Dictations, Darshans, and Spiritual Warfare:
A Comparison of Two Prophets and Their Organizations and
An Examination of Children Raised in a New American Religion
For most of my life both of my parents have been Communicants of Church Universal and Triumphant, a syncretistic belief system. My mother Marsha joined the church in her early 20s and my father Floyd (though 10 years younger than my mother) also joined the Church in his early 20s. Church Universal and Triumphant (CUT) is a new American religion in the theological lineage of Gnosticism, Theosophy, I AM Activity, the Bridge to Freedom, the Summit Lighthouse, the Temple of the Presence, and the Hearts Center. My father left officially left CUT in 1996 when my parents separated (a few years before their legal divorce in 1999), though his disillusionment began with the retirement of charismatic CUT leader Elizabeth Clare Prophet due to Alzheimer’s. My mother left CUT in March of 2005 to join the Hearts Center, another offshoot of these new American religions. My parents raised seven children in the Church.

The Summit Lighthouse was founded by Mark Prophet, an Army Air Corps veteran from Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin, in 1958 after he left a similar organization. Elizabeth Clare Prophet incorporated the Summit Lighthouse into CUT in 1974 after the death of Mark Prophet, saying she was called by Jesus to do this. During the time of this transformation the membership of the church was in the thousands, though many more people regularly participated in the Church activities, bought books, VHS tapes, and cassettes. These new American religions (the Bridge to Freedom, CUT, and the Hearts Center) all share a common base root in Theosophy and the Teachings of the Ascended

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Masters of the Great White Brotherhood. The Great White Brotherhood is a divine pantheon of evolved souls that are no longer in physical embodiment but that spent thousands of cycles of reincarnation on Earth and other planets. These souls are almost all deities in religions around the world including Hinduism, Catholicism, Buddhism, and ancient pagan religions. As constantly reiterated in Church literature, the name does not refer to any racial attributes but to the aura of pure white light that surrounds these Masters. The Great White Brotherhood includes Jesus Christ, Saint Germain, Mother Mary, Gautama Buddha, Shiva, Astrea, Archangel Michael, K-17, Cyclopea, Helios, Diana, Pallas Athena, and the Goddess of Liberty. The Ascended Masters are in direct contact with their Messengers and give live dictations and question and answer sessions called darshans. Mark Prophet and Elizabeth Clare Prophet were the messengers of the Summit Lighthouse.

In 1994 researchers at Stanford published an academic study of the Church: Church Universal and Triumphant: In Scholarly Perspective. Bradley C. Whitsel at Pennsylvania State University published The Church Universal and Triumphant: Elizabeth Clare Prophet’s Apocalyptic Movement in 2003. Whitsel classifies CUT as a progressive millennial movement, a messianic organization that believes in a spiritual transition of the entire planet resulting in a totally shifted reality. In Church Universal and Triumphant this total reality shift is called the Golden Age and, according to Church doctrine, would occur when 50 percent of world karma is balanced. CUT also focuses on the ascension of the individual soul; this is a similar transition that ends the cycles of reincarnation for one soul after she balances 50 or more percent of her karma.
CUT teaches that to balance world and personal karma, people should decree, meditate, and keep their bodies clean of alcohol, drugs, caffeine, sugar, rock music and music with a syncopated beat, oral sex, and premarital sex. Decreeing is a form of rapid prayer that emphasizes speed, constancy, and repetition. The most powerful healing decrees are known as Violet Flame decrees. The Violet Flame (also referred to as the healing, transmutive flame) is a violet-colored spiritual fire that is said to envelop people and transmute, or burn away, their negative karma while they decree. I have used the phrase “pagan Puritans” to describe the behavioral and belief structure of the Church.

In 1989 Mrs. Prophet delivered a message from the Great White Brotherhood that prophesized a nuclear attack by Soviet Russia on the United States. Bomb shelters were built on the Church properties of the Royal Teton Ranch, Glastonbury, and Livingstone, all in South West Montana. Church members were encouraged to trade cash for gold bullion and coins, buy disaster supplies to last anywhere from six months to seven years, and to relocate to the bomb shelters. Four of my brothers and sisters, my mother, my father, and I moved into the bomb shelter in Livingstone for a few days. The date of the prophesized nuclear attack on the United States by the Soviet Union came and went. The church immediately lost one-third of its membership. The numbers of faithful continued to decline and in 1999 Elizabeth Clare Prophet retired due to Alzheimer’s. In a recent Church publication, a pamphlet explaining future changes for the preservation of the Teachings in the post-ECP era published in the summer of 2004, captures well the division between members that spells out the waning influence and probable eventual dissolution of CUT as a functioning community and church:
“Since Mother’s retirement, there have been differing opinions among membership about how the organization should be run and what its standards should be, issues that are directly related to our core identity. Our former mode of functioning as a mystery school that centered around a physical Guru/initiator directly linked to the ascended masters and actively engaged in our daily activities no longer exists. At one extreme, there are now some who want to see a strict adherence to the standards prevalent during Mother’s tenure for both new students and chelas alike. At the other extreme, there are those who desire to see a democratically governed organization where everyone “sits under his own vine and fig tree” and no one has authority over another”.

The Hearts Center seems to follow the second model, or least has begun so by allowing members to submit rituals and decrees for acceptance by their Messenger, David Lewis. Given the pattern of these churches, once another Messenger appears and forms his or her own organization, that person will be denounced by Lewis and the Hearts Center, by the Temple of the Presence, and by Church Universal and Triumphant and the Summit Lighthouse. This pattern has been held in place by all other splinter organizations of the I AM Movement. The I AM Movement accepted the teachings of Madame Blavatsky and the Theosophical Society as valid but rejected the Bridge to Freedom as psychic activity. The Bridge to Freedom accepted the I AM Movement and the Theosophical Society but rejected the Summit Lighthouse and CUT. The Summit Lighthouse and CUT accepted the Bridge to Freedom, the I AM Movement, and the Theosophical Society but rejected the Temple of the Presence. The Temple of the Presence recently rejected the Hearts Center but accepted all of the previous incarnations of the Teachings.

I firmly disavowed my belief in the Ascended Masters in 1999 after reading a number of my mother’s Keeper of the Flame lessons. A Keeper is the first level of

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membership in the Church; the lessons were too radically right wing and exclusionary for me to swallow. Then after a few years of atheism and a steadily worsening depression, I became re-involved in the Church through the youth program of CUT by going to the Winter Teen Retreat in January of 2004 hosted by the Church near San Antonio, Texas. For the next year I became deeply involved in the youth program and was a youth counselor for the Summer Retreat in Corwin Springs, Montana in June and July of 2004. I also joined the Keepers of the Flame Fraternity, the preliminary membership group of the Church; the Communicants are the higher level of membership and the vows include allegiance to the Church as a body, strict adherence to the lifestyle guidelines, and at least a ten percent tithe of the member’s income. In addition I was a founding member of and the Secretary to the Knights and Ladies of the Flame, a group of people ages 19-26. I left the Church in January of 2005 because I could no longer stomach (again) the overt politics of the Church. While reading my Keeper of the Flame lessons I found a number of, what I considered to be, totally unbelievable and ridiculous accounts from the Ascended Masters about “black dog men” and other “nefarious beings.” I could not reconcile my participation and my disbelief in core principles of the Teachings of CUT. I resigned from my offices and discontinued my Keepers of the Flame membership.

My interest in Church Universal and Triumphant and its so-called splinter groups is one built on a lifetime of exposure. I find everything about religions completely fascinating and want to continue my studies of CUT and its theological children. My mother left CUT to follow the new “Messenger of the Great White Brotherhood,” David Lewis, and became a part of the Hearts Center in February 2005. She has been very open about her belief in the new dictations and teachings given by Lewis. She invited me to a
dictation session and darshan given by David Lewis in Los Angeles on September. When David Lewis and my mother were both members of Church Universal and Triumphant, they were friends and saw each other at the quarterly conferences. My mother’s friendship with David Lewis seems to have led her to follow him in his Messengership, she frequently speaks of the pre-established trust that she has in him.

In September I attended a darshan given by the messenger and founder of the Hearts Center, David C. Lewis. He gave dictations from Mother Mary and Jesus Christ. Lewis then intermediated a darshan between participants and the Ascended Master El Morya. An audio recording of the both the darshan and the dictations were made available in streaming MP3 on the Hearts Center website: http://www.heartscenter.org. As a means for comparison I bought and watched a DVD that the Summit Lighthouse sells in its online bookstore for $24.99, minus taxes and S&H. The DVD includes a lecture by Elizabeth Clare prophet on “Twin Flames in Love” and a dictation from Gautama Buddha given in Los Angeles on April 5, 1980.

Elizabeth Clare Prophet, by the time of her retirement in 1999, was the stately matriarch of a devoted following. She wore beautiful gowns, huge gemmed rings, and addressed her flock from an impressively decorated stage. Her lectures and dictations are bloated with New Age rhetoric and esoteric references. The lecture on twin flames begins with the invocation: “Oh light of the ineffable word.” Twin flames were the most popular topic that Elizabeth Clare Prophet lectured on, and Church Elders and organizers describe those seminars as the best attended. In keeping with the entirety of the “Teachings” (a general term that refers to everything the I AM Movement, the Bridge to Freedom, the Summit Lighthouse, and Church Universal and Triumphant have
collectively published and/or espoused), the idea of twin flames emphasizes a “oneness” with the universe that culminates in a loss of self. Everything in your life, as a chela (or “slave”) should be bent towards this “higher purpose.” Desires that do not bring a soul closer to the loss of individuality, much like in Buddhism, are degraded as either “human,” “psychic,” or “not of the Light.”

The Church’s disavowal of anything “psychic” seems at best confused and at worst hypocritical. A person who claims to be in contact with the Ascended Masters may or may not be determined to be engaging in psychic activities. Before her retirement, Elizabeth Clare Prophet made those determinations herself and held personal meetings with people who believed their actions to be inspired by the Great White Brotherhood. In one case, Mrs. Prophet excommunicated a chela from the organization for claiming to be in contact with Saint Germain. Mrs. Prophet repeatedly stated in lectures that participating in psychic activities opened up the entire organization to infiltration by the False Hierarchy. The penance for such a transgression is first excommunication, then years of steady decree work to earn back the broken covenant. This pattern occurred a number of times within the organization. Monroe Shearer was excommunicated from Church Universal and Triumphant in the mid-90s and went on to found the Temple of the

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iii This information is from David Lewis, given during his darshan and lecture in Van Nuys, September of 2005. Lewis was a staff member of Church Universal and Triumphant for over 30 years (serving Elizabeth Clare and Mark Prophet since he was 18) and privy to a great deal of the inner workings of the organization.

iv The False Hierarchy includes: Satan and his Nephilim (also called Watchers and fallen angels); extra-terrestrials that genetically experiment with human beings; fallen angels that have embodied as human beings and are often said to be rock stars, actors, and pro-choice politicians; the entities of suicide, drug addiction and alcoholism, homosexuality, and rock music; and soulless automatons created by Satan and his hordes that somehow reincarnate as human beings despite their lack of a soul – to name a few. This False Hierarchy acts in direct opposition to the Hierarchy of the Ascended Masters and competes with God for the souls of man.
Presence with his wife (and supposed twin flame) Carolyn Shearer. Elizabeth Clare Prophet denounced the Temple of the Presence as psychic activity¹. David Lewis was also excommunicated from Church Universal and Triumphant, but by the Council of Elders and not by the Alzheimer-incapacitated Mrs. Prophet. Other psychic activities that CUT members are dissuaded from (some may say forbidden from) participating in are tarot readings, Ouija boards, aura readings, past life readings, channeling, séances, and astral projection. Though it’s not clear that all of these activities are punishable by excommunication, they are all said to be spiritually dangerous practices.

Despite the organizational aversion to anything “psychic,” the CUT session I attended was entirely based on astrology. All the students bought Elizabeth Clare Prophet’s book Predict Your Future: Understand the Cycles of the Cosmic Clock. The teaching of the book and of the Summit University session was that each of the twelve astrological sun signs (Pisces, Leo, Sagittarius) is assigned to one of the twelve hours on a clock. Each hour on the clock contains a challenge or a spiritual test that relates to the generally widespread astrological profile of the associated sun sign. Special decrees were given to transmute the karma that descends during each cycle of the day, month, or quadrant of a person’s expected life span. An explanation given in the course material for Summit Lighthouse exposes some of the rhetoric used in the exercise:

“Satellites of planets are meant to act like giant screens that reflect the feelings (pure feelings) of lifewaves on the planet. However when mankind misqualifies the energy of the sun, that misqualified energy is reflected in the moon. The moon will amplify the negative substance of the 12 hierarchies based on its cycle. It is important to make a call when you are aware of this moon substance. Example: “In the name of the Christ, in the name of the I AM Presence, I call to mighty Astrea and to the Lords of the Violet Flame to consume the cause and core of all

¹ This information is from current CUT President Kate Gordon, given during early July 2004 at her home in Bozeman, Montana.
misuses of the hierarchy of Capricorn, of God-Power, and of all moon substance that is a misqualification of that energy.”

A very clear binary is established immediately in the Teachings. Twin flames are the masculine and feminine representations of God that were created as one being and divided into these two aspects. This idea is taught to children and neophytes as vision of a raindrop that falls from God and divides in two. Each set of twin flames is assigned an individual and a shared “Divine Plan.” The twin flames hold “an identical, electronic blue-print.” Elizabeth Clare Prophet describes Adam and Eve (of Judeo-Christian fame) as the archetypical twin flames. We feel incomplete as people because we lack the presence of our twin flame. Romantic, heterosexual love really is the cure for all humanity’s pain. Elizabeth Clare Prophet and Mark Prophet are, famously within the Church, twin flames themselves. They both also left marriages (Mark also left children) to be with each other and found the Summit Lighthouse. Whitsel refers to the students of the Teachings as “staunch defenders of the status quo,” a position that is evident in the Church’s championing of heterosexual marriage and that could also be seen in the anti-New Deal politics of the I AM Movement.

During the dictation Elizabeth Clare Prophet stands between two tall marble pillars in front of the altar. Three huge paintings, one of Jesus Christ, one of the Chart of Your Divine Self (also called an I AM Presence Chart), and one of Saint Germain dominate the back wall of the altar. Mrs. Prophet is dressed entirely in white. Her tunic has a Nehru collar and long sleeves. Her pants are white cotton and her hair is a rounded mass of tight curls. She speaks alternately with her hands clasped together in front of her

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throat or extended towards the audience and her eyes alternately open and close. Her voice is full and demands the attention of the audience. She speaks with increasing speed throughout the dictation and calls the audience “beloved hearts” frequently. Most of what she says alludes to esoteric descriptions of the spiritual plane. Mrs. Prophet smiles broadly and never skips a beat. The dictation lasts for 23 minutes.

David Lewis’ dictations and darshan were held in the home of one of his followers off the Van Nuys exit of the North-bound 405. A chart of the I AM Presence hung on a wall above a modest altar behind him, as it did behind Mrs. Prophet. There were about 12 people present. Lewis spent a solid fifteen minutes at the beginning of the meeting telling his story of feeling called to the Masters’ service, being initiated by Jesus Christ, Saint Germain, and El Morya, and of trying to convince the Council of Elders of CUT to consider his willingness to undergo the tests Mrs. Prophet established during her administration of CUT and to be instated as the new official Messenger of Church Universal and Triumphant and the Great White Brotherhood. Instead, David Lewis and anyone who followed his teachings were officially excommunicated from Church Universal and Triumphant and required to undergo a severe time of penance and psychic cleansing if they wanted to return. This punishment is in accordance with the precedent established by Mrs. Prophet.

There was an uneasy transition between the political explanations Lewis gave and the commencement of the dictations. Elizabeth Clare Prophet’s dictations were always preceded by hours of the chelas spiritually preparing the room for the presence of the Masters by decreeing for hours on end. Lewis does not have the size of membership that the Prophets garnered after over 40 years. Lewis was wearing an earpiece and a
microphone in order to run a live broadcast of the dictations over the Internet and until a few moments before the dictations began it was unclear what sort of mental state he was in. Unlike Mark and Elizabeth Clare Prophet’s displays of dictation reception, Lewis seemed very much in control of himself and fully able to check with the system administrator to determine whether or not he was broadcasting. When a delay of a few minutes arose he chatted with members of the audience.

First Lewis began with a dictation from Jesus Christ. He sounded very similar to the quality of tone that Elizabeth Clare Prophet used when she gave dictations. Lewis elongated words unnaturally and spoke very loudly, especially for a relatively small living room. When Mother Mary appeared without a pause from Lewis, there was a notable shift in his voice. At first he seemed unsure of how to speak in a feminine manner. His voice was softer and more demure. In both instances he seemed to gain momentum, like Prophet did, the further into the dictation. Each dictation was about ten minutes long. Unlike Mrs. Prophet, Lewis kept his eyes firmly shut. He was in a position considerably closer to his audience than Mrs. Prophet had been, so that may account for the ease of dictating with open eyes.

With the darshan, as with the dictations, there was an unclear shift in roles. Lewis would wait for an audience member to ask a question, and then he would repeat the question and often clarify some point with the person before again closing his eyes. There was a pause of a few beats before Lewis began answering each time. Again he spoke with a commanding and loud voice. His answers involved a lot of synonyms and a great deal of pausing between each word. I asked a question towards the end of the session that related directly to the youth group I helped found in CUT, the Knights and Ladies of the
Flame: “Where are the Knights and Ladies of the Flame cosmically, and what are they doing?” His answer totally perplexed me. He said that the Knights and Ladies of the Flame are a true organization and that the only requirements for membership are allegiance to “the three dots and their teachers” (a symbol created to represent the Masters Lanello, El Morya, and Kuthumi) to do an hour of “violet transmuting flame” and other decrees each day. Then David Lewis, speaking as El Morya, addressed me directly: “And YOU, if you desire, can contribute toward that evolution, beloved heart, as your mother has done.” Then he opened his eyes and looked at me: “Does that answer the question?”

I was telling my mother later about my question and why I asked about the youth group when she said: “Oh I thought you were talking about the Knights and Ladies of the Flame in the Hearts Center! Isn’t that funny, we have a group with that name too.” Lewis’ answer suddenly made perfect sense. He either didn’t know that two separate groups share that name, or assumed that I knew about the Hearts Center group because of my mother’s heavy involvement. Within the Hearts Center, my mother is a member of the Knights and Ladies of the Flame; I didn’t even know they existed. This revelation colored my experience with the Hearts Center, like E. E. Evans-Pritchard discovering the trick of an Azande shaman.

Because attending the darshan with my mother was not just an isolated exposure to new American religions, I experienced the event with a critical distance I may not have otherwise had. I’ve attended live dictations and darshans held by Elizabeth Clare Prophet and I’ve been a student at Summit University, the formal CUT teaching sessions.
Comparing the dictation given by Mrs. Prophet and the dictations and darshan given by David Lewis illuminated some deep structural similarities. Both performers rely almost entirely on the present belief of the audience and also the compliance of the audience to not disturb or disrupt the ceremony. Both performers also rely on voice and body movement control in order to present a stable and authoritarian presence. Given that Mrs. Prophet delivered dictations for almost 20 years before the 1980 taping I watched on the DVD, it is not hard to imagine that David Lewis could someday have a more powerful stage presence, a more imposing stage, and a more convincing. Much like any other shamanistic trance, successfully convincing dictations requires the complete absorption of the performer’s faculties so they cannot be visibly distracted and break the fourth wall.

Monsters Under My Bed: Growing Up in a New American Religion

It was not my original intention to expand my research by including an examination of my own childhood as a “Church kid.” However, the chapter “Psychosocial Functioning and the Experiential World of the Children in the Church Universal and Triumphant” by Lawrence Lilliston and Gary Shepherd from Oakland University in the book Church Universal and Triumphant: In Scholarly Perspective edited by James R. Lewis and J. Gordon Melton presented a view of the Church kid childhood that I found myopic and in some cases, totally wrong. I think that because the research focused on children whose parents were members of the Church staff and therefore almost entirely surrounded by the culture of the Church, the children they studied probably did benefit psychologically from both the community support and the cultural isolation that the communal living situation depended on. Unfortunately (for the validity
of the research) most of the children being raised within Church Universal and
Triumphant did not, either ever or always, live on Church land and attend Church schools
with other Church kids. In that case, for the rest of us, being raised according to the tenets
of CUT did not conform to the extremely positive view espoused by the authors of the
Oakland University study.

Pieces of the study that correspond to my (and my six siblings’) experiences
largely deal with the noted early intellectual and academic growth of the Church kids.
From a very early age, Church kids are taught to read and many were either home-
schooled or enrolled in Montessori schools that emphasize early development. By the
time I enrolled in the first grade, I knew all my multiplication, division, addition, and
subtraction tables and could complete simple long division. In the second grade I won a
countywide oral presentation contest with my dramatic reading of poetry from J.R.R.
Tolkien’s *The Hobbit*. In the sixth grade a poem I wrote about the state of mind of a
dying drug addict that won best overall in my school district’s yearly writing competition.
I skipped the eighth grade, and after convincing my best friend Miriam (also a Church
kid) to join me, entered high school at 13. I graduated in the top ten (students, not
percent) my high school class. My oldest sister Allison Frost, now a radio host and
producer for Oregon Public Broadcasting in Portland, also skipped the eighth grade. Most
of the people I know who were raised in the Church are not only in general more
intelligent than people of similar age and socioeconomic background but are also
excellent students. The Church emphasis on self-improvement and spiritual and
intellectual study lends itself well to education: “The encouragement to look inside one’s
heart (one’s own experience of reality) as a guide to truth is a one of Elizabeth Clare
Prophet’s most frequently cited aphorisms. These four points [I will touch upon the other three points later] produce one of the most salient points of the Church and the Teachings – the empowerment of the individual to seek truth, to be creative in that search, to be courageous in the search, and to be confident of one’s ability to find reality and truth.\textsuperscript{vii}"

Funnily enough I believe that the Church’s emphasis on self-reliance, taught from a very young age, discouraged the vast majority of its children from remaining involved past the onset of puberty.

Other aspects of a Church childhood resulted in a deep sense of difference and exclusion from the world outside the Teachings. The Lilliston/Shepherd study claims that the boundaries between the Church and the “outside world are well defined yet permeable”\textsuperscript{viii}.” The researchers reiterate that the Church does not claim to have all the answers (yes, it most certainly does claim to have all the answers) and that “the Church views itself as different from the world that does not live by the teachings, while at the same time it is cooperative with that world\textsuperscript{ix}.” As a child I was warned not to tell people the name of the Church I was in, though the Church defined everything about my life. At no point in my life has the Church been something that was cooperative with the world I lived in. I was not allowed to eat mostly anything that other children ate or participate in their world as fully as they were able to. For instance, in the first grade I was given and told to wear earplugs at a friend’s roller rink birthday party because the roller rink played rock music. My oldest brother, Austin, was given a red sweatshirt by our aunt one

\textsuperscript{vii} From Church Universal and Triumphant: In Scholarly Perspective, edited by James R. Lewis and J. Gordon Melton, copyright 1994 by the Center for Academic Publication, page109.
\textsuperscript{viii} Same as above, page 110.
\textsuperscript{ix} Same as above, page 110.
Christmas. When he got home the sweatshirt was taken away from him because the color red was said to anchor sexual and violent energy and was inappropriate to wear. The sense of isolation and otherness that Church kids outside of Montana experienced extended beyond the realm of birthday parties and Christmas presents.

A popular bumper sticker once published by the Summit Lighthouse read: “Souls of Light are waiting to be born. Have one!” This is the best explanation I have for the large number of children in many Church families. Moreover the statement really hones in on how Church kids were taught to think of themselves. We were told that we are spiritual warriors in the fight against the False Hierarchy. My mother especially emphasized this and has recently told me that because all seven of her children were conceived with that purpose in mind and have all since left the Church, she is deeply disappointed in every single one of us. Because of Elizabeth Clare Prophet’s emphasis on the uniqueness of people born into the Church, there is a sense within the community that the children of the Church are all avatars (elevated souls in embodiment on Earth for the salvation of the human race) and members of an esoteric host of souls referred to as “The 144,000.”

I interviewed my sister Allison about her childhood experience with the Church: “Isolation from the rest of the world, that was the experience!” she exclaimed. In fifth and sixth grade she had to wear a dress twice a week and the colors of the day that correspond to the seven chakras. She hated wearing a dress and hid pants in her backpack. Knowing that her religion as quite unlike the Christianity that nearly all her classmates participated in, she always felt as if she had a secret: “I was just mortified that somebody would find out.” Allison noted that the sense of exclusion from the rest of the
world was “more like an attitude than an incident.” She listed off a few elementary
school memories: “You can’t buy a hot lunch at school, because your mom won’t let you
eat any of the food on it. You don’t get to go to the roller rink. I never got to go to
sleepovers. Because we moved around so much we never got invited to parties. I could
never go to dances in high school, let alone the prom. Not being able to watch TV or
listen to music, you were kind of isolated from the popular culture. Kids would talk about
TV shows at school. And I was isolated in other ways, but if I could get the approval of
the teachers, then that was at least something.”

But worse than being excluded from her peers at school, she said, was being
separated from the rest of the family: “Much more devastating socially than being
isolated from the outside was the tension that was created between the cult members and
their families who were not in the cult.” Allison brought up an issue that I remember
causing a lot of tension in our family: Nobody was allowed to touch the babies that were
younger than three months old. “That was so alienating to friends and family members,”
she said. “Mom lost a really good friend because of it. And she didn’t even let her own
mother hold her baby. What would she say now if she weren’t allowed to hold a
grandchild? I guess that’s just another one of the Teachings that’s fallen by the wayside.”
The crumbling of the very strict rules we lived by was a confusing process to experience.
Allison and Austin, my older brother and sister, were made to wear the chakra day colors
(Monday: blue; Tuesday: pink; Wednesday: green; Thursday: purple and gold; Friday:
white; Saturday: violet; Sunday: gold or yellow) whereas that was not mandated for the
younger five children. I was allowed to go to the roller rink, as I previously mentioned,
but was told to wear earplugs. I was allowed to go trick-or-treating with other Church kids, but we weren’t allowed to keep any of our candy.

Allison’s experience corresponds to what the rest of my brothers and sisters remember. For a brief period my family lived in Montana; we were in the area near the headquarters of the Church but not on Church-owned land and my parents were never on staff. Being in the area of the Church but outside of its cultural isolation/protection exposed us to the teasing of the area children; the kids who heard their parents talk about the “cult” and its destructive practices at home. My brother Justus and my sister Charity were harassed at school for being “CUTs” and I was called a “dirty little CUT” at a public swimming pool. There was never a time in our childhoods when my siblings and I felt as if it was “okay” or “normal” to be a Church kid. The few times I remember reaching close to that sort of peace were at the summer conferences. Even then, the Church kids whose parents were on staff separated themselves from the kids from other places around the world.

In the summer of 2004 I went to the Freedom Conference at the Church headquarters in Corwin Springs, Montana; I was a counselor at the youth camp. On the last night of camp, CUT President Kate Gordon (there are two, the other is Lois Drake) gave a speech to the youth about the emerging “blueprint” for the future of the Church and the Teachings. She wants to move CUT into the mainstream of American religions and said that the alienation from society that we all experienced as children was one of her motivating factors. “I raised children in the Church. I know what you guys went through, and I’m sorry,” she said.