

CIS BULLETIN: CHURCH UNIVERSAL AND TRIUMPHANT

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Introduction

Name: Church Universal and Triumphant

Original name: Summit Lighthouse

Founder: Mark L. Prophet (1918-1973) in Washington, D. C. in 1958

Current Leader: Elizabeth Clare Wulf Prophet (1940-), who has advanced Alzheimer's disease, changed the name of Summit Lighthouse to Church Universal and Triumphant in 1957.

With Elizabeth's retirement, two co-presidents attend to the daily church affairs.

Headquarters: Since 1986, 7,500-acre Royal Teton Ranch, purchased from billionaire Malcolm Forbes, near Yellowstone National Park in Park County, Montana. The ranch was once around 33,000 acres, but land has been sold by the church.

Membership: Not reported, but estimates range around 10,000 today, down from a peak of 50,000 members worldwide. At its peak, around 700 followers lived on the Royal Teton Ranch with another 300-400 living nearby. Fewer live there now.

CUT's Worldview

The Church Universal and Triumphant (CUT) has been influenced by a number of individuals and movements. Although never a part of Theosophy, Mark Prophet was influenced by the Hindu-occult philosophy of Helena P. Blavatsky (1831-1891), co-founder of the Theosophical Society. Prophet was also influenced by Guy W. Ballard (1878-1939), co-founder of the "I AM" Movement. Both groups are forerunners of today's New Age Movement.

These two groups drew inspiration from the Hindu worldview (reincarnation and the divinity of mankind) and the occult worldview (lost continents of Atlantis and Lemuria, Ascended Masters, communication with the dead).

The CUT has also incorporated a peculiar blend of Christianity with its teaching that Jesus and His mother Mary are part of a group of Ascended Masters called "The Great White Brotherhood." "The mystical paths of Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Taoism and Confucianism are infused with new revelations from the ascended masters."

The CUT demonstrates a strong sense of conservative American patriotism. Members are often involved in social issues, especially concerning abortion, child pornography, nuclear warfare, use of alcohol and tobacco, all of which the CUT opposes. The CUT believes the United States has been singled out as the leader in the dawning of the New Age Movement.

The CUT encourages a tolerant attitude toward the world's religions, suggesting there is truth in all religions. However, the CUT has been extremely critical of basic Christian doctrines. While it uses the Bible and biblical terminology, the Bible is radically reinterpreted and familiar terms redefined.

Ex-members, including Moira Prophet Lewis, 27, daughter of Mark and Elizabeth Prophet, and families of members accuse the CUT of cult-like brainwashing through sleep and privacy deprivation, confessions, and rote repetition (a practice called "decreeing.")

After the CUT was accused of collecting weapons at its ranch, the U.S. government investigated and confiscated large quantities of semi-automatic assault rifles and 120,000 rounds of ammunition at the Royal Teton Ranch in 1989. At least two leaders, including Elizabeth's second husband, Ed Francis, were given suspended prison sentences. The CUT claims the weapons and "bomb shelters" on the ranch were to protect members during and after a nuclear war which they believed would occur before 2002. (The church now says this was all a drill for the real thing.) An Ascended Master is said to have warned Prophet that "the U.S. risked war with the Soviet Union, possibly as early as Oct. 2, 1989."

The main bomb shelter, 20 feet underground, is said to have been stocked with enough food (canned fish, dried meats, grains and cooking oil), water and fuel to last 756 people for 49 days. A church employee rotates the food, keeps fresh batteries in flashlights and keeps pests under control.

Basic Teachings

Masters: A basic teaching of the CUT is the ability of Elizabeth Clare Prophet, also called Guru Ma by her followers, to receive guidance for the CUT from Ascended Masters. Ascended Masters are said to be persons who once lived on the mythical island of Atlantis. They escaped Atlantis before its destruction and now are said to exist in the vicinity of Tibet where they reveal themselves and their teachings to specially selected individuals on a spiritual level through a process called "trance channeling." The primary Ascended Masters for the CUT, a group called "The Great White Brotherhood," are Jesus, his mother Mary, St. Germain, Master Kuthumi, Master Godfe, El Morya, Pope John XXIII, Buddha, Muhammad, Shakespeare, Hercules, Christopher Columbus, the wizard Merlin, Ray-O-Light, and K-17, who is said to be the leader of the "Inner Secret Service."

An article in the 1 March 1996 *San Antonio Express-News* claimed that Elizabeth Clare Prophet is "America's leading authority on angels." According to the article, she has been teaching people how to contact angels for more than 30 years.

Response: Two of Plato's (427-347 B.C.) dialogues, *Ti-maeus* and *Critias*, are the historical background for the belief in Atlantis. In these dialogues, Plato described an island paradise beyond the Pillars of Heracles with mountains and fertile plains, rich mineral deposits, and a large and thriving population. The theory states that the island sank about 9,000 years before Plato's lifetime.

Interest in Atlantis was minimal until 1882 when Ignatius T. Donnelly published a book entitled *Atlantis*. He proposed that Atlantis was in the Atlantic Ocean, and that its kings and queens became the gods and goddesses of later mythologies. Some occultists claim Jesus, as Melchizedek, was the emperor of Atlantis in an earlier lifetime. Donnelly attributed the origin of the Garden of Eden to Atlantis.

Edgar Cayce (1877-1945), founder of the Association for Research and Enlightenment, did more than anyone to popular-

ize the theory of Atlantis. He described the civilization as being very advanced, with electricity and airplanes. He claimed they used a large crystal to trap the rays of the sun as their energy source. Cayce predicted Atlantis would rise again in 1968 or 1969.

The legend of Lemuria arose to explain the range of a small primate, the lemur, found in widespread parts of the land surrounding the Indian Ocean. A now submerged island was suggested to explain the lemur's presence in lands from Africa to the Malay Archipelago. Later, the geographical location of Lemuria was moved from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean.

One occultist described the typical Lemurian as between 12 and 15 feet tall, brown-skinned, able to walk equally well backward or forward, and with eyes that saw equally well ahead or to the side. The Lemurian's clothes were made of reptile skin, and they made pets of dinosaurs.

Of course, no evidence for either of these submerged continents has been discovered. A more probable explanation for the theory of Atlantis is that Plato was referring to the Minoan civilization on an island in the Aegean Sea called Santorini (now called Thira). The civilization and much of the island was destroyed in 1400 B.C. by a massive volcanic eruption. The collapse of the Minoan civilization is the most likely origin of the Atlantis legend.

God: The CUT holds a pantheistic view of God (all is God) in that God is impersonal energy which extends through the entire universe much as light shines from a single flame. That energy is called Father-Mother God. God the Father is the unmanifested energy from the universe's source. This energy manifested in matter is God the Holy Spirit, while the perfect blending of the two is God the Son.

Response: Christians reject the CUT's trinity. God was before creation. He is the Creator of the universe and cannot be identified with it. In other words, the universe is dependent upon God for its existence, but God is independent of creation. God relates personally to mankind with love, grace and mercy. God has revealed Himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Jesus: The CUT rejects the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as God incarnate. For the CUT, Jesus was one of many religious teachers who as ordinary men fully realized their personal divinity. This divinity, called "the Christ," "Christ Self," or "Christ Consciousness," is found within every person. Jesus' atoning sacrifice on the cross is rejected. The CUT claims Jesus traveled to India, Egypt and Greece before his public ministry began to study of the religions of those countries. The "lost teachings" of Jesus have been received from him and his mother, Mary, in the spirit world.

Response: For Christians, Jesus is more than a guru or religious teacher. He is the unique Son of God who as God became man. Jesus' atoning sacrifice on the cross provided an opportunity for every person, by grace through faith, to receive forgiveness of sins and the promise of eternal life. There is no historical evidence that Jesus traveled to India, Egypt or Greece; his teachings contradict the philosophies of the religions of those countries at every point.

Humanity: For the CUT, humans are "sparks" of the impersonal energy of the universe or god. This divinity in humans is spoken of as the I AM Presence, the True Self, the Christ Self, the Higher Self, etc. Prophet says she wants "to help a person reconnect with his Holy Christ Self and through the Holy Christ Self with his I AM presence." Mankind's problem is not rebellion against God, but ignorance of his/her personal divinity and union with God. For the CUT, mankind needs a teacher, not a savior.

Response: Humans are created in the image of God, but are not divine or "sparks" of the divine. Sin is a willful act of rebellion against God and others, and is mankind's most basic problem. Christians believe that the only path for salvation is through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Salvation: Karma and reincarnation are basic CUT teachings. Karma is a teaching borrowed from Hinduism and Buddhism that every action has its appropriate result. Good acts create good karma; bad acts bring bad karma. It is believed that because of mankind's ignorance of his divinity, bad karma, spoken of as negative influences, has accumulated which must be eliminated. Reincarnation, or transmigration of the soul, is closely related to the teaching of karma. Reincarnation is the belief that the immortal, divine soul will inhabit many different bodies in successive lifetimes until it discovers its true identity, its divinity. Elizabeth Clare Prophet claims to have been Martha, Lazarus' sister; Guinevere in King Arthur's court and to have lived in Egypt during the time of the Pharaohs.

Spiritual practices necessary for discovering one's divinity include: (1) visualization exercises where images, shapes or colors are "visualized" to bring self-purification. (2) Decreeing, or a rapid form of repetitive chanting of certain words and phrases for 1-2 hours each day, is practiced. (3) Invoking spirit beings is practiced. Invoking the violet ray of St. Germain is said to have remarkable positive effects in eliminating negative influences.

Response: Christians reject the belief in karma and reincarnation. Salvation is a free gift from God through faith in Jesus Christ. It is impossible to earn one's salvation by good works or special spiritual practices. Salvation is not dependent upon what a person does (karma), but upon what God has already done (grace). The Bible rejects an idea of reincarnation, holding rather to the doctrine of the physical resurrection of the body.

Miscellaneous: Individuals may relate to the CUT on three levels. They may participate in most of its religious services and conferences, and receive church teachings without joining the CUT. They may join the Keepers of the Flame Fraternity and pledge to nurture the flame of their inner self. They may become full members and be formally baptized. Full members are required to tithe their income.

Prophet appears regularly on three cable television shows appearing on 150 stations nationwide to promote the teachings of the CUT. *Pearls of Wisdom* and *Royal Teton Ranch News* are the CUT's periodicals. Its publisher, Summit University Press, has published more than 50 books, plus audio and video recordings.

About half of the CUT's money comes from the sale of items from its gift shop, including a \$239.95 framed portrait of Elizabeth Clare Prophet. The church's publishing arm, Summit University Press, said it has sold more than three million books in the last decade. Members are translating the CUT's books into as many as 27 languages. Members' tithes amounted to around \$3 million in 2007. With expenses of \$6 million, the church ended the year with a deficit of \$1 million.

Children are educated through high school in a Montessori school established in 1970. The CUT's university, the unaccredited Summit University, is located in Corwin Springs, Colorado. Students may attend seminars and retreats, take home study courses, or on-line courses. Seminars in 2009 are scheduled in five U. S. cities, and in Canada, Mexico, Brazil, Venezuela, the Dominican Republic and Australia. Subjects include Alchemy, Healing with Mother Mary, and Experience the Light Within.

The CUT continues to fight the "cult" label placed on it by critics.