

## *Growing Families International*

### *A Response to The Christian Research Journal (CRJ) "A Matter of Bias" March 1999*

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“A Matter of Bias” - was it honest reporting or a desperate attempt by CRI to regain lost credibility with their listening audience and donor base since the release of their first article, “More Than a Parenting Ministry” (April - June 1998)? Many GFI and CRI supporters have asked if we will publicly provide a detailed response to “A Matter of Bias” written by Kathleen Turner and Elliot Miller. At first we felt it best to leave the matter unanswered and let the piece speak for itself. But who would be served with silence? Not the CRI donor base or the GFI community.

If CRI’s believability was not seriously injured by GFI’s well documented responses, then a “A Matter of Bias” would never have been written. If Turner and Miller’s first article was even reasonably accurate or believable, they would not have needed ten pages to defend or justify its existence. But truth has a way of foiling falsehoods and “A Matter of Bias” is a mendacious attempt to recover public confidence. We are content to let the reader decide whether Turner and Miller succeeded in their efforts.

#### **Introduction**

As in their last article, “More Than a Parenting Ministry,” the principle authorship of “A Matter of Bias” is Kathleen Turner. Elliot Miller’s contribution, according to CRI insiders, was confined to editing the piece not writing it. He can speak to that himself. Nonetheless, his name will be mentioned throughout this response.

We’ll start our response to “A Matter of Bias” with Turner and Miller’s closing statement. They wrote:

“We believe the results of our thorough investigation, now published in two issues of the *Christian Research Journal*, adequately demonstrate that we have been both careful and truthful and that GFI’s defenses against criticism are intentionally misleading and sometimes outright false. At some point, readers need to consider how much evidence must be dismissed or explained away, and how many respectable critics must be doubted, in order to believe GFI. Unhappily, in this case, both sides cannot be telling the truth” (p. 41).

Turner and Miller selected three powerful words to characterize their own reporting. “Thorough,” “careful,” and “truthful.” The *New World Dictionary* defines *thorough* as omitting nothing, complete, out and out absolute. *Careful* means accurately done in a painstaking way, circumspect, given careful considerations to all circumstances. *Truthful* speaks to the quality of being honest, conformity to the facts, correctness, accuracy, free of bias. GFI is happy to take these three terms and use them to measure the legitimacy of Turner/Miller and CRJ’s latest report. “The Case of Kathy Nesper,” a few paragraphs below, demonstrates exactly what “thorough,” “careful,” and “truthful” mean to Turner and Miller.

In the conclusion of “A Matter of Bias?” (p. 41), Kathleen Turner and Elliot Miller stated what they thought was needed to solve the problem.

“What is needed,” they write, “is a meeting like that proposed by Nesper where the concerns of both sides can be aired, objective judgments rendered, actions suggested, and appropriate accountability to the body of Christ instituted and maintained for the future. The results should be made public for the sake of public accountability. Experience to date indicates that nothing less will be adequate” (p. 41).

That is an amazing statement when one considers how many times CRI rebuffed the invitation to meet with GFI. CRI rejected the efforts of Ken Sande of Peacemaker’s ministry. (Please see GFI “letters” More Than a

Parenting Ministry Response.) GFI's request to meet with CRI was consistent with the Manual of Ethical and Doctrinal Standards put together by the leaders of Evangelical Ministries to New Religions (EMNR). They set out the process for resolving complaints between public ministries. Not surprisingly, they start with Matthew 18:15-17. The National Religious Broadcasters call for the same thing, along with a host of Christian conciliatory ministries, not to mention nearly every denomination. Para-church ministries can not claim exemption from the biblical process. They do not stand outside the church or above it.

The fact is, the Ezzos have been and are always willing to meet, even with critics (honest ones). They're characterized by it. Consider the case of Kathy Nesper cited as a witness in CRJ's latest defense. Presented to the CRJ readership is a peace-seeking woman, frustrated over the Ezzos' continual refusal to meet with her for the sake of the unity of the body of Christ. Yet, the hard and indisputable evidence is in obvious contradiction with everything Kathleen Turner stated to be "thorough," "careful," and "truthful." We will document in a few paragraphs below, the actual written transcripts between Kathy Nesper and Gary Ezzo. From those letters the reader will have some interesting examples of Kathleen Turner's reporting ethics.

**The reader will note that:**

1. Kathleen Turner and Elliot Miller had in their possession all the Nesper and Ezzo correspondence, so they cannot use the excuse that they were misinformed.
2. They had to go out of their way to find a portion of a quote that sounded adversarial and then cut, splice and patch together pieces of letters to create the pretense of a response contrary to the actual response.
3. In so doing and by their volitional efforts, Turner and Miller presented the *CRJ* readership not just a distorted version of events but the opposite of what was true and clearly documented.
4. A few paragraphs later, they announced that their reporting was thorough, careful, and truthful, and boldly stated, "Unhappily, in this case both sides cannot be telling the truth."
5. It does appear that the evidence does tell the truth.

**Consider the case of Kathy Nesper**

Turner and Miller wrote.

"GFI critic Kathy Nesper, president of a Christian parenting and childbirth education organization called Apple Tree Family Ministries, initiated correspondence with the Ezzos because she 'sensed rising tensions among all concerned' and 'believed a call for unity was needed.' Over the course of 11 months and 13 letters, Nesper proposed a meeting where the Ezzos and a group of their critics could all 'lay the issues openly before several unbiased person of godly reputation and respected integrity upon whom we agree, for their evaluation and counsel . . . There can be no objection to accountability to unbiased godly counselors where there is a sincere commitment to follow biblical principles. I welcome it even if I am found to be at fault, so I can make it right' " (pp. 40-41).

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The quote above came from a letter dated September 18, 1997, addressed to Gary Ezzo. It was the 5th letter in the Ezzo/Nesper correspondence series. To that particular quote Kathleen Turner and Elliott Miller cut, spliced, and pasted in something not found in the September 18, 1997, letter. They added the following statement:

"The Ezzos refused this attempt at mutual public accountability, accusing Nesper of duplicity and saying, 'We have no interest in meeting with nine of your friends to talk about your view on attachment parenting theories or GFI, or what

you like or don't like about our presentation' " (p. 41).

Did Mrs. Turner report the facts of this letter? Is that how the Ezzos responded? If we read the Turner/Miller description correctly, they stated that 1) "Over the course of 11 months and 13 letters, Nesper proposed a meeting with the Ezzos," and 2) "The Ezzos continually refused this attempt at mutual public accountability accusing Nesper of duplicity."

**Fact One:** On January 25, 1997, Kathy Nesper wrote Gary and Anne Marie for the first time. She shared her experience with some *Preparation for Parenting* moms.

**Fact Two:** Nowhere in her letter did she ask to meet with the Ezzos or ask to have the Ezzos meet with any other people, let alone critics. Quite to the contrary.

**Fact Three:** It was the Ezzos who continually pursued Kathy Nesper not the reverse as Mrs. Turner clearly and shamelessly implied. On February 25, 1997, they wrote: (For clarity, we added the **bold** and underline highlights to the following letters for the purpose of emphasis.)

Dear Mrs. Nesper,

" . . . we would love to sit down and chat with you personally, listen to your concerns, and perhaps share a few of our own. We would like to propose a luncheon for the three of us. Even better, how about a dinner meeting that includes your husband? We can find a restaurant halfway between Artesia and Chatsworth that will allow for leisurely dining and a time of sharing. We both have a rather significant following, so whatever we can do to bring unity, without compromise, to the Body of Christ warrants our efforts. Are you willing to meet with us? If you are agreeable to this invitation, please call our secretary, Kim Meier, at GFI (818-772-XXXX). She can arrange dates, places, and times. We do hope to hear from you."

On March 11, 1997, Kathy Nesper declined the Ezzos' invitation to meet but suggested that maybe we could carry on a letter-writing discussion. In response, the Ezzos again invited Mrs. Nesper to meet with them. In an April 21, 1997, correspondence they wrote:

Dear Mrs. Nesper,

"Thank you for your letter of March 11, 1997. I trust you're serious in wanting to bring unity to the Body of Christ. Since our written material, including our letters, is so often misquoted by attachment-parenting proponents, we believe the biblical admonishment of going to one another is the best way to begin open and honest discussion of mutual concerns. Because of that, we again will extend to you an invitation to meet with us personally. In so doing, we hope to find a starting point for honest discussion . . . We trust you will reconsider our invitation to meet personally."

On May 12, 1997, the Ezzos' invitation to meet was rejected a third time by Kathy Nesper. The Ezzos responded on June 2, 1997. (See Attachment One for complete letter.) On June 30, 1997, Mrs. Nesper wrote back but still refused to meet with the Ezzos. Gary and Anne Marie extended yet another invitation while encouraging her to follow the biblical pattern of conflict resolution. In a letter dated August 18, 1997, they wrote:

Dear Mrs. Nesper,

" . . . This is the evidence that we take your request very seriously, and we desire to address your concerns. We will be willing to meet with you, and your Pastor, and our Pastor, so every word may be established and any accusations can be affirmed, rebuked, or corrected in a biblical manner (Matthew 18:15-16).

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Kathy, if you're unwilling to follow the scriptural admonishment on these issues, then there is no point in continuing inking our paper. Our prayer is that you will accept the biblical model of going one to another as the means by which God can bring healing."

On September 18, 1997, Kathy Nesper agreed to meet with the Ezzos but not according to God's plan. She asked the Ezzos to suspend any private meeting and the Matthew 18 process and go right to an open meeting with a group of GFI critics, whose names she never revealed. It was from this letter that Turner and Miller lifted the Nesper quote and presented it as if it was something that she had been pursuing "for over the course of 11 months and 13 letters." Here is where the cutting and splicing of quotes come in. Kathleen Turner wrote:

**"Over the course of 11 months and 13 letters, Nesper proposed a meeting where the Ezzos and a group of their critics could all 'lay the issues openly before several unbiased person of godly reputation and respected integrity upon whom we agree, for their evaluation and counsel . . . There can be no objection to accountability to unbiased godly counselors where there is a sincere commitment to follow biblical principles. I welcome it even if I am found to be at fault so I can make it right.' "** (September 18, 1997)

To the above quote Kathleen Turner cut and spliced in the following statement that was not part of the September 18, 1997, letter. Kathleen Turner wrote:

**"The Ezzos refused this attempt at mutual public accountability, accusing Nesper of duplicity and saying, 'We have no interest in meeting with nine of your friends to talk about your view on attachment parenting theories or GFI, or what you like or don't like about our presentation.' "**

Question: Where did that statement come from? That wasn't Gary Ezzo's response to Mrs. Nesper's letter of September 18, 1997. Those words are not even found in Gary's next written response of October 24, 1997. This is what Gary wrote in response:

Dear Mrs. Nesper,

In my last letter, I asked you to provide the names of the nine people you stated shared their concerns with us. I also asked that you provide the approximate dates when these meetings or correspondence took place.

In your letter of September 18, 1997, you stated you could not give me their names because you do not have their permission. Kathy, since your appeal is based on the belief that these people actually came to us, in one form or another, I think it should be rather easy to obtain permission to share their names and provide a copy of their correspondence. After all, if they told you they came to us in person, then I see no reason why they would want to hide their identity now. We want to know who specifically is making the claim that we did not take their concerns seriously, and what their concerns were.

Since we know who has written and talked with us over the years from the attachment parenting side of the issue, it will be interesting to see your list of names. In fact, without those names and supporting documentation, I'm afraid that we cannot go any further in our dialogue. When that information is provided, we can than move toward a joint meeting with yourself, your pastor, Anne Marie and myself and our pastor.

We look forward to that opportunity.

Gary Ezzo

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If the above letter was Gary Ezzo's response to Kathy Nesper, where did Turner and Miller pull the villainous quote from? It was cut, spliced and patched from a completely unrelated letter written two months later on December 1, 1997. Here is the pertinent context of that letter as the Ezzos unfolded all that they knew about Kathy Nesper's real motives.

Dear Mrs. Nesper,

On Saturday, November 15, 1997, we were conducting a late afternoon leadership meeting in Melbourne, Australia. A young attachment-parenting-type mother named Allicin Hillbig attempted to disrupt that meeting. Waving a fist-full of internet correspondence in her hand she began to sound her alarm about how bad the Ezzos' teaching was. To say the least, she acted foolish and shamed herself. She quickly left the meeting crying and embarrassed, taking her internet postings with her. We all felt bad for her and prayed the Lord would heal her.

Why am I bringing this up to you? Because it was during her diatribe that she told the audience that it was Kathy Nesper that she was in conversation with, and from whom she received encouragement. It was your encouragement that led her to disrupt the church meeting. Is this the same Kathy Nesper who stated in her January 25, 1997, letter that, "I do hope and pray that we may all encourage the respect for one another within the body of Christ that is called for in Scripture"? Is this the same Kathy Nesper who wrote that she was "concerned about unity among true believers, even when we disagree"? It doesn't seem to be. Why are you intentionally sowing seeds of divisiveness and disunity among the brethren and then portraying yourself as a mediator?

While you are saying one thing to us, you seem to be acting and saying another around other people. We were willing to meet with you, Kathy. We offered four times and four times you refused. What is more amazing is that we offered this knowing that the unity of the Body of Christ was not your real motive for writing or meeting.

You see, months before we received your first correspondence we had in our possession your e-mail of October 4, 1996 to the Kuhlmanns. That letter was rather telling. There, you revealed your true motives about being in correspondence with us. It was in that letter that you neatly tied your relationship to Lisa Marasco, Rebecca Prewett, Steve Rein, and Chuck Smith's daughter and her activities at Calvary Chapel, Costa Mesa. Even more telling is a follow-up letter in our possession describing (according to Kathy Kuhlmann) your concerns over what would happen if Gary Ezzo ever found out about all these associations, especially Chuck Smith's daughter and what she was mailing out of Chuck's church . . .

. . . Knowing what we know about the behind-the-scenes Kathy Nesper, we have no interest in meeting with nine of your friends to talk about your views on attachment parenting theories, or GFI, or what you like or don't like about our presentation. Please keep in mind, that knowing all that we did about you, we were still willing to give you a chance to explain personally and in private the discrepancy between what you were writing us and writing others. That chance is gone now. With your on-going refusal to meet with us, there is no biblical basis for us to meet with any one else.

I do believe this brings our private correspondence to a close. Carry on with your ministry and expect us to do the same.

Sincerely,  
Gary Ezzo

### Summary

We believe has been made. The hard and indisputable evidence contradicts everything Kathleen Turner pledged to be "thorough," "careful," and "truthful." Again, please consider:

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1. Kathleen Turner and Elliot Miller had in their possession all the Nesper and Ezzo correspondence, so they cannot use the excuse that they were misinformed.
  2. They had to go out of their way to find a portion of a quote that sounded adversarial and then cut, splice and patch together pieces of letters to create the pretense of a response contrary to the actual response.
  3. In so doing and by their volitional efforts, Turner and Miller presented the *CRJ* readership not just a distorted version of events but the opposite of what was true and clearly documented.
  4. A few paragraphs later, they announced that their reporting was thorough, careful, and truthful, and boldly stated, “Unhappily, in this case both sides cannot be telling the truth.”

It does appear that the evidence supports Turner and Miller’s last statement: “Unhappily, in this case both sides cannot be telling the truth.” **The letters do tell the truth.**

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### **Need More?**

For those who need more examples of Turner and Miller’s “thorough,” “careful,” and “truthful” reporting, please read on.

To create her desired storyline, Mrs. Turner would often employ the tactic of demagoguery. Demagoguery is the practice of taking statements of opponents and ascribing new meaning contrary to what is actually said or intended. This is done by adding or changing words of a quote or sentence. From their new meaning, the writer builds a straw man argument then proceeds to knock it down, ascribing the error to their opponent. Here are some more examples:

### **1. Primary Sources Not Consulted (p. 34).**

In “A Matter of Bias?” Turner and Miller claimed that GFI refused to answer her questions. They wrote:

“After placing great stress on a statement CRI President Hank Hanegraaff made on the radio that our research was based on primary sources, GFI supplied five alleged examples of inadequate primary research. This resulted, they say, in a distortion of the facts. It is first of all ironic that GFI would criticize us for not contacting primary sources. They are arguably the most primary source of all and yet when Kathleen Turner approached them with a list of questions to ensure accuracy in our article, they refused to answer any of them” (p. 34).

“Refused to answer any of them?” Once again the written record proves the contradiction in Mrs. Turner’s statement. The Ezzos were ready and willing to answer any of CRI’s questions. It was not CRI’s questions that GFI refused to answer, but their questioner. In their November 11, 1998, letter to Elliot Miller, GFI invited Miller to speak with them and ask any question. “Please know if

you have any questions concerning these responses, Mr. Ezzo would be happy to talk with you personally. If you would like to speak to him, you can call . . . (number given, letter closes)”

There was a good and noble reason why the Ezzos had hoped to speak with Elliot Miller. Kathleen Turner was not trustworthy. Given her history, her associations, and controversy surrounding her attachment parenting/La Leche League perspectives, GFI knew she could not be trusted to honestly report the details of a private conversation with the Ezzos. Their concerns have now been proven trustworthy in the last two articles.

Further, the fact that GFI refused to entertain questions from Kathleen Turner is completely irrelevant to GFI’s original charge that CRI used anecdotal sources and hearsay to build their first and now their second report. Whether the Ezzos interviewed with Kathleen Turner or not has nothing to do with Hank Hanegraaff’s claim that “More Than a Parenting Ministry” was not about “secondary sources.”<sup>1</sup> The five examples presented in GFI’s original response challenging that claim continue to stand unchallenged to this day.

## **2. Mischaracterizing Turner’s Background (p. 38).**

Regarding critics and specifically Mrs. Turner, we read:

“Sadly this additional and unsubstantiated attack on the Kuhlmanns and others cited in GFI’s response only further illustrates our concerns about GFI’s treatment of critics. GFI responded to our article in a similar fashion” (p. 38).

GFI noted the following facts about Kathleen Turner in their response to “More Than a Parenting Ministry”:

“She is not a journalist. Kathleen Turner, the principle author of “More Than a Parenting Ministry” and “A Matter of Bias?” is not a trained theologian, a professional researcher, an expert on cults, or a CRI staff person. To accurately state her credentials, she is an attachment parenting/La Leche League proponent and mom who carried into her two articles personal parenting bias that clashes with GFI’s Christian parenting worldview.

When Kathleen Turner states she “. . . is not and has never been an activist for the La Leche League or the attachment parenting philosophy of childrearing” (p. 38), technically she is half correct. But GFI never said that she was an activist for the La Leche League but rather “at least in part” an activist for their philosophy of parenting.<sup>2</sup> (For a comprehensive critique of the La Leche League and its parenting philosophy and outcomes, see investigative reporter Peggy Robbin’s book entitled Bottle Feeding Without Guilt [Prima Publishing, 1995].) GFI did not mischaracterize Mrs. Turner’s background or her La Leche League, attachment parenting connections. If anything, we undercharacterized her connections.

## **3. Focus Does Not Recommend the Materials (p. 34).**

Terner and Miller stated:

“In their critique of our article, GFI challenged our quotes from Focus’s statement, claiming that Focus’s desire is to maintain a ‘neutral stance’ with respect to GFI’s work. Contrary to GFI’s claim, we quoted Focus’s statement directly and accurately.” (Emphasis added)

Terner and Miller again side-stepped the real issue. GFI’s response did not question the accuracy of their quote but *CRJ*’s willingness to use an old letter from Focus rather than the one most currently available during the time of their research. This takes us right back to Hank Hanegraaff’s assurance that his “research” staff checked and double-checked their sources for accuracy. Apparently, that did not happen, and GFI’s charge continues to stand unchallenged.

*CRJ*’s willingness to suppress this information is consistent with GFI’s claim that they provide only partial information with the intent to mislead their readership.<sup>3</sup> Terner and Miller also did this when quoting from the Ezzos’ *Preparation for Parenting*. They used old sources when new and updated material was available to them.

#### **4. Due Diligence Not Displayed by the Ezzos’ Church (p. 34).**

Terner and Miller wrote:

“. . . the Ezzos promised a ‘thorough examination’ of the issues by their own elders at Living Hope Evangelical Fellowship . . . None of the elders, however, even contacted Johnson, the author of the Grace Statement, to discuss Grace’s concern.”

They went on to say:

“While Johnson was not on active status at the time, he was still a member of the board of elders, has been since 1985, participated in the meeting when Grace affirmed its statement, and is now active” (p. 34).

Why didn’t the elders of Living Hope contact Phil Johnson?

Someone gave Terner and Miller some wrong information regarding Phil Johnson’s involvement. Every January, Grace Church publishes a list of its elders who are affirmed by the congregation. Phil Johnson’s name was not on the list in 1997 or 1996. That is because he wasn’t an elder. The names that were on the official Grace Church Elder Board during that period received the Living Hope response to the Grace statement. Living Hope Elders had no reason to talk with a non-elder or an inactive elder about elder business.

Second, there was nothing to talk to Phil Johnson about. He stated his position in the Grace Statement and his subsequent follow-up statements. Everything the Living Hope Elders needed to make an evaluation on Mr. Johnson’s opinion was already presented. The fact is, the elders of Grace Community Church did change their statement on March 21, 1998, retracting most of everything Phil Johnson put forth in the previous November 1997 statement. It didn’t stop Phil from further

rumor mongering as verified by the CRJ articles.

Terner and Miller went on to make the point that Phil Johnson “spent hours in reconciliation meetings with Ezzo and Sande and said none of the substantive issues raised in the Grace Statement were resolved” (p. 41).

There is some truth in the quote but not the type that vindicates Phil. Actually there was only one meeting, not “meetings.” The meeting lasted eleven hours and two truths became evident. First, Phil could not offer any tangible evidence supporting any item contained in his statement while Gary provided substantial evidence refuting everything Phil wrote.

Second, Phil inability to keep his stories straight is nothing new. It was very easy to simply let him talk until he eventually perjured himself in front of Ken Sande. (Perjury is Mr. Sande's words not GFI's.) Attempting to impress Mr. Sande with the accuracy of his memory, Phil went into great detail about a meeting with Gary describing what was said and promised, where Gary sat, how he got up out of his chair, even how he said goodbye and promised to meet with Phil again. He gave times and dates and insisted this was the meeting that Gary said this and Gary said that.

Phil's embarrassment filled the room when he discovered that Gary and Anne Marie were thirty-three hundred miles away in Boston at the precise moment Phil claimed Gary was sitting in front of him. That is when Ken informed Phil that he just perjured himself and thus rendered all his accusations unbelievable. (While Phil didn't completely catch Ken's point [the part about inaccurate reporting destroying his credibility], it did reveal the level of honesty that surrounded the entire Grace Statement.) Apart from the highlight of that revelatory moment, the meeting did not resolve anything. We do not believe Phil ever went back to the Grace Elder Board to confess the perjury incident. Nonetheless, the Grace Statement was changed on March 21, 1998, but that fact, the reader will note, never made Mrs. Terner's article.

## **5. Division in New Hampshire (p. 34).**

In “More Than a Parenting Ministry,” Terner and Miller claimed that the Ezzos split their church back in New Hampshire. They wrote:

“When the Ezzos left New Hampshire to come to Grace in the early 1980's, the church (now called Lakes Region Bible Church) was divided due to controversy over Gary Ezzo, with the church accusing him of exhibiting authoritarianism and isolationist tendencies . . . it is clear that the church where Gary was pastor-teacher was concerned enough about his actions to ask him to step down . . .” (p. 34).

Gary never denied stepping down from his pastor/teacher role nearly twenty years ago. Whether he was asked to do so or whether he and two other elders resigned first rather than compromise their convictions will always be subject to interpretation and opinion. But clearly the issues had nothing to do with exhibiting authoritarian and isolationist tendencies. Terner and Miller's assertions were without merit. Gary stepping down was as much tied to his plans to head off to Talbot Theological Seminary as it was a protest vote. Out of a seven man overseer Board, three were opposed to letting the school become the principle ministry of the church and four were in favor. Gary's decision was pragmatic. While disagreeing with it, Gary felt if that is what the majority of overseers decide, there is no use fighting for something if you're not going to be around six months

to maintain it.

In their defense, Terner and Miller stated they based their reporting on “three witnesses” and that others have “since affirmed the accuracy of their comments.” We checked out the new names they used as credible sources and the new witnesses who since affirmed the accuracy of their reporting. Amazingly she quotes sources that were not associated with the church. The few witnesses that were cited in Terner’s first article left the church nine months after the Ezzos for the same reasons the Ezzos did— conflict with the school and integrity issues surrounding its principal.

The accusation that Gary Ezzo’s beliefs led to a church division is self-refuting. Applying some logic to Terner and Miller’s reporting will make the point. Let’s assume Terner and Miller reported the events correctly. We’ll assume that in November of 1982, Gary Ezzo was asked to step down from his pastor/teacher position (for whatever reason). We then must assume that the authoritarianism and isolationism problems were gone. Yet, nine months later while the Ezzos were living three thousand miles away, their old church under its new leadership split. If the “eye-witness” blamed Gary for their church problems in November 1982, who did they blame in 1983? Ironically, isolationism and authoritarianism were exactly what Gary and the other elders worked to deliver the church from.

## **6. The Formation of the Ezzo Church (p. 35).**

Terner and Miller wrote:

“GFI denied our statement that ‘Living Hope Evangelical Fellowship, where the Ezzos now attend, took form essentially as a splinter group from Grace because of controversy regarding Gary Ezzo . . .’ Yet, John MacArthur himself has affirmed to CRI that he considers this a splinter group from his congregation and that he so informed the people involved in writing at the time.”

Living Hope Evangelical Fellowship did not begin as a splinter group from Grace Church or because of any controversy regarding Gary Ezzo. If Terner and Miller felt compelled to report why some former Grace attenders withdrew their membership, or what inspired them to join the start up of a new evangelical work, they should have asked them instead of relying on the opinion of a person who was partly responsible for the scattering of his own congregation. Actually, Kathleen Terner did interview four members of Living Hope including its pastor. Not surprisingly, their comments never made it into the article.

Ironically, the credit for the start up of Living Hope had more to do with John MacArthur than it did with Gary Ezzo. The problems came to a head months after the Ezzos’ departure. That is when a growing distrust between the leadership of the Ezzos’ former Adult Fellowship class and some members of John’s staff emerged. On October 13, 1996, John personally went to the group with the hope of doing some damage control. While publicly admitting the Ezzos left Grace Church months earlier with concerns about the integrity of his leadership, some of John’s other statements did not prove as trustworthy or honest. Within days and weeks, more than a hundred families left the church over the incident. Some of these sought out Dave Maddox (John’s former Dean of Students at the Master’s College) and asked him to pray about starting a new work with an emphasis on family and evangelism.

A new church did start in January of 1997. Rather than taking some responsibility for the original exodus, John first blamed Dave Maddox and the people who left. John wrote letters and made public decrees calling Dave's actions, and those of his followers, "factious," and insisted the new church be shut down. He accused Dave of lying to him and his congregation about John's feelings. He even had his membership department send letters to anyone leaving Grace Church warning them not to go to Dave's church. Dave responded answering John point by point, defending his actions, and countering John's charges claiming he had been slandered and lied against. In the final analysis, both men were less than honest with each other and the Christian community at large.

A few months later, John turned his reproach on the Ezzos for supporting Dave's efforts. What could possibly be wrong with that? According to a former key elder at Grace Community, Gary's presence and support gave Dave and Living Hope "credibility" at a time when John did not want them to look credible. As a result, Gary gets branded "disloyal," the rumor mongering begins, and the public criticism went from a trickle to raging river. It was these events that eventually led to the November 1998 Grace Statement.

## **7. Why Several Original Leaders Left GFI (p. 25).**

According to Turner and Miller:

"Both of these couples (Abels and Williams) also clearly initiated their own departures both clearly due to concerns about integrity."

As noted in our first response, most ministries which have known rapid growth over the years (especially in the very beginning) have people who come and go. Obviously, in large public ministries, some departures are necessary. So was the case of the Abels and the Williams. Neither couple initiated their departure from GFI as Turner and Miller contend. For a more detailed explanation of circumstances leading to the Abels' and Williams' departure from GFI, please see endnote five.

## **8. Released from Membership: The Case of Pat and Debra Baker.**

Turner and Miller wrote:

"As an example of division associated with GFI, our original article stated that 'Debra and Pat Baker were involuntarily released from membership and even barred from unofficial church functions after voicing concerns about *PPF* at Covenant Fellowship of Philadelphia. GFI challenged this statement noting that the Bakers had not responded to a letter of concern sent to them from CFOP in a timely manner . . . The Bakers contradict GFI's implication. They (the Bakers) insist they attended church every Sunday during the months preceding their being 'released' from membership. Financial records from the church itself demonstrate that they had consistently given to the church during that period . . ." (p. 35).

A couple of comments can be made here. First, on May 26, 1993, CFOP pastors sought the Bakers in writing and asked them to clarify their "relationship to the church."<sup>6</sup> That letter was followed up with three more requests over a five month period appealing to the Bakers to respond to their pastors. Still no response. Yet, according to Turner and Miller, the Baker's "insist they attended church every Sunday during the months preceding their being 'released' from membership." It

seems odd that a couple would go to church weekly for five months, sit under their pastor's teaching, but ignore their pastor's repeated attempts to contact them no less than three times. We'll leave that quandary for the reader to figure out.

Second, Mrs. Turner's use of the Baker example engenders a number of fallacies, most notably the fallacy of irrelevant thesis. Turner and Miller's thesis, "GFI divides churches," is not supported by their evidence. It is a non-sequitur argument. The fact that the Bakers were dropped from their church membership roles (for whatever reason) does not support Turner and Miller's conclusion that GFI divides churches. CFOP was not divided. If anything, they were more unified with the Bakers' departure. The point GFI made, and one that continues to stand, is that the Bakers' claim of being "involuntarily released from church membership for voicing concerns over the PFP" material is at best an exaggeration, more likely a fabrication.

## **9. Regarding Matters of Theology (p. 36-38).**

Scripture Twisting

Instinct

Chastisement and Guilt

Living under the weight of sin

Pelagianism

Is God Obligated to Save Our Children?

Total Depravity

Sex Education and Children

As was the case in their original article, Turner and Miller's opinions regarding points of theology demonstrate ambiguity and confusion. Neither Kathleen Turner nor Hank Hanegraaff have any formal Bible or theological training. Elliot Miller has some. That is why we must assume this section was written by Kathleen Turner. Her assessment and rationale for her statements follow no line of coherent theological logic in light of what the Ezzos really teach. Much of what appears, like the Matthew 27:46 contention (p. 38), or her explanation of Pelagianism, or understanding of total depravity, or matters of sex education and children, demonstrate our concern. For treatment of these topics, please see our original response to "More Than a Parenting Ministry."

## **Conclusion**

The many concerns voiced by GFI and CRI supporters in response to "More Than a Parenting Ministry" have still not been answered by CRI or resolved. "A Matter of Bias?" was not a witness for CRI but for GFI.

Why would CRI take a chance with this type of journalism? In his essay, "When Christians Fight Christians" ([Christianity Today](#), October 6, 1997), Tim Stafford, speaking of conflicts initiated by para-church ministries, offers one suggestion.

"Does someone benefit from the controversy in terms of enhanced reputation, publicity, or greater

power? It is in his or her interest to keep the fires burning” (p. 34).

Stafford, referring to para-church ministries like CRI attacking other Christians, says there is an incentive to take risks.

“There can even be an incentive to quarrel. If you can make the case in your newsletter or on your radio show that you are fighting for principle (and who isn’t), then your “community of donors” may actually give more.” He goes on to say: “Fighting tends to shut down contributions in a local church, but it may increase giving to para-church organizations that successfully spin the dispute into a matter of honor or a point of identity . . . Churches have members; para-church ministries have donors” (CT pp. 30; 33).

Donor-dependent, para-church organizations, if they hope to maintain the status quo, are forced to calculate the risks of offending some donors by what they say and do against the gain of harvesting others. It seems to us, Tim Stafford put his hand right on the money.” Where would CRI be without donors?

#### ENDNOTES

1. July 28, 1998, edition of the *Bible Answer Man* Broadcast.
2. See GFI response p. 3.
3. In a letter from Kimberly Krohn, Correspondence Assistant to Dr. Dobson, dated April 29, 1998, the following statement appears: “Our decision should not be interpreted as a pronouncement of negative judgment upon the Ezzos; it is actually an expression of our desire to maintain a neutral stance with respect to their work.” Nowhere in that paper does Focus mention Matthew 27:46. (We do acknowledge that Turner and Miller cannot be held completely at fault for misrepresenting the facts in their original review regarding the Focus on the Family statement. Focus changed their position paper on GFI no less than four times in 1998.) Furthermore, while Mr. Hetrick may not endorse GFI curriculums, certainly many of his co-workers do. The Ezzos’ material, specially Preparation For Parenting and Growing Kids God’s Way continues to be very popular and widely used among Focus employees. Some employees are GFI class facilitators.
4. For more information on this, please see the following website “<http://home.pacbell.net/jacobarm/>”
5. *Regarding the Williams’*: The Williams’ left in 1993 only after the Ezzos decided not to carry their tape series and workbook due to concerns over legalism and some points of theology. After five months of dialogue over this issue, the Ezzos asked the Williams’ to decide if they wanted to move forward with GFI; and the Ezzos’ recommended changes needed in the Williams’ toddler material or move on by themselves. They chose the latter. The parties agreed to disagree and moved on with their lives.

*Regarding the Abels*: In a letter dated August 28, 1994, the Ezzos very graciously informed the Abels that “it would be best to bring our public ministry partnership to a close.” Accepting the Ezzos’ final decision, a few days later Eric submitted his resignation as director of Ministries. Eric’s September 1, 1994, resignation letter states in full: “The withdrawal does not stand as a denial of my support for the ministry — quite the contrary is true. Not only do I endorse the Ezzos’ personal ministry to young families, but I can wholeheartedly recommend the curriculum they promote. My resignation is primarily associated with unresolved differences regarding the structure and conduct of the businesses that support their work.” Eric’s resignation letter does not exactly match or support Mrs. Turner’s reporting. We believe it is a little disingenuous to hear Eric say years later, “Oh we really had serious concerns over the Ezzos’ personal integrity.” As far as the Ezzos are concerned, Eric’s Internet campaign of trashing the Ezzos since his departure only substantiated that their decision “to bring their public ministry partnership to a close, “was absolutely the right decision.

6. May 26, 1993, and September 21, 1993, letters from CFOP pastors to Pat and Debbie Baker.

