

SUBJECT: Recent Events

In recent weeks we have observed many people in the Urantia movement reacting with panic and confusion. It is most important that the Executive Committee act with rational evolutionary wisdom shaped by their own spiritual guidance. We have had a number of people who are sincere and dedicated students of The Urantia Book who have received "special messages." Anyone listening to these people can hardly help being influenced. This is especially true when individuals are confronted with this phenomena for the first time. I have talked with numerous people both in the church and the Urantia movement who report receiving special messages from spirit personalities. They all have high face validity and sound convincing. As you know, there have been many of such people in the history of religion. Some have been revered; some have been ridiculed; most have been forgotten. These messages are always personally meaningful to their recipients--but sometimes unwise or even disastrous results have followed uncritical and emotional response to these messages by the group.

It is painful to evaluate such experiences when they are reported by a dear friend. Vern is one of the most able people in the Urantia movement. He appears to be balanced, rational, sincere, and dedicated. In analyzing his special messages we should fully accept and love him but certainly not revere him. Some of you may recall that last spring I said, "We should always consider these messages as if they were authentic spirit communications but we should never make our final decisions primarily because of these reports of extraordinary events. We should evaluate their content by the highest evolutionary wisdom we have and with the aid of our own inner guidance."

The essence of Vern's latest message is: World War III is inevitable; be prepared; and do not be afraid. Let us contemplate these messages with our highest human wisdom.

Practically every one is aware of the threat of nuclear war. Various scientists analyzing the contingencies have statistically predicted the inevitability of nuclear war--it is just a matter of time. Various people studying the world situation have predicted World War III. There have been various "special" messages predicting it--earlier this year a student of The Urantia Book received a special message predicting the imminence of World War III and the Soldotna Study Group in Alaska has gotten involved with this prophecy. Some people think the hard line of the Reagan foreign policy is increasing the possibility of nuclear war. ABC Motion Pictures has produced "The Day After," which will be broadcast on November 20th picturing the terror of a

nuclear attack. For these and many other reasons it is rational to take the content of Vern's latest message seriously--not because they are special messages but because our evolutionary wisdom should have already led us to this position.

It is therefore sensible for any responsible organization living in a zone highly vulnerable to nuclear attack to consider rational steps to lessen the damage of such an attack. The first precautionary step is to make photo copy records of any indispensable materials and store them in a safe place--such as the salt mines in Kansas.

A second rational consideration is to consider steps for personal safety. For the last twenty-five years Civil Defense officials have been trying to get our citizens to take such precautions. We should be knowledgeable about nuclear fall-out, escape routes, the location of shelters, communications, food and water, etc. Some individuals living in high risk areas might wish to consider moving to a safer location. Many of us, however, knowingly choose to serve in vulnerable cities. There are numerous tasks and missions of service which are more important than our own safety. Those who fear death usually also fear life. I personally do not think we have any indispensable individuals in the leadership of Urantia Brotherhood. If nuclear war should come, it is my judgment that enough of the General Council or others capable of leadership in the Brotherhood would survive to carry on the work just as wisely and effectively as those presently in office.

A third consideration which we might contemplate over a reasonable period of time is moving Urantia Brotherhood headquarters out of Chicago to a better location. For reasons other than the danger of nuclear attack, many of us have always felt we should eventually move the Brotherhood office to a more peaceful and esthetic location. It might be good to appoint a committee to study a relocation of headquarters offices--not because of any special message but because it is in harmony with good long range planning.

All of these decisions and actions can be taken without uncritically accepting or summarily rejecting the messages which Vern received as authentic supermortal communications. I can think of reasons for accepting them as authentic; and I can think of reasons for assuming they are products of Vern's subconscious mind. Personally, I like to leave the question open and make my response to the messages on the basis of my best evolutionary wisdom and highest spiritual guidance--not on the fact of unusual phenomena or the claim of special authority. I believe the Executive Committee would be wise to make their decisions primarily on the basis of guidance from the fifth epochal revelation, evolutionary wisdom, and their own spiritual guidance rather than the primacy of any special messages reported by any individual.

Although I like to maintain an open mind concerning the authenticity of such messages, I believe it highly probable that they have origin in the subconscious mind. We need to go one step further in analyzing Vern's messages to understand their real danger to the Brotherhood. There are many reasons for the judgment that they are of auto-origin in Vern's mind.

1. The Urantia Book teaches us that God does not arbitrarily and miraculously interfere with the historical evolutionary process. Although the Most Highs rule in the kingdoms of men this did not prevent the

default of Adam and Eve or the many terrible wars on our world. In some of the most critical events on our planet no outside interference was permitted. Various passages of the book warn us against this kind of phenomena. Dr. William S. Sadler made a thorough study of such experiences and came to the conclusion that such communications took origin in their own unconscious minds. Many other scholars and scientists have made similar studies and have arrived at the same conclusion. I believe these evaluations are sound. Furthermore, the results of Vern's messages in its triggering of panic and a fortress with steel shutters and guns to defend it do not have the ring of high spiritual quality or guidance.

2. The cult characteristics associated with the Family of God Foundation present a clear danger. It is almost completely dominated by Vern. There is a psychological cohesiveness of the group that borders on militant determination and a defensiveness toward anyone who does not agree with their doctrinaire positions. I talked with some of their leaders when we visited Berkeley and Clayton in September about my concern over the growing cultish behavior of the group. They assured me that they were independent in their thinking. One person admitted that the Family of God was a benevolent dictatorship but that they were willing to go along with it because of Vern's great potential. For years I have been concerned that the greatest danger to Urantia Brotherhood is not opposition from outside forces but cultism and dogmatism from within. It appears that this has now become a terrible reality.

3. The personality cult and ego involvement of Vern are classic characteristics of aberrant religious movements. Vern is the best known and most charismatic individual in the Urantia movement. He has been constantly praised and honored. He and many around him believe he is a member of the Reserve Corps of Destiny or a "special" leader. Brilliant and charismatic individuals are particularly susceptible to delusions of grandeur. They believe their missions are so important that their ideas and leadership are indispensable. Dr. Sadler used to say that this type of ego idealism was the most serious danger of the Urantia movement. Those who remember their introductory course in psychology will recall that defense mechanisms and delusions are most effective when they are completely unconscious. In talking with Vern one is impressed with his conscious honesty. He remarks, "I would have preferred to have lived and died without being involved in anything like this." One comes to the conclusion that he is either hearing authentic spiritual messages or that if they have an auto-origin, this origin is completely unconscious. If they do have origin in his own subconscious, he is completely unaware of it and the chief victim of his own delusion. In any case he needs our love and our prayers. There are various other signs of ego-involvement: "I think I have been prepared for this." "My time has arrived." "I think is not co-operating because he is jealous of my position."

4. Vern's activity as an astute politician and a behind the scenes power broker now threaten the future of Urantia Brotherhood. For years the Family of God people have given every possible service and support to the power structure of the Brotherhood and Foundation. They have evolved a special, almost indispensable, relationship with both organizations. This is good and commendable but they now appear to be using this power to radically influence the activity and direction of Urantia Brotherhood. Vern has cultivated a subtle association between his mission and the blessing and guidance of Christy and Dr. Sadler. Note the picture of Vern and Dr. Sadler on the recent publication "The Family of God Foundation and The Urantia Book." This appears to be a deliberate strategy.

Vern is currently writing letters to leaders in the Urantia movement and inviting them to come to Clayton for a conference with him. They plan to write letters to everyone on their mailing list. They in this manner are bypassing the official Brotherhood organization to consolidate their own

influence and power. This is the greatest threat to the future of Urantia Brotherhood yet to appear. It is a danger more serious than the most extreme attack from fundamentalists or others in our society. The future of the nature and unity of the Brotherhood is at stake.

These are some of the reasons why I think it is highly probable that the messages Vern has been receiving are from his own subconscious mind. If this is indeed the case, I believe these delusions are entirely unconscious and this is the source of their power and effectiveness. Vern sincerely believes they are spirit communications. Our hearts should go out to Vern who in all probability is the victim of his own intense and sincere desire to serve; but each of us must make reality decisions regarding the source of his message.

If we do not have nuclear war in the next two years or so, do not assume this will disillusion the "true believers." Sociological studies show that members of these groups become even more committed to their point of view. Usually some form of rationalization takes place to explain why the event didn't happen. In Vern's case the most probably explanation will be that an "emergency son" prevented it. Only fresh spiritual insight is effective in breaking the hold of systematic delusions.

Things we should NOT do:

We should not act precipitously or in any way not dictated by sound and rational evolutionary wisdom. Word of Vern's message will spread throughout the Brotherhood. By Saturday, October 22 Jim Mills received a call from Colorado saying the Brotherhood was planning a stronghold in northern Wisconsin with guns to defend it! Since that time I have had calls from all over the country reporting various wild stories and revealing considerable anxiety and panic. There is a real danger that the Brotherhood will become associated with esoteric sources of guidance, cult extremism, and regressive behavior rather than sound evolutionary wisdom and high spiritual orientation. Can you imagine what a tough investigative reporter will do with this type of reaction.

We should not move Urantia Brotherhood headquarters to Clayton, California. We should keep Urantia Brotherhood independent from any kind of special association or influence from other groups.

3. We should not allow ourselves to be conditioned to dependence on "special" guidance in determining the policies and actions of Urantia Brotherhood. The long term purposes and goals of Urantia Brotherhood are much more important than any short term expediencies which we might be tempted to take because of fear and anxiety. The fifth epochal revelation and evolutionary wisdom must be the basis for our decisions and actions.

We should certainly love Vern and all of the fine Family of God people. In the light of their own perceptions, they are deeply dedicated to the welfare of The Urantia Book and Urantia Brotherhood. At the same time we must keep our balance and furnish the kind of rational wisdom and spiritual leadership which is needed in this time of crisis.

MJS