Chapter 1 Sacred Counsel

1. McKean embodied a Weberian sense of divinely sanctioned charismatic leadership and authority (Weber, “The Sociology of Charismatic Authority,” 245–252). McKean’s authority hinged on the legitimacy of his “personal revelation,” and his downfall partly on the precarious nature of charismatic authority (Weber 1946, 262, 248). Many lead ICOC evangelists were also charismatic leaders, meaning individuals with exceptional speaking skills, charm, and the ability to inspire devotion and emotion in members—for example, Kip’s brother, Randy McKean, Elena McKean, Gordon Ferguson, Sam Laing, and Geri Laing. In fact, as the unified movement crumbled and McKean’s authority faded, some congregations remained loyal to their local charismatic evangelist.

2. See Stanczak, “The Traditional as Alternative: The GenX Appeal of the International Church of Christ,” 113–135, for further validation of ICOC’s extensive use of contemporary media forms and culture. Stanczak’s data is drawn from field study in the Los Angeles ICOC.

3. I found maintaining honest theological criticism and open discussion of religious beliefs as a researcher opened many doors in fieldwork and gave me a clear strategy and coping mechanism for confronting efforts to convince me of ICOC’s worldview. See Gordon, “Getting Close by Staying Distant: Fieldwork with Proselytizing Groups,” 267. Gordon argues that “open, honest, disagreement with the groups’ beliefs as well as a visible role as a researcher result in increased rapport and acceptance by the groups [proselytizing groups] and reduced psychological stress on the researcher.”

4. See Sirianni and Friedland, Civic Innovation in America: Community Empowerment, Public Policy, and the Movement for Civic Renewal, for further discussion regarding perceived loss of civic engagement.

5. See Janet Jacobs’s book, Divine Disenchantment, for validation of high time demands and authority in leadership. Jacobs interviewed a few early members of the discipling movement. Stanczak, “The Traditional as Alternative: The GenX Appeal of the International Church of Christ,” validates this high time commitment and level of social interaction as well.

6. For further exploration of this relationship see Rieff, The Triumph of the Therapeutic. See also Lasch, Haven in a Heartless World: The Family Besieged, 97–110; Conrad and Schneider, Deviance and Medicalization, and McGuire, Ritual Healing in Suburban America.

7. The medical model represents a dominant paradigm in Western society for understanding health, illness, and deviance. The medical model understands the biological body as a machine that can malfunction and is founded on the
germ theory of disease that stresses each disease as caused by a specific agent. There have been widespread social implications for this dominant model: concentration on the internal body rather than on the external environment. We more often look for causes inside the individual rather than those rising from the social structure and immediate social environment (see Conrad and Schneider, Deviance and Medicalization).

8. Evidence of this marriage between religion and psychology is strong in the wider evangelical subculture. For example, the American Association of Christian Counselors Inc. is “an organization of evangelical professional, lay, and pastoral counselors” who claim a dedication to “promoting excellence and unity in Christian counseling” (Christian Counseling Today 11, no. 1 [2003]: 6). Their magazine, Christian Counseling Today, and their official journal, Marriage and Family: A Christian Journal, are distributed quarterly.


10. The heart as a symbol of religio-therapeutic healing is ubiquitous in the contemporary U.S. religious/spiritual marketplace. For example, Griffith (1997, 112) found a similar focus on the heart as a symbol of healing and transformation in Aglow and notes: “The theme of bringing to light those things that have been hidden in the darkness of the human heart is an old one in Christian theology and practice, acted out in various rites of confession and contrition.” Griffith explores “the recurrent Aglow depictions of feelings kept ‘hidden in the heart’ as well as the measures by which such secrets are apparently revealed in the forging of intimate relationships with God and other people.”

Chapter 2 An Unsinkable Raft in a Foreboding Divorce Culture

1. The use of the word “traditional” implies that our cultural model of family, the normative nuclear family that includes a mother, father, and children, with mother as domestic caretaker, father as breadwinner and authoritative family figure, is a long-established family structure. This model of family is more correctly understood as an aberrant family form that took shape after the Industrial Revolution. Families then moved from a primarily family-based economy where goods and necessary materials were produced in the domestic sphere, to a wage-based economy where wages were earned outside of the home and necessary materials sold. With the rise of this wage-based, consumer economic model, ideals of female domesticity and male breadwinning took root in dominant white Protestant culture. The normative nuclear family ideal has never been typical and in fact represented less than a quarter of all households in the United States at the turn of the twenty-first century.

2. In covenant marriages, spouses (heterosexual) willingly enter into a legal union that demands, for example, premarital counseling, divorce counseling, and rejection of “no-fault” divorce. Legislation is pending in some states for the creation of such marriage contract options. Covenant marriage is currently legal in Arizona, Arkansas, and Louisiana. Not surprisingly, the covenant marriage movement is backed by many conservative evangelical and fundamentalist Christian leaders and organizations.

Christians or “believers” to nonbelievers were labeled “unequally yoked,” a reference to “II Corinthians 6:14” that warns against being matched with unbelievers. R. Marie Griffith (1997, 175–176), in her analysis of evangelical women in Aglow, God’s Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission, notes discourse labeling non-Christian husbands as “unsaved,” “backslidden,” or “unbeliever[s].”


5. Members acknowledged that other churches tried to counsel individuals before marriage, but stressed that the ICOC was more foolproof because pre-marriage discipling was mandatory. Like many other tight-knit religious communities, members and leaders presented the discipling community as a “safe dating haven” in a society where dating had become evil, dangerous, and misguided (Kanter 1972; Davidman 1991). Singles talked of how they were blessed to have so many “great brothers” and “awesome sisters” to date in the Kingdom. They presented their potential mating pool as exceptional, better than what you might find in another church or in the secular dating world—better because disciplers were teaching “respect.” Some members and ex-members suggested that the ICOC dating pool was exceptional because there were lots of physically “beautiful” and “handsome” brothers and sisters to choose from in the movement. In the words of one young City COC male member, the Kingdom was full of “awesome, powerful, and beautiful women of God.” Members noted that one of the reasons the ICOC was so successful in producing great marriages was that members could not get married until marriage disciplers felt they were “ready.”

6. This universal process varies cross-culturally. We can name cultures that complicate our gender dichotomy of male/female, such as Native American cultures that might recognize a third gender in those we would label as homosexual, transsexual, or transsexual. See Fausto-Sterling’s Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality, in particular chapters 1–5, for an in-depth discussion of the social construction of sex and gender. See also Lorber, Paradoxes of Gender, which stresses gender as a social construction. See also the ethnomethodological approach in West and Zimmerman’s “Doing Gender,” 1125–1151. For discussion on third genders see Herdt, “Third Sexes and Third Genders,” 21–84.

7. See Collins, Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment; Landry, Black Working Wives: Pioneers of the American Family Revolution; and Jones, “My Mother Was Much of a Woman.”

8. I explore these contradictions further in chapter 5 drawing from Townsend’s book, The Package Deal, in his concise and detailed explanation of the ambiguity and tension fathers face today in adhering to emotionality and breadwinning ideals. See also Garey’s work, Weaving Work and Motherhood, for an ethnographic illustration of late twentieth-century tensions that women face in juggling wage work and “doing motherhood.” See also Rosanna Hertz and Nancy L. Marshall’s edited volume, Working Families, a collection of quantitative and qualitative works that highlight tensions and workplace efforts. See also Arlie Hochshield’s work, The Second Shift.

9. See Gallagher, Evangelical Identity and Gendered Family Life, for an excellent analysis of the gender beliefs and practices of evangelicals in the United States. Gallagher draws on Swidler’s (1986) tool kit analogy to help illustrate the
sources of evangelicals’ varied gender ideology and how specific gender beliefs and practices are maintained and negotiated.

10. Ex-members, to no surprise, told a radically different story of women silenced through submission, of domestic violence left to flourish, and of gender confusion. The complexity of experience regarding female submission has been documented in the evangelical subculture as well. For example, Sally Gallagher (2003, 165), in Evangelical Identity, Gendered Family Life, notes that a “handful” of women in her sample “talked about living in abusive relationships,” and that “those who did described how the idea of husbands’ headship helped justify the abuse and made it difficult for them to leave.”

11. See Gallagher (2003, 155–174) for an excellent discussion of why evangelicals continue to hold discursively to female submission and male headship in marriage. Most important, she argues that this gender stance is a “key marker” of the “embattlement” through which “evangelical subculture maintains its distinctiveness.”

12. Here I refer to a subtle yet persistent “madonna/whore” dichotomy at work in adolescent culture and many mainstream media representations of female sexuality. Regarding persistence in adolescent culture see Lees, Losing Out: Sexuality and Adolescent Girls; and Tolman and Debold, “Conflicts of Body and Image: Female Adolescents, Desire, and the No-Body.”


14. There were also several celebrity members of the church who were put front stage in ICOC performances of awesome church family and who, I suspect, were not disciplined as harshly as other members. For example, one member was a musician with a well-known popular rock band, and he and his wife were featured speakers at large events. Another couple, Megan and Cory Blackwell (she a model and he a former professional basketball player), were asked to help the arts/media/sports ministry (Jones and Brumley 1994, 38). Ex-members charged early on that the group worked hard to convert people with high status as members and they were looking for “beautiful people” who would legitimize the movement.

Chapter 3 Collective Performances of Healing

1. The ICOC’s use of the name “Marriage Enrichment” underscores movement incorporation of widespread secular and religious therapeutic approach and language; Marriage Enrichment is the name of a national marriage/family organization that has held workshops in churches and community organizations across the United States.

2. The list continued: “Build a fire in the fireplace, turn out the lights and talk. Take a horse-drawn carriage ride. Go swimming in the middle of the night. Write a poem for your spouse. Remember to look into your spouse’s eyes as he/she tells you about the day. Tell your spouse, ‘I’m glad I married you!’ Hug your spouse from behind and give him/her a kiss on the back of the neck. Stop in the middle of your busy day and talk to your spouse for 15 minutes. Create your own special holiday. Do something your spouse loves to do, even though it doesn’t interest you personally. Send your spouse a love
letter. Build a snowman together. Watch the sunset together. Sit on the same side of a restaurant booth. Picnic by a pond. Give your mate a foot massage. Put together a puzzle on a rainy evening. Take a moonlight canoe ride. Tell your spouse, ‘I’d rather be here with you than any place in the world.’ Whisper something romantic to your spouse in a crowded room. Have a candle-light picnic in the backyard. Perfume the bed sheets. Serve breakfast in bed. Reminisce through old photo albums. Go away for the weekend. Share a milk shake with two straws. Kiss in the rain. Brush his/her hair. Ride the merry-go-round together. Dedicate a song to her/him over the radio. Wink and smile at your spouse from across the room. Have a hot bubble bath ready for him/her at the end of a long day. Buy new satin sheets. Tenderly touch your spouse as you pass one another around the house. Reminisce about your first date. Plant a tree together in honor of your marriage. Go kite flying. Attend a sporting event you’ve never been to together. Take time to think about him/her during the day, then share those thoughts. Drop everything and do something for the one you love—right now!”

Chapter 4  In with the Old and the New

1. For example, in the early 1970s parents of converts formed the anti-cult group, Free Our Sons and Daughters from the Children of God, FREECOG.

2. Irvine (1999) notes the ambiguity in her study of codependent self-help groups. As victims of family “dysfunction,” of “codependent” relationships, they talk about needing to spend more time on themselves and accomplish goals as individuals. The irony, as suggested in the title of her book, Codependent Forevermore, is that this journey of selfhood takes place through dependence on others in this therapeutic community.

3. See, for example, Lalich, “Pitfalls in the Sociological Study of Cults.” Lalich argues, “There is no way to know how many times researchers have been successfully ‘fooled’ by such groups, in the sense that the researchers were shown a version of reality that either differed from the typical daily life or hid from view the negative or controversial aspects” (124). In the section entitled “Tricks and Set-ups” she lists “Selected Interviews,” “Selected Topics of Discussion,” and “Staged Events” as dangerous pitfalls of data gathering in such groups (126–127).

4. Wuthnow (2000, 126) points out that “in a national survey, Poloma and Gallup (1991, 90–96) found that 65 percent of Americans thought it ‘very important’ ‘for a religious person to make an effort to forgive others who have deliberately hurt them in some way.’”

5. For one example of the ease with which forgiveness is given, and little subsequent action taken, see Emerson and Smith (2000, 52–68), Divided by Faith, for their discussion of racial reconciliation efforts by white and black evangelicals in the United States.


7. For example, see Larry Crabb, Connecting: Healing for Ourselves and Our Relationships: A Radical New Vision, for examples of an evangelical Christian approach to replacing secular therapy with healing Christian communities and counselors.
8. See chapter 7, “Homosexuality: From Sin to Sickness to Life-Style,” in Conrad and Schneider, *Deviance and Medicalization: From Badness to Sickness*. See also Neil Miller's journalistic social history, *Sex-Crime Panic: A Journey to the Paranoid Heart of the 1950s*, which tells the story of a group of gay men labeled as “sexual psychopaths,” locked up in a mental hospital (to be “cured” of homosexuality) for crimes they did not commit.

9. Use of genetic language by organizations and groups interested in legitimating products, worldview, and family itself is pervasive in U.S. society (Nelkin and Lindee 1995). And there has been an increasing location of a range of individual problems in genetic structure (Lippman 1992).

Chapter 5 Awesome Kids


3. There is a movement within the Christian evangelical subculture to accept the single lifestyle as a valid choice alongside the promotion of marriage as the ideal family unit. This ICOC adoption example and the movement’s efforts to build and strengthen their “singles ministry” reflect the acceptance of singlehood in both secular culture and the evangelical subculture. Evidence can be seen for approval of the single life in the growing evangelical publishing industry, for example, Michelle McKinney Hammond’s *Sassy, Single, and Satisfied: Loving the Life You’re Living*.

4. Micaela Di Leonardo, “The Female World of Cards and Holidays: Women, Families, and the Work of Kinship,” has shown the constant “kinwork” women do with regard to constant upkeep and planning of family holidays and events, birthdays, and religious holidays.

5. For example, as Marjorie Devault illustrates in her book, *Feeding the Family*, women spend a significant amount of time budgeting and planning family meals that may never be visible to other family members.

6. Discourses of multiculturalism, multiracialism, color blindness, individualism, and relationality combined in the ICOC to present the discipling network as a powerful and virtuous relational body able to cure individuals of racism and achieve a kind of institutional racial harmony that outside organizations had failed to produce. Multiculturalism and multiracialism are imprecise and historically fluid concepts, too easily recognized by many as the mere presence of individuals from different racial and ethnic backgrounds coming together in a single group. As a result, these concepts often manifest in simplistic organizational and individual approaches to complex social problems and racial/ethnic dynamics (Hollinger 1995). Nevertheless, these concepts are powerful and persistent ideals in U.S. mainstream discourse, used with frequency alongside concepts like diversity and inclusiveness to legitimate organizations and groups.

7. In the ICOC, mandatory close and frequent social interaction forced members to develop strong cross-racial and ethnic networks. In addition, members and leaders drew from this picture of tight-knit diverse networks as they repeatedly performed *intimate diversity scenes*, the enactment and/or narration of close and caring relationships among a racially and ethnically diverse membership (Jenkins 2003).
8. For example the visible efforts of organizations like EPOCH-USA (End Physical Punishment of Children) and NCACPS (National Coalition to Abolish Corporeal Punishment in Schools).

Chapter 6 Brothers and Sisters for the Kingdom of God

1. See, for one strong example, Southwest Airlines’ presentations of employees and corporation as family in Freiberg and Freiberg, Nuts: Southwest Airlines’ Crazy Recipe for Business and Personal Success.

2. Carol Stack introduces this concept of “fictive kin” in her well-known All Our Kin, an ethnography that explores the reciprocal nature of constructed kinship among those living in poverty in a black urban community.

3. See James L. Nolan’s edited volume, The American Culture Wars: Current Contests and Future Prospects, for arguments regarding the usefulness of the culture wars thesis in understanding contemporary U.S. society.

4. See Griffith, Born Again Bodies: Flesh and Spirit in American Christianity. Griffith provides a rich social historical exploration of the role of religion in shaping bodies and sexuality.

5. See, for example, Brasher, Godly Women: Fundamentalism and Female Power. Also see Griffith, God’s Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission.

Chapter 7 A Kingdom That Promised Too Much

1. See Max Weber’s (1921) discussion of the characteristics of charismatic authority and its instability: “By its very nature, the existence of charismatic authority is specifically unstable. The holder may forego his charisma; he may feel ‘forsaken by his God,’ as Jesus did on the cross; he may prove to his followers that ‘virtue is gone out of him.’ It is then that his mission is extinguished, and hope waits and searches for a new holder of charisma” (Gerth and Mills, 1946, 248).

2. Discipleship Publications International (DPI), after the fall of the unified movement, is still in operation. It appears that they have dropped books from their list that stress McKeen’s version of Christian discipleship.