



Church Universal and Triumphant and The Summit Lighthouse

Author: Erin Prophet

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Introduction

Church Universal and Triumphant (CUT) came to global attention in 1989 when its followers built and stocked fallout shelters in Montana and elsewhere in preparation for nuclear war and other catastrophes predicted by its leader, Elizabeth Clare Prophet (1939–2009). Today it would be more accurate to call the group by the name of its parent organization, The Summit Lighthouse (TSL), which was founded in 1958 by Prophet's husband, Mark L. Prophet (1918–73). Between 1975 and around 2000, CUT was the primary identity of the organization. Today, although CUT still exists, the organization's primary public identity is once again TSL. The group's theology is complex and includes religious rituals and self-improvement programmes that build upon Theosophical and New Thought lineages, which incorporate esoteric, metaphysical and perennialist ideas. The church also promotes alternative medicine and Montessori education. However, its thought-world also includes a cataclysmic bent drawn from Theosophy, the Bible, and Eastern religion. By the late 1980s its prophecies had become more specific and immediate.

In late 1986, Prophet began recounting a vision of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. Later that year, she warned of the increasing likelihood of a Soviet first-strike nuclear attack on the United States, followed by a period of war, famine, disease, and cataclysmic 'earth changes'. In late 1989, she declared a 'danger period' for March and April of 1990. After the period ended, she updated the prediction to encompass a twelve-year period of returning karma, which would conclude in 2012. She urged her followers to continue building shelters while also increasing their prayer work, which could yet avert catastrophe (Elizabeth Prophet 1990).

Although she never acknowledged a failure of prophecy, Prophet was widely seen as a failed prophet and the group lost about a third of its members following the shelter episode. The remaining members either spiritualized the prophecies or concluded that their efforts had averted the predicted events (Erin Prophet 2009). The group briefly rebounded during the 1990s; however, after Prophet retired in 2000 due to early-onset Alzheimer's disease, it dwindled due to schism and lack of direction (Palmer and Abravanel 2009). It returned to a focus on self-improvement, healing, and education and maintains a headquarters in Montana. The church doctrines continue to be satisfying enough to sustain a following in spite of perceived failures of leadership. In 2011, Elizabeth Prophet, among others, was awarded the facetious Ig Nobel Prize in Mathematics for reportedly having wrongly predicted 'the end of the world' in 1990.

Movement Origins and Historical Development

TSL, founded by Mark Prophet in Washington, DC, in 1958, was itself a product of schism among followers of revelations from 'adepts' and 'masters'. These were enlightened spiritual beings who were believed to have contacted various 'amanuenses', or scribes, in the tradition of the Theosophical Society, founded by Helena P. Blavatsky and others in 1875.

TSL drew most of its early membership from the milieu surrounding the I AM Religious Activity, founded by Guy and Edna Ballard in 1930s Chicago. The Ballards transformed the 'masters' of the Theosophical tradition into 'ascended' masters, building upon ideas from New Thought (Melton 1994; Rudbøgg 2013, 156–60). Their movement attracted about fifty thousand followers, who referred to the Ballards as 'accredited messengers' of ascended masters. The 'masters' included well-known figures such as Jesus Christ and Gautama Buddha as well as Theosophical and Rosicrucian masters such as 'M', also known as Morya, and Saint Germain (Braden 1949; Rudbøgg 2013).

The Prophets were never members of the I AM but Mark Prophet attended events at the Bridge to Freedom 'ashram' in Flourtown, Pennsylvania, which had been founded in 1954 by former I AM members. Frances Ekey, a prominent Bridge member and former I AM leader, formed an alliance with Mark Prophet, who had already begun receiving messages known as 'dictations' from ascended masters (TSL Research Department 1992).

After founding TSL in 1958, Mark Prophet split with Ekey and began calling himself a messenger for the ascended masters. In 1961, he gave a public dictation in Boston before such a group, which was attended by Elizabeth Clare Ytreberg, a devoted Christian Scientist who had also been studying the Ballards' books. She asked Mark to train her to become a messenger. He agreed and the two married in 1963, and by 1964 she had been publicly acknowledged as a messenger.

Mark and Elizabeth Prophet formed a dynamic team to promote ascended master teachings. They nurtured international groups, led followers on pilgrimages to India and the Middle East, and in 1966 purchased a large mansion in Colorado Springs, Colorado, which served as headquarters of the Summit. The mansion was also home to dozens of 'staff', or committed members who worked full time for the organization, as well as to the four children the Prophets had together (the author of this article is their second-born). After Mark died suddenly from a stroke in 1973, Elizabeth announced that he was now the ascended master Lanello and took her first dictation from him. His death set off a period of apocalyptic speculation in which the members purchased survival equipment and forty acres of land in Montana. However, the Prophets had also established a centre in California, to which Elizabeth soon moved operations. She founded CUT there in 1975 and began to regularly hold 'Summit University' training programmes at temporary locations.

By 1977, the group had expanded into a two-hundred-acre property in the Santa Monica Mountains near Los Angeles, which was dubbed 'Camelot' in reference to esoteric tradition. The church sponsored live-in 'teaching centre' homes and study groups in major cities in the United States as well as Europe, India, Australia, the Philippines, and Africa. Prophet became a familiar figure in the New Age scene of the 1980s and was called both 'Mother' and 'Guru Ma' by her followers. Her books, which are published by Summit University Press, an arm of the church, have sold more than a million copies. Her cable television shows,

which were broadcast for free on public access networks during the 1980s, reached audiences of millions.

As its profile rose, CUT-TSL faced concerted opposition to its development plans in California, particularly during the cult scare that followed the Jonestown mass suicide in 1978. Lawsuits by former members and negative press coverage heightened the group's feelings of persecution. The increased scrutiny led to difficulties receiving building permits from California authorities and threats by the federal government to take Camelot for a park headquarters. Prophet had maintained an optimistic and progressive attitude, but, by the fall of 1986, after having lost a lawsuit with a former member (see Erin Prophet 2019), Prophet had sold Camelot and moved the headquarters to Montana, where the group had in 1981 purchased a twelve-thousand-acre ranch bordering Yellowstone National Park (Erin Prophet 2009).

Prophet named the property the Royal Teton Ranch as a homage to the Ballard books, which identify the Grand Teton mountain in nearby Wyoming as the spot of a hidden 'etheric' retreat and a place of spiritual importance. The ranch was initially intended as a summer retreat and site of the group's annual conferences, which attracted thousands of people. But the group had maintained an emphasis on 'preparedness' since the 1970s and intended to construct fallout shelters from the beginning.

The shelter episode, also referred to by some members as a 'shelter cycle', extended from January 1987 to May 1990. Church staff broke ground in the spring of 1989 on the shelter project, in an isolated mountain valley known as 'The Heart of the Inner Retreat', on the Royal Teton Ranch near Corwin Springs, Montana. Thousands more followers built and stocked shelters near their homes, including in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and in Australia, as well as at a CUT-owned subdivision of several thousand acres near Emigrant, Montana. This development was known as the Community of Glastonbury, and church members who were not part of the staff had leased property there (Erin Prophet 2009).

Although Prophet never directly gave a date for war, she issued a series of escalating deadlines encouraging everyone, not just her followers, to build and stock shelters. She also urged her followers to engage in ever-longer prayer vigils, which had the dual purpose of preventing the prophesied events and preparing the followers spiritually in the event they failed to prevent the apocalyptic future. There was always an avertive component to the millennialist orientation (see Wojcik 2011 on avertive millennialism). Prophet embarked on lecture tours in Europe and the United States during 1987 and 1988 to urge preparedness but also inaugurated a 'save the world with violet flame' campaign, exhorting her followers to additional 'decree work'. Decrees were one component of a broader aspect of the church's teachings known as the Science of the Spoken Word (Mark and Elizabeth Prophet 1983). Violet flame decrees in particular were believed to dissolve negative karma. However, the church leadership sent signals to followers that they believed disaster was more likely than not. These actions included warning those who did not have shelters to leave the state, and selling off teaching centres in major cities (Erin Prophet 2009).

Both group members and leaders decided that defensive weapons were a part of their preparations, given the dire scenarios. In the summer of 1989, church staff member Vernon Hamilton was arrested in connection with the illegal purchase of military-style weapons. These were legal to own but Hamilton had purchased them with a false identity to disguise their connection with the church. Eventually, both Hamilton and Edward Francis, the church's vice president and Prophet's husband, were convicted of providing false information in the purchase of a firearm. Hamilton's weapons were confiscated but other legally obtained military-style weapons were stored in or near the shelters during the shelter episode for defence in a potential situation of anarchy, although they were never used. As eventually revealed in an

investigation by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), an additional cache of unused weapons had been purchased in the 1970s by staff men (but not the church). They included several dozen AR-15 assault rifles and other weapons (Johnson 1995).

The peak of the shelter episode occurred in March 1990, when two drills were held, the main shelter was occupied overnight, and government scrutiny intensified (Johnson 1995; Erin Prophet 2009). Following the drills, the church's finances were severely taxed by government investigations and lawsuits, particularly after a fuel spill caused by faulty underground tanks buried at the site. In the early 1990s, the IRS briefly revoked the church's tax-exempt status, which it regained in 1994 after agreeing not to own weapons or to store them on its properties and to refrain from other specified activities (see Skidmore 1994; Erin Prophet 2009).

Environmental concerns over the church's Montana properties also received a great deal of attention during the 1980s and 1990s. The leak of fuel from underground tanks did not cause permanent damage, and an extensive remediation effort was completed. Other issues concerned the location of wildlife migration routes across the church's property as well as water rights owned by the church to a geothermal spring. Eventually, these concerns were alleviated somewhat when, for example, the church sold parts of the main ranch to the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation to facilitate wildlife migration (see Reinhold 1990; Robbins 1998).

The church recovered from the shelter episode and held its largest summer conference to date in 1992 (with an attendance of five thousand). However, a leadership crisis was imminent. Donations had fallen off and middle management were demanding more involvement in church governance. New bylaws were passed in 1995 to allow greater participation from members. A new chief executive was hired and Prophet said she would withdraw from active management to focus on spiritual matters. But the strain of the previous decade had taken its toll on her health and, although she embarked on new lecture tours and publishing initiatives, she had begun to experience cognitive difficulties, which were diagnosed in 1998 as early-onset Alzheimer's disease (she was aged fifty-nine). After Prophet's retirement in 2000, the leadership decided to assert TSL once again as its primary identity, although the church still functions. Prophet's illness led to schism and fragmentation. Challenges to her authority had already been underway during the 1990s. Her refusal to appoint a spiritual successor left the way open to further schism (see Palmer and Abravanel 2009).

Presently, the leadership of CUT-TSL has retreated from the participatory model and has centralized control in a board of directors and council of elders. The group emphasizes simple and positive messages and has developed a growing social media presence. In 2018, after long negotiations with regulatory authorities, it opened a hot springs spa at the Royal Teton Ranch, which is projected to be the centrepiece of an alternative healing retreat.

Founders, Leadership, and Member Identity

Mark Prophet, a native of Wisconsin, was an electrician and salesman with spiritual inclinations. A Methodist who had also been exposed to Pentecostalism, Mark developed esoteric interests during the 1930s and began participating in Rosicrucian organizations and the Self-Realization Fellowship. Around

1951, Mark encountered publications from the I AM spin-off the Bridge to Freedom. In 1952, he began writing the *Ashram Notes*, a series of letters from the master El Morya, and distributing them to a small group (El Morya 1990). In August 1956, Mark met Frances Ekey, and later that year he read the Ballards' books. By early 1958, after a string of business failures, he moved to Washington, DC, where he worked for the postal service and founded TSL (TSL Research Department 1992).

When Mark met his future spouse, Elizabeth, in 1961, she was completing a degree in political science at Boston University. Her mother, a Swiss immigrant, had exposed her to Theosophical and I AM books in their home in Red Bank, New Jersey. Elizabeth had taken up Christian Science at age nine and was in formal training to become a practitioner when she met Mark, although she had also read the Ballards' books and was looking for a way to fuse her spiritual interests (see Elizabeth Prophet 2009).

Mark was largely self-taught. His formal education had ended with the eighth grade, and Elizabeth provided an additional level of sophistication to his work, which she began to edit as she commenced her training to be a messenger. The Prophets managed the group together, through a nominal board of directors, and eventually began to ordain ministers and establish a leadership structure.

The peak membership in CUT-TSL occurred between 1985 and 1995 but there were varying levels of involvement. The most basic membership was simply to join the mailing list, which included roughly fifty to seventy-five thousand individuals at its peak. These individuals may have simply read or subscribed to the publications, or attended events and services at the headquarters or a local group. Attendance at the three-month Summit University programmes was an option for greater participation, as was membership in another organization within the group, the Keepers of the Flame Fraternity, which had about seven thousand members. Membership in CUT itself numbered in the five to ten thousand range during its peak. The church itself does not publish membership figures; these are based on the author's knowledge as a former church leader.

Formal CUT members were known as 'communicants' and were required to tithe and agree to lifestyle restrictions concerning alcohol and sexual practices. The Keepers of the Flame Fraternity made no lifestyle demands but did require annual dues and attendance at certain services. Staff members could choose from several levels of financial and time commitment (see Burkhart 2002; Erin Prophet forthcoming). Church members could also attend three-month or shorter retreats and workshops at Summit University, a non-accredited school established by the Prophets. All of Mark and Elizabeth Prophet's work, some written under the names of various ascended masters, was essentially self-published, by either TSL or Summit University Press. Their major religious teachings are included in their coauthored works, including *Climb the Highest Mountain* (1972).

Books authored by the Prophets in the name of ascended masters include *The Chela and the Path*, by El Morya (1976), and *Prayer and Meditation*, by Jesus Christ and Kuthumi (1978). Since Prophet's retirement in 2000, TSL has continued to publish their work. Versions of their major teachings can be found in the nine-volume *Climb the Highest Mountain* series (Mark and Elizabeth Prophet, 2003-9).

Geographical, Political, and Social Context

CUT-TSL developed a niche global presence, with groups in nearly every major city at its peak in the 1980s and books translated into a dozen languages. The headquarters moved frequently during its history—from Virginia to Colorado to California to Montana—which meant that its members were not drawn from a particular geographical area. The greatest concentration of members was in southern California, where the group experienced its most rapid growth, and Montana, where many members moved during the 1980s. At this time, the group maintained a strong presence in Latin America, Canada, Europe, Africa, Australia, and the Philippines, and many of those who participated in the Montana shelter episode were not US citizens.

Throughout its history, the group has tended to support conservative political positions, although it also took stands that aligned with liberal ideas, such as opposition to nuclear power, and support for organic farming and alternative medicine. It attracted members from across the political spectrum, though they tended to become more conservative after joining, particularly during the 1980s, with regard to social issues such as abortion and homosexuality. The Prophets' overt patriotism and prominent display of the American flag also gave the group a nativist sheen. However, there was always a globalist bent. They displayed a version of the flag with metallic gold stripes replacing the red, as a symbol of the destiny of the nation and its people to transcend warfare. The ascended masters were referred to as members of the Great White Brotherhood, a term taken from Theosophy. The masters were believed to be promoting a divine plan for the betterment of all humanity. The group took pains to make clear that the brotherhood included 'lady masters' and that 'white' referred to a frequency of energy and not to race (Elizabeth Prophet 1987). Since Prophet's retirement, the group has been less vocal about politics and there has been some dissent around the issue of LGBTQI rights, but the abortion proscription is strong and members continue to be active in conservative causes.

The Ballards, who founded the I AM Religious Activity, have been called fascist because some of their early members had belonged to William Dudley Pelley's fascistic Silver Legion of America, a Christian nationalist organization with mystical leanings. However, they were more hyper-patriotic than fascist. Their primary focus was on personal spiritual transformation but they also engaged their decree and prayer work to support political goals. The Ballards were opposed to the labour movement and Roosevelt's New Deal, but they held decree vigils (see below) to defend the United States from German submarine attack as well as various forms of psychic warfare by destructive forces and evil 'entities' (see Braden 1949, 299-301).

The practice of using decrees to combat both physical and psychic dangers would be continued in CUT-TSL, for example in prayer vigils opposing the mafia, rock music, and abortion, and in specific decrees written to combat destructive habits (such as addiction), which were believed to be caused by spirits known as 'discarnate entities'. Although the specific rituals are reserved for advanced members, the Prophets' publications build a case for their use in a theology of evil (see Mark Prophet 1981; Mark and Elizabeth Prophet 2005).

Mark Prophet was influenced by Christian survivalists during the early 1970s in Colorado, and in the later 1970s Elizabeth Prophet became more overtly political. Her public dictations from masters frequently mentioned abortion and homosexuality as evils to be targeted with decree work. She supported Ronald Reagan in the 1980 and 1984 US presidential elections but thereafter did not endorse any presidential candidate. She also condemned Nixon's Watergate scandal and the 'power elite' and banking

establishment for having facilitated the rise of communism. In annual addresses given on 4 July, she maintained a populist stance, challenging an 'international capitalist-communist conspiracy' (see Whitsel 2003).

Research conducted by Constance Jones at a CUT-TSL conference in 1993 found that of three hundred respondents, 52 percent identified as conservative, 8 percent as very conservative, and only 29 percent as moderate, liberal, or very liberal. Members tended to be well educated but not well-to-do. Over three-quarters had a post-high-school education, with nearly a quarter having done graduate work and 28 percent having had a professional career prior to joining the church. However, only 12 percent earned more than \$50,000 per year. Most had been raised either Protestant (42 percent) or Catholic (35 percent) (Jones 1994, 43-49).

Beliefs, Change over Time, and Relationship to Parent Tradition

The foundations of CUT-TSL beliefs are in Theosophy as filtered through the lens of the I AM and Bridge to Freedom, with a strong Christian emphasis that draws on New Thought. The basic theology of CUT-TSL is that each soul has multiple 'bodies', or layers of identity. Through transforming karma, the soul can free itself from its 'lower' mental and emotional patterns and unite with a Higher Self, which consists of an individualized presence of Christ ('Christ Self') and an 'I AM Presence' (Elizabeth Prophet 1997). The goal is to become a liberated being through the ascension, and Jesus is revered as a way-shower, who demonstrated how all could become like him. Liberation is accomplished through performing good acts and through giving decrees, accompanied by meditations, songs, and chants, as well as through grace received from messengers and saints (Mark and Elizabeth Prophet 2009). The teachings of the ascended masters through the messengers are authoritative, although many spiritual teachers are acknowledged and venerated (see Mark and Elizabeth Prophet 2003-9). All individuals are believed to have an equal opportunity of achieving ascension, and the church welcomes members from every race. The church offers sacraments but also requires tithing, confession and attendance at prescribed services, and adherence to lifestyle requirements (Erin Prophet, forthcoming).

Almost all of the Prophets' early followers were former I AM or Bridge members, making it important for them to uphold in general the teachings of those organizations, with a few important differences. One of TSL's innovations was to add the Christ figure to the I AM's depiction of the individual 'Divine Self' (Erin Prophet forthcoming). The I AM had taught that anyone who wanted to ascend in the present life had to forego sexual intercourse as well as eating meat and drinking alcohol (Braden 1949). The Prophets liberalized these teachings, although they periodically advocated vegetarianism as well as control of the 'life force' by limiting sexual activity. Sex within marriage is sanctioned, even if nonprocreative, and contraception is permitted. Divorce is considered a private matter (see Erin Prophet 2017). In addition to providing rituals and teachings for achieving divine liberation, the Prophets anticipated a utopian future 'golden age' on earth in which individuals would prioritize the transformation of consciousness over material pursuits. The church has sponsored training programmes for Montessori teachers and various alternative medicine modalities such as juice fasting and foot reflexology.

After Mark's death, Elizabeth continued a prolific stream of innovations, which included a greater emphasis on astrology (forbidden in the I AM) as well as a complex theory of evil and hybrid humanity based on

interpretations of the apocryphal Book of Enoch. During the 1980s, she elaborated on the theology of evil and warned that fallen angels could incarnate in human form to create war and chaos. The church does not preach eternal damnation but rather that souls may become trapped in the 'astral plane' after death if their spiritual condition is not in harmony. Extremely evil people who do not choose 'the light' after many lifetimes may undergo a soul extinguishment known as the 'second death'. The church preaches nonviolence and respect for life, and individuals identified as evil are not to be directly attacked but prayers directed against their 'energies'.

In 1984, Elizabeth published her most popular book, *The Lost Years of Jesus*, which claimed that Jesus had visited India in his youth. It was followed soon after by *The Lost Teachings of Jesus (Mark and Elizabeth Prophet 1986)*, which framed the church's teachings as Jesus's original message, including support for Hindu and Buddhist ideas. Although the Jesus in India legend has been debunked by scholarly sources (see Lewis 2003; Joseph 2012), the union of East and West suggested by this story explains some of the popular appeal of the Prophets' work (for more on their thought-world, see Melton 1994; Abravanel 2013; Erin Prophet 2017).

Approach to Prophecy, Inspiration, and Revelation

Competition over authority has characterized the movements descended from the I AM Religious Activity. In the I AM, 'psychic activity' of any sort was forbidden, which meant in practice that no one could claim to have received messages from ascended masters without the sanction of the accredited messengers (see Saint Germain 1935, 255). Messages through accredited messengers were seen as originating at a purer level than 'psychic' messages, which were said to be subject to error and deception. Geraldine Innocente, the central figure in the Bridge to Freedom, was dismissed by Edna Ballard for 'psychic' work. Her authority was in turn challenged when members of the Bridge supported Mark Prophet. Each parent group would accuse the schismatics of error and faulty communion.

In the CUT-TSL tradition, the only official messengers to date have been Mark and Elizabeth Prophet, who had exclusive ability to receive official communication from *ascended masters*, who are distinguished from ordinary deceased individuals by having achieved liberation from their karma through ascension. However, individuals are encouraged to connect directly with the 'higher self', also known as the I AM Presence, and with the ascended masters for personal guidance and inspiration. Numerous members were expelled or disciplined for promoting their own messages from ascended masters.

The church does acknowledge the Bible as sacred scripture but incorporates scriptures from all major religious traditions. Both Mark and Elizabeth Prophet were believed to have had a number of previous incarnations in other faiths, including Elizabeth as Martha of Bethany and Mark as the Gospel writer Mark. The sanctity of their past lives helped to legitimate their claim to 'progressive revelation' and the ability to interpret the scriptures for the twentieth century, which they saw as the dawning of the Aquarian Age (see Erin Prophet forthcoming).

Prophecy was a part of the Prophets' ministry from the beginning, and they both saw themselves as prophets in the Old Testament sense, which to them meant exhortation to follow divine teachings and not necessarily precise prediction of future events. They also saw themselves as the Two Witnesses predicted

in Revelation 11. They justified their theological innovations through the concept of progressive revelation, articulated in New Age parlance, as seen in a 1962 dictation by Jesus Christ through Mark: 'Progress as progressive revelation is the law of spiritual evolution. ... With each new level of attainment, even after the ascension, [there open] vistas of knowledge transcending the old' (Jesus Christ [1962] 1986, 230).

The prophecies that led to the shelter episode of 1987–90 brought Elizabeth Prophet and the church to worldwide attention. Her predictions of economic collapse, nuclear war, and natural disaster as the ride of the Four Horsemen, which inaugurated the shelter episode, cannot be seen as an entirely new development. Although the extreme response of building the shelters was new, prophecies of war and disaster were not. As far back as the 1960s, the Prophets had warned of both cataclysm and nuclear war. Concerns about both types of event were one catalyst for the move of TSL's headquarters from Virginia to Colorado in 1966 (Erin Prophet 2009).

War and cataclysm were a part of the equation of 'planetary karma', which was a frequent subject of dictations. Much of the group's decree work was intended to avert this karma (as well as render harmless the evil forces believed to be using it for nefarious ends) and to prevent or turn back predicted events. The 1986 prophecies differed from the group's earlier periods of contraction in that they directed an extensive programme of preparation and specifically linked the fulfilment of prophecy to events in the outside world, such as the construction of antiballistic missile defences. In *Prophet's Daughter* (2009), the current author suggests a connection between the prophecies and the challenges to Elizabeth Prophet's authority that surrounded the church's loss of a lawsuit in 1986 (*CUT v. Mull*). See also Prophet (2019) for a history of the suit.

The shelter episode emboldened challengers to Elizabeth Prophet's authority. Although the group was undergoing internal changes driven by demands for better governance, others soon began to claim authoritative contact with ascended masters. The first group to claim new inspiration was the Temple of the Presence (TOP), founded by Monroe Shearer, a former CUT minister and board member. He and his second wife, Carolyn Yost Shearer, who had been a music teacher and choir director in CUT, began to gather a following in the mid-1990s. The TOP, currently headquartered in Tucson, Arizona, legitimates itself with a declaration of a 'new dispensation' from the masters El Morya and Saint Germain (TOP 2013). In 2004, David Christopher Lewis, a TSL staff member, began receiving messages from Lanello and other masters, and eventually formed the Hearts Center, which generally supports the I AM and TSL work, though it sees the founding of CUT as an unhelpful digression while also incorporating new messages from Elizabeth in an ascended state.

Sources and Evidence

The following academic works have been published on CUT. Lewis and Melton (1994) edited an anthology concerning the group's thought-world and history. It also included chapters on members' personality, children, and relationship with law enforcement. Whitsel's (2003) published dissertation provides context for the apocalyptic prophecies. Starrs and Wright's (2005) review of the shelter episode contains factual inaccuracies based on media reports but nevertheless presents a useful timeline and contextualization. Palmer and Abravanel (2009) documented the schisms surrounding Elizabeth Prophet's retirement. Hammer (2016) reviews the incorporation of Jewish mystical traditions into Prophet's theology, including

her teachings on the divine feminine, and Erin Prophet also briefly explores her charisma (2016). Balch and Langdon (1998) criticizes Lewis and Melton's anthology for not incorporating the perspectives of former members and failing to address controversial issues involving the church. Erin Prophet (2009, 2019) addressed and contextualized some of these issues. Palmer and Erin Prophet's (2018) entry on CUT-TSL in the World Religions and Spirituality Project provides further information on published research.

In terms of primary sources, Elizabeth Prophet published a memoir, *Preparation for My Mission* (2009b), edited by her daughters Erin and Tatiana. The book was based on a series of interviews the sisters conducted with their mother in the early 1990s. A competing and hagiographic memoir, based on the same series of interviews and other verbal recollections, was edited by CUT staff and published as *In My Own Words* (Prophet 2009a). Former members of CUT-TSL have published memoirs ranging from the highly critical (Paolini and Paolini 2000) to the hagiographic (Genito and Genito 2016; Miller 2018). Some have also published channelled work, including by Elizabeth Prophet in an ascended state (Michaels 2015). A novel, *The Shelter Cycle* (Rock 2013), fictionalizes and largely misconstrues the religious teachings but provides a sympathetic portrait of children who experienced these events. Most academic work to date has focused on the apocalyptic events and much less so on the lived experience of the members or the nuances of the group's theology.

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