

Eschatology: The cult that I left

“Obviously the greatest tragedy that can happen to Christian Scientists occur when they die of a curable disease after postponing a consultation with a medical doctor. A more subtle kind of tragedy afflicts believers who, after not being healed by faith, assume that the failure is a defect in themselves.”

—Martin Gardner

On August 9, 1985 I arrived at midnight to the San Francisco international airport from Mexico City. I was alone and awaiting the immigration department officer, who was interviewing another young man. When the officer finally came to me he inspected all of my luggage belongings. It surprised me he was amiable and that he easily let me go out into the city as a tourist. I had deceived him: my project was to become an immigrant. I told to myself with enthusiasm:

They don't know what they're doing! They don't know what they're doing! They have no idea about the menace I represent! Now the end of the world is at hand...

I believed I had the key to develop paranormal powers. I believed that I and those who developed such powers would force the *eschaton* in history; that we would irrupt in human destiny to the point of thoroughly transforming the world just like the novel *Childhood's End*.

How could such a bizarre idea got into my mind?

I had been indoctrinated in a New Age cult called Eschatology. My plan was based on the expectation that I only needed to complement the Eschatology training I received in Mexico with parapsychological studies in American libraries and institutes.

But how did I fell prey of such a cult?

As a teenager I was crushed emotionally by my parents and a witch-doctor they hired. It's understandable that, once the adolescent crisis was over, in a state of utter confusion I fell in a cult. Although I expected it would save me, the cult damaged me even more. Since I believed that Eschatology would solve my problems it made no sense to go back to a school I had abandoned due to the extreme abuse at home.

But instead of recounting my misadventures in Eschatology I better talk about the kind of cult I fell and how I escaped it cognitively.

Mary Baker Eddy (1821-1910), a sensitive New Hampshire girl, probably was abused like me at home. Mary became disturbed. The physicians who attended young Mary were as naive as today's psychiatrists: they approached the family problem with physical treatments. Mary rightly became resentful of conventional medicine. The disorder caused by the abusive parenting was profound. After getting married and becoming an early widower, for decades Mary's life shipwrecked until she found shelter in the fatherly figure of Phineas Quimby, one of the typical American quacks who flourished in the 19th century inspired by Franz Mesmer. Like Mesmer, Quimby believed in the power of the mind and suggestion to treat diseases. The encounter was crucial. Instead of physical methods Quimby was interested in Mary as a person, and without explicit intention Quimby helped Mary to transfigure her family's

Calvinism into a more benign version of Christianity with no hell at all. Quimby sometimes used the expression “Christian science” for his quack teachings, a term that Mary Baker subsequently appropriated to name the church she formed.

With no credit for Quimby as her mentor, in 1875 Mary Baker published the first edition of her textbook *Science and Health with the Key to the Scriptures*. The following year she formed, with some of her followers, a society and in 1877, at fifty six, she married again, with Asa Gilbert Eddy. In 1879 Mary Baker Eddy officially founded a church, which in 1890 counted with four thousand followers. Since then the established Church and its numerous churches grew up exponentially. In 1895 a temple was built in front of New York’s Central Park, and by 1906 another immense temple was built in Boston when Eddy already was eighty five years old. Stefan Zweig wrote:

In twenty years out of a maze of metaphysical confusion she created a new method of healing; established a doctrine counting its adherents by the myriad, with colleges and periodicals of its own; appointed a Sanhedrin of preachers and priests; and won for herself private wealth amounting to three million dollars.

Zweig adds that since Queen Elisabeth and Catalina of Russia no woman obtained such a triumph over the world, nor lived to see on Earth a monument to her rule as Mary Baker Eddy.

Her followers were Legion: hundreds of quacks and dozens of minor sects with varied names sprouted throughout the United States, factions by apostates or those who had been excommunicated by the church. One of them was a young man called William Wilfred Walter (1869-1941).

William W. Walter

Starting as a barber, Will Walter had to earn a living at seventeen in Aurora, Illinois. At twenty one he married Barbara Stenger and the couple had a son. In a cult it is difficult to obtain basic information about the founder, but one of the very few pieces of biographical info about Walter is that at his late twenties he got a job as a buyer in a large warehouse. He initiated contact with the local Christian Science church after he developed tuberculosis. Walter ignored that spontaneous remission is not unusual in cases of pulmonary tuberculosis; he remained convinced that a church practitioner had healed him by purely psychic means. Walter thus became a devout follower of the church and reached the position of first reader (though officially there is no clergy in the church, the first reader may appear to outsiders as the equivalent to a Protestant pastor).

In 1912 Walter’s revolutionary idea of God distanced himself from the church. Or perhaps he was excommunicated. The information from eschatologists I have is contradictory. At any event, Walter accepted the title “The Walter Method of Christian Science,” which served his followers to distinguish the incipient organization from the mainstream church. He received correspondence from disillusioned Christian Scientists and claimed to heal his clients through mental means alone. In 1917 he taught his first class at home, but not until 1928 he changed the name of his small movement to “Eschatology.”

With the exception of his abandonment of theism, Eschatology shares almost all the incredible Christian Science doctrines, such as the belief that for advanced understanders it is possible to heal any illness and even old age to the point of staying centuries in this world.

But Eddy and Walter died at common ages of dying. Walter died without having finished a series of booklets that he promised would be forty. In 1940 he wrote: “This is booklet number thirty-one. The first of the fourth series of ten of the *Common Sense Series*.” But soon after he wrote booklet #34 death surprised him.



Will Walter

After he passed away the information I possess is, once more, contradictory. Some say that the movement fell apart; others, that Walter's wife passed on the torch to Genevieve Rader. At any event, in the 1960s the organization moved to California, where all sort of New Age movements flourish. In the 1970s the wealthy Mexican Mario Estrada, who studied with Rader, brought Walter's doctrines to Cuernavaca. Estrada was the teacher of Juan del Río, whom I met in Mexico City in 1977 through one of his sons.

Well: 1977 had been precisely the year in which my parents confabulated with a witch-doctor to control me through drugs that my mother poured furtively in my meals. (See my article "Unfalsifiability in Psychiatry" after the present one.) Such criminal behavior could have destroyed my life and I escaped by the skin of one's teeth. The abuse explains the state of confusion in which I found myself at that time, and why I entered the world of Eschatology.

Walter's doctrine

Even though Christian Scientists are not very devout of theism, Walter understood deity more or less as the posterior New Age: he became to believe that each individual is God, something like democratizing for mankind what had been said about Jesus Christ in the first Christian councils, the famous formula *Vere homo, vere Deus*. But Walter suffered terrible inner struggles to get rid from the theism he had been taught as a child in Catholicism: an agony that reminds me my own religious agonies. Walter was able to overcome the parental introject by

eliminating from his mind all belief of God as a personal being. In my opinion, chapter 14 of *The Sickle*, the first textbook of Eschatology, where Walter recounts his religious agony, is the only relevant chapter of *The Sickle* for the non-eschatologist.

In Walter's worldview Jesus of Nazareth, despite of having been the individual who has better understood the Science of Life (called "Eschatology" by Walter) and that developed paranormal powers best, was a man like any other. Potentially everyone can develop extra-sensory perception as Jesus read the thoughts of the Samaritan woman; and psychokinesis, the domain over the material world as Jesus healed people and walked on the water. The "Master Mind Jesus," Walter tells us, learned those powers thanks to a long Hebrew tradition of understanders of the Science of Life, as registered in the Bible albeit in veiled form to hide the *psi* development formula from "the evil minded." (In parapsychological literature "psi" means both extra-sensory perception and psycho-kinesis.) Walter wrote:

The so-called wonders wrought by Moses were done through his own understanding of the mental power; and therefore, they were not miracles, but the producing of mental phenomena through known methods. With the same amount of understanding they could be again reproduced in this age. The fact is that greater so-called wonders are now being produced by students of Mind.

Since not only Jesus but every human being is God incarnate, Walter deduced that the age in which mankind attains consciousness of its divinity, and therefore of its potential powers, will arrive when his students understand—as Jesus and Walter understood—the Science of Life. When this happens the consequences will be eschatological. In *The Sickle*, a title extracted from a passage of the Book of Revelation, Walter tells us that after the publication of *The Sickle* the understanding of the application of mental power will come, and with it "the end of the age."

All of these grandiloquent, though megalomaniac ideas of Walter and his followers infected the altogether confused adolescent I was and explain my soliloquy at the San Francisco international airport. To understand my alienation I have no choice but to enter into detail in the art of developing mental powers as Walter taught it.

The Law of Importunity

In Eschatology there are three laws that Juan del Río (1923-2001) taught me and my female classmates since the first formal class we attended in December 1978: laws that I interpreted in a very practical way.

The first one, the Law of Cause-effect, tells us that given our divine nature we can create *ex nihilo* whatever we desire.

The second one, the Law of Proportion, tells us which quality our thought should have to be "causal": it must be an absolute feeling in the objective reality of our desire. Walter interpreted that this is what Jesus tried to say: "Therefore I tell you, all things whatever you pray and ask for, believe that you have received them, and you shall have them" (Mk. 11:24). The textbook illustration chosen by del Río was that of an Apothecary scale. When a pan of the scale accumulates 51 per cent of our positive thoughts and feeling ("Believe that you have received them...") the scale will tip on the bottom stop and the manifestation of our desire is automatic (the opposing pan would represent the "appearances" and "misleading" shortages in our lives). Hence the name of "proportion" for this Law. But the real problem starts here. If we possess the ability to cause (the First Law) and we know the quality our thinking must have to be causative—a profound conviction (the Second Law)—how can we reach such a conviction?

The Third Law, the Law of Importunity, does the trick. According to the eschatologists Importunity means “to pray insistently and persistently until the mind yields,” that is, until the sum of thoughts generates a positive feeling without doubt. This is something that Walter also deduced from Jesus’ teachings: the parable of the man and his neighbor in the midnight that asks for some bread; the man answers that everybody is asleep but, because of the neighbor’s Importunity, he wakes up and gives the neighbor what he wants (Lk. 11: 5-13). The idea is repeated in the metaphor of the widower that with great persistence importunes a judge pledging for justice, a parable with the moral “to pray always without becoming weary” (Lk. 18:1-8). Walter interpreted the praying of these verses not as a pledge to a nonexistent personal God, but as the mental practice of the advanced student of the Science of Life. The way to reach the state of profound conviction (“believe that you have received them!”) is a repetitive and bothersome mental exercise, an importune praying to oneself which culminates in the feeling of conviction. Following the metaphor of the Apothecary’s scale, through the importunistic repetition of thoughts the individual mind accumulates the needed 51 per cent on the “right” pan for the scale’s arm to lean toward our favor, that is, to generate the feeling of conviction.

To illustrate how an understander could utilize these three Laws let us suppose that he lost a hand (say, as Jaime Lannister lost it in an episode of *Game of Thrones*) and wants it back. According to the First Law he can since his thought is causative and can create from nothing. According to the Second Law, to achieve it he has to feel that he already has his hand. Now then, to generate a feeling that contradicts all appearances he must “pray,” the Third Law tells us, he has to say to himself that the hand already exists with inexorable Importunity until the conviction is achieved. The way to do it is to withdraw to a solitary place, maybe hiding the stump where the hand ought to be so that the appearances will not disturb the eschatologist, and to repeat a line of thought such as “My hand exists and I know it’s here” with as much feeling as he can put into it.

With time, the theory goes, thanks to Importunity a mental state will be reached in which the accomplished eschatologist will really believe he has a hand. That would mean fulfilling the Second Law and, *voilà*, in the objective world a new hand will appear. Of course: students are taught that in order to achieve such a feat they must start with much lesser goals such as healing oneself from a flu or a nervous ulcer. These modest accomplishments will be the platform to develop an invincible faith in one’s own ability to cause; a faith that, with the step-by-step feedback of successes, will allow the apprentice to solve increasingly difficult problems (such as the re-expression of an amputated limb).

Cognitive dissonance

In essence, that is the formula to develop psychokinesis according to Walter: a power that, *The Sickle* claims, when quite a few eschatologists develop it “the end of the age” will arrive. (In this article I use the terms “psychokinesis” and “psi” but the eschatologists do not use parapsychological terms.)

Decades ago, when I believed fervently in Walter’s apocalypse, I imagined that if Eschatology teachers got sick, old and died as any other mortal it was because they didn’t apply the teachings adequately; I believed they were mediocre individuals with no ambition whatsoever. One of the reasons I distanced myself from Juan del Río and my second teacher, Jaime López, was that I didn’t see any psychokinetic result not only in my life, but in theirs. Del Río, who died of cancer in 2001, looked like a man of his age, a fifty six years old, when I studied with him in 1979. Once a new student told me he had asked del Río in front of other

students if he knew at least a single eschatologist who did not age. Del Río stayed silent for a little time and responded in the negative. “Then Eschatology still doesn’t iron out wrinkles!” exclaimed the student. I thought exactly the same. Where were the centenarians that had to exist per force once Eddy and Walter rediscovered the “Science of Life” that had originally been discovered by understanders like Methuselah and the other Biblical centenarians? In theory, the most elemental development of psychokinesis ought to control, through psychic means, one’s own body. Eddy herself taught that her science could forestall the ravages of old age, and many of her devout followers did not expect her to die. What I saw flatly contradicted what Walter had promised.

Walter devoted two chapters to the subject of how to overcome old age in *The Sharp Sickle*, the other textbook of Eschatology. In the chapter “Youth and Maturity” Walter wrote:

Youth, being a sense of youth, can be consciously continued or maintained with all its vigor, energy, and good emotions. That this is not a mere theory can be established by the longevity of the Bible characters, who understood this fact.

Walter’s disciples swallow this paranormal claim like fundamentalist Bible worshipers. In one of her booklets Florence Stranahan wrote:

“You say yours [the hair] is prematurely gray. Age has nothing to do with it. It is your own thought.”

That eschatologists really believe they possess the elixir of youth is also apparent in the commentary by Genevieve Rader on those chapters of *The Sharp Sickle*: a commentary that is read to the advanced students and ratifies and elaborates Walter’s statements. But like Eddy, Stranahan and Walter, Rader, who for forty years directed Eschatology until 1981, got old and died.

So the great masters were getting old and dying just like everyone else. That didn’t concern me much since I also swallowed the eschatologists’ rationalizations: that Eddy, Stranahan, Rader and many others didn’t understand quite well the Science of Life, and that Walter did his “transition” to the next world because he wanted.

Believing these silly rationalizations allowed me to continue my studies of Eschatology. During my first year in the cult I tried countless times to fulfill the tortuous Law of Importunity but I couldn’t. I felt like a fool parroting so many lines of thought without any result whatsoever and never accomplished the marathon sessions of hours or even days that, del Río told us, Walter had performed. I was twenty years old and wanted to become a virtuous of praying—Importunity—to manifest my youthful desires. But it never occurred me to question the existence of such powers. It didn’t occur to me that the fault was not mine, or that other eschatologists had passed through similar difficulties in the praxis of Importunity. I didn’t dare to think they had fulfilled the Law of Importunity with no result, and even less did I dare to think that the stories of the marathon sessions of Walter were just tale-telling by the eschatologists. Perhaps it was Jaime Hall, my closest Eschatology friend (who passed away in 1996 due to a sudden heart failure), the one who told me that Walter had prayed for days; that he needed money and a former student sent him a check by mail: a miracle he attributed to his marathonic Importunity. It never occurred to me to question that miracle or those attributed to Jesus. I couldn’t conceive that what the gospels tell could not have been historical but literary fiction, and that the “metaphysical” interpretation of Eddy and Walter about the New Testament was humbug. Years, oh how many years had to pass to call into question the historicity of the Biblical tales!

Now that I have abandoned all faith in the existence of such powers I can see some fairly elemental things that I didn’t see due to my blind faith. If Eschatology were a science and

its laws as real as the gravity law or the thermodynamics laws, it's more than elemental that I would have witnessed plenty of demonstrations of such laws by my teachers Juan del Río and Jaime López. (A vignette: During a conversation with my father in the early 1980s I once referred to the latter as "Yoda," since we had just watched *The Empire Strikes Back*.) Gravity does not need demonstration: we see it every day. But neither I nor any Eschatology student had seen a relatively modest paranormal feat such as moving a small object psychically, let alone a centenarian Methuselah who re-expressed amputated limbs.

They die younger...

To anyone close to fell prey of Eschatology or any other New Age cult I would recommend considering this litmus test to distinguish a false science from the true sciences:

Scientists can demonstrate the reality of their sciences at sight of everyone: electricity, engineering, computing, medicine, aeronautics, petrochemistry, automotive mechanics and many more. Pseudoscientists can't. Had I reasoned this way before moving to the States I would have realized that I didn't need to travel in pursuit of "serious" parapsychological materials to strengthen my eschatological faith. The fact that no eschatologist kept himself or herself young, or at least healthier than the norm, should have been enough for not seeking my salvation there.

According to the *Journal of the American Medical Association* of 22 September 1989 thousands of deaths of Eddy's followers were registered along with a control group. If Christian Science was a real science one would expect that its followers lived longer than the control group. But the journal revealed something different. The death rate among Christian Scientists from cancer double the national average, and 6 percent of them died from causes considered preventable by doctors. The non-"Scientists" on the average lived four years longer if they were women and two longer if they were men.

Contrary to what they believe, followers of Eddy die younger of cancer than the average American due to their reluctance to go to the doctor. If similar studies were performed on Walter's followers, who are also reluctant to ask for help in medicine because "belief in disease causes disease," I bet that a study would throw identical results. My former teacher Juan del Río fell seriously ill precisely because he forfeited medical check-ups even after he became rich as a result a large following of students, and when he developed symptoms the cancer was already in an advanced stage.

I must say that the best lesson I ever received about the Law of Importunity was given to me by del Río in private. His exposition was clearer and more didactic than the very chapters of *The Sickle* that teach the student how to "pray." Twenty years later, when the cancer was detected, del Río had a window of opportunity of more than four years to pray with Importunity and overcome the disease.

But he failed miserably. And he failed for the simple reason that cancer has no "mental" etiology nor it is healed by "healthy thoughts" or by "eradicating all hate" as predicated by Walter.

My other teacher, Jaime López, went even further than del Río regarding the dilemma of whether or not going to the doctor. He once made a critical remark of the del Río family since they practiced prophylactic vaccination (Juan was a physician and he practiced his profession before entering the cult). In his study at Puebla, López told me that he didn't vaccinate his sons, and that Juan and his wife had disappointed him for doing it. Jaime López ended his commentary telling me that he functioned in life "as Walter says."

It is important to notice that Raquel Hall, Juan del Río's widower, continued the teaching to hundreds of students of Eschatology, a cult she now calls "Mental Application." The long agony of her husband did not move her to question the dogma that cancer is curable by mental means alone. The believer in a cult, religion or pseudoscience rarely grows up when confronted with what psychologists call a shock of cognitive dissonance (like death).



Juan Del Río already with cancer

Yes: as a young man I was ignorant about the study of the American Medical Association and believed that the teachers' old age and death was caused by their lack of the understanding that Jesus and the Old Testament centenarians had. Once more: it never occurred to me that the "Laws" of Eschatology simply did not exist, that it all was megalomania, a grandiose fantasy. It didn't occur to me because I could not conceive the inexistence of the paranormal: an idea that my father had inculcated me as a child with his beautiful tales about the miracles of Jesus. Although as a young man I had abandoned Christianity, I erroneously believed that the existence of extra-sensory perception and psychokinesis, on which the systems of Eddy and Walter are tacitly based, had been demonstrated scientifically by parapsychologists and that I only needed to check and see it for myself in the American labs of parapsychology. Hence the need to emigrate and my soliloquy that night at the airport.

Please levitate this ship!

The extremely disturbing experiences of 1985-1988 in California after I left the airport is the subject of the last chapter of *Hojas Susurrantes*. Here I will only quote a passage from my diary that shows the maturity of my ulterior apostasy from the cult:

2 September 1997

Yesterday I read two chapters of *The Sharp Sickle* after years of not reading it and something important happened in my mind. For the first time I doubt Walter's honesty.

Remember my handwritten note in that *Skeptical Inquirer* article about how should I have reacted before the claim of the Law of Importunity?:

Guru: “Don’t take my word for it. You can learn to do psychokinesis yourself.”

Skeptic: “Great! I’d love to! But before I put in the time and shell out the cash, I want to do a little consumer research. How about a demonstration?”

This is the crux. Neither Walter nor Genevieve or Robert Durling could even do a little psychokinetic demonstration like what Walter claims on page 219 of *The Sharp Sickle*: that with his pure thought he affected pieces of steel, rubber, stone, wood and clay. Today my attitude would be to request a demonstration (“before I put in the time...”) or not trying to fulfill the interminable hours of the alleged Law of Importunity. It’s on this point where I have changed. He who now reads this *Sickle* is another man: a skeptic.

It’s a gem what Walter says on page 207: “*Investigate the works* [emphasis in the original!] of those you chose as leaders and you will not be far mislead,” because he died abruptly. “That Mrs. Eddy did not discover the whole is seen in that she is no longer here,” Walter wrote in the most treasured book by eschatologists. Another gem, since there’s nothing more fatal for Eschatology’s credibility that Walter died even younger than her!

At the end of his chapter “Conclusion” I wrote with red ink: “OK, Walter or contemporary teachers of Eschatology, I ask you this with no scorn whatsoever: Teach me a Yoda-like lesson by levitating the ship in front of Luke as in the film *The Empire Strikes Back* and tomorrow I’ll humbly re-start studying the first booklet of the *Plain Talk Series*!”

Except for a few syntax corrections, that’s what I wrote in my 1997 diary. The *Plain Talk* booklet is the text for the first classroom lesson in Eschatology.

It is worth mentioning that in his time there were people who considered Walter a swindler. Florence Stranahan, one of his most loyal disciples, wrote in the booklet *Messages on Christian Science series I*:

You write that Mrs. ___ says that Mr. Walter is a crook [...] and that he is promoting a money-making scheme.

Stranahan doubted that the accusation of the unnamed woman was accurate. But Oliver Roberts de La Fontaine, a rich man from Wells Fargo & Co. in California, wrote in *The Great Understander* that Walter charged him \$10,000 for a course for the initiate (the value of a mansion in those times). In his book Oliver confessed that when he heard such a figure he momentarily harbored the thought that Walter had been chasing him with previous courses so that, once convinced, charge him a fortune.

Oliver paid Walter what he wanted. The anecdote moves me to point out that some paragraphs of his textbook suggest a lack of principles of the man who, *in absentia*, I took as my spiritual guide and mentor. Walter wrote:

There are two positive stages of unfoldment which precede conscious transition [for eschatologists “conscious transition” is going to the next world without experimenting death]; and these must be fully understood and demonstrated before the third stage of conscious transition can be understood and demonstrated. Therefore, whenever any student of mine will prove to me through demonstration that he or she understands these first two stages, I will gladly give him the law governing the third stage.

The first stage is the demonstration of invisibility. Jesus could accomplish this at will, as is stated in the Scripture. The second stage is the transfiguration.

Did Walter really believe this? In his words (“whenever any student of mine will prove to me through demonstration that he or she understands these first two stages...”) it is implicit that, if Walter asked the student such a demonstration, he could make himself invisible and transfigured as well, as preliminary stages of the complete understanding of the Mind.

Years ago I used to think that Walter was simply a crackpot. Now I am starting to look at him under a more sinister light. If Walter didn’t make himself invisible he was not a crank, but a charlatan. The difference between a crackpot and a charlatan is that the crank believes in his myths, whereas the charlatan swindles consciously. Martin Gardner distinguishes between the two in his hilarious *Science: The Good, the Bad and the Bogus*: a crank is someone like Velikowski, who believed in his lunatic astronomy; a charlatan is someone like Uri Geller, who deceived us with his “psychokinetic” tricks.

So I repeat: Did Walter really believe what he asked his students, that with time they could make themselves invisible? As I said, in such a request it was not only implicit that he, Walter, did master invisibility but that he had transfigured his body as Jesus did. But it is an established fact that Walter never demonstrated he could make himself invisible before the men of science in his age. Had he done that he would have revolutionized the scientific world.

Presently I do not believe that Walter made himself invisible. And that can only mean one thing: that Walter lied to his pupils and readers by implying, in the above-cited quotation, that he could achieve such paranormal feat. This conclusion will upset eschatologists, since Walter ended *The Sickle* stating that, above all, one must be sincere with oneself.

It is impossible to prove a negative; for instance, that Walter did not become invisible. But it is possible to show what science really is. There are two basic rules of the thumb in the skeptical community about paranormal claims.

The first one is “Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence,” for example, not only evidence that Walter had demonstrated invisibility publicly but that advanced eschatologists could do it today. But in his book Walter does not even bother to describe an *ordinary* proof for his extraordinary claims (the same fault appears throughout the textbook of Walter’s mentor, Mary Baker Eddy).

The second one is “The burden of proof rests upon the claimant alone.” It has been noted that in pseudosciences the burden is inverted; for instance, the teacher requests the student to make himself invisible—even if the teacher himself has not previously demonstrated invisibility! (Just contrast this irrational demand with the demonstrations performed by the teachers of magic in the *Harry Potter* films.)

Let’s assume for a moment that Walter could make himself invisible. Why didn’t he perform public demonstrations? Was it to hide his secret formula of Importunity to develop such powers from the evil minded?

Don’t make me laugh, Walter! How absurd it would have been that Edison, just after he invented the electric light bulb, showed it to nobody but kept his most important invention to himself. Let’s imagine that he asked his students that *they*, not the inventor must show Edison how to create a light bulb—before letting them enter into his lab to see the shining light bulb of the teacher!

After pondering over the two *Sickles* with a healthy dose of skepticism, the inescapable verdict about Walter is that he may well have behaved as a crook, just as the woman mentioned by Stranahan stated in the above quotation.

Recommended readings

To fully understand Walter and company it may not be a bad idea to read the biographies about the mischievous lives of the creators of religious empires on American soil: from Joseph Smith to L. Ron Hubbard and the reverend Sun Myung Moon passing through those who, like Walter and a myriad others, couldn't create large organizations and their followers are barely known. Martin Gardner's *The Healing Revelations of Mary Baker Eddy* is a good starting point.

Whoever wants to know why real scientists do not believe in paranormal powers—which many cults promise to their followers—cannot miss *Leaps of Faith* by Nicholas Humphrey: a scholarly yet readable skeptical study about parapsychology.

R.I.P.

On 6 March 1941 the *Aurora Beacon News*, the newspaper of the small town in which Walter spent most of his life, published the note: “William Walter Dies Suddenly in Florida Home.” The article specified that that house was Walter's “Winter home,” and that he died “of heart attack.”

Eschatologists claim that the gospel tale about the Ascension describes Jesus' “conscious transition” to the “next plane” of existence. The note demonstrates that what I heard in Eschatology is a lie: that Walter didn't die like everyone else but made the “transition” to the next plane just like Jesus.

The Jesus tale is another lie. In the final chapters of *Gospel Fictions* Randel Helms demystifies the Resurrection and Ascension stories. It is worth noting that I started excerpting the first chapters of Helms' book for *The West's Darkest Hour* but not the final chapters. I was obtaining practically zero feedback from the Americans who apparently are reluctant to question their parental introjects this far.