

*Lance & Susan St. Clair*

Date: February 18, 1998  
To: Growing Families Participants  
From: Lance & Susan St. Clair, GFI Community Representatives  
Re: Christianity Today, February 9, 1998

*Christianity Today* has recently published an article written by Randy Frame entitled "Growing Criticism." Here is their letter, followed by our comments.

#### GFI In Response to Christianity Today's "Growing Criticism"

1993, Christianity Today offered its first critique of the GFI ministry in an article entitled "The Brave New Baby." Back then, most of the critics cited were followers of the La Leche League/Attachment parenting mothering theory - The Ezzos are not. Now four and a half years later, (February 9, 1998) a second CT article appeared entitled "Growing Criticism, Groups back away from Preparation for Parenting."

While the new story line was arranged a little differently than the 1993 version, the players and CT's approach to the story were basically the same. It does appear that CT used "Christian concern" to put a covering over the use of gossip. There was a story to be had, but CT missed it. In 1993, 80,000 parents were using one of the two popular GFI programs previously criticized by CT: *Preparation for Parenting* and *On Becoming Babywise*. Four years after their article appeared, there were a million parents.

Based on those figures, may we suggest some encouraging story ideas? Maybe CT can pursue the numbers of people who were brought into the Kingdom of God as a result of seeing the beauty of God's holiness lived out in these families? Out of the numbers above, maybe CT would consider highlighting the many marriages that have been pulled back from the brink of divorce because mothers and fathers got their life priorities back to where God wanted them to be. Maybe a story could be done on the great numbers of fathers who rededicated themselves to God and their families first, and not their careers? Or, the thousands of mothers who were liberated from emotional and physical fatigue simply because they brought some order and routine to their baby's day and restful sleep to their baby's night. And what about the many unhappy and unruly children who were given the gift of self-control and contentment and as a result, are now living testimonies of the transforming power of Jesus Christ in the life of their parents? Isn't there a natural story in there which needs no spin?

Isn't all of this the result of exactly what Peter called us to: "Having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation" (1 Peter 2:11). What a great New Testament strategy. Even though the world has stopped listening to the Christian voice, the world is still watching our behavior. In a day and culture where families are falling apart and mothers and fathers parent in despair, the beauty of God's moral law lived out in family relationships becomes a compelling testimony so powerful that many of those in the world who see it, actually find God. Equipping parents for that purpose is what GFI is all about.

Based on CT's subtitle: "Groups back away from Preparation for Parenting," we can only ask the reader one question: Which group do the parents above belong to and how many more will there be in the year 2002?

Meanwhile, if you're looking for something to read, may we offer an article from the latest *Community Perspective*? "One Reason Why The Ezzos Do Not Support Attachment Parenting." (Winter 1998) This is the other side of the story we wish CT would run. For your convenience we have provided a link to that article.

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Some additional thoughts from the St. Clairs:

It would appear this article is intended to create concern through loosely compiled, unsubstantiated comments and conclusions. The way the information and quotes are arranged causes an initial sense of alarm in the reader, but read the article closely! You will notice there is not a thread of evidence, documentation, or justification in any of the claims.

The article sites that Grace Community Church, the church where Gary Ezzo served for 10 years under John MacArthur, "issued a public statement disavowing any affiliation with GFI and outlining 'serious concerns' ... " We, also, attended Grace Community Church for a decade, serving as Deacons in our last years. Our children were raised in that church, came to know Christ in that church, and two of them were married there. While not a reflection of their Biblical soundness, it is our personal experience that Grace Community Church has "serious concerns" with many programs that CT might support: Henry Blackaby / Experiencing God; Bill Hybels / Willow Creek; and Promise Keepers are some of the people and programs that Grace Community Church openly speaks against.

Randy Frame quotes Phil Johnson (the author who posted Grace Community Church's statement) again toward the end of the article. Johnson's claims are inaccurate, unsubstantiated, and inconclusive. GFI responded to these comments with a well documented statement.

What Phil Johnson did was sad and unfortunate. It is a poor reflection of a Church that is home to a well respected Pastor and Teacher, John MacArthur. We can only imagine that Grace's elders, in retrospect, would not take this course of action again if the opportunity presented itself. GFI is making every attempt to biblically resolve this situation with Grace. By the way, we are wondering why Randy Frame posted such a small part of GFI's response to the Grace statement? When CT submitted a list of questions to GFI, they say GFI declined to answer. CT was referred to the web page that contained those answers. Why did they not report both sides?

The article reports, "Critics maintain generally that the Ezzos advocate a style of parenting that overemphasizes control and discipline at the expense of parental intuition and compassion." Who are these critics? The article never tells us! Are they experts in their field or are they individuals whose personal paradigms are sorely rocked by the conviction that their views are perhaps not obtaining in the same glorifying results? The article then reads, "These critics go on to say that medical advice offered or implied by GFI materials runs counter to current medical wisdom." Where is the "wisdom?" Lacking the documentation, one has to ask if CT has just reported someone's disgruntled opinion. If you would like evidence, you may request from GFI a recently prepared document summarizing Preparation for Parenting entitled: Preparation for Parenting – An Introduction. In that summary, you will find the documentation CT should have reported where GFI quotes statements from 6 well known infant care professionals or organizations (including American Academy of Pediatrics and Focus on the Family) whose breastfeeding guidelines fall (in some cases significantly) within the guidelines of GFI's parent directed feeding program.

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The article states that certain phone calls prompted the Child Abuse Prevention Council of Orange County to conduct an extensive study of the GFI materials. Did you notice the article said nothing about the findings? Can you guess why? There was not one documented case of failure to thrive. At this point we don't think any of you would be surprised to know who those calls were from.

CT reports, "Colleen Weeks co-chaired the committee, which conducted a detailed investigation of GFI materials..." Was this an objective study or did she begin her investigation with a personal agenda? If so, wouldn't one predict her results to be bias?

By the way, who is Colleen Weeks? CT never tells us.

CT further reports that "according to critics ... GFI represents its principles as being the only biblically prescribed approach to parenting." This is a false accusation. Randy Frame even says, "GFI materials acknowledge that the Bible is silent on such issues as infant feeding." CT states that Kathy Nesper, "whose ministry specializes in childbirth education and family life education for young Christian couples, says, 'The underlying message is that their way is God's way.' What is her way and how does it advance God's Kingdom? The article never tells us.

We were disappointed with Randy Frame's lack of research. As every *Preparation for Parenting* family will attest, the Matthew 27:46 paragraph does not exist in the material and hasn't since 1994. Randy Frame should have known that. Gary removed that paragraph because of the confusion over his intended point. That speaks to the strength of his character and his openness to constructive comments.

In fact, the Ezzos have been extremely open to comments and constructive criticism. We recently met with some local Lactation Consultants who had concern over some verbiage in the current *Preparation for Parenting* Material. Upon bringing these concerns to Gary, his response was open and gracious. Gary agreed that the verbiage was confusing and altered the material for the next printing.

Randy Frame states that the AAP "may" join the GFI critics, that there is a "resolution" proposing the AAP comment publicly, and "if" approved ... and he goes on. This loose reporting again gives the reader the aroma of concern. Anyone can write the AAP and ask them to comment publicly on anything they choose. All that is before the AAP is a request on *behalf* of a group of attachment parenting / demand feeding advocates. They would like the AAP to review the GFI material. That does not concern GFI. They would probably welcome the review. However, it is our understanding that at this time, the AAP has no intention of doing so. Randy Frame even makes the reader suspect that this review will take place in the fall of 1998. Read it carefully! That is not what the article says.

Again, Randy Frame quotes another individual whom the reader knows nothing about: Barbara Francis. Who is Barbara Francis? She is quoted as saying, "If a child can never say no, that child will not develop a sense of autonomy." Shouldn't this statement be qualified? Are we talking, "Would you like more milk?" "No." (Obviously this can't be what Francis is saying) Or, are we talking about "In five minutes I am going to ask you to clean up your toys". "No!"

In the spirit of not exasperating our children, the Ezzos advocate giving our children a five minute warning when they are in the middle of play. (Ephesians 6:3: Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.) But upon the end of that five minute period when Dad says it's time to clean up, Dad has every biblical reason to expect obedience. (Ephesians 6:1-2: Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother - which is the first commandment with a promise). The Ezzos say we are to discipline our children to the standard, train them to the standard, encourage them to the standard and love them to the standard. These children are taught to obey not out of fear of reproof, but out of the love of righteousness. Good is elevated, rather than evil merely suppressed.

No, Barbara, the child's obedience will not likely "be rooted in fear of abandonment or punishment," but rather in love and devotion.

By the way, Where in the Bible does it say that "if a child can never say no, that child will not develop a sense of autonomy."?

Ms. Francis' opinion, speaking of *Growing Kids God's Way*, is inserted into the body of this article which is primarily speaking to *Preparation for Parenting*. This can be very confusing to a reader who was not familiar with both programs. Again, basic research and accuracy should have prevailed.

There is one note of truth to the article, and one we believe really could have been the main story: "...3,500 churches worldwide use the GFI-published resources for guidance on child rearing." This is true! And it is growing. In 1993, 80,000 parents had gone through *Preparation for Parenting*. Today, it is 1,000,000. These are happy babies and happy families. Mom's who are enjoying a healthy breast feeding experience. Fathers that are involved with the parenting of their children from birth. Siblings who appreciate not being "orphaned" just because a new member of the family has been added. Communities that are enjoying other people's children. And a nation that has reason for hope with regards to our next generation of leaders. What are we really arguing about?

Another interesting note: Where are the comments and opinions from those who are using this method of parenting? The article makes reference to the fact that they are around. Frame even tells us, "GFI's Web site includes testimonies and newspaper articles featuring {these} people". Frame extracted many statements from the "critics" - Isn't it a rather biased approach to avoid the opinions of 1,000,000 parents?

A word of encouragement to you: "And let us not loose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary." (Galatians 6:9) Unfortunately, there are individuals whose mission it is to push their philosophy against the Ezzos and often do so at the cost of accuracy and integrity.

What would the Ezzo's want of our Community? "He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8) Continue to do what you know is right in your own family. Walk in humility. You do not need to defend the Ezzo's. God is doing that well enough. When you do need to speak, speak the truth in love. Enjoy the fruits of your labor and let that be your witness. Refer your concerns to the Growing Families International leadership team. Continue to pray for the ministry and the Ezzos. And rejoice! You are part of God's miracle work winning the nation to Christ, one family at a time.