

MEMO

To: John Hales

From: Harry McMullan

Re: Requested thoughts on Vern's predictions

October 27, 1983

My assumption is that by this time, most everyone has decided whether or not he or she believes Vern's message concerning World War III. Unfortunately, the legitimacy of the message can only be indicated by a tragedy which we fervently hope does not occur.

But while the danger of war is hypothetical, we may be absolutely certain that there will be serious problems for URANTIA Brotherhood resulting from Vern's message. All of us, and headquarters in particular, will be receiving frantic calls from confused/terrorized members who want to know what we think about all of this. The subject of nuclear war stirs deep fears in practically everyone. Here those feelings may be complicated by personal-importance emotions arising from being part of the remnant supposedly permitted to have advance warning of the catastrophe. This memo will attempt to address not the truth or falsity of Vern's message, but the likely effect that his prophecy may have on the Brotherhood.

What is to be our response to such inquiries? Vern's relationship to the URANTIA movement is so intimate and of such long standing that it is not particularly credible for us to say something along the lines of, "Well, Vern is a member of the Brotherhood just like you are, so why not ask him if you have any questions?" Such a waffling response becomes even less credible if the questioner knows that officers of the Brotherhood thought his messages sufficiently important to make two trips out to Clayton to discuss them.

On the other hand, any possible script I have been able to think of for an official response seems even worse than a non-answer waffle. On an individual basis, I suppose that each person will answer according to whether or not he is inclined to believe Vern, and maybe the best of the unattractive options is not to make any "official" response, and leave our officers to muddle through answering the inquiries as best they can.

If Vern's message is true, each of us has a number of problems to solve, not the least of which is staying alive, and there are other fairly obvious organizational matters which I believe have already generally been provided for. Let's consider what the other alternative holds for us, in the event that Vern is mistaken.

Next summer's conference comes and there has been no World War III touching American soil. What then? According to the message, the only event which would have stopped the inevitable war would have been the advent of an Emergency Son. What if Vern informs us that the Emergency Son has arrived and prevented it? On the assumption that such a Son would be invisible, what if Vern claims to be in contact with him, and to be his spokesman?

That is practically the situation now, since a number of us seem to believe that Vern is the mouthpiece of the celestial planetary administration. Such a belief greatly simplifies decision-making, since such a believer no longer need exercise whatever evolutionary wisdom and spiritual guidance he might receive, but need only consult the oracle in the knowledge that, if the situation is sufficiently important, Vern will convey the desires of the planetary administration.

Many of us appear to believe this in spite of such clear statements in the book as "You [Vern included] are quite incapable of distinguishing the product of your own material intellect from that of the conjoint activities of your soul and the Adjuster" (1207.3), and "[N]othing which human nature has touched can be regarded as infallible" (1768.8). I will not burden this memo with the dozen or so additional quotes we have all read warning us against just this sort of thing.

In any event, Vern is now unequivocally assuming the role of New Contact Personality. Jesus taught us to ask the Father for guidance, and to use our evolutionary common sense as well, and we have been further blessed with the revelation of God contained in The URANTIA Book. The existence of a New Contact Personality, if one is inclined to believe the claims, offers a short-cut to the necessity otherwise of working out our own answers to problems in the normal and natural way which Jesus and the book both teach. The dangers implicit in many of our members looking to any human being rather than to their inner spirit for guidance are so horrendous and obvious that I will not belabor the point.

Bear in mind that the messages so far (that I have been told about, in any case) have not been directed at men's souls, exhorting them to seek the Father's will, but rather have consisted in fairly specific instructions about certain material actions that we should or should not take. Such instructions short-circuit any discussion, debate or consensus-seeking as to the wisdom of a particular course. The subject is not longer whether a given course is wise, given all of the factors involved, but whether Vern received guidance. Since Vern has claimed to have received other messages of which he did not wish to reveal the contents, those who are inclined to believe him must be reluctant to disagree with him on anything, for, who knows, maybe his opinion on that subject derived from angelic or midwayer guidance as well. Does anyone fail to see the danger of a personality cult in this situation?

There does not appear to be any method to authenticate Vern's message. We were supposed to believe The URANTIA Book because of its inherent value, but many are

now believing Vern on the grounds that he is a highly dedicated and righteous man who was believed by Christy to be a reservist. On those points: being dedicated and righteous is no guarantee whatever that one is necessarily correct in one's opinions; Christy herself would never have claimed to have been infallible in her opinions; and nowhere is it written "once a reservist always a reservist" or that reservists are themselves infallible.

The entire scenario of Vern's claimed celestial contact varies sharply with the only agreed-upon contact of midwayer/angelic communication in our era: that pertaining to the transmission of the book. There, such communication had to occur, but great pains were taken to avoid public identification of the Contact Personality. The assigned reason was that it was important that the personalities of the individuals involved not be a cause of either belief or non-belief in the book. This present situation is structured on the opposite premise, has none of the benefits, and fulfills all of the dangers implied by a violation of the midwayers' approach in getting us the book. The present approach asks us to believe the message not because of its inherent validity, but because of who said it. Isn't that precisely what they were trying to avoid? Is it reasonable to believe that the midwayers' methods would have changed 180 degrees? Furthermore, in receiving the book we had a Contact Commission composed of several people who could confer with each other to make sure that they had understood what was transpiring properly, reducing the danger of distortion which could result from just one person being involved. As far as I know, we have nothing to go on here except one person's say-so.

How then do we test the truth of what Vern has told us? That we should take into account the reality that we live in a dangerous world in which nuclear war is possible should be obvious to all. Nothing new there. But what he said is quite different, and if one is disposed to believe it, requires preparations of a different order. If we have suspended our critical faculties under the belief that Vern is God's messenger to us, even if this message were genuine, how would we know that the next one was genuine as well? How does the Brotherhood react if Vern calls to tell the Brotherhood to immediately evacuate Chicago? Suppose that we do so, and it turns out to be a false alarm? More to the point, if we have suspended our critical faculties, what would be the characteristics of a false message?

The Brotherhood has long been agreed on the desirability of avoiding any priesthood which might even remotely appear to take on the role of mediator between the celestial forces and mortal man. We are courting a far more extreme danger in the de facto recognition of a New Contact Personality who claims to be the transmitter of vital and explicit instructions to the believers.

Inasmuch as the Executive Committee was horrified about the publicity which might result from a one-inch ad offering free information about the book in the classified section of Psychology Today, it should consider how it will react if/when any stories appear in the San Francisco area press about this situation:

Cult followers of a local radio evangelist recently took over an abandoned seminary in the nearby town of Clayton. Their leader claims that an angel told him World War III was coming soon, so they have converted their building into a virtual bunker and have stocked it up with freeze-dried food and other survival provisions. They are now armed to the teeth, living behind sand-bags and steel shutters, prepared to shoot intruders. Neighbors have called for an investigation by the County Sheriff. Unconfirmed rumors have it that the evangelist has been running a front recruitment operation for an occult group known as URANTIA Brotherhood under the guise of a non-denominational religious foundation for over fifteen years. More will follow as our investigation continues.

Remembering that Jim Jones came from the San Francisco Bay area, and the fact that Vern is already somewhat well known there from his radio broadcast, you can imagine what a field day the press could have with this story, and how easy it would be for an enterprising reporter to dig up the facts concerning Vern's close association with the Urantia movement.

We should all keep each other especially in our prayers as we seek the Father's guidance as to how best to react to this situation.