

[The names of individuals and churches have been omitted in this Internet copy of the letter to protect their privacy.]

The Elders of
[name] Church
[address]

December 4, 2004

Re.: Opinion on the "Growing Kids God's Way" Curriculum by Gary and Anne-Marie Ezzo, part II.

Dear Pastors and Elders,

I am pleased to submit to you the following letter of opinion about the "Growing Kids God's Way" (GKGW) program, developed by Gary and Anne-Marie Ezzo which is currently under review at the [name] Church. We trust that you were given and are familiar with my first opinion letter, dated October 23th, 2004, which primarily addresses the "Preparation for Parenting" (Prep) class. I'd like to use my first opinion also as an introduction to my second opinion. I will repeatedly refer back to it and to its attachments in order to avoid unnecessary repetition. I have attached a copy of it for your convenience.

This second opinion letter responds to the following issues that have been brought up before the review committee and the Elders:

1. The charge of heresy or cult-like behavior.
2. The Ezzos' character.
3. The Ezzo critics, a discussion of manner, method, and motivation.
4. My appeal to the Elders to investigate the Ezzos' materials for themselves.

Grace and Peace be with You.

Respectfully submitted by

Dr. [name]

Opinion on the "Growing Kids God's Way" program by Gary and Anne-Marie Ezzo, part II

respectfully submitted by Dr. [name] on November xx, 2004 to the Elders and the GKGW review committee.

Abstract

Raising children is one of the most sacred duties a parent has. God has entrusted these little ones to our care so that we may lead them in paths of righteousness and fear of the Lord. Even unbelievers take this task seriously since they as well are consciously or intuitively aware that by the way we raise our offspring we propagate our cultural and spiritual heritage into the next generation. It is thus not surprising that people tend to have strong convictions about how best to go about raising and educating children. This translates into passionate debates when conflicting views collide, or sometimes it descends into ugly mud slinging where every means seems right to tear down not only the opponent's point of view but also himself. I feel strongly that the latter is actually taking place with regards to the Ezzos on Steve Rein's web site www.ezzo.info from which most of the "available material" brought before the review committee has been culled. The following analysis tries to document that this information is not reliable because for the most part it either quotes the Ezzos out of context or twists their meaning to make it look bad in the eyes of the uninitiated observer. I am also trying to show that the most severe criticism of the Ezzos revolves around some of their parenting recommendations that stand against our prevalent culture of post-modernism and secular humanism. This obviously invites heavy criticism. However, for evangelical Christians it also warrants careful analysis by comparison to the Holy Scriptures in order to avoid the hype and come to a Biblical conclusion. My thesis is that GFI's (Growing Family International) materials can meet Biblical scrutiny and can stand on their own. It is my earnest prayer that the review committee and the Elders of TFC will look into the GFI courses for themselves rather than to rely on an emotionally charged testimony or the agitation on www.ezzo.info to come to a judgment of the appropriateness of GFI material for [our church].

1 Introduction

I'd like to keep the introduction short as a lot of what I needed to say was already given in my first opinion letter [1]. I will use the abbreviations defined there.

The GKGW ministry has a long and fruitful history at [church]. I recently spoke with [name] who was instrumental in starting the program at our church. She has provided me with information which may give the group additional perspective as they consider the main issues discussed in this letter.

1. Former senior pastor [name] and his wife [name] took a GKGW course with the [name] as facilitators. Due to time conflicts they were unable to complete the course. However, based on their completed lessons and subsequent independent evaluation Pastor [name] approved the curriculum with great enthusiasm as appropriate for [our church]. In fact he publicly recommended the program for every parent of young children in [our church] from his pulpit. We also noticed that in many of his sermons he used examples or principles from the foundational GKGW course to exhort parents to train up their children in self-control and in the 'fear of the Lord.'
2. The [name]s had at one time (around 1998/99) tried to get the Ezzos to visit [town] and hold a regional meeting at [our church]. Although initially in favor, Pastor [name] decided that he didn't want [church] to be part of the immediate controversy surrounding GFI in the late 90s, but wisely chose to wait before endorsing a conference. This clearly demonstrates that [church]'s leadership was well aware of the GFI controversy. Nevertheless, they continued to enthusiastically support the [names], then us, then the [names] in our efforts to facilitate GKGW classes. For evidence, please review the letters of support by Pastor [name] and [name] to us which were written well after they investigated the controversy [2, see also letters by pastor [name] attached to 1].
3. As longstanding facilitators, we all were aware of the potential problems that can result when this, or any other similar material, is applied legalistically. We make a concerted effort to reiterate the Ezzos' admonishment to use context in parenting. The Ezzos even spend a considerable amount of time on one GKGW video expanding on the dangers of legalism in parenting.
4. Finally, let me add an important aspect of the GKGW classes that I didn't mention in my first letter: The course provides ample time for discussions between the participants and with the leaders. This is an integral part of the curriculum and its value lies in the flow of experience and advice from the leaders and more experienced parents in the group to those with less experience. It is an excellent way to make the course material real and "down to earth" and allows parents to voice their concerns and get their questions answered.

2 The Charge of Heresy

2.1 "Evaluation" by the Christian Research Institute

A lot of the theological criticism against the Ezzos' ministry is based on the evaluation done by Kathleen Turner at the Christian Research Institute (CRI), which can be found on their web site at <http://www.equip.org/free/DG233.htm>. Kathleen Turner, M.B.A., was a research associate of the Christian Research Institute and has been researching GFI's materials for two years. She published three articles with CRI on her research and was also the author of an article that appeared in October 2000 in Christianity Today (CT, see <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2000/013/6.70.html>) which essentially rehashes her earlier articles with CRI. Since she apparently never wrote for CT before or after, I have to conclude that she was not part of CT's journalistic staff and was simply given CT's platform to voice her views. Since her analysis seems to be a recurring theme in the chorus of critical voices, it is important to the contextual framework of this letter to evaluate her criticism.

2.1.1 The Christian Research Institute (CRI)

CRI is a Christian apologetics and counter-cult organization founded in 1960 by Dr. Walter Martin (1928 - 1989). According to their web-site, <http://www.equip.org/>, they exist to provide Christians with carefully researched information and well-reasoned answers that encourage them in their faith and equip them to intelligently represent it to people influenced by ideas and teachings that assault or undermine orthodox, biblical Christianity. They are a so-called apologetics ministry. Their business is essentially to provide answers to cults and sects from a Biblical point of view. CRI is led by Hank Hanegraaff who has no theological degree but was nonetheless promoted to lead CRI after Dr. Martin's passing. Since then many (including Dr. Martin's surviving family members and dozens of former CRI staff members as well as people on the outside) have questioned Mr. Hanegraaff's contention that he was the hand-picked successor to Dr. Martin (see <http://www.xmark.com/focus/Pages/hank.html>). Apparently this individual has left a trail of broken lives in his wake. He has also been caught in questionable financial practices involving dealings between the not-for profit CRI and his own for-profit company. An unbiased account of many of these issues have been published by [apologeticsindex.org](http://www.apologeticsindex.org) here: <http://www.apologeticsindex.org/h13.html> The controversy about Hanegraaff's blatant plagiarizing of Dr. James Kennedy's "Evangelism Explosion" which was documented by the well-known apologetic Robert Bowman (<http://www.atlantaapologist.org/COPYCAT.html>) was what I had known about CRI even before realizing that CRI was one of the main critics of GFI. Obviously, CRI's own ethics problems do not necessarily preempt their criticism of the Ezzos. However, it may be permitted to apply the same strict standards to them as they apply to GFI.

2.1.2 Kathleen Turner's article

Kathleen Turner's article entitled "More than a Parenting Ministry" can be downloaded from CRI's web site at: <http://www.equip.org/free/DG233.htm>. To make it easier to distinguish direct quotes from the article from my own comments, I will not only place the quotes within quote marks but also in italics fonts. According to the article she has an MBA degree. Apparently she has not earned a degree in theology. In the summary of her article Kathleen Turner lays out what she is after. She states: *"Parenting programs authored by Gary and Anne Marie Ezzo and promoted by Growing Families International (GFI), including Preparation for Parenting and Growing Kids Gods Way, are both wildly popular and highly controversial. The programs mix sound parenting advice with highly disputable ideas, but this does not fully account for the controversy. GFI has provoked unprecedented public censure from Christian leaders because, although it is not a cult, it has consistently exhibited a pattern of cultic behavior, including Scripture twisting, authoritarianism, exclusivism, isolationism, and physical and emotional endangerment."* Clearly, it is what she terms the "cultic behavior" which is described as " *...including Scripture twisting, authoritarianism, exclusivism, isolationism, and physical and emotional endangerment,*" that is the main focus of the article. Turner then goes on to try to convince the reader that GFI is not a cult *per se* but a cult-like organization because in her judgment GFI exhibits these characteristics. The Ezzos have actually responded in public to the allegations leveled at them from Temer. Their defense appears to me well reasoned and I am therefore submitting their two articles to this letter as attachments (see "The Community Perspective - A Special Report" written to counter CRI's article [3], and "A Response to Christianity Today" dated November 13, 2000, written to counter Temer's CT article [4]). I encourage the committee to read and consider these attachments. Rather than repeat what the Ezzos themselves have written there I have added some of my own observations below.

1. "Scripture Twisting and Extra-biblical Revelation"

Temer states in her article *"We first of all can unequivocally state that GFI is not a cult,"* yet goes on to suggest later that they may be guilty of the heresy of Pelagianism: *"The Ezzos' unbalanced emphasis on the parents' role seems to flow out of their theology of the will. Coming from a Calvinist perspective, the Grace statement links their view with Pelagianism (while not calling it outright Pelagianism), a fifth century heresy that denied the doctrine of original sin and taught that man could be righteous by the exercise of free will alone. Arminians, who believe in the freedom of man's will, would probably not go*

so far as to compare the Ezzos' view with Pelagianism. But Arminians also believe in man's utter need of the gospel to be righteous, and so they too would likely find the Ezzos' lack of emphasis on the grace of God disturbing."

Having gone through the GKGW class at least four times, we have yet to find any evidence or even remote suggestion that the Ezzos would promote that salvation can be obtained through one's own will or asceticism. Let me quote from edition 5 of GKGW how the Ezzos teach about man's fall and free will (see GKGW, pp.16-17):

"Theologically, depravity is referred to as the sin nature, a condition of human nature passed on at conception from generation to generation. Depravity reflects the fact that man, by his own merits, can never achieve righteousness with his own efforts. Great is the grace of God to save unsavable man.

We do want to be careful how we define depravity and sin nature. When we say that an infant is born with a sin nature, we are not referring to his ability to make right and wrong moral choices. Newborns do not make such cognitive decisions, but the propensity of sin lies within their natures. Every child is subject to base elements of depravity. Depravity is not a barren state of corruption wherein man can do no good thing, but it is a condition of our humanity separating us from God.

Training the Heart

The primary consideration in early parenting is the child's heart and not simply outward behavior. There is something about the human heart that requires attention, and that is the focus of early training. ...

The general goal of heart training, the portion that parents can impact, is to help a child gain personal self-control. Self-control in turn helps the child with controlling his tongue and his actions, handling negative emotions, and making sound judgments."

Further down GKGW states (pp. 22-23):

"Only by the Grace of God Can the Task of Parenting Be Achieved

The duty of Christian parents to instruct their children in the knowledge of God cannot be achieved apart from His grace. We know this in our own family...

As a parent, you want many things for your child. But the most important issue must be your child's salvation. You may wonder what you can do to influence your child's decision. "Isn't salvation a personal issue?" you ask. "I certainly don't have the power to make it happen." This is true. Salvation occurs, as the Bible says by grace alone, through faith alone. Yet many parents wrongly conclude that dependency upon grace means they should relinquish all responsibility or "let go and let God." The belief follows this logic: Why should parents bother to develop the moral character and conduct of their children if grace and salvation, the supreme goals, are not the direct result of moral training? ...

The simplest answer to that question is that God requires the training of children. Proverbs 22:6 calls parents to, "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." ... "

It seems to me that Mrs. Turner didn't read these statements or didn't believe that the Ezzos meant it when they were writing them, as she compiled her article. In fact even when considering the passage that Turner cites as proof of the Ezzos' Pelagianism, such an allegation can only be made by wildly interpreting into the passage what is not there. Such behavior (reinterpreting content and concealing opposing material) attests to ill will and at least to this reviewer demonstrates that Turner went about her review with her mind already made up.

2. "Authoritarianism"

One of Turner's contentions is that the Ezzos would limit the discussion of the students in class, citing the Ezzo's "Starting a Parenting Ministry" audiotape: *"No Debate in Class. The Ezzos set up specific class rules that limit debate. The Ezzos' tape "Starting a Parenting Ministry" discusses "four basic rules" for a GFI class. Gary Ezzo explains one: "We tell them that there are no debates in the class We will not debate an issue in the class. We do not accept any debates in the class." ... "*

This contention is in stark contrast with the way we have always held our classes and with the way we feel the Ezzos wanted us to teach our classes. In order to understand Gary's statements it might have helped to provide some context. The "General

Guidelines in Preparation for Class" [5, see attached] which were given to us and which we distributed to all class facilitators states among other things:

"...Group Discussion (approximately 15-30 minutes) - Group discussion is critical to clarification and practical application. Review the outline for the night's lesson and consider sharing some of the "Possible Discussion Topics" from the Session Guides section. Again, encourage participation from all students. Students should be told that there will be no arguments during class time. Disagreements regarding class material should be discussed at another time in private between the class leader and individual students. Feel free to contact Growing Families International or your Regional Representative for advice regarding difficult situations or questions."

From this it should be clear that arguments and argumentative discussions should be avoided in the class. This is a general rule for small group discussions and which incidentally our Family Groups also try to follow. Having been Family Group leaders in the past we have attended a few training sessions at [church] where questions have come up about unruly and/or argumentative behavior of participants. The consensus was to deflect arguments by funneling them into a personal discussion between the group leader (or assistant leader) and the person in question, or in difficult cases to get counseling ministers from [church] involved.

Furthermore, I'd like to direct your attention to Dr. [name]'s testimony [6, see attached] in which he states among other things: *"Its (the parenting course's) strength is in enabling parents to build support groups in which to listen to the Ezzos teach biblical parenting principles, and then discuss those principles with each other in the group setting. The principles are then applied at each of the families' homes and the group gets back together to discuss the results."* As Dr. [name] points out one of the strengths of this course is that the principles are discussed in the group setting which mediates and prevents falling into extremes: *"Where mistakes occur in the teaching of GKGW or in the application of GKGW, the group support system of the course should step in to help correct those problems."* It is obvious from both the Ezzo's point of view as well as from Dr. [name]'s and our own that group discussion is essential in helping the young parents digest and properly apply the concepts learned. It is also quite obvious that contentious arguments would disrupt the learning process, and should have no place in a small study group.

Let me also add the following excerpt about the "Do's and Don'ts in Leading a Class" which we received at a GFI workshop held in Columbia, SC, in January of 2000" [7, see attached]:

"1. Do not start without church leadership approval. Do keep your church leadership informed.

5. Do not be a legalistic leader. Do hold your class to the standard.

6. Do not think you need all the answers or your children need to be perfect. Do walk in humility as required of spiritual leaders.

7. Don't rush the fruit. Do give your parents a chance to grow.

8. Do not let your class members think they have arrived. Do teach them humility by your example."

These exhortations seem to me the exact opposite of authoritarianism either by the Ezzos or by the class facilitators.

3. "Exclusivism"

Turner starts off this paragraph with the statement: *"GFI materials make it clear that the Ezzos' parenting philosophy is superior to others. GFI's programs are described as 'God's Way' and 'biblical.' Christians with different parenting philosophies are said to be, in their thinking, 'Christians up to a point.' ..."*

First of all, the name Growing Kids God's Way is just that, *i.e.*, a name. If we were to subject all Christian ministries to the same type of criticism of practicing exclusivism, we would for example have to question the Crown classes which are currently held with great success and support from [church]'s leadership since a variant of their financial stewardship classes is called "Discovering Gods Way of Handling Money Course." We would also have to warn people against reading books like Beverly LaHaye's "The Joy of Marriage God's Way," Kay Arthur's "Free from Bondage God's Way," or "Greater Health God's Way" by Stormie Omartian. Just check out amazon.com with the key words "God's Way" and you will find many more. Such criticism, which by the way also is seen in Dr. Dobson's statement, comes across as extremely petty and narrow-

minded. If this is the best Turner can do in demonstrating GFI's exclusivism I am thoroughly under-impressed. By the way, the Ezzos have renamed their course material, which clearly shows that they don't put excessive emphasis on the name.

Regarding the second statement Turner makes in the above quote, it might be instructive to quote the whole context from which it is taken (prep, p. 21): *"It should not surprise us that the non-Christian holds a world-view on parenting that is fundamentally humanistic or man-centered in origin and purpose. But what is particularly alarming is the number of Christians who hold similar thoughts. In their thinking, they are Christians up to a point. Although they acknowledge the sufficiency of God and the Bible, they do not see a need to subject their personal opinions, reasoning, and emotions to the guidelines of Scripture in all areas of life. That creates a false dualism, the notion that there are sacred and secular sides to life. Dualism fosters the belief that God's Word is sufficient in the realm of religion but lacking in other areas"*

When read in context, it becomes clear that the Ezzos are not criticizing Christians and claiming that they are "Christians to a point" for holding divergent parenting philosophies. Rather they criticize the tendency to emulate the world's approach to parenting, rather than allowing themselves to be guided by God's Word.

Let me further comment on another one of Turner's "findings" which she describes as follows: *"The GFI 'Community.' Countless parents have described feeling like outsiders in their own churches, being rejected by people who used to be their friends, and being made to feel less spiritual, all because they were not part of the GFI 'community.'"*

The word "countless" is extremely misleading, as Turner certainly did not indicate that she ever made an attempt to actually count the number of these people. It clearly refers to anecdotal evidence she may or may not have collected personally and which can conveniently be exaggerated by referring to them as "countless." Yet, it serves her purpose to point out what she deems a general problem with GFI, divisiveness in the church. We certainly cannot exclude the fact that somewhere in the thousands of churches where GKGW are being or at one point have been taught in the past, there may be some zealots (in German we would probably call them "hundertfiftycenterers") who discredit the program by their arrogant behavior. However, let me state quite clearly, that both in the GKGW video courses and during their leadership conferences the Ezzos clearly point out that leaders and alumni are expected to lead humble lives, not to brag about the program, and only speak of it when asked, *i.e.*, when invited in someone else's life to share their parenting experiences. As a family we have always followed this advice. I know that the [names] have, too, and I am confident that I can make this statement for all parents at [our church] who have gone through the program. We have certainly never been accused of rejecting people who have not gone through the program. In fact some of our closest friends in [our town] have not only not gone through the program but decided it was not for them. On the other hand, it might actually be interesting to see how much divisiveness has been brought into churches by the agitation of people like Steve Rein, the owner of the ezzo.info web site. I do not have numbers but [name], the regional GFI rep in [city] has assured me that we are not alone in having to defend our use of GFI materials against people who consider it their duty to purge it from their churches discipleship courses.

4. "Isolationism"

Turner writes: *"One of Grace's [John MacArthur's Grace Community Church's] key concerns pertains to the result of such thinking: 'GFI parents tend to insulate their children from other children' including Christian children 'who are not part of the GFI community.' ... GFI parents have been known to sever all relationships with non-GFI families. To some degree, GFI teaching is directly responsible for encouraging this attitude."*

This statement is very inflammatory and certainly untrue for our own church. Again, we don't want to give the impression that this could never happen with some hundredfiftycenterers out there, but to imply that this behavior is a result or even encouraged by the Ezzo's teaching is preposterous. Nowhere in the GFI material have we found any encouragement to pull back from other church families who do not follow the same approach. However, if Turner's criticism is to be taken literally, why stop at ostracizing the Ezzos and their followers. In line with the same argument perhaps we should rethink our approach to Christian private schools and homeschooling in general? Isn't it clear that many Christian parents, certainly a great number of families in [our church], use these avenues to allow their children to get a solid education while sheltering them from the damaging influence of worldly influence thus creating an "insulated community?"

The Ezzos encourage GFI graduates to continue to meet after they are done with their classes, to reinforce their efforts in parenting their children. We believe that this is not only a reasonable suggestion but probably comes naturally for any group or class where people have accompanied each other on a discipleship journey, and is certainly reflected in the way our Family Groups are clinging together. Finally, from a personal perspective as a parent: It is indeed much more easy to invite friends over whose children play well with ours and respect our property and theirs. Conversely, it is difficult to invite others when time and time again our children are in tears about their trashed rooms and toys after the friends have left. Yet, in none of the latter cases have we ever tried to "convert" these parents to the GFI program. Rather, we have explained to our

children, that they have to take responsibility for what they allow their friends to do or not to do when they visit their rooms, and that they have the freedom to not share certain toys that could become damaged.

5. "Physical and Emotional Endangerment"

In this bullet Turner asserts: "Another controversial aspect of GFI is an emphasis on parental control from infancy on 'control that has been associated with infant failure to thrive cases and has raised concerns about the potential for hurt and angry children. "'

This criticism obviously targets the Prep class for which I have already submitted my opinion (please refer to my letter from October 23 and its attachments, [1]). Let me add to what I have already written that Failure to Thrive (FTT) is not so uncommon among newborns. In a recent comment in the *International Journal of Epidemiology* 33 (2004) 847-848, Dr. Peter B. Sullivan from the John Radcliffe Hospital at the University of Oxford, England, states: "*The population prevalence of FTT has been found to range anywhere between 1.3% and 20.9% depending on the definition of FTT that is used.*" and "*There is, in fact, little objective evidence to support this putative link with poverty [a link between poverty and FTT that has been suggested in some of the older literature].*" "*Recent studies suggest, in fact, that the majority of children with FIT come from the larger population of more 'average' income backgrounds*"

The Ezzos' critics often contend, based on anecdotal evidence, that *Prep for Parenting* and the Ezzos' *Babywise* book is responsible for thousands of FTT babies. While these numbers are obviously not researched, let me simply point out that even if they were true, it would represent a stellar record for GFI. Based on the *Babywise* book sales and the numbers of families that have gone through *Prep* a total of approximately up to 5 million babies may have been raised according to these principles. Assuming only the most conservative estimate of FTT babies of 1.3% this would translate in an expected number of 1.3% x 5 mio = 65,000 FTT babies over the years if the rate were the same as that of the general population. I readily admit that these numbers have no scientific relevance whatsoever, but they show that in order for the critics to do a better job criticizing the program with numbers, they should claim that hundreds of thousands of babies have suffered FTT due to the program.

I realize that in the above section I have not dealt with every single criticism that is presented in Turner's CRI (and CT) articles. Honestly, I don't think it is necessary to "drink the whole barrel to find that it is vinegar rather than wine" and have therefore only picked a couple of perhaps the most egregious examples of Turner's process of "fact-finding," *i.e.*, taking the Ezzos out of context, and conveniently leaving out pertinent information.

3 Other Criticism

In this section I'd like to briefly talk about Dr. Kent McClain's, Dr. Barbara Francis', and Dr. James Dobson's criticisms which were added to the package of "available material" for the committee to consider.

3.1 Dr. Kent McClain's Evaluation

McClain's main points of criticism are:

1. Missing Biblical Cornerstones, *i.e.*, the lack of subjects he thinks are important in a parenting class, like redemption, God's covenants with man, salvation, how to walk in faith and how to share it, etc.
2. Mishandling of Scripture, *i.e.*, quoting Scripture out of context or misapplying it.
3. Presence of Legalism.
4. Questionable Views of Child Development.

Again, I can only briefly comment on these allegations and will apply the "vinegar barrel" approach liberally as it is essentially impossible to follow up on every last bit of criticism.

1. **Missing Biblical Cornerstones:** From the list of missing subject titles given by Dr. McClain on pages 7 and 8 of his treatise, it appears quite clear that he is trying to recommend a wholesome and Scriptural approach to Christian child education. However, from the list of topics he includes it also appears that he is advocating to base such a course on Biblical themes that are sometimes difficult to grasp even for adults. Given that the GKGW course is targeted to parents with children from age 3 to pre-teens, it seems a bit over the edge to teach for example God's covenant with Abraham. Even the concept of salvation appears to be too abstract for the younger ones in this age group and should be reserved for the Middle Years (8 - 12 years of age) where indeed the Ezzos do bring it up. Furthermore, let me make

the observation that the topics suggested by Dr. McClain are generally being taught in an adult Sunday School class and from the pulpit in many evangelical churches, and thus Christian parents ought to be familiar with them and are expected to apply them in their approach to child education. This is not to say that the GKGW couldn't be extended or complemented with additional materials. I personally could quite easily come up with 18 more lessons to teach to young parents that might be important and valuable. However, given that everybody has just a limited amount of time the Ezzos, and any author of a parenting course for that matter, have to make a selection. From my experience, the selection that is offered by GKGW is rich in material that is spiritual and practical, and has proven to be generally very helpful to our own family and others'.

2. **Mishandling of Scripture:** I have great difficulty following Dr. McClain's reasoning in selecting the Scripture verses in question. He refers to 40 verses cited by the Ezzos as "out of context" or as "possible misapplications." The fact that he claims that these are **possible** misapplication already contains an admission that this selection is based on personal perception and possibly preference. I started looking up these references in the GKGW book. First of all, many of them appear to be cited by at least one page off when compared to the 4th edition of the GKGW manual (some do not appear to be present at all). The citations do not fit the 5th edition at all. Since the treatise was written in 2000 it couldn't possibly be the latest revision entitled "Along the Virtuous Way" that Dr. McClain is referring to, and I have thus to conclude that he used a very outdated version of the course at the time he compiled his criticism. Out of his first 12 stated "possible misapplications" within the first 40 pages of the GKGW manual, which contain probably at least four times as many Bible references, I was able to come up with only two where I personally would have used other Scripture references or none at all. I gave up the tedious process and concluded that Dr. McClain has applied extremely narrow criteria for his decisions. In **none** of the cited cases did I find any of the "twisting of Scripture" that the Ezzo critics suggests. I find it disturbing that such a grandiose charge as "misapplication of Scripture" is based on so little evidence.
3. **Presence of Legalism:** It seems to me that legalism is a recurring theme among the critics of GKGW. [My wife's] and my own perception was that within the frame of the 4th edition the course might have been more easily misapplied in a legalistic fashion. Although the entire 2nd chapter in the 4th edition is dedicated to discussing the matter of avoiding legalism in parenting, the material has since been revised with the Ezzos making this point repeatedly throughout the whole course. This helps a great deal as we found ourselves as teachers much less prompted to remind parents not to apply the course recommendations legalistically, but to use wisdom guided by the Holy Spirit in their parenting decisions. Finally, we feel that perhaps Dr. McClain has himself struggled with legalism and is thus receiving the GKGW material in a legalistic way. From our own experience we can say that occasionally a parent couple is predisposed to legalism and that this is where problems can occur. Typically, this is spotted in the discussion section of the class and can be dealt with by working with these parents and reminding them about God's grace and that we often have to work in a grey zone where not everything is black and white and that in any case we have to rely on prayer, the Holy Spirit, and context to make righteous decisions. While I do not want to accuse Dr. McClain of ascribing to a humanistic world-view it seems like much of the criticism of perceived legalism points to aspects of the Ezzos' teaching that counters the humanistic and post-modernistic world-view so prevalent in our society. In this frame of mind a child's disobedience to his/her parents is not seen as a moral flaw. It would be considered normal that children are not obedient when called the first time. Also, from a humanistic point of view the funnel concept would be viewed as limiting a child's potential or desire to explore, rather than a tool to teach a child self-control and responsibility. I guess we all are to some extent influenced by our own culture and its underlying assumptions and world-views without even being conscious of it. This may be one of the main reasons why there is so much disagreement even among Christians about child training methods.
4. **Questionable Views of Child Development:** Dr. McClain lists some perceived issues with the Ezzos' views of child development and criticizes some of their recommendations as not age-appropriate. It appears that most revolve around the moral mandate of first-time obedience, the teaching of sign language to pre-toddlers as a way for them to communicate before they learn to speak, and the "funnel" concept with which the Ezzos teach that as a child grows in self-control and responsibility it should be given more and more freedoms. We have observed in our own children and those of others that these concepts are valid and that they can be applied to toddlers. We know of one family who managed to teach their pre-toddler 20 different signs with which the little girl was able to communicate with her parents. Regarding first-time obedience it should be clear that this is the form of obedience that God expects from us as well, and that he both forgives us when we don't live up to it but also continually works on our hearts to bring us to this Biblical standard. Regarding the funnel concept each parent couple has to decide for their own family what the boundaries of the funnel are at a given age of their children.

In all these aspects we have always used moderation and age-awareness in applying the principles to our pretoddlers and toddlers, and recommended to our class members to do likewise. Most families have simply tried out the suggestions and stuck with what worked for them. We don't have the impression that the Ezzos or the GKGW material would criticize us for not having 100% success 100% of the time, or for not applying the principles early enough. Rather we understood, and we feel that the Ezzos agree with this stance, these principles as the Biblical standard that

has to be worked at in a loving and caring way. Taken with parental love the principles taught in GKGW will produce good results. Children will grow up with good boundaries and their conscience will be filled with Biblical values that will help them to make righteous decisions later on in life. Will these children all turn out the same way? Of course not. We are not talking about a sausage factory that turns out the same identical product time and time again. Each child is special and by working diligently with each individual child parents will recognize their differences and allow them to develop into morally responsible adults.

In summary, I find Dr. McClain's analysis missing the target. If taken as intended, *i.e.*, non-legalistically, the GKGW material has been very helpful to us and to many other families who were former members or are currently members of [our church].

3.2 Dr. Barbara Francis' Criticism

Dr. Francis' concerns can be grouped into several different categories as well:

1. Perceived Legalism,
2. Concerns Regarding Emotional Development,
3. Concerns Regarding Views on Sex Education,
4. Cultural Concerns,
5. Concerns Regarding Misrepresentations, Distortions, and Contradictions.

Let me briefly comment on all four of them as well as the overall tone of the critique:

1. **Perceived Legalism:** Dr. Francis states in her introduction: *"While I saw good guidelines relating to, for example, learning another's 'love language' for healthy communication or concern for protecting the sexual innocence of children, I was troubled at the overall tenor in its approach to parenting. My concerns were not only in the content of the material, but also in its negative perception of children, the legalistic tone of the presentation, and the adherence of its followers that verged on idolatry."* This again reflects the same concern that was already expressed in Dr. McClain's analysis, *i.e.*, the perceived legalism of the program. I do not doubt for one moment that there are people who take the course in a legalistic manner and have negative results. Well, you can even take the Bible in a legalistic manner with dire results. Perhaps the Ezzos should try to exert more control over who teaches their classes and allow only facilitators with a certified non-legalistic approach to do so. Obviously that is not possible, and even if attempted would probably lead to the critics claiming the Ezzos exerted cult-like mind control on their followers. In final count, everybody who takes this course, or any discipleship course in any church for that matter, is himself responsible before God how he receives and applies it. Paul exhorts the Thessalonians in 1. Thess. 5:21: *"Test everything. Hold on to the good."* That is our duty as Christians with just about anything and certainly applies to a parenting course as well. What appears legalistic after Biblical examination should be rejected. What appears to be beneficial should be taken with thanksgiving and applied with grace. We and many other alumni of the GFI courses have found that the latter works very well for our families.
2. **Concerns Regarding Emotional Development:** Dr. Francis starts out this section of her analysis with the statement: *"Relevant issues concerning emotional development are simply not presented in the GFI material. The overriding focus of the material is order and obedience; emotional or psychological health is typically either ignored or subsumed under a rubric of 'correct' behavior (as defined by GFI as 'obedience'). In other words, a child is 'healthy' to the degree that he is unquestioningly compliant and obedient to the parents' rules."*

While it is true that the Ezzos emphasize first-time obedience, which incidentally is not so difficult for a child if it can trust his parents to be fair, loving and caring, it is certainly a distortion of the GFI material that its focus is only "correct" behavior. Nothing could be further from the truth. I'd like to refer to the section about "Training your child's heart" from which I already cited a paragraph above (in the CRI chapter) which shows that it is the child's heart that we have to develop, not its outward behavior. Let me add to this another exhortation, particularly for fathers from chapter 4 of GKGW, The Father's Mandate (GKGW p. 74-75):

" ... Our private world is the most secret of all places. No one can visit our private world without an invitation, for our private world takes place on the inside. Children have a private world that is constantly changing and developing. Fathers need to be particularly sensitive to this world.... When your child is willing to share the issues of his or her heart, you must seize the opportunity. When your child invites you into his or her private world, you must listen with your heart as well as your head. Although there are no guarantees in parenting, this statement comes close to being a certainty: If you can prove your trustworthiness during the vulnerable moments in the early years, your son or

daughter will come to you when he or she is older and faces life's challenges in the teen years. Your child will not forget you in times of need. A father can establish a trusting relationship in the secret places of his child's heart, but he can destroy it there as well. That is why it is critical that you respect your child's private world," and not attempt to "rearrange the furniture" if you are invited in, as Gary mentions in the video.

Mandate Four in the same section states: *"Give your child the freedom to fail: Giving your child the freedom to fail almost sounds un-American. In our country, we love winning. At times, I wonder if this love has caused us to abandon our perspective and appreciation for what we can learn from losing. It is a crippling thing for a young creative mind not to have the freedom to fail in front of dad. Reassure him or her that failure is acceptable, as long as he or she makes an honest effort. Your child needs to know that you view his or her failures as the first steps to success. As it is with so many experiences in life, it is better to try and fail than not to try at all"*

When taking the GKGW as a whole with all chapters put in context it appears to me that the focus is not "only correct behavior" as Dr. Francis implies, but rather the focus is on the parents changing their own potentially dysfunctional behavior, and become sensitive to their children to be able to guide them to grow up to be responsible and Biblically responsive adults. Naturally, this is done from a position of authority in the younger years but changes to a position of trust and guiding through their relationship as the children grow into the middle and teen years. It almost seems that Dr. Francis (like other critics) skims over these essential chapters in GKGW dismissing them as "some good guidelines" and focuses in on what she has a conceptual problem with, *i.e.*, first-time obedience, chastisement, etc. It is obvious to this reviewer that by considering only the chapters about chastisement you will lose the balance necessary for Biblical parenting.

3. **Concerns Regarding Views on Sex Education:** Sexual education and the parents' role in it is presented in the "Reflections of Moral Innocence" course. Dr. Francis observes the following: " ... *the GFI material is built upon the premise that the knowledge of sexual anatomy as well as the anatomical function of the sex organs takes away from childhood innocence. They further imply that this knowledge is evil and corrupting in itself. ...*" We would like to strongly reject the preposterous claim that the Ezzos imply that the knowledge about sexual organs is evil and corrupting in itself. I have to admit that we haven't taught this class but once many years ago and it seems difficult to gather all the facts from memory to check Dr. Francis' assertions. We certainly feel that it should rather be us who teach our children about reproduction and the function of sexual organs than have that teaching be done by the schools, their peers, or the internet. We agree with the Ezzos that this has to be done in a sensitive and age-appropriate way so as to not awaken sexual desires too early. We also maintain with the Ezzos that in order to have a meaningful impact on a teenager's life as he/she struggles through his/her awakening sexuality a trusting parent-child relationship is the most important prerequisite.
4. **Cultural Concerns:** Dr. Francis maintains that the Ezzos' material is culturally insensitive, and derogatory towards so-called "primitive" cultures, like the Indians of South America. Her only quote comes from a CT article from 1993 that apparently references some older material by the Ezzos. I have to say that I did not find anything in GKGW or any of the other GFI classes that is in our possession that could be construed as pejorative regarding third-world cultures. Having visited and lived in such countries myself, and having had many interactions with Christians there, I would certainly have picked up on it. If such material was in the Ezzos' courses at one time in the past it would be very deplorable. The only reference to the "so-called" primitive cultures is found in Prep, p. 48. It is not at all denigrating of these cultures but rather matter-of-fact, and points out that some extreme forms of attachment parenting that try to emulate the close infant-mother relationship which is perceived to be present in these cultures, may simply not be appropriate for our own culture.
5. **Concerns Regarding Misrepresentations, Distortions, and Contradictions:** Dr. Francis' main concern here is that the assertions made by the Ezzos in their material is not based on actual scientific research, that they tend to misrepresent actual research and that they would represent themselves as experts which they are not. As someone who has to write scientific papers as part of his job, I may be a bit biased here. Obviously, in such a context I would cite pretty much every assertion I am making with the appropriate literature reference. However, such an approach may not be appropriate in the context of a Christian parenting class as long as the basic premises are based on sound Bible teaching. The GFI courses are not intended to be a pediatric manual but rather a guideline for Christian parents how to achieve their goals of raising Biblically responsive children. GFI's Prep course contains quite a number of references to the pediatric literature (see Prep Endnotes). References to the modern behavioral sciences literature are more scarce in the 18-week GKGW course. However, the Ezzos give an overview of and discuss some of the history of parenting theories (referring to their proponents) in appendices One and Two of the GKGW manual (pp. 271 - 289). Not being an expert in this field of study I don't find myself able to judge whether this gives an accurate picture of the so-called state-of-the-art. I'd like to caution that the psychological and behavioral sciences are considered by many not as hard and exact as the natural sciences. Thus it is much harder to come by solid facts and more often than not the personal bias of the researcher plays a role in his/her interpretation of the available data. As a somewhat related

example of these difficulties let me point to the ongoing debate in the psychological literature about the potential benefits or harm of spanking children as a method of chastisement (see for example <http://people.biola.edu/faculty/paulp/sweden2.html>, E. T. Gershoff, Psychological Bulletin 128 (2002) 539-579, and D. Baumrind *et al.* Psychological Bulletin 128 (2002) 580-589). What I tend to take away from the study of these scientific articles is the notion that the issue is not as clear-cut as many would like to have it, that individual bias of the principal investigator plays an important role in the interpretation and selling of the conclusions, and that as a Christian I have to rely more on the study of the Scriptures and the guidance of the Holy Spirit than on every wind of teaching (Eph. 4:14). By the way, I found it very helpful that the Ezzos consider spanking only as one method of chastisement and that it is reserved for obviously rebellious behavior. They also exhort parents to not use it in anger and to make absolutely sure that the child is not injured in the process.

To finish this point I'd like to cite Dr. [name]'s assessment. Dr. [name] is a board certified specialty physician and GFI representative for his area. He emailed me the following assessment:

" ... However, it is important to know that the Ezzos have based their teachings on applicable current research, biblical principles, experience as a parent and pastor, common sense and over fifteen years as the Lord's servants in a worldwide parenting ministry. Their much maligned teaching on biblical parenting principles in the nineties is now becoming part of the mainstream parenting advice around the world. The Babywise series continues to be a top seller on Amazon. With all the attempts to discredit the Ezzos' teaching by focus groups, there are no law suits levied against them that I know about. The Ezzos have made very open and humble attempts to bring his critics together but were rebuffed. While the basic teaching has remained the same throughout, they have responded to various and timely recommendations by making necessary changes in the text and video presentations. I'm not sure I know what else they can do. They seem to be held to a higher standard than others teaching similar material. That's okay; they have accepted the criticism as an opportunity for personal growth and to improve their teaching. But I do want to mention that even Dobson now has essentially the same infant care recommendations as the Ezzos, which are essentially the same as AAP. Is he held to the same research standard as the Ezzos? Are the critics attacking him with the same viciousness as they do the Ezzos?"

[Name], we in the scientific and medical communities have a tendency to see our research contributions as the gold standard to which the Bible should be subservient rather than the other way around. My undergraduate degree was in psychology. Over the years, I have developed many friendships with professionals in the behavioral sciences. However, my opinion of ongoing research in this area is that, for the Christian, it is of little value. We can make observations and some predictions about behavior, but only God knows the heart of man. His failings come from a condition of the heart, something that science cannot measure. Remember the example that I sent you about how Barbara Howard, a behavioral pediatrician, would handle a child who wouldn't stay in her bed in the middle of the night? Personally, I think her recommendations were cruel and abusive, lacking any semblance of common sense. But she is highly credentialed and considered authoritative, and so her views are held in high esteem. She provides the gold standard by which others methods are measured. The problem is that next year, someone else will come along with a new technique. The Ezzos teach biblical ethics in parenting. These principles are the underpinnings of their recommendations. Not everything they teach is in the Bible, but the principles behind the recommendations are in the Bible. They recognize that everyone must make their own choices in parenting and the GKGW ministry offers just one option for them to consider."

In defense of the Ezzos I'd also like to point out that they certainly do not try to misrepresent themselves as something they are not. In the 5th edition of GKGW the Ezzos introduce themselves as follows (GKGW p. 8): *"The tools of our endeavor included prayer, observation, experience, personal study, common wisdom, and, most importantly, the Holy Spirit. We are a husband and wife, a father and mother, co-laborers in ministry, and two observers of human nature. It is our desire that the truth presented on the pages to follow falls somewhere between correction and challenge, enlightenment and confirmation."*

Furthermore, the intended use of the program is stated in the same introduction as follows: *"As was the case with the previous editions, this curriculum is not intended to give all the answers or provide the reader with all he or she will ever need to know about the process of raising a child. Therefore, parents guided by their own convictions have the ultimate responsibility and duty to research parenting philosophies available today and then make an informed decision as to what is best for their family. Growing Kids God's Way is just one resource out of many available to guide parents along the way. "*

3.3 Dr. James Dobson's Criticism

Dr. Dobson's criticism is perhaps the most balanced of the materials submitted to the committee for review. Yet, he also falls into the same trap of regarding the Ezzos' material as too rigid and legalistic. It is the same old story that everybody seems to be harping on, and if I didn't know better from our own experience and from the experience of others here in [our city], I might be tempted to say that perhaps we are the only ones who are not taking the program legalistically. However, based on our knowledge of the material we firmly believe that if applied as intended, GKGW will facilitate family harmony between parents and children along Biblical principles.

To address Focus on the Family's concerns I'd like to recommend that the committee peruse Dr. [name]'s letter to James Dobson, dated January 4, 2004, which you will find attached [8]. It is well written and should hopefully answer the concerns that Dobson's statement may have caused.

We realize that the program, just as any man-made program, is not perfect. There have been instances in our classes where parents were unsuccessful in implementing some of the Ezzos' recommendations. In those cases we pray and work with those parents. We always suggest that parents themselves seek the Lord for what is right for their family. In some cases we have also suggested to consider other parenting books as well. Yet, based on the fruit that this program has born at [our church] and in the families of many others in the [our town] area, we maintain that it is valuable and helpful, and that [our church] should not be ashamed to continue to recommend it to their church members as it has done over the past 10 years. Speaking with Dr. Dobson's words: *"In the final analysis, we would suggest that, if a parent decides to use the GFI curriculum, its principles should be implemented only in conjunction with generous measures of common sense, intuition, and natural parental affection."* This advice should apply to any parenting course, not just the Ezzos'.

4 Character Issues

4.1 Attacks on Gary Ezzo's Character

Before I deal with the detailed allegations against the Ezzos character, let me make this observation: We all have character deficiencies. I certainly do, and I depend on the grace of God to help me work through them toward personal holiness. It is most likely, and in some cases evidently, true that the people who throw stones at the Ezzos and their ministry have their own character issues. ' In fact many men and women of God both in the Bible and in Church History have had character problems. Should we throw out Martin Luther's theses just because he became an anti-Semitic agitator later in life? No, we keep steadfast to the reformatory truths as far as they conform to Biblical revelation, while at the same time rejecting his diatribes against the Jews (<http://www.icrelations.net/Jen/?id=1004>). I would maintain that the same approach should be taken here, *i.e.*, the Ezzos' teachings should be accepted as far as they are confirmed by the Scriptures. If it turned out that the Ezzos had acted wrongly with respect to their critics it would be their duty to repent and seek forgiveness and reconciliation, and if they refused to do so it would mean that we personally couldn't submit ourselves to their leadership and probably wouldn't support their ministry financially. However, we would still hold on to their teachings which we have tested and found Biblical.

Personal attacks on Gary's character abound in the "available material" submitted to the review committee. The main charges can be summarized as follows:

1. The Ezzos have chosen to leave three separate churches in the 20 years until 2003. Actually, due to their move to South Carolina that would be 4, but the critics mainly point toward them leaving John MacArthur's Grace Community Church and Living Hope Evangelical Fellowship in California. The common accusation against the Ezzos is that they were excommunicated due to lack of accountability and truthfulness. I would like to suggest to listen to the other side of the story and to read [3] and bullets #1 and 2 in reference [4]. Please also refer to pastor Ron Seidel's statement [10] cited further below.
2. Gary is accused of taking credit for degrees he never had (see for example the CT article "Unprepared to Teach Parenting". Please let me point your attention again to the attached "Response to Christianity Today" [4], where under bullet #12 Gary Ezzo defends his MA degree from Talbot School of Theology, earned in 1985 (not 1995 as incorrectly noted in [4], see copy of the degree attached [14]), and clarifies the context in which Mohawk Valley College has been mentioned on a post-employment form at Grace Community Church.
3. Gary's professional conduct has been questioned because of the way he handled an apparent case of embezzlement of money by his son-in-law in his organization. Gary has repeatedly stated (see [3] and [4]) that the offender had been confronted and had repented and that forgiveness was granted and that arrangements for restitution had been made. Thus he considers it a private matter and closed. Since his company is privately held, it is very likely that this assessment is correct and would hold up in a court of law.

Since these charges are generally not very well documented on the internet it is difficult for an outsider to decide on the veracity of the arguments and counter-arguments. I personally don't feel qualified to make a statement about the Ezzos character, and certainly not based on these allegations. The points that Gary makes in his defense seem to me logical and should be seriously taken into account, though.

In addition to what Gary Ezzo has written in his self-defense I'd like to present to the committee evidence and testimony in support of his character (see attachments [10-13]). This includes:

1. Letter from Ron Seidel, senior pastor of Granada Hills Community Church, dated April 18, 2001 [10]. He was the last pastor the Ezzos served under while still living in California. He has had personal insights into the issues surrounding the Ezzos leaving their second California church, Living Hope Evangelical Fellowship. Let me cite from his letter: " ... *As their pastor, I trust I can help dispel some of the rumors, associated concerns and inaccurate media reports. I will endeavor to present facts in this letter and avoid personal commentary.... As a pastor seeking to honor Christ in all things, especially in ecclesiastical matters, I can say without prejudice that if there was any sinful liability on the part of Gary or Anne Marie related to Living Hope, they would not be members of our church today. They would have been directed back to their former church to resolve their issues.... we concluded: 1. That the concerns raised by the Ezzos over the misconduct of their former spiritual leaders had biblical validity.... 2. We found no evidence that suggests that prior to their departure, any charge of misconduct or wrongdoing was ever presented to the Ezzos, ... In light of this information, I trust our findings will help settle any question about the integrity of Gary or Anne Marie and how they conducted themselves before, during and after their departure from Living Hope. We are pleased to have them within our membership. Thank you for giving me this opportunity. I pray it serves the truth.*"
2. Letter from [Name], Pastor, Family and Community Ministries at [Church] in, [City] [III]. Excerpts from his letters are: *"In my reading, teaching, and continual review of the Growing Families International curriculum I do not find their material to be "rigid, controlling or exclusive." Quite the contrary, the Ezzos have flexed to adapt their curriculum to the best research in the field, provided that research is compatible with Biblical principles. With each new revision they have labored diligently to update their material. What I appreciate about the Ezzos is their refusal to compromise Biblical values for the sake of political correctness. The do not back down from the Biblical principles and Biblical world-view which underlies their curriculum.... Most critics have relied on the findings of others, most notably Hank Hanegraaff and the Christian Research Journal. Regarding Mr. Hanegraaff, I have not found him or his publication to be particularly credible or accurate in what he says or writes.... Gary Ezzo stands solidly within the sphere of biblical orthodoxy believing that salvation is sola fide, sola scriptura, sola gratia. His writings do not indicate that he believes in salvation from a semi-Pelagian position of faith plus anything.... [Church Name] has had a long-standing policy of adapting curriculum to meet the unique needs of our church family. We have done this with the Growing Families International curriculum as well. We have supplemented Growing Kids God's Way with teaching in areas which we felt were not addressed such as the practicalities of leading family devotions and practical steps to take in problem-solving. We have likewise adapted Preparation for parenting to fit the needs of our couples expecting newborns.[Church Name] has no reputation for or good will toward approaches that are "rigid, controlling or exclusive." ... NO approach formulated by man is perfect, but the benefits which we are seeing in the lives of families are undeniable and affirm our decision to continue using it."*
3. Letter from Associate Pastor for Small Group Ministries at [Name of Ministry], [Name of Pastor] [12]: *"What we do know is this. Gary Ezzo is a good man that we believe loves God, is committed to the truth and has labored for years in an effort to assist and grow parents in their love for God and their kids As to the concerns regarding the GFI curriculum, we do feel as if they are able to stand on their own with respect to doctrinal purity, an appropriate and clear explanation of intent and their use as a tool to aide and guide and parent choosing to follow this approach. As in many situations, it is rarely the material but instead the extremist bent of an unsuited or immature teacher that can lead a parent to a dangerous or inappropriate application of a principle. This, of course, is not the Ezzos' problem or a curriculum issue but instead the responsibility of those of us who oversee this ministry in the local church setting."*
4. Letter from [Name], M. Div., Pastor of Evangelism and Discipleship at [Church], Rochester, Minnesota [13]: " ... *Several families in our church use the materials and I see nothing of the legalism, paraded by its critics, in the lives of any of those families. My wife and I (both widowed and recently married) went through the materials with a critical eye, aware of these charges. In the 18 week "basic" course and the 6 week "middle years" course, I did not find one theological problem with the materials. They continually speak of heart transformation by the gracious work of Christ and His powerful Word, not the extreme legalism with which they have been charged. I also saw no evidence of the Ezzo's trying to build a "following" after themselves - they constantly pointed people to the glory of Jesus Christ.... With respect to Mr. Ezzo 's character, I don't personally know him, nor do I personally know others who speak critically of him. I enjoy the ministries of Grace to You (John MacArthur) and Focus on the Family, yet I know that people often view other people or things very differently (some Christians also demonize John MacArthur and James Dobson). As much as I love John MacArthur's teaching, I can't personally vouch for his character any more than Gary Ezzo's. I can only say that the materials of both ministries I have studied are consistent with solid, biblical exposition and application; and are reflective of godly, Spirit-led personal lives.... We, at [Church Name], have tried not to stir controversy where the evidence of changed lives speaks volumes to the contrary. Where God is at work, Satan will always stir up strife and contention, even using well-intentioned believers.... Our family was and is immeasurably blessed by the sound, common sense Bible-based principles we have learned.... I thank God for how He has used the GFI materials in our life and respectfully encourage you to consider the "other side" of the issue."*

5 Summary and Conclusion

In summary let me reiterate that I have not attempted to answer all of the criticism against the Ezzos exhaustively. That would be very hard to do with the limited time I can afford to spend on this project. What I have tried to do, though, is to look a little bit beyond the surface of the criticism. From my above statements which I have made in good faith with the material that is available to me, I conclude that the majority of the criticism on the ezzo.info web page is unfair and biased, and designed to tear down the Ezzos' ministry rather than to offer constructive criticism. I have attempted to show in several examples how the critics have twisted and taken the Ezzos' statements out of context to further their agenda. There are certainly areas of the Ezzos' materials that could be improved, and where appropriate I tried to point that out. Overall, from our point of view the GFI program has a lot of positive sides and when applied with common sense, as done in the past at [our church], has proven itself to be of great benefit to young families.

[The remainder of the summary and conclusion was specific to this particular church and not necessary for inclusion.]

Respectfully submitted by
[name]

References:

- [1] [name], Letter of Opinion I about "Growing Kids God's Way" submitted to [Church] on October 24th, 2004. [2] Copies of correspondence between [our church] leadership and the [name]'s and [name]'s.
- [3] Gary and Anne-Marie Ezzo, "The Community Perspective - A Special Report," released October 26, 1998. [4] Gary Ezzo (?), "A Response to Christianity Today: Unprepared to Teach Parenting?" November 13, 2000.
- [5] "General Guidelines in Preparation for Class;" taken from a leadership guide by GFI.
- [6] Dr. [name] M.D. "My professional and personal testimony regarding GKGW." Copy of email dated October 31, 2004.
- [7] Notes on "Do's and Don'ts in Leading a Class" from regional GFI workshop held in Columbia, SC, in January of 2000.
- [8] Dr. [name], "Letter to Dr. James Dobson," 2nd January, 2004.
- [9] Testimonial letters by: [names], [names], [names].
- [10] Ron Seidel, senior pastor of Granada Hills Community Church, letter dated April 18, 2001.
- [11] [Name], Pastor, Family and Community Ministries at [Church], letter dated February 9, 2000.
- [12] [Name], Associate Pastor for Small Group Ministries at [Ministry Name], letter dated November 5, 1997.
- [13] [Name], M.Div., Pastor of Evangelism and Discipleship at [Church]. [City], email dated June 4, 2003.
- [14] Copy of Gary Ezzo's M.A. degree in Ministry from Biola University, Talbot Theological Seminary and School of Theology, dated 1985.
- [15] Memorandum by [Name] re: Steve Rein, dated August 4, 1997.