

**ARRANGED MARRIAGES, BROKEN FAMILIES AND CONCERNED
PARENTS: A “BOUNDED CHOICE” PERSPECTIVE ON COMMITMENT IN
GRACE GOSPEL CHURCH**

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

Grace Gospel Church (GGC) is a small congregation that has met in various venues in Pinetown, KwaZulu-Natal since 2003. It is a partner church of the Mauritian-based organisation, Church Team Ministries International (CTMI), led by Miki Hardy. Hardy is a pastor who claims to have received a unique revelation from God, and he is considered to be an apostle by his followers. Grace Gospel Church and Church Team Ministries International have gained international attention due to claims that they exert a controversial influence over their members. This influence appears to induce a radical commitment to the partner church and CTMI, leading to behavioural, career and study changes, arranged marriages and estrangement between members and their families. Grace Gospel Church has been accused of being a cult, and this exploratory research questions whether this accusation has justification by comparing the group's theology and practices against theological, psychological and sociological research on cults. Cult researcher Janja Lalich's theory of "bounded choice" is described and used to evaluate the commitment witnessed in GGC. Bounded choice exists when, as a result of psycho-social group dynamics, a personal fusion occurs between the individual and the ideology and mores of the group. Out of this fusion, a charismatically committed "true believer" emerges who may appear to have personal freedom, but whose palette of choices is severely curtailed by the beliefs and practices of the group. "Bounded" decision making results which might appear irrational or repugnant to those outside the group, but to true believers represent their highest aspirations. This research indicates that GGC shares many characteristic features of typical cults and also promotes the conditions necessary for bounded choice to occur. It is thus concluded that GGC could legitimately be termed a cult, and that bounded choice is a valid explanation for the controversial choices made by its members.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated firstly, with love to my wife Cathy, and sons, Kyle and Lex, who supported and assisted me in my research, despite the sacrifices it entailed.

And secondly, to the parents and families who have suffered much as a result of a loved one's commitment to GGC or CTMI. "Weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning." (Psalm 30:5)

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ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| CTMI | Church Team Ministries International |
| GGC | Grace Gospel Church |
| CTMI/GGC (or GGC/CTMI) | Where something is synonymous with, or can be attributed to, both groups |
| CPG | The Concerned Parents' Group |

Chapter One: “Finding meaning in abnormal things”

1.1 Introduction

In July 2008, the respectable middle-class suburb of Westville, KwaZulu-Natal, was shaken at the murder of Johannes and Magdalena Lotter by their children, Hardus and Nicolette. The question of what motivated Hardus to strangle his father with an electric cord; incapacitate his mother with a stun gun, assault her with his fists and sit on her for fifteen minutes to restrain her so that his sister, Nicolette, could stab her to death¹ kindled many debates and opinions. A pastor, Leon van Assenderp, testified that he had witnessed “signs of demonic possession in the Lotter siblings and co-defendant Matthew Naidoo shortly after the crimes.”²

The verdict ultimately pointed to the pathological but profound influence Matthew Naidoo, a self-professed “third son of God”, and also Nicolette’s former boyfriend, had over Hardus and Nicolette. Clinical psychologist, Professor Lourens Schlebusch argued that Naidoo had employed mind control to programme the siblings and he likened the case to the 1978 People’s Temple suicide, where 909 people died on the instructions of charismatic cult leader, Jim Jones. Although he did not assess Naidoo, Schlebusch said mind controllers were calculating and that the siblings lost control of their behaviour under Naidoo's influence:

“Everyone wants to know their purpose. Some people get caught up and find meaning in abnormal things,” [Schlebusch] said.³

In the same year of 2008, I was approached in my professional capacity as a pastoral therapist by a number of parents who were concerned about the behavioural changes they had witnessed in their children after the young people joined Grace Gospel Church

¹ Nivashni Nair, Lotters “victims of mind control”, *Sunday Times Live*, 09 March 2012, <http://www.timeslive.co.za/local/2012/03/09/lotters-victims-of-mind-control> (Accessed 10/03/2012)

² <http://www.ecr.co.za/kagiso/content/en/east-coast-radio/east-coast-radio-news?oid=1444895&sn=Detail&Lotters,-Naidoo-were-'possessed'>. (Accessed 10/03/2012)

³ Nair, Lotter ‘victims of mind control’, *Sunday Times Live*, <http://www.timeslive.co.za/local/2012/03/09/lotters-victims-of-mind-control> (Accessed 10/03/2012)

in Pinetown, KwaZulu-Natal. I interviewed these parents and several of their adolescent children. Both parents and young people reported that Grace Gospel Church (GGC), and its parent organisation Church Team Ministries International (CTMI) inspired a powerful, atypical and sometimes swift change in the worldview and behaviour of many of those exposed to the groups' teaching and/or devotees. It was the broad-spectrum change in young people's perception of Christianity, their biological families, historical friends, romantic partners and career plans that alarmed parents, who were at a loss to explain this change. Although the behavioural changes were less dramatic and destructive than those observed in the Lotter case, a common feature of both scenarios was the presence of charismatic religious leadership. Both incidents occurred within ten kilometres of one another in a society that was totally unprepared for such events and did not know how to understand them. While facile explanations of mind-control, cults and demonic possession abounded, but the fact was – and still is – that KwaZulu-Natal has no capacity to deal with this type of phenomenon. Academics and church leaders alike lack the insight and skill to deal with cults and those affected by cults. And some young people are likely to continue to find meaning in abnormal things.

Those who have researched cults contend that they multiply during times of social distress, and thousands may exist in any society, but as many tend to be small or exist for a very limited period of time, they attract minimal attention.⁴ When they are noticed, it is because of their seemingly strange beliefs, alternative worldviews and lifestyles, and purposeful commitment. The assurance of salvation and intense conviction of the typical cult attracts some but their counter-cultural and innovative ways repel others. There is a widespread concern that an unusual group, lead by a charismatic leader, will travel the same path as Jim Jones and the People's Temple. There is no doubt that some groups – religious or otherwise – harm people, and consequently there is a moral imperative to research groups that cause concern in society to assess the potential danger to those held in the thrall of their charismatic leaders. In the short time that it has existed (since 2003) Grace Gospel Church has left a negative impression on the society

⁴ For example, Lorne Dawson (ed.), 2003. *Cults and New Religious Movements: A Reader*. Malden, USA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

around it. It has been in the local and national media several times accused of arranging marriages, breaking up families, and engaging in shady business deals.

In spite of holding degrees in psychology and theology I realised that the distinctive beliefs of GGC, the commitment its members displayed to the group, and its relationship to the wider Church and society represented a phenomenon I was not well-equipped to deal with. I approached local academics and clerics for guidance and came swiftly to realise that the subject of cults is one that has fallen between the disciplines of psychology, theology and sociology in local universities, and is largely unmentioned in clerical training. Although all those approached had personal ideas on the subject, no one had formally studied cultic groups and no one knew who to refer me to. This inspired a desire to research GGC and cults more fully and formally.

Although a handful of theses on cults have been produced in other South African universities,⁵ nothing resembling the phenomenon represented by GGC has been previously researched through the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Stephan Pretorius, who has published two dissertations on cults has recently (2011) published a brief journal article on Grace Gospel Church.⁶ Apart from this, there has been no other research conducted on the group.

1.2 Methodology

In overview, the research offers an exploratory investigation of an alleged cult in KwaZulu-Natal and follows a qualitative research paradigm.

If the robust debates concerning the definition and use of the term “cult” are momentarily sidestepped (and returned to in Chapter 2), it is fairly obvious that researching cultic groups will present particular difficulties. Not unreasonably, a group

⁵Erasmus' (2004) M.Th. thesis dealing with the Houy Group, based near Volksrust, Mpumalanga; Pretorius' (1998) Ph.D. thesis on evangelising cult members; Pretorius' (1995) M.A. thesis which identifies 12 significant characteristics of cults; and Stoker's (1994) Ph.D. thesis which defines cults and their characteristics.

⁶Stephan Pretorius, 2010. “Family Alienation is Presented as a Requirement for Total Commitment in Some New Religious Groups”, *Journal for Christian Scholarship*. 46.

would not want to be labelled a cult – or even a “new religious movement” – as this politically and academically acceptable but awkward term is a known synonym for cult. Research integrity, though, demands that those being researched understand the nature of the research and its potential impact on them, and give informed consent for the research. This raises the question of how a researcher could obtain data from a group hypothesized to be a cult, while maintaining an appropriate level of integrity.

Barker notes that sociologists have long accepted that multiple methods (interviews, questionnaires, observation and literature reviews) of researching groups can, individually and together, provide a rich overall picture of the group. She further argues for varied methodological techniques and for all actors affecting the particular situation to be researched in their own right and also taken together.

While it may be useful, even necessary, to have specialist researchers concentrating on one set of persons (such as current members) and another set of researchers concentrating on another set (such as former members), if we want to understand the interaction between them and, therefore to further understand each phenomenon itself, we cannot just add the two isolated phenomena together. The ever-changing whole is in some ways more and in other ways less than the sum of its parts. Not only do we need to visit both sides of the fence to get an overall understanding of the whole scene, we need to understand the whole scene in order to understand its component parts.⁷

This notion of providing multiple perspectives on a group and considering the interaction between actors informed the basic methodology of the research into GGC. The basic research hypothesis was that GGC could be termed a cult and that the radical commitment of its members could be attributed to a psycho-social state termed “bounded choice”. To test the initial part of the hypothesis, a literature review of the various academic perspectives on cults was undertaken and compared to data on GGC to ascertain whether there appeared to be any correlation between the two. Material for this literature review was obtained from the libraries of the University of KwaZulu-

⁷ Eileen Barker, 2011. “Stepping out of the Ivory Tower: A Sociological Engagement in ‘The Cult Wars’.” *Methodological Innovations Online*. 6(1), p. 35.

Natal, St Joseph's Theological Institute, the International Cultic Studies, internet searches and from my own library. In particular, psychological, theological and sociological perspectives on cults – representing the dominant disciplines investigating this phenomenon – were reviewed.

Data on GGC was gathered from members of the group, former members, families of members and the media. This data was contained in documents of mass media such as the GGC website, (www.gracegospelchurchsa.org), newspaper articles about GGC, the Carte Blanche exposé on CTMI, member's blogs, JOY! Magazine articles, the Concerned Parents' Group website (<http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/>), published journal articles, and from my own correspondence with GGC and its former members.

With respect to the data provided by former members and affected families writing on the Concerned Parents' Group (CPG) web forum it is important to note that no contributor to the CPG forum was deprogrammed or subjected to exit counselling, which might have tainted their perceptions of either GGC or CTMI. The contributors furthermore used *nom de plumes* to protect themselves and family members still in GGC or CTMI from abuse and/or shunning. The testimonies used in this thesis come from contributors whose real identity is known to the researcher, and whose accounts are known to be trustworthy. As the forum and websites of CTMI and GGC are open to the public no permission was required to use material from them. The data drawn from these sources was compared to the material on cults in the literature review.

Thereafter, the concept of bounded choice was presented and evaluated. In 2004 sociologist and cult expert Janja Lalich produced a book entitled *Bounded Choice: True Believers and Charismatic Cults*.⁸ In *Bounded Choice*, Lalich argues that cultic groups share certain characteristics that can be represented in an interlocking framework consisting of charismatic authority, a transcendent belief system, a system of control, and a system of influence. Where these four dynamics are present in a group, they

⁸ Janja Lalich, 2004. *Bounded Choice: True Believers and Charismatic Cults*. Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press.

create a closed social system that accepts information that serves to reinforce the system while rejecting any disconfirming evidence. Within this closed system, Lalich postulates that individuals experience a reality she calls “bounded choice” whereby individual choice is severely limited and moulded by the ideology and social expectations of the group. Consequently, cult members may choose to demonstrate behaviour that appears irrational to those outside the closed system, but within the worldview of the cult, these same behaviours may represent the group’s highest aspirations.

Later in 2004, Lalich used the bounded choice framework to examine and analyse the Heaven’s Gate cult. This analysis was presented in the article “Using the Bounded Choice Model as an Analytical Tool: A Case Study of Heaven’s Gate” and published in the *Cultic Studies Review*.⁹ Based on textual analysis and interview data, Lalich illustrated that the conditions for bounded choice were met in Heaven’s Gate, and that this psycho-social state of the member, where personal freedom had become fused with the ideological aspirations of the group, could provide an explanation for the unusual and ultimately suicidal behaviour of its members.

Lalich’s use of the bounded choice framework as a methodology to study the Heaven’s Gate cult inspired the use of the same framework to investigate the radical degree of commitment displayed by members of GGC. This decision was based on the premise that the framework had been successfully employed previously and also because it avoids a unidisciplinary approach to cults. As is argued in Chapter 2, cults are complex phenomena that defy adequate analysis by any one academic discipline and thus a model such as Lalich’s which incorporates elements of ideology/theology, psychology, social psychology and sociology was considered normative.

It was initially intended to combine textual analysis and interviews with members of GGC to evaluate whether bounded choice could explain the radical changes in

⁹ Janja Lalich, “Using the Bounded Choice Model as an Analytical Tool: A Case Study of Heaven’s Gate.” *Cultic Studies Review*, Vol. 3, No. 3, 2004.

behaviour of some individuals who joined GGC, but to obtain informed consent for the interviews, individuals would need to be informed that GGC was being considered a cult. This would, even in the most optimal conditions, have created suspicions and a reluctance to respond to the research. But, in any case, permission to interview members of GGC was not granted by its leadership and this effectively limited the data available for research. The particular conditions surrounding this are discussed below in the section entitled “Reflexivity”. As a result, in Chapter Six, documentary data and data drawn from a questionnaire were used as the basis for analysis to determine all four dimensions of the bounded choice framework were present in GGC. If the four dimensions (charismatic leadership, transcendent ideology, systems of control and systems of influence) were proved to be present, it would support any correlation observed in the literature review and it would further indicate that bounded choice might provide an explanation for some of the unusual behaviours of members.

To supplement the limited data on GGC, a survey of former members’ experiences using a confidential, self-administering questionnaire was also undertaken.¹⁰ The questionnaire was constructed by the researcher from characteristics of the psychosocial state of boundedness, found in the Appendix to Lalich’s *Bounded Choice*.¹¹ These characteristics were formulated into 80 closed questions requiring respondents to indicate whether or not each characteristic was present in GGC during their association with the group. On the basis of this categorical approach, it was assumed that the questionnaire would yield similar results if used repeatedly with the same respondents. As the questions were drawn from an acknowledged authority on cultic groups, it was further believed that they would provide a valid measure of cultic tendencies within groups, and thus have construct validity. The theory and terminology underlying the questions was not explained to respondents, and it was further assumed that respondents were not familiar with Lalich’s theory of bounded choice and thus would not be able to manipulate the questionnaire. The questionnaire was not normed on any population prior to administration.

¹⁰ Instrument is found in Appendix “B”.

¹¹ Lalich, *Bounded Choice*, pp. 265-266.

Non probability snowball sampling was employed for the survey. A former pastor of GGC, Howard Silk, agreed to contact all former members of GGC known to him. Silk joined Church Team Ministries International (CTMI) in 1992 and was allied with CTMI and GGC until 2009. In 2009, after becoming disillusioned with GGC, Silk became associated with the Concerned Parents' Group (CPG).

Survey respondents needed to be former members of GGC – thus members between 2003 when the group started until the recent past. At the date of answering the questionnaire they needed to be over the age of 18, to avoid ethical issues in having child respondents.

I provided Silk with a protocol for introducing the research to potential respondents. He needed to explain that they would be required to reflect on the “congregational dynamics” of GGC. No mention was made of Lalich or her theory of bounded choice, in order to prevent any leading of responses. Silk would continued by asking whether the potential respondent would be prepared to answer a questionnaire and, if so, through which media (email or fax) they would like to receive the questionnaire. Silk then supplied me with the names and addresses of those who wished to be part of the research. This determined the sample size of 40 respondents. Silk was instructed not to pressurise individuals into being respondents and it was anticipated that his involvement would increase the credibility of the research thus improving response rates.

Each respondent was contacted through their medium of choice and sent a questionnaire with a letter of introduction and explanation. Respondents were assured that no responses or findings that could be traced back to particular individuals would be published to ensure confidentiality. In the event of respondents experiencing trauma during completion of the questionnaire, as a result of repressed or unpleasant memories, free and immediate trauma counselling was offered. Each respondent was given a time limit of three weeks to return the questionnaire and after two weeks a general reminder was sent to all participants.

The questionnaire aimed to answer whether bounded choice was present in GGC. The degree to which respondents reported such dynamics would be seen as the degree to which they were present in GGC, and thus the potential for bounded choice to be operational in this group.

It must be noted that although Howard Silk was potentially a valuable source of data on GGC, I rejected the idea of interviewing him directly, as I attempted to provide a balanced account of GGC – that is, equally weighted opinions for and opinions against the group. If I interviewed Silk who became an opponent of GGC, I would have felt obliged to interview someone from within GGC which was impossible due to the lack of consent given to conduct such interviews.

As documents provide much of the data for this research it is necessary to consider the quality of documents used. Bryman points out that documents used in research need to fulfil certain requirements: they should be able to be read; they should not have been produced specifically for research purposes; they need to have been preserved and thus available for analysis and they need to be relevant to the concerns of the social researcher.¹² Since the documents used in this research were not produced for research purposes they can be considered non-reactive which improves the validity of the data. Similarly, the websites of GGC, CTMI, and the CPG are obviously official organs of their respective groups, containing what can be considered official documentation, and as they contain descriptions of the various organisations, testimonies and statements of belief, they provide relevant information for research.

Citing Scott (1990), Bryman suggests four criteria that determine the quality of the documents used in research: authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaning.¹³ For the document to be authentic it needs to be genuine and of unquestionable origin. The websites used for this research are official websites of the respective organisations and thus of unquestionable origin. The credibility of the data rests on the data from these websites being free from error and distortion. Obviously, GGC, CTMI and the

¹² Alan Bryman, 2001, *Social Research Methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p. 370.

¹³ Bryman, *Research Methods*, p. 371.

CPG may present information in a way that serves to enhance their agendas, but since these websites are their official and public self-disclosure, it is assumed that the information they contain is free from gross error and disinformation. The material gleaned from these resources is representative of the respective organisations as it is drawn from statements of belief, testimonies and organisational teaching. In terms of meaning, the material is clear and comprehensible.

As declared above, the research conducted on GGC followed a qualitative paradigm. According to Creswell, qualitative research is characterised by several features.¹⁴

Firstly, the researcher is the key instrument.

Qualitative researchers collect data themselves through examining documents, observing behaviour, or interviewing participants. They may use a protocol – an instrument for collecting data – but the researchers are the ones who actually gather the information. They do not tend to use or rely on questionnaires or instruments developed by other researchers.¹⁵

In this particular study, documents of mass distribution, that is, websites and media publications formed a large part of the data collected on GGC. As noted above, a questionnaire, based on Lalich's concept of bounded choice, was also devised by the researcher and used to gather information.

Secondly, according to Creswell, qualitative research typically gathers information from multiple sources of data which is then reviewed, organised and made sense of.¹⁶ In this research, data was gathered from websites of GGC, CTMI, the CPG, the media (newspapers and television programmes) and a questionnaire. This data was then organised and reviewed in light of theological, psychological and sociological theories on cults, and against Lalich's bounded choice model.

¹⁴ J.W. Creswell, 2009. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. (Third Edition). Los Angeles: Sage. p. 175.

¹⁵ Creswell, *Research Design*, p. 175.

¹⁶ Creswell, *Research Design*, p. 175.

Creswell notes that there is a focus on “the meaning that the participants hold about the problem or issue”¹⁷ rather than on the meaning that the researchers bring to the research. In the research, an attempt was made to let the voices of those committed to and against GGC be heard – as well as the meanings they ascribed to their experiences of GGC.

Qualitative research, furthermore, is interpretative whereby researchers offer “an interpretation of what they see, hear and understand. Their interpretations cannot be separated from their own backgrounds, history, contexts, and prior understandings.”¹⁸ This concept is explored more fully in the next section of the thesis under the heading “Reflexivity”.

A final characteristic of qualitative research noted by Creswell is that qualitative researchers “try to develop a complex picture of the problem or issue under study. This involves reporting multiple perspectives, identifying the many factors involved in a situation, and generally sketching the larger picture that emerges.”¹⁹ The perspectives of members, ex-members and those affected by GGC were gathered to provide as rich a possible description of the group.

For Schram it is also important for qualitative data to be embedded in a natural context.²⁰ Large amounts of data in this study were drawn from the websites of GGC and its parent organisation CTMI which provide data on the groups, in a natural context.

In the final analysis, though, Schram argues that as the integrity of qualitative research rests upon persuasive principles and guiding assumptions rather than categorical rules and distinctions, “there is no single, agreed-upon way to be a qualitative researcher.”²¹

¹⁷ Creswell, *Research Design*, p. 175.

¹⁸ Creswell, *Research Design*, p. 176.

¹⁹ Creswell, *Research Design*, p. 176.

²⁰ Thomas H. Schram, 2006. *Conceptualising and Proposing Qualitative Research*. (Second Edition.) New Jersey: Pearson Education Inc. p. 10.

²¹ Schram, *Qualitative Research*, p.15.

1.3 Reflexivity

According to Schram a cornerstone of qualitative research in particular is the concept of reflexivity which is an “acquired sensitivity, a simultaneous awareness of self and other and of the interplay between the two.”²² Over and beyond the ethical and methodological issues qualitative research of a cult might inspire, existed an entangled and hostile relationship between the researcher and group that predated the research. Consequently, discussion follows which deals with reflexivity of self, the research subjects and the interplay of self and research subjects; and then continues with a dedicated discussion on ethics, power and subjectivity.

1.3.1 Reflexivity: The researcher

The researcher is the medium through which any social reality is described:

Although social reality exists independently of the volition of any particular individual, it can exist only insofar as individual minds are continually recognising it and acting as the media through which are processed the cultural ideas and meanings, and the roles and expectations that arise from and result in its existence.²³

While a researcher brings meaning to the subject under scrutiny, this meaning is grounded in subjective perceptions which are uniquely formed by the researcher’s personality, character, life experiences, values, orientations, social position and so forth. Meaning is thus always subjective due to differences in perception, but this does not invalidate these perceptions and meaning-making.

Researchers create secondary constructs of reality by consciously or unconsciously selecting research data that are indubitably influenced by their own interests. Reflexivity requires the researcher to make his/her perspectives and assumptions explicit to clarify issues of “voice” and bias.²⁴ To this end, I declare that I am a white, male South African of European ethnicity and middle class socioeconomic status. My intellectual orientation – that is, “the basic premises that influence the stance from which and the

²² Schram, *Qualitative Research*, p. 9.

²³ Eileen Barker in Lorne Dawson (ed.) 2003. *Cults and New Religious Movements: A Reader*. Malden, USA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd. p. 8.

²⁴ Creswell, *Research Design*, p. 192.

lens through which [the researcher] views the world and [the] particular research project”²⁵ - has been formed by academic qualifications in psychology and theology; by working as a counselling therapist in private practice, and also as an ordained cleric in two mainline Christian denominations in South Africa – the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa and the Anglican Church of Southern Africa. This training and experience has led to a stance that is curious and evaluative of religious belief and practice, and views such beliefs and practice through the lenses of the disciplines of psychology and theology.

Further perspectives on CTMI and GGC were obtained by my engagement with them prior to commencing formal research. Being a founding member of the Concerned Parent Group provided much rich experience of those affected by CTMI and GGC and shaped my perception of the two groups.

1.3.2 Reflexivity: The research subjects

In the Introduction I outlined my first encounters with Grace Gospel Church (GGC). I initially viewed GGC as a heterodox religious group that exerted considerable influence over its members. This influence appeared to lead to behavioural changes that were distressing to the families, friends and associates of members, but not to members of GGC, who expressed euphoria about the group. Church leaders in the community similarly expressed concerns about GGC.²⁶ My informal research indicated that there were significant parallels between the beliefs and practices of GGC and cultic groups, and I thus began to perceive them to be a potential threat to the community in which they were located.

By late 2009, my continued informal research, experience of GGC and encounters with former members of GGC and CTMI had strengthened my perception that GGC could be considered a cultic group. As mentioned above, there has been no academic research conducted on cults or new religious movements in KwaZulu-Natal to date, and

²⁵ Schram, *Qualitative Research*, p. 40.

²⁶ “CPG anniversary! What has happened and where to from here?” Posted by CPG Testimonies, (27/03/2010). <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpbb-3.0.5/phpbb3/viewtopic.php?f=10&t=235&p=1236&hilit=fraternal#p1236>. (Accessed 02/08/2013)

consequently no resource people. I thus began to see GGC as representing an opportunity to initiate research into new religious movements or cults in KwaZulu-Natal.

Schram argues that the beliefs a researcher has about the research subjects are “basic in the sense that they can never be established in terms of their ultimate truthfulness. Rather they must be accepted simply on faith and the persuasiveness and utility of their arguments.”²⁷ Essentially, it is accepted that the researcher’s perspective is one of multiple constructs of reality, and not a claim of a universal or objective truth, and this is how Grace Gospel Church has been presented in this dissertation – as a particular construct viewed through the unique lenses of the researcher.

1.3.3 Reflexivity: the relationship between researcher and research subjects

Some aspects of my relationship with GGC have been described above. In summary, I had never heard of Grace Gospel Church (GGC) or Church Team Ministries International (CTMI) before December 2008, and came to know of the group initially through my counselling practice. My knowledge of the group developed through meeting members, family of members, ex-members and by consulting GGC and CTMI’s websites. Perceiving GGC to potentially be a cult, and thus a possible threat to the community, and on the authority of being a registered pastoral therapist, I composed three open letters²⁸ during the course of 2009 designed to be circulated in the community in which GGC was located. These letters indicated my observations that GGC exhibited cult-like features, described particular features of their belief and practice and gave an overview of the psychological manipulation that can occur in cultic groups. I also initiated a support group for people who were distressed by GGC, which met for the first time in March 2009. This support group became known as the Concerned Parents’ Group (CPG). My perception of GGC at this time was undoubtedly critical and negative.

²⁷ Schram, *Qualitative Research*, p. 40.

²⁸ In Appendix “A”. Letter 1 dated 29 January 2009; Letter 2 dated 3 April 2009 and Letter 3 dated 1 July 2009.

On the 28th August 2009, Miki Hardy, the leader of CTMI, phoned me requesting that I meet with him and some of his elders in Durban. When I insisted that members of the CPG be present and the meeting be taped, Hardy cancelled the meeting. This further impaired the relationship between GGC and me.

On 1 January 2010, Hayley Page, who was a member of GGC and CTMI, and who had consulted professionally with me in December 2008, published a series of defamatory statements about me on her blog and in a series of emails. These statements were potentially damaging to my professional reputation and thus it was necessary to take action against her. I requested that Page withdraw these statements, but she refused and I consequently instituted legal proceedings against her for libel. She was indicted against making any libellous statement against me by the KwaZulu-Natal High Court later in 2010²⁹ and ordered to pay the legal costs of the case. It needs to be clearly seen that the case concerned Page's libellous articulations and had nothing to do with her beliefs or association with GGC.

On 7 November 2011, I wrote to the pastor of GGC, Basil O'Connell-Jones, requesting permission to interview members of GGC. It is perhaps not surprising given the history of the relationship that he refused to respond to the request. This refusal determined the amount and type of data that was available for research.

The relationship between GGC and researcher can thus be described as entangled and hostile which obviously raises concerns about the objectivity and ethics of the research. My engagement with the group also raises issues of power. These concerns are now addressed.

1.4 Ethics

The National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioural Research was created in 1974 and charged with codifying protections that are required to protect human research subjects. The Commission formulated three

²⁹ Case No 6234/2010.

ethical principles which are summarised in the Belmont Report. These principles are respect for persons, beneficence and justice.³⁰ The Report defines each as follows: respect for persons requires that each person be regarded as an independent person, capable of looking after their own welfare; beneficence requires the researcher to do no harm to the subjects and to strive for maximum benefit for the subjects, and justice is described as a striving for equitable distribution of benefits and burdens of research.

The Commission identified three types of activities to ensure the protection of human subjects: informed consent, risk and benefits assessment and equitable selection of subjects. Informed consent is linked to respect for the individual and involves offering each subject insight into the research, its potential risks and benefits and that each subject sign a formal consent document. Risk assessment ensures the concept of beneficence, and the selection of subjects is designed to satisfy the principle of justice.³¹

From the outset, it is important to note that research into Grace Gospel Church (GGC) was given an ethics clearance by the University of KwaZulu-Natal in May 2012. As there was no permission given from GGC to interview members of the group, the only subjects involved in the research were former members of GGC. These subjects were asked to complete a questionnaire which required informed consent and compensated for the possibility of distress by offering counselling. Snowball sampling provided a sample that was equitably selected.

However, it is the relationship between the researcher and GGC before research commenced that might warrant further ethical discussion. Although this stands outside of the formal research period *per se* it had a substantial effect on the quantity and quality of data available. Schram poses four questions³² that address the question of ethics in research – and these will be applied to the relationship between GGC and myself prior to formal research beginning. The questions are:

³⁰ L.E. Dorsten & L. Hotchkiss, 2005. *Research Methods and Society: Foundations of Social Inquiry*. New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc. p. 32.

³¹ Dorsten & Hotchkiss, *Research Methods*, p. 33.

³² Schram, *Qualitative Research*, p. 50.

1. Is this a good or right thing to be doing?
2. How should I be towards the study participants?
3. Would I want others to be this way towards me?
4. Do I regard my interaction with the participants as a means to an end?

Conducting informal research (that is, outside of an academic institution) into GGC and then using my status as a pastoral therapist to publicise a warning against GGC may be justified as follows. In the first instance, GGC had raised concerns among parents, schools and churches in its community prior to my knowledge of them. Using my academic training in theology and psychology, I was in a position to evaluate these concerns, and the doctrines and practices of GGC, and provide an informed opinion. In light of the fact that there was no individual or group better placed or prepared to offer a public opinion on GGC, I composed open letters designed to be distributed in the community. At the heart of this decision was a concern that if a potential cult was left to develop, it might become a People's Temple or similar death cult.

A problematic element of this is that I did not meet with the leadership of GGC or give warning of my intention to publish a critical account of them. This can be regarded as lacking integrity, and I indeed regard it as a mistake. However, this decision was based on the reputation O'Connell-Jones had of belligerently and abusively dealing with concerned people and those critical of GGC or CTMI.³³ I therefore regard the open letters as good and right for the community but acknowledge that they may have been lacking in beneficence and damaging to the reputation of GGC.

With respect to the second principle, that research should aspire to be respectful of the study participants, I submit that after evaluating the beliefs and practices of GGC I found substantial deviations from mainstream Christian theology and practice. These deviations appeared to damage the unity of families and the Church (as GGC promotes an exclusive theology, claims to be superior to other churches, and thus proselytises

³³ See Letter to CTMI Deacon over Watershed Meeting, <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=5&t=215> (Accessed 05/10/12)

Christian groups), and the future prospects of young people (educational and career opportunities were abandoned in favour of work for GGC and CTMI, and arranged marriages were alleged). It was thus difficult to respect these beliefs and practices. I respected the confidentiality of members of GGC and CTMI that shared their stories with me, in that I generalised information about GGC and the behaviour of its members, mentioning no names or identifying details in my open letters.

In reflecting about whether I would like to be treated in this way, I imagine that I might initially feel defensive about being the object of scrutiny and research, but as long as the researcher was respectful, explained how data would be used, and provided a balanced conclusion that outlined both positive and negative attributes, I would be satisfied. I would object to being publically criticised through a series of letters, but I doubt that I would refuse a meeting with my critics.

In conclusion, my critical engagement with GGC and CTMI preceding the research created a hostile relationship that denied me the opportunity to conduct in-depth interviews with members of GGC or CTMI as it is probable that they perceived me to be a hostile and prejudiced researcher.

1.5 Power

As a result of the interviews, meetings and informal research conducted during 2009, I came to the conclusion that GGC and CTMI exercised a powerful influence over their members' minds which caused many of them to abruptly abandon historical personal values and relationships in favour of the values and relationships provided by GGC and CTMI. Such members of GGC and CTMI appeared to have lost their personal agency, and their concerned relatives and friends had no recourse to challenge this influence, as the leaders of GGC and CTMI were unconcerned or defensive. I responded to the disempowered position of those concerned about GGC and CTMI by using the authority of my formal qualifications, experience and status as a pastoral therapist and member of the Christian clergy, to give voice to their concerns. I anticipated that this would prevent their concerns being ignored or minimised, and at the same time, would raise awareness that GGC was a possible cultic group, in a society that was largely ignorant

about such groups. In essence, I used the personal power at my disposal to challenge the power that GGC and CTMI exercised over the lives of members and their families.

1.6 Subjectivity and the quest for objectivity

As my relationship with Grace Gospel Church prior to initiating formal research was critical, it is possible to argue that this might influence the objectivity of the research. Three responses can be offered to this proposition:

Firstly, all research is to a greater or lesser extent subjective. As German sociologist Max Weber pointed out, all research is to some degree tainted by the values of the researcher.³⁴ Schram elaborates on this theme by contending that qualitative inquiry is guided by two assumptions.³⁵ The first is that the researcher gains an understanding of the social world through direct personal experience in natural circumstances which involves a subjective perceiving and describing of data.³⁶ The second assumption is that the nature of the engagement with others filters and affects what counts as meaningful knowledge for the inquiry. As it is impossible to replicate the complexity of any research object, the researcher is forced represent this phenomenon selectively according to a judgment of what is most meaningful. In doing this, the researcher interprets and shapes data. Schram argues that qualitative inquiry

is not a search for knowledge for knowledge's sake...but a search for the significance of knowledge...in this sense, interpretation really has nothing to do with proving things right or wrong, predicting or controlling. Interpretation demonstrates its worth through how effectively it explains things and whether it impacts or inspires the practice of others.³⁷

In terms of the particular research into Grace Gospel Church, and in light of limited availability of data, information on the group was sourced from the websites of each GGC and CTMI - specifically the statements of faith and testimonies of members on

³⁴ D. Silverman, 2001. *Interpreting Qualitative Data: Methods for Analysing Talk, Text and Interaction*. (2nd Edition). London: Sage Publications. p. 270.

³⁵ Schram, *Qualitative Research*, pp. 8 -14.

³⁶ Schram, *Qualitative Research*, p. 11.

³⁷ Schram, *Qualitative Research*, p. 12.

these websites. The data obtained in this way reflects the organisation in natural circumstances – if not in an enhanced and promotional way.

Other data was drawn from the Concerned Parents' Group (CPG) website forum which contains testimonies of former members and those affected negatively by GGC and CTMI. Obviously, there may be a tendency to portray GGC and CTMI critically in this data but it is proposed that a dialectic is created between data sources that may cancel out their respective biases. Furthermore, Lalich contends that former members can provide a valid source of data, and that to avoid former-member informants on the assumption that they are “angry and unreliable apostates” is a “harmful” notion that results in limited, shallow and sanitised perceptions of groups.³⁸

It must also be noted that the data largely reflects others' perceptions of GGC and CTMI, rather than my own, although I was obviously responsible for selecting material. In this way, an attempt was made to promote objectivity in the research.

As described above, further data was obtained through a questionnaire based on cult expert Janja Lalich's book *Bounded Choice: True Believers and Charismatic Cults*.³⁹ It was anticipated that this questionnaire would provide a technical and objective measure of cultic dynamics within GGC, as a questionnaire mitigates the possibility of interviewer bias.

A possible methodological concern is that respondents to this questionnaire might have encountered my open letters to the community, and that this exposure would have contaminated the data. While it is possible that respondents had read these letters, they do not contain any reference to Lalich's text or the notion of bounded choice which precludes them being a confounding influence.

³⁸ Lalich, *Bounded Choice*, p. 4.

³⁹ Lalich, 2004. *Bounded Choice: True Believers and Charismatic Cults*. Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press.

Secondly, the academic rigours inherent in producing a thesis require careful research, argumentation and presentation of data, which minimises the potential for simply producing a subjectively polemical tract against GGC and CTMI. During the course of research I was open to disconfirming evidence of my pre-research experiences and knowledge. As Schram contends, there needs to be potential for the perspectives and understandings of both researcher and participants to be changed during the course of the inquiry.⁴⁰ Although there was an openness to change my perceptions, I found that research tended to confirm my initial conceptions of the group.

There is no avoiding the fact that the researcher had an enmeshed and hostile relationship with GGC and CTMI, and this will always raise concerns about subjectivity. Eileen Barker, a sociologist known for her research into new religious movements and cults, argues that it is difficult and methodologically inappropriate for researchers to adopt a clinically detached position with respect to new religious movements. She argues that only by becoming part of the data can certain information be gathered and while it can be argued that this will contaminate reporting there is often no better way of investigating. Barker also notes that this type of research also gives the researcher the opportunity to be politically active - to make a difference in fighting bigotry, injustice and unnecessary misery.⁴¹

It was not possible for me to start formal research into GGC with a *tabula rasa*, and the interactions that occurred between GGC and me prior to, and during, the research process lend texture to the data gathered. By initially taking a stance against GGC and CTMI, and by drawing attention to them through open letters and this thesis, I acknowledge a political dimension to the relationship whereby I used my status as a Pastoral Therapist and researcher to oppose what I saw as an organisation that sowed division and discord in society, and could develop into a life-threatening cult.

⁴⁰ Schram, *Qualitative Research*, p. 9.

⁴¹ Barker, *Cults and New Religious Movement*, p. 8.

While future researchers of GGC and CTMI should avoid the mistakes that have precluded more intimate research, it was only through engagement with these two groups that motivated the desire to research GGC more fully.

1.7 Overview of the dissertation

A review of the academic literature on cults is provided in Chapter Two. Although this research is conducted under the discipline of theology, psychological and sociological perspectives on cults are also included.

In Chapter Three, Lalich and her theory of bounded choice are discussed. It is argued that her multidisciplinary and four-dimensional approach to cultic groups provides a proven, elegant and practical framework to assess the dynamics of groups; and thus a useful tool with which to analyse GGC.

Grace Gospel Church's history, distinctive theology, practices, and relationship with society provide the material of Chapter Four.

In Chapter Five, GGC is evaluated against the literature on cults outlined in Chapter Two to assess whether there is any justification in regarding it as a cultic group.

In Chapter Six, the documentary data collected on GGC is evaluated against Lalich's theory of bounded choice in order to ascertain whether the psycho-social state of bounded choice might be present in the group. This data is then complemented by examining the results of the questionnaire.

The conclusions drawn from this research, as well as suggestion for future research are discussed in Chapter Seven.

Chapter Two: Cult definitions and dynamics

2.1 Introduction

The term “cult” has been used both professionally and pejoratively to describe a wide range of groups. It is thus important to begin by examining the historical usage of the term and then to explore how the academic disciplines of psychology, theology and sociology define cults and contribute to an understanding of them. Due to the complex nature of the phenomenon it will be argued that a multi-disciplinary approach is called for.

2.2 The use of the term “cult”

The word “cult” is derived from the Latin “*cultus*”, a form of the verb “*colere*” which means to worship or reverence a deity.⁴² According to Gomes, *cultus* is used in the (Latin) Vulgate translation of the Bible in the general sense of worshipping: in Acts 17:13 it is used to describe the worship of false gods, while also being used to describe the worship of the true God in Acts 17:25.⁴³ Cult could thus be legitimately used as a word that describes any worshipping group of people.

Theologians have used the term cult variously: to describe ritual practices associated with religious centres, to describe liturgical ritual, and to locate the origins of Christianity in a prophetic protest against the deadening rituals associated with the Temple cult in Jerusalem.⁴⁴

According to Hexham and Poewe, academic discussion concerning the nomenclature of religious organizations is heavily influenced by the early 20th century work of Max Weber and Ernst Troeltsch.⁴⁵ They categorised different religious organisations through comparison to an ideal type which, they argued, expressed the essence of an organization in its purest form. Troeltsch used the term cult as something of a residual

⁴² A.W. Gomes, 1995. *Unmasking the Cults*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan. p. 7.

⁴³ Gomes, *Unmasking the Cults*, p. 7.

⁴⁴ Irving Hexham and Karla Poewe, 2003. “The Erosion of the Social Link in the Economically Advanced Countries”, *The INTERNATIONAL SCOPE® Review*, 5. p. 129.

⁴⁵ Hexham and Poewe, “The Erosion of the Social Link”, p. 129.

category in this theoretical scheme, and the term has subsequently been developed by a number of theorists.

The media has tended to use the term in a popular and indiscriminate manner, such that cult now evokes thoughts of “zombie-like Moonies with glazed eyes who sell flowers in a supermarket parking lot, or chanting Krishna devotees in saffron robes, or violent megalomaniacs, such as Jim Jones and David Koresh, who lead an army of brainwashed automatons to their tragic deaths.”⁴⁶

Shupe and Bromley (1980) contend that such negative characterisation reveals the work of the so-called Anti-Cult Movement (ACM).⁴⁷ This movement, also known as the counter-cult movement, is a loose term used to describe groups and individuals who oppose, or are critical of cults. The ACM had its origins in the United States in the late 1960’s in response to the spread of the new and unusual groups of that time. It was comprised of parents of cult members, some lawyers, psychologists and social workers, ex-cult members and religious leaders. The precise organisation and influence of ACMs today varies significantly from country to country according to the social and political factors, and there is little co-ordinated activism between ACM groups. A useful distinction can be made between secular and Christian evangelical ACMs, ACMs formed to counter a specific cult, and ACMs that offer exit counselling from cults.

Some sectors of the ACM and psychologists use the term cult more discriminately to refer only to malevolent groups – groups that are believed to be extremely manipulative and exploitive.⁴⁸

For many, the phonic similarity of “cult” and “occult” further lends an unsettling tone to the term cult. It must, of course, be noted that “occult” refers to a wholly different

⁴⁶ Gomes, *Unmasking the Cults*, p. 15.

⁴⁷ Anson D. Shupe and David G. Bromley, 1980. *The New Vigilantes: Deprogrammers, Anticultists and The New Religions* in Stuart A. Wright, 1991. “Reconceptualizing Cult Coercion and Withdrawal: A Comparative Analysis of Divorce and Apostasy”, *Social Forces*, 70, p. 127.

⁴⁸ Stephan Pretorius, 2010. “Family Alienation is Presented as a Requirement for Total Commitment in Some New Religious Groups”, *Journal for Christian Scholarship* 46, p.3.

reality.⁴⁹ The term has even been regarded as a “social weapon” to undermine groups not viewed with favour by a society’s religious or political hegemony.⁵⁰ But the bottom line, as Dillon and Richardson (1991) remark, is that cult usually connotes “some group that is at least unfamiliar and perhaps even disliked or feared.”⁵¹ Such is the negative connotation of the word that Lalich deems it “the ‘c’ word.”⁵²

Indeed, the polemical and promiscuous usage of the term has overshadowed academic attempts to employ cult as a neutral term or to rehabilitate the term. Consequently, some academics have concluded that the “term cult is useless, and should be avoided because of the confusion between the historic meaning of the term and current pejorative use.”⁵³

But Richardson acknowledges that other researchers continue to use the term cult “so that people who read their writings will know they are talking about phenomena popularly referred to as cults.”⁵⁴

Sociologists, in attempting to provide a less objectionable term, coined the term “new religious movement” (NRM) which is probably the most academically accepted term used to describe non-mainstream religious groups known as cults. Stephan Pretorius, a UNISA academic and cult researcher, notes that this term originated in a period of religious innovation in Japan after the Second World War. Such groups were called *shinshukyo* (literally “new religions”) by Japanese sociologists.

However, this definition invites its own problems, as sociologist Eileen Barker points out: “Some new religious movements are no longer so new, some never were movements, and the religious status of some is a matter of dispute.”⁵⁵

⁴⁹ “Occult” is defined as “Kept secret, esoteric; recondite, mysterious, beyond the range of ordinary knowledge; involving the supernatural, mystical, magical...” *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, 1952. Oxford University Press: London.

⁵⁰ James T. Richardson, 1993. “Definitions of Cult: From Sociological-Technical to Popular-Negative”, *Reno Review of Religious Research*, 34. p.355.

⁵¹ Richardson, “Definitions of Cult”, p. 348.

⁵² Janja Lalich, 2004. *Bounded Choice: True Believers And Charismatic Cults*. Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press. p. xviii.

⁵³ Richardson, “Definitions of Cult”, p.348.

⁵⁴ Richardson, “Definitions of Cult”, p. 352.

Pretorius, in his article on spiritually abusive new Christian religious movements in South Africa, uses the term “demanding new Christian religious movements”⁵⁶ which may be a useful appellation for a particular type of cultic group.

Two other terms which are often connected, somewhat inaccurately, with cult are “sect” and “heresy”. Sect, derived from the Latin “*secta*” which means a faction, or school of thought, or political party,⁵⁷ is often used as a synonym for cult, or to denote a similar type of group. However, sociologists of religion, drawing from the pioneering work of Troeltsch, define sects as formally organised groups that form in protest against, and in competition with, the prevailing religion of a culture. They may have many features in common with cults but as Ellwood argues “the sect, as a particularly intense version of the dominant religion with withdrawal features, is usually said to possess more legalistic than charismatic authority and to represent a spiritual alternative only in a much narrower sense than the cult.”⁵⁸

Sects thus lack some of the definitive qualities of cults (for example, charismatic leadership), form for different reasons (for instance, protest rather than unique revelation) and may be the type of group a cult, as it matures and becomes institutionalised, develops into.⁵⁹ Sect, therefore, is a poor synonym for cult.

From a Christian perspective, heresy is regarded “as a deliberate denial of revealed truth coupled with the acceptance of error.”⁶⁰ This understanding is based on the use of the Greek term *haireisis* (literally meaning “choice”) employed in 2 Peter 2:1 to mean a destructive opinion. In Christian usage then, heresy would ordinarily be understood as doctrinal error concerning a central point of Christian theology. Cults may or may not

⁵⁵ Eileen Barker, “The Scientific Study of Religion? You Must be Joking!” in Lorne Dawson (ed.) 2003. *Cults and New Religious Movements: A Reader*. Malden, USA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd. p. 2.

⁵⁶ Stephan P. Pretorius, 2007. “Seemingly Harmless New Christian Religious Movements in South Africa Pose Serious Threats of Spiritual Abuse,” *HTS Theological Studies* 63. p. 262.

⁵⁷ Gomes, *Unmasking the Cults*, p. 17.

⁵⁸ Robert S. Ellwood, 1986. “The several meanings of ‘cult’ . *Thought* , 61, p. 213.

⁵⁹ James T. Richardson, 1979. “From Cult to Sect: Creative Eclecticism in New Religious Movements”, *The Pacific Sociological Review* 22. pp. 139-166.

⁶⁰ Walter A. Elwell, (ed.) 1984. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books. p. 508.

embrace a heretical theology, and thus heresy should be seen as a specifier rather than distinctive of such groups.

Mindful of the adverse connotations of the term, it is necessary to justify the fact that the term cult will be employed in this research. Several factors motivated the decision: firstly, the media coverage about Grace Gospel Church has included several references to it being a cult.⁶¹ This may be regrettable and another instance of the media's sensationalist use of the term, but the fact remains that Grace Gospel Church has publically been declared a cult rather than a new religious movement, sect, or heretical group. To avoid using the term is to avoid reflecting on the use of the term in this context. Secondly, this research is found within the discipline of theology and the word cult has an established usage within theological circles as opposed to, for example, the term "new religious movement". Thirdly, Lulich does not shrink from using the term in *Bounded Choice*. And finally, although research has been conducted into new religious movements at other South African universities, the phenomenon of new religious movements/cults has not been previously researched by a student from the University of KwaZulu-Natal; nor has there been any research into such groups in KwaZulu-Natal. As this dissertation represents "first generation" research, and in line with what Richardson noted above about the need to ensure that what is being researched is clear to others, the term cult will be employed.

2.3 Defining a cult

From what has been written above, it will not be surprising to find that it is a daunting prospect to define a cult. An interested individual might reject popular notions and turn to the academy to clarify what a cult is. But which discipline within academia would assist in this quest? cursory research reveals that the majority of research done on cults has occurred in the fields of psychology, sociology and theology and there is the obvious tendency for the discipline investigating the phenomenon to make its principles and perceptions normative. The difference of opinion between disciplines has unfortunately polarised academia from the 1970's onwards into "anti-cultists" and "pro-

⁶¹ Victoria John: Church "Worse than Death", *Independent on Saturday*, 7 November 2009 pp. 1,2,7; MNet, *Carte Blanche*, broadcast on 7 February 2010.

cultists” in so-called “cult wars”.⁶² Consequently, there are psychological, sociological and theological definitions of cults, and as each discipline has differences of opinion within its own ranks, the academy provides little consensus on what a cult actually is.

Secondly, cults come in a bewildering variety of beliefs and sizes. As Lalich points out, “...cults may take any form or focus on any interest...”⁶³ And, of course, what may be classified as a cult at one point in time, may later be more accurately defined as a sect.

Thirdly, the definition of a cult must identify how cults are able to change the way people think, perceive reality and behave, often in counter-cultural or even self-destructive ways. As psychiatrist and author Robert Jay Lifton notes in his forward to Margaret Singer’s work *Cults in Our Midst: the Continuing Fight against Their Hidden Menace*:⁶⁴ “Singer recognises the complexity of the cult phenomenon, the reality of psychological manipulation at the centre of things and the fact that totalistic groups transcend any particular professional discipline.”⁶⁵

Given this acknowledgment of complexity from an authority on cults, there is justification in providing a broad and multidisciplinary approach to the subject. The literature review of psychological, theological and sociological perspectives on cults which now follows does not aim to provide a comprehensive review of each discipline’s insights, but rather a brief background to illustrate the complex nature of such groups. This review also provides a backdrop against which the multidisciplinary approach of Lalich can be appreciated.

2.4 Psychological perspectives

At the heart of all psychological models of cults lies the notion of induced psychological manipulation and control of cult members. This psychological

⁶² Michael Langone, 2005. “Cult Awareness Groups and NRM Scholars: Toward Depolarization of Key Issues”, *Cultic Studies* 4, p. 146.

⁶³ Lalich, *Bounded Choice*, p.xix.

⁶⁴ Margaret T. Singer, 2003. *Cults in our Midst: The Continuing Fight against Their Hidden Menace*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

⁶⁵ Singer, *Cults in Our Midst*, p. xi.

manipulation is variously described as “thought reform”, “coercive persuasion”, “mind control” or “brainwashing”.⁶⁶

2.4.1 Thought reform

Pioneering work in this field originated with three researchers at the United States Military biomedical facility known as the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research shortly after the Korean War (1950 – 1953). The researchers were Robert J. Lifton, Edgar H. Schein and Margaret T. Singer. Each researched the effects of intense indoctrination programmes on former Prisoners of War (POWs) of the Communist Chinese.

According to Morantz,⁶⁷ Lifton was a professor at both Yale and Harvard, and had won recognition in his study of the long term psychological effects of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In January 1954 Lifton arrived in Hong Kong to examine Western ex-prisoners of war, who had been incarcerated in Communist China. With few exceptions, Lifton noted that these former POWs displayed remorse and grief at leaving China. Lifton theorised that through a coerced process of confession and renunciation of the former self, followed by exhortations to re-mould the self, the POWs’ identities had been assaulted and reduced to a regressive status deprived of adult power, mastery or selfhood. In this state of abnegation a vision of a new and socially valued identity would be communicated to them. This identity would provide a new start, a disjuncture from the former self and its “evil ways” and the opportunity to be part of something larger than self that existed for the betterment of humanity. Lifton adopted the label in use by the Chinese authorities - “thought reform” - to describe what he observed in the

⁶⁶ As “brainwashing” has become such an overused term it is useful to consider its origins. In 1951 American foreign correspondent Edward Hunter published the book *Brainwashing in Red China* based on his interviews of individuals who had escaped from Communist China to Hong Kong. His translator explained that the Communist process of eradicating an individual’s former belief system was colloquially known as *hse nao* which literally means “wash brain” or “cleansing the mind”. The Chinese hierarchy called it *Szu Hsing Kai Tsao* which translates as “thought reform” or “ideological remoulding”. As a result of Hunter’s book the term “brainwashing” entered Western discourse. In contemporary use, brainwashing is overtly coercive and associated with abuse or the threat of abuse. Mind control is more subtle and involves suggestion and group processes.

⁶⁷ In Paul Morantz, “Characteristics of totalistic movements (destructive cults)”, <http://www.paulmorantz.com/cult/characteristics-of-totalistic-movements-cults/>, p.12. (Accessed 03/06/2012)

POWs. In spite of the effectiveness of thought reform, Lifton believed that it was impossible to completely overwrite the former self and worldview through this process.

Lifton argued that thought reform required the presence of eight psychological themes, which he came to argue that cults use to promote behavioural and attitudinal change. They are

1. Milieu control. This is a control of intra-group communication, often presented as a proscription of gossip but intended to prevent any expression of doubt or criticism of the leadership or group. Control is maintained through peer-reporting which further isolates members from one another.
2. Loading the language. Members increasingly use the jargon of the group which initially inhibits both their cognitive processes and conversation. This makes critical thought and expression difficult. As a person becomes fluent in “group-speak”, communication with outsiders becomes energy-consuming and difficult, thus promoting socialising within the group.⁶⁸
3. A demand for purity. The group promotes a “black or white” perspective on the world, with the group ideal being right, pure and good, and outsiders to the group being regarded as impure, fallen and evil. This dichotomous thinking is internalised by members and used to judge themselves and all others. “Anything can be done in the name of this purity; it is the justification for the group’s internal moral and ethical code.”⁶⁹
4. Confession. This activity is presented as a means of personal unburdening but it provides the leadership of the group with information that can be used to control and manipulate the member. In particular it assists in rewriting a member’s past,

⁶⁸ Reminiscent of George Orwell’s *1984*. “Don’t you see that the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought? ...Every year fewer and fewer words, and the range of consciousness always a little smaller. ...The whole climate of thought will be different. In fact there will *be* no thought, as we understand it now. Orthodoxy means not thinking – not needing to think. Orthodoxy is unconsciousness.” George Orwell, 1994 (reprinted). *1984*. Oxford, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd. p. 37.

⁶⁹ Margaret T. Singer, 2003 (revised ed.). *Cults in Our Midst: The Continuing Fight Against Their Hidden Menace*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. p. 71.

denigrating it so that any desire to interact with people from the member's past, or to return to them, becomes illogical.⁷⁰

5. Mystical manipulation. "The group manipulates members to think that their new feelings and behaviour have arisen spontaneously in this new atmosphere."⁷¹ The leader portrays the groups as having a higher purpose and its members as having voluntarily chosen this group and its lifestyle.
6. Doctrine over person. Not only the past, but also the present is required to be filtered through the group's doctrines. Members are taught not to pay attention to their own perceptions or feelings but rather to conform these to the view of the group.
7. Sacred science. The leader's ideology is given respectability by connecting it to a credible authority. This allows the leader to claim that the group's ideology should be widely applied and to discredit any opposition.
8. Dispensing of existence. Due to the elitist notions of the group, outsiders are considered "lower beings", available for manipulation and destruction if necessary. This perception of outsiders reinforces the dichotomous "us versus them" worldview and the member's dependence on the group, as leaving it would represent a profound loss of personal value.

Lifton's research was complemented by that of psychologist Edgar Schein, who from 1952 – 1956 was chief of the Social Psychology Section of the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research. Schein called the process of indoctrination among POWs "coercive persuasion" and published a book of the same title in 1961.

Schein identified three stages that represent the process of coercive persuasion:

1. "Unfreezing". An individual's sense of self, notion of personal history and personal worldview are destabilised by the catechesis, discipline and interaction of the group. This precipitates an identity crisis, opening the individual psychologically to contextual suggestions about "correct" thinking and conduct.

⁷⁰ Again alluded to in 1984: "Who controls the past...controls the future: who controls the present controls the past." Orwell, 1984, p. 26.

⁷¹ Singer, *Cults in Our Midst*, p. 72.

2. “Changing”. The suggestions and example of the group provide a way out of the identity crisis. The movement towards a new identity is reinforced by the individual making a public commitment to the ideology and practices of the group. “Peer pressure is very important to this process: If you say it in front of others, you’ll do it. Once you do it, you’ll think it. Once you think it (in an environment you do not perceive to be coercive), you’ll believe that you thought it yourself.”⁷²
3. “Refreezing”. The group rewards the individual’s new identity, and punishes any unwanted behaviours with criticism, group disapproval and loss of status. “Most of the modern-day thought-reform groups seek to produce smiling, non-resistant, hardworking personas who do not complain about group practices and do not question the authority of the guru, leader, or trainer.”⁷³

As a senior psychologist in the psychology laboratory at Walter Reed, Margaret Singer became fascinated by the subject of thought reform and researched it in its many settings throughout history, leading her to study how cults and other groups use thought reform processes.

In 1976 Singer was appointed by the court to examine heiress Patricia Hearst who had been kidnapped and indoctrinated by a radical terrorist group, the Symbionese Liberation Army, and was later tried as a bank robber. Singer counselled survivors and families of members of Jonestown in 1978 as well as families of the Branch Davidians members who died in the conflagration in Waco in 1993. Her first article on the subject of cults was published in *Psychology Today* in 1979 and during her career she interviewed and worked with more than three thousand cult members.⁷⁴ Singer was also an expert witness in many cases in which former members of cults sued the cult for damages. Together with Janja Lalich she produced arguably the best known and most referenced work on cults entitled *Cults in our Midst: The Hidden Menace in Our*

⁷² Singer, *Cults in Our Midst*, p. 76.

⁷³ Singer, *Cults in Our Midst*, p. 77.

⁷⁴ Singer, *Cults in our Midst*, p. xxiii.

Everyday Lives (1995).⁷⁵ In 2003 this work was revised and updated, Lalich was not listed as a co-author and the title was changed to *Cults in Our Midst: The Continuing Fight Against Their Hidden Menace*.⁷⁶

Singer argues that although cults will differ in terms of their degree of influence and control, size, and expectations of members, they will have similar origins, power structures and governance.

Her theory of thought reform depends on a complex set of interlocking psychological and social factors that can bring about significant changes in the thinking and behaviour of an individual. These changes may happen quickly or slowly depending on the circumstances and subject. However, the key point for Singer is that the subject must be kept unaware that they are part of such a process of manipulated transformation that will lead to their psychological enslavement.

Brainwashing is not experienced as a fever or a pain might be; it is an invisible social adaptation. When you are the subject of it, you are not aware of the intent of the influence processes that are going on, and especially, you are not aware of the changes taking place within you...A thought reform program is not a one-shot event but a gradual process of breaking down and transformation. These systematic manipulations of social and psychological influences under particular conditions are called *programs* because the means by which change is brought about is co-ordinated. And it is because the changes cause the learning and adoption of a certain set of attitudes, usually accompanied by a certain set of behaviours, that the effort and the result are called *thought reform*.⁷⁸ [Italics in original]

Singer argues that six conditions are required for thought reform to occur:

1. It is essential to recruits unaware of what is happening and how they are gradually being changed. The group exposes the member to two agendas: the overt agenda encourages a series of minor personal changes that seem inconsequential to the member but a second, covert agenda is designed “to get

⁷⁵ Margaret T. Singer and Janja Lalich. 1995. *Cults in our Midst: The Hidden Menace in Our Everyday Lives*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

⁷⁶ Margaret T. Singer, 2003. *Cults in our Midst: The Continuing Fight against Their Hidden Menace*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

⁷⁸ Singer, *Cults in our Midst*, p. 61.

you, the recruit or member, to obey and to give up your autonomy, your past affiliations, and your belief systems.”⁷⁹ Singer contends that the existence of this double agenda makes the thought-reform process one of non-informed consent – in other words, coercive.

2. It is necessary to control the recruit’s social and physical environment and time. Within the physical bounds of the cult, how, when and with whom the recruits spend their time is simple to control. But even when away from the commune/cult headquarters/church it is possible to exercise control over recruits by instructing them what to do when they are not otherwise busy e.g. to read cult approved literature, pray, or witness for the group.
3. A sense of powerlessness is required. Through distancing the recruit from family and friends and other support systems, relocation to remote places and depriving a recruit of his/her main occupation and means of income, the individual is dramatically disempowered. This powerlessness undermines self-confidence in their own understanding of the world and their good judgement. As self-esteem wanes and confusion waxes, the cult presents its worldview, passionately endorsed by the group. It is a worldview that is critical and/or mutually exclusive of the recruit’s former worldview. The recruits experience profound internal dissonance in response to this challenge to their beliefs and values, but they are not permitted to express or discuss their doubts or questions. The erosion of critical thought and personal worldview is assisted through physical fatigue, which is created through the group’s constant demand for recruits to be busy.
4. A fourth condition required for thought reform involves the creation of a set of rewards, sanctions and experiences that inhibit recruits’ pre-group behaviours. Recruits are manipulated through social pressure and leader’s teaching into assuming a social identity acceptable to the group. Any former beliefs or behaviour are designated irrelevant, if not evil. As recruits realise that it is socially advantageous to eliminate old ideas and old patterns, they are suppressed, allowing the group’s manner of thinking and acting to emerge.

⁷⁹ Singer, *Cults in our Midst*, p. 64.

5. It is necessary for the cultic group's ideology and behaviour to be learned. This is accomplished through operant conditioning – that is through reward and punishment of acceptable behaviour. By this point, recruits have already become dependent on the rewards offered by the leaders and the recruit's peers, and thus they are primed to assimilate the group's ideology and behaviours. Recruits are rewarded for good performance with social and sometimes material reinforcement. If they are slow to learn or in any way noncompliant they will be faced with the threat of “shunning, banning and punishment which includes loss of esteem from others, loss of privileges, loss of status, and inner anxiety and guilt.”⁸⁰ It is frequently the case that cults maintain complex and contradictory ideologies and practices.⁸¹ Singer notes that the more difficult it is to grasp and internalise the group's ideology and behaviours, the more effective the conversion process will be, as new recruits will be eager to avoid criticism or shunning. Consequently, they will just accept what they cannot reconcile.⁸² Approval is won through behaviours and thought-patterns that conform to the group's discourse; similarly, the recruit's relationship with peers becomes threatened if “correct” functioning is not displayed. Over time, an easy solution to the insecurity generated by the difficulties of learning the new system is to simply inhibit any display of doubt, and “even if you do not understand the content, to merely acquiesce, affirm, and act as if you do understand and accept the new philosophy or content.”⁸³
6. For thought-reform to develop it is necessary to create a closed and inviolate system of logic. If a recruit finds any reason to criticise or complain, the group's leader and peer group will allege that the member is in some way defective, not

⁸⁰ Singer, *Cults in Our Midst*, p. 67.

⁸¹ “*Doublethink* means the power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one's mind simultaneously, and accepting both of them.” Orwell, *1984*, p. 165.

⁸² “To know and not to know, to be conscious of complete truthfulness while telling carefully constructed lies, to hold simultaneously two opinions which cancelled out, knowing them to be contradictory and believing in both of them; to use logic against logic, to repudiate morality while laying claim to it, to believe that democracy was impossible and that the Party was the guardian of democracy; to forget whatever it was necessary to forget, then to draw into memory again at the moment when it was needed, and then promptly to forget it again: and above all, to apply the same process to the process itself. That was the ultimate subtlety: consciously to induce unconsciousness, and then, once again, to become unconscious of the act of hypnosis you had just performed. Even to understand the word “doublethink” involved the use of doublethink.” Orwell, *1984*, p. 27.

⁸³ Singer, *Cults in our Midst*, p. 68.

the group. Contradictions and challenges are disallowed - the individual member is always wrong, and the system is always right. All of this serves to facilitate the conversion or remoulding of the individual. To be accepted in this closed and controlled environment recruits change, displaying their conversion through talking in the jargon of the group, even if they have little understanding of the ideology behind the catch-phrases they are using. This use of a new language creates a disjuncture with the recruit's former life and allows the recruit to justify self-defeating actions and even hostile acts towards others. It is precisely these behaviours that invite criticism from the outside world because they violate the norms and rules of the society. However, such criticism is rationalised in the cultic group, through its ideology and language, often as persecution.

The degree to which these conditions are present determines the restrictiveness of the cult and the overall effectiveness of the program of thought reform.

While there are differences in their conceptions of thought reform, all three are agreed that the aim of thought reform is to

- Destabilise an individual's self-concept
- Manipulate the individual to drastically reinterpret their life experience, alter their worldview and to accept a new version of reality and causality
- Create a dependence on the organisation thereby changing the individual into a deployable agent of the same organisation

2.4.2 Social psychology and group dynamics

The discipline of social psychology provides additional and complementary perspectives on group dynamics. Even if the conditions for thought reform are not present or are only partially represented, a group can influence individuals powerfully and insidiously. And, naturally, the group dynamics described below can support the process of thought reform.

Social psychology deals with understanding how and why individuals behave, think and feel as they do in social situations.⁸⁴ It is an “interdisciplinary field located midway between sociology and psychology.”⁸⁵ In particular it provides insight into how groups can and do influence individual’s attitudes and behaviours.

A particular concept of social psychology is that of social worlds – “grouping of individuals bound together by networks of communication or universes of discourse.”⁸⁶ Within social worlds – and religious groups are a particular type of social world – the internal environment of the individual is categorised, perceived, and brought into systematic relation with the outside world.”⁸⁷

The social world or group provides individuals with security, safety, status and prestige in exchange for personal loyalty and commitment. Druckman contends that loyalty to the group is expressed as an in-group bias⁸⁸ consisting of both emotional and cognitive formulations about the group. This bias is made

extreme in competitive situations where there is incentive to favour one's own group. It also appears to increase when there is consensus among group members about their goals and strategies - not only are they loyal to the group but they all define the problem, what they want to do, and how they want to do it in a similar manner.⁸⁹

In Grace Gospel Church (GGC) it may be hypothesised that individuals are provided with a sense of security and status in exchange for their loyalty to the group. Security and status are derived from the theologically exclusive beliefs of the group (discussed in detail in Chapter Four) which imply that members of the group are spiritually superior to other Christian believers. The bias towards GGC will be further reinforced by the competition represented by other churches in the Pinetown area. Consensus in GGC is

⁸⁴ Baron, Branscombe, Byrne, *Social Psychology*, p. 5.

⁸⁵ Alfred R. Lindesmith, Anselm L. Strauss & Norman K. Denzin. 1999. *Social Psychology*. (8th Edition.) London: Sage, p. 3.

⁸⁶ Lindesmith et al, *Social Psychology*, p. 323.

⁸⁷ Lindesmith et al, *Social Psychology*, p. 323.

⁸⁸ Daniel Druckman. 1994. “Nationalism, Patriotism, and Group Loyalty: A Social Psychological Perspective” in *Mershon International Studies Review*, Vol. 38, No. 1. p. 63.

⁸⁹ Druckman, “Nationalism”, p. 63.

likely to be achieved out of members' submission to the claimed apostolic authority of the leader.

In group settings where there is both competition and consensus, a limited opportunity exists for discrepant information to filter into the group or for group members to consider reasons for change. Consequently, stereotypical representations are formed which "become a means for maintaining one's images"⁹⁰ because they offer an economical classification of self and other. There is frequently a simplistic creation of dichotomous "us versus them" stereotyping, which is evident in GGC (Chapter Four). The in-group bias thus serves to organise particular social worlds, and moulds personal and group identity, perspectives and interactions with others.

It is fascinating to consider that members of groups may have equally valid and authentic, but different expressions of selfhood. The self-categorisation theory of Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher & Wetherell (1987) considers the relationship between the self and the collective self and notes that the collective self emerges as part of the normal variation in self-definition and it reflects and makes possible the collective processes of social life.⁹¹ In a dynamic way, the self mediates collective processes and personal cognition and the collective self underlies social influence processes which in turn shape cognition. Social psychology thus points to the fact that social interaction depends on a complex personal identity, and this sheds light on how a person can validly be a member of a group, exhibiting characteristics of the group, but also remain an individual. Crucially, it can be argued that the collective self – which will represent group characteristics– can be regarded as a true expression of self according to self-categorisation theory, which mitigates notions that the collective identity is a false identity produced by psychological brainwashing.

Nonetheless, social forces do mould people, and particularly people's attitudes, through basic classical conditioning. An unconditioned stimulus - for example, the sense of

⁹⁰ Druckman, "Nationalism", p. 63.

⁹¹ John C. Turner, Penelope J. Oakes, S. Alexander Haslam & Craig McGarty, 1992. "Personal and social identity: Self and social." Paper presented to the Conference on "The Self and the Collective", Department of Psychology, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ. p. 22.

esteem that comes from feeling significant - is paired with a conditioned stimulus, for example, being present in a particular group. Through the association of the group and the feeling of esteem, the individual comes to believe that the group is superior and elite. Thus a particular attitude to the group and the world outside of the group is learned through conditioning. What is of specific interest and importance in understanding cultic groups is the fact that such attitudinal changes can occur subconsciously: "Not only can classical conditioning contribute to shaping our attitudes...but often we may not be aware of the stimuli that affect the conditioning."⁹²

Subliminal conditioning, that is, classical conditioning that occurs in the absence of conscious awareness of the stimuli involved, is an accepted form of attitude shaping in social psychology.⁹³ This provides an important insight into how cultic groups may be able to influence the attitudes of members without members being consciously aware of how they are being influenced.

Attitudes are also shaped by operant conditioning when rewards and punishments are linked to attitudes and actions:

Sometimes the conditioning process is rather subtle, with the reward being psychological acceptance. Parents reward children with smiles, approval, or hugs for stating the right views. As a result of this form of conditioning, most children express political, religious, and social views that are highly similar to those of their parents and other family members, until the teen years when peer influences become especially strong... As adults, we may be aware that different groups we belong to will reward (or punish) us for expressing support for a particular attitude position.⁹⁴

The potential of a cultic group to offer its members a sense of psychological acceptance will thus be a powerful indicator of its ability to shape the attitudes of the individual.

Social psychology also stresses that attitudes can be formed through observational learning. This can happen even in the absence of direct rewards for approved attitudes,

⁹² Baron, Branscombe, Byrne, *Social Psychology*, p. 151.

⁹³ Baron, Branscombe, Byrne, *Social Psychology*, p. 152.

⁹⁴ Baron, Branscombe, Byrne, *Social Psychology*, p. 153.

and relies simply on observing the views and behaviour of others, and comparing one's view of reality with that of the group. If the individual's views are congruent with the group, the individual tends to assume that their views are correct. If the individual's attitude is different to that of the group but the group is one that the individual values and identifies with they will be inclined to adjust their attitudes.⁹⁵ Ultimately, human attitudes are shaped by the desire to be similar to people that are liked and identified with.

The strength of an attitude is based on the attitude's extremity, that is, the degree to which an individual feels strongly one way or another. This in turn is proportional to the vested interest of the person holding it. Strength is also determined by certainty which is created by clarity about the issue, the notion that it is a valid or proper attitude to hold, and personal experience:

...attitudes formed on the basis of direct experience with the object about which we hold a particular attitude can exert stronger effects on behaviour than ones formed indirectly. This is because attitudes formed on the basis of direct experience are likely to be stronger and be more likely to come to mind when in the presence of the attitude object...Similarly, attitudes based on personal relevance are more likely to be elaborated on in terms of supporting arguments, and this makes them resistant to change.⁹⁶

Supporting much social psychology theory and research is the idea of attitude consistency which suggests that "people tend to organise their attitudes in a harmonious manner so that their attitudes are not in conflict."⁹⁷ When an individual notices that they hold attitudes and behaviours that are at variance with one another (called cognitive dissonance), and when the inconsistency cannot be justified, the individual may change their attitude. What is significant to realise is that it might not take much convincing for an individual to resolve their inner dissonance:

Cognitive dissonance theory predicts that it will be easier to change our attitudes by offering us just barely enough to get us to engage in the attitude-discrepant

⁹⁵ Baron, Branscombe, Byrne, *Social Psychology*, p. 154.

⁹⁶ Baron, Branscombe, Byrne, *Social Psychology*, p. 161.

⁹⁷ James W. Vander Zanden. 1984. *Social Psychology*. New York: Random House. p. 168.

behaviour. This ensures that we will feel there is little justification for our behaviour, while additional reasons or rewards would help to reduce dissonance and result in little subsequent attitude change. Social psychologists sometimes refer to this surprising prediction as the less-leads-to-more effect, that is, less reasons or rewards for an action often leads to greater attitude change, and it has been confirmed in many studies...the strategy of offering us just barely enough to induce us to say or do things contrary to our true attitudes can often be an effective technique for inducing attitude change.⁹⁸

Another concept that social psychology provides insight into is that of conformity. Conformity is affected by cohesiveness - the extent to which we are attracted to particular social group and want to belong to it. Factors affecting conformity include the size of the group - the larger the group and thus the more people that behave in a particular manner, the greater the tendency to conform. Conformity will also be driven by situational norms which guide individuals' behaviour in particular situations or environments. An example is that of people lowering the volume of their voice when entering a church. What social psychologists have discovered is that one does not necessarily need to be aware of the norms for them to influence behaviour. "On the contrary, norms can be activated in an automatic manner without our consciously thinking of them, and when they are, they can still strongly affect our overt actions."⁹⁹

At the heart of conformity is the "desire to be liked or accepted by others and the desire to be right - to have accurate understanding of the social world."¹⁰⁰

Similarly, compliance can be promoted in individuals without there being obvious external pressure. In terms of the so-called "foot-in-the-door" technique, if an individual can be induced to comply with a small request, there is a significant chance that they will comply with a larger demand later.¹⁰¹

Additional situational factors governing conformity and compliance include group size, cohesiveness, publicity and surveillance, difficulty and ambiguity, fear and anxiety and

⁹⁸ Baron, Branscombe, Byrne, *Social Psychology*, p. 179.

⁹⁹ Baron, Branscombe, Byrne, *Social Psychology*, p. 279.

¹⁰⁰ Baron, Branscombe, Byrne, *Social Psychology*, p. 280.

¹⁰¹ Vander Zanden, *Social Psychology*, p. 213.

the allocation of resources.¹⁰² Conformity tends to increase with group size, the cohesiveness of the group, the degree to which behaviour is monitored by others, the difficulty or ambiguity of a task, the greater the individual's sense of fear or anxiety and an equitable sharing of resources.

The point is made that the discipline of social psychology provides insight into the conscious and unconscious ways in which groups may affect the identity, attitude and behaviour of individuals. This would appear to be of great help in understanding cultic groups and their effect on individuals, and particularly the group's subtle influence, for this is either denied or attributed to some mystical or spiritual force.

2.4.3 Various cult definitions based on the psychological model

Singer defines a cult in terms of the processes and interactions that happen in the group. Thus a cult will create a cultic relationship “in which a person intentionally induces others to become totally or nearly totally dependent on him or her for almost all major life decisions, and inculcates in these followers a belief that he or she has some special talent, gift, or knowledge.”¹⁰³

Singer utilises the label “cult” to refer to three factors:

1. The origin the group and role of the leader
2. The power structure, or relationship between the leader (or leaders) and the followers
3. The use of a coordinated programme of persuasion (which is called thought reform, or, more commonly, brainwashing)¹⁰⁴

She expands on each factor as follows:

- Cult leaders tend to be self-appointed, persuasive people who claim a special mission or knowledge. They attract people to themselves with their charisma or drive and are able to ultimately dominate and control members' lives. Instead of

¹⁰² Vander Zanden, *Social Psychology*, p. 215.

¹⁰³ Singer, *Cults in Our Midst*, p. 7.

¹⁰⁴ Singer, *Cults in our Midst*, p. 7.

directing veneration towards a transcendent reality or principle they tend to centre veneration on themselves.

- Cults are highly authoritarian with the leader being regarded as the supreme and uncontested authority. The leader offers an innovative panacea to life's problems and members regard themselves as being unique and exclusive recipients of this truth. Outsiders to the group and thus those out of the "know" are looked down upon and seen as lesser beings. Members are encouraged to develop a set of double standards – absolute transparency towards the group's leaders but practiced deception and manipulation of outsiders. Cults tend to work on the utilitarian principle that the "ends justify the means".

In terms of the third factor – programmes of persuasion – Singer states that "cults tend to be totalistic, or all encompassing, in controlling their members' behaviour and also ideologically totalistic, exhibiting zealotry and extremism in their worldview."¹⁰⁵

In other words, cults will expect that members give increasing amounts of time, energy, and resources as a sign of their total commitment to the goals of the group. This will invariably result in a significant change to the individual's lifestyle. Thought reform is central to this dependent relationship.

Singer contends that cults are in the ascendancy and are often not recognised for what they are. In her view they exist for only two purposes: recruitment and fund-raising. While established religions and altruistic groups may be involved in these two activities their aim will not simply be to grow numerically and wealthier but rather to strive for the betterment of others: "A cult may claim to make social contributions, but in actuality these remain mere claims or gestures. In the end, all work and all funds, even token gestures of altruism, serve the cult."¹⁰⁶

She identifies one type of cult that uses psycho-social processes to deceive, manipulate, exploit and keep their members for as long as possible. Then there are other

¹⁰⁵ Singer, *Cults in our Midst*, p. 10.

¹⁰⁶ Singer, *Cults in Our Midst*, p.11.

organisations, often commercially driven and focused on self-improvement, that use similar persuasion processes but do not want long-term members. Their desire is rather that members buy more courses and products and invite new recruits before leaving. In both groups, though-reform is evident.

Singer is clear that there are some cults that pose a danger to society:

...I'm not talking about a problem that can be dealt with by a philosophical debate or a hot expose on a television talk show. The threat presented by cults goes much deeper than that. I'm talking about the very real threats to public health, mental health, political power, and democratic freedoms – as well as growing concerns over consumer issues – that become apparent as we learn how these manipulative and often unethical groups and programs have spread into not just the nooks and crannies but also the major sectors and institutions of our society.¹⁰⁷

Another well known cult researcher who focuses on the psychological dynamics of cults is Paul Morantz. He is a Los Angeles-based lawyer who has specialised in cult and brainwashing cases for over 30 years, and in litigation against cults. He prefers to define a cult as a “totalistic movement” and like Singer contends that a process of brainwashing or coercive persuasion is the psychological mechanism through which control is exerted over members of cults.

He defines coercive persuasion as the art of convincing someone to accept a new belief system involuntarily while at the same time convincing the person he has accepted the belief voluntarily.¹⁰⁸ This is achieved through what he calls the “double bind”. Members are persuaded that their lives before the cult were “bad” and that they needed the salvation of the group. Simultaneously, members are taught that they are elite and better than non-members because they are in the group. But they are not well enough or good enough to leave the group. The paradoxical nature of these beliefs is not realised by members while they are members and it is this paradox that allows them

¹⁰⁷ Singer, *Cults in Our Midst*, p.5.

¹⁰⁸ Paul Morantz, “Characteristics of totalistic movements (destructive cults)”, <http://www.paulmorantz.com/cult/characteristics-of-totalistic-movements-cults/> p.8. (Accessed 03/06/2012)

to be successfully controlled. They seek to avoid the pain of being reminded of their former selves and to seek those times when they are credited as a success in the eyes of the group.

Morantz further draws attention to the fact that members' relationships are often subject to the leader's control. It is common that the leader and or community select mates for members and break-ups require similar permission.¹⁰⁹

He observes that the coercive persuasion of the group does not work without constant reinforcement, and notes that investigators of Korean POWs found that after 90 free days, the thought-control of the group was extinguished.

Another prominent American cult researcher is Steven Hassan, a former recruit of the Unification Church (Moonies), and currently an author, licensed counsellor and an exit counsellor. Hassan has authored two books on cults and methods of counselling cult members. Hassan defines a cult as a destructive group "which violates the rights of members and damages them through the abusive techniques of unethical mind control."¹¹⁰ Hassan notes that there are various types of cults - religious, political, psycho-therapy/educational and commercial.

He contends that hypnotic techniques (such as practicing meditation to shut down thinking, chanting a phrase repetitively for hours, or reciting affirmations¹¹¹) are used by cults as methods of mind control to recruit and retain members. Hassan has developed a model of mind control derived from both Schein and Lifton's work termed "BITE" (Behaviour, Information, Thought, Emotional Control).¹¹² Hassan claims that cults recruit and retain members through behaviour modification, withholding information, and persuasion techniques, such as inducing phobias, which collectively result in thought or mind control.

¹⁰⁹ Morantz, "Characteristics" p.9.

¹¹⁰ Steven Hassan, 1990. *Combating Mind Control*. Rochester, Vermont: Park Street Press. p. 37.

¹¹¹ Hassan, *Combating Mind Control*, p. 57.

¹¹² Hassan, *Combating Mind Control*, pp. 59-66.

Durban-based cult researcher Robin Jackson, a former member of the Jehovah's Witnesses, provides a good overall perspective on cults in his book *Cults: How They Work*.¹¹³ For Jackson, deliberate control of members takes the form of mind control (exercised in deceptive practices, exclusivity and intimidation); relationship control (exercised through the "love bombing" of instant friends in the cult), information control (especially critical or disconfirming information produced outside the group), reporting structures and time control. The book is a good summary of psychologically-based theories of cults and contains little unique material. However, Jackson makes the provocative claim that the cult that has caused the most deaths worldwide is the Jehovah's Witnesses through their refusal to allow blood transfusions and organ donations.¹¹⁴

Stephan Pretorius is arguably South Africa's leading authority on cults. Pretorius, as mentioned above, is an academic at the University of South Africa (UNISA) and specialises in the religious rights of those involved in new religious movements. In his definition of a demanding new Christian religious movement, he combines both psychological and theological themes:

A relatively small group of people zealously following a leader who has a special gift. The group exhibits radically new so-called Christian religious beliefs and practices that are contrary to traditional Christian beliefs. The leader and his or her followers believe that they are the final arbiters of what is or is not the truth. The group isolates itself from the outside world, exhibiting inward innovative behaviour that both differentiates and makes for conformity among group members, thus establishing a group identity. Sophisticated techniques are utilised in order to bring about thought reform (mind control), group identity and dependence on the group (Pretorius 2004:609). The group is described as "demanding" as a result of the requirement of total commitment to its doctrines and practices at whatever cost. In the process, family, friends and other support structures are abandoned; possessions, personal ambition, human rights and self-worth are all relinquished for the sake of the group's goals. Followers are subtly persuaded to commit to the high demands of the group under the guise that this is the will and purpose of God.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Robin Jackson, 2008. *Cults: How They Work*. Bluff: Jacko Consulting.

¹¹⁴ Jackson, *Cults*, p.30.

¹¹⁵ Pretorius, "Seemingly harmless", p.262.

Pretorius explains how the term “programming”, traditionally applied to computing, can be applied to people. With humans it implies that

...certain responses and attitudes become embedded in the brain circuitry and can then be retrieved in accordance with the will of the programmer. There is also the implication that the retrieved material will be verbalised and acted out in an automatic manner that circumvents the individual’s own earlier desires, beliefs and judgement.¹¹⁶

He equates the indoctrination of some religious groups with this type of programming. Through indoctrination, the group may introduce ways of perceiving and understanding their lives (including their biological family) that contradict their former beliefs and reframe their experiences. Pretorius contends that the programming that indoctrination facilitates is reinforced by a process of psychological conditioning. Conditioning is a form of learning where the “frequency or predictability of a behaviour or response is increased through reinforcement (i.e. a reward for exhibiting the desired response).”¹¹⁷ There are two fundamental types of conditioning: classical conditioning (also known as Pavlovian/respondent conditioning/Pavlovian reinforcement) and operant conditioning.

Pretorius argues that classical conditioning occurs in certain religious groups, and particularly in the form of fear conditioning. He cites the fact that with Grace Gospel Church (GGC), members are told they are an elite special group and that those outside the group have “twisted hearts” and might contaminate the member’s special status.¹¹⁸ This facilitates the withdrawal of people from their families of origin into the homes of other GGC members and instils a fear of the world outside the group.

For Pretorius, operant conditioning, experienced through “definite rules and regulations and through peer pressure, group conformity and role modelling”¹¹⁹ is the primary

¹¹⁶ Pretorius, “Family Alienation”, p.3.

¹¹⁷ Pretorius, “Family Alienation”, p.5.

¹¹⁸ Pretorius, “Family Alienation”, p.10.

¹¹⁹ Pretorius, “Family Alienation”, p.10.

method of conditioning in cultic groups. He argues that “these practices seem to be present in GGC.”¹²⁰

The result of the programming of individuals in cultic group is an alienation and separation from the support of family and friends, and an increasing dependency on the group and its leader.

Although Pretorius does not support the notion of brainwashing as an irresistible force that robs members of cultic groups of their freedom, he warns that “the psychological techniques used by these groups must not be underestimated in terms of being successful in obtaining an unhealthy control over many followers. It is more correct to say that not all potential members that are approached by these groups fall victim to their control.”¹²¹

2.4.4 Psychological factors predisposing individuals to cult membership

Psychological models of cultic groups consider factors that are likely to make an individual susceptible to joining a cult.

Lifton considered individuals who had early life problems with trust, chaos, and dominating parents, and those with negative self-image, tendencies towards guilt, identity confusion, exposure to historical or racial conflict, and inclinations toward all-or-nothing emotional attachments as being susceptible to thought reform. Individuals would be particularly susceptible during late adolescence and early adulthood as this is the time when identity takes shape. He also notes that dissatisfaction with large societies leads to confusion and lack of commitment and can make one vulnerable.¹²²

Singer suggested that crises such as divorce, a death, or just the transition to adulthood make individual’s vulnerable to joining a cult.¹²³

¹²⁰ Pretorius, “Family Alienation”, p.10.

¹²¹ Stephan P. Pretorius, 2012. “Coercion in New Religious Movements.” *International Journal for religious freedom* 5(51). p. 157.

¹²² Morantz, “Characteristics”, p.9.

¹²³ Morantz, “Characteristics”, p.9.

Morantz argues that intelligence, instead of inoculating an individual, renders them more likely to join. This he attributes to intelligent people seeking meaning in life and writes, somewhat condescendingly, that “poor people, more concerned with food on the plate and often having deeper family-raised religious roots, are less susceptible.”¹²⁴

According to psychiatrist and author Marc Galanter, members of cults tend to come from middle- and upper-middle-class social backgrounds. Many have tertiary education and have at least one or both parents still alive. On the basis of member’s self reports, psychological distress appears to be a significant factor in joining a cultic group. Clinicians have described cult members as being emotionally disturbed, depressed, inadequate, borderline antisocial, lonely, rejected, sad and having limited social ties before joining.¹²⁵

2.5 Theological perspectives

A strictly theological approach to cultic religious groups is essentially centred on the question of orthodoxy. It compares a group’s doctrine or interpretation of sacred texts to a particular religious yardstick.¹²⁶ If a group’s belief system or hermeneutical principles are deemed to be heterodox, it could be defined a cult. This model also tends to downplay any similarity between cultic groups and the mainstream church. For instance, Maurice C. Burrell argues that there are “very important differences between the sects I have examined [the Worldwide Church of God, the Family of Love, the Unification Church, the Divine Light Mission, Transcendental Meditation, Hare Krishna and Scientology] and my own faith, which is that of a Christian.”¹²⁷

Ronald M. Enroth, an evangelical Christian sociologist, argues in *A Guide to New Religious Movements* (2005) that for evangelical Christians, a cult is determined by its deviation from orthodox Christianity as formulated by historic statements of faith such

¹²⁴ Morantz, “Characteristics”, p.2.

¹²⁵ Marc Galanter, 1999 (2nd ed.). *Cults: Faith, Healing, And Coercion*. New York: Oxford University Press. p. 26.

¹²⁶ It should be remembered that not all religious cults are Christian. For instance, the Nation of Islam is considered to be cult of Islam by Gomes (1995).

¹²⁷ M. C. Burrell, 1981. *The Challenge of the Cults*. Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, p.8.

as the Nicene or Apostle's Creeds.¹²⁸ Similarly, Walter Martin, also an evangelical author, evaluates cults from the standpoint of Scripture in *The Kingdom of the Cults* (1996) and argues that cults distort, contradict or misinterpret the Bible and thus contradict major Christian doctrines. He defines a cult as "any religious group which differs significantly in some one or more respects as to belief or practice from those religious groups which are regarded as normative expressions of religion in our total culture."¹²⁹

Martin develops this definition by adding that a cult can also be "a group of people gathered about a specific person or person's misinterpretation of the Bible."¹³⁰

Gomes outlines the common theological characteristics of cults in his work *Unmasking the Cults*. (1995). He argues that cults have to be defined theologically, not behaviourally: "examining the group's doctrinal system is the only way to determine whether it is a cult."¹³¹

Gomes prefers to utilise the term "cult of Christianity" which he defines as

a group of people, which claiming to be Christian, embraces a particular doctrinal system taught by an individual leader, group of leaders, or organisation, which (system) denies (either explicitly or implicitly) one or more of the central doctrines of the Christian faith as taught in the sixty-six books of the Bible.¹³²

Gomes identifies certain theological characteristics of cults which he argues exist in differing degrees and combinations in cults. He furthermore notes that not all theological aberrations are equally bad – a denial of the Trinity is considered more serious for him than practising snake handling. His nineteen theological characteristics of cults are:

¹²⁸ Ronald Enroth, (ed.) 2005. *A Guide to New Religious Movements*. Illinois: InterVarsity Press, p.15.

¹²⁹ Walter Martin, 1996. *The Kingdom of The Cults*. Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, p. 11.

¹³⁰ Martin, *The Kingdom*, p. 11.

¹³¹ Gomes, *Unmasking the Cults*, p. 47.

¹³² Gomes, *Unmasking the Cults*, p. 7.

- a denial of the Trinity
- a denial of salvation by grace through faith
- a devaluation of the work of Christ
- a denial of the bodily resurrection of Christ
- a reduction of the absolute authority of Scripture
- a redefinition of Biblical terminology
- an exclusivistic belief system
- a compartmentalisation of conflicting facts
- a rejection of the doctrine of eternal punishment
- an emphasis on experience over doctrine
- an emphasis on direct revelations and visions from God
- claims of miracles, signs and wonders
- a fixation on eschatology
- a denial of the priesthood of the believer
- a disregard for sound hermeneutical principles
- syncretism
- an involvement with the occult or spiritism
- a tendency to see Scripture as alluding to their cultic movement
- an emphasis on minor points of theology.¹³³

Martin points out that cults characteristically redefine terms used in orthodox Christianity according to their own theological framework, rendering them at odds with the historical usage of these terms:

It is simple for a cultist to spiritualise and redefine the clear meaning of Biblical texts and teachings so as to be in apparent harmony with the historic Christian faith. However, such harmony is at best a surface agreement, based upon double meanings of words which cannot stand the test of Biblical context, grammar, or sound exegesis.¹³⁴

¹³³ Gomes, *Unmasking the Cults*, pp 25 – 47.

¹³⁴ Martin, *The Kingdom*, p. 21.

Hexham and Poewe offer a similar perspective on the use of language in a cult. They note that cult members give new and meanings to commonly-used Christian terms like “redemption” and this differing use of language can give rise to doubts about the sincerity of a cult:

Often it seems impossible to have a reasonable conversation with them. Faced with probing questions, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Hare Krishnas and other cult members seem to give stock answers and don’t appear to take important questions seriously. To the annoyance of outsiders, cult members use unintelligible in-group jargon, and when they speak plain English, they don’t use our language in quite the same way we do.¹³⁵

Pretorius, in his journal article on Grace Gospel Church (GGC), contends that GGC misapplies scripture in order to psychologically condition members, and to justify the breaking up of families.¹³⁶ Scripture is thus used to repudiate any possible claims that the group acts unethically in alienating families.

Such definitions of cultic groups on the basis of their denial or distortion of what is regarded as Christian orthodoxy is problematic for several reasons. Firstly, such groups could more accurately be termed heretical. As discussed above, the terms cult and heresy are not synonymous. Secondly, this type of definition presupposes a homogenous notion of Christian orthodoxy which, regrettably, does not exist. It is impossible in the modern era of fragmented Christianity to declare with certainty where the boundaries of orthodoxy and heresy lie. Thirdly, this definition fails to account for the situation where a group or leader may adhere to orthodox theology but may act contra to well-accepted Christian principles and doctrine. Counselling psychologist and author Michael Langone, envisioning a church that proclaims sound theology but practices psychological manipulation, writes

...a church with sound theology *can* be cultic when its practices are not consistent with its theology. I assume here that Christianity’s belief in the sacred nature of Man and consequent respect for his mind, autonomy, identity, and

¹³⁵ Hexham, I and Poewe, K. 1986. *Understanding Cults and New Religions*. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, Michigan, p.1.

¹³⁶ Pretorius, “Family Alienation”, p. 10.

dignity imply that cultic modes of relating to others are unchristian and, therefore, a group cannot be cultic and *practice* Christianity in a manner consistent with Christian doctrine.¹³⁷ [Italics in original]

Langone exposes an evangelical fallacy - that the preaching of sound theology somehow inoculates a church from becoming totalitarian and cultic. He offers the reminder that because the church is composed of fallen individuals, it always has the potential to oppress its members. While Langone calls such a church a cult, in spite of its proclaimed orthodoxy, Enroth prefers the term “abusive churches” in order to protect his definition of a cultic group offered above. Enroth, writing of abusive churches, declares:

...when [religious leaders] violate that trust, when they abuse their authority, and when they misuse ecclesiastical power to control and manipulate the flock, the results can be catastrophic. The perversion of power that we see in abusive churches disrupts and divides families, fosters an unhealthy dependence of members on the leadership, and creates, ultimately, spiritual confusion in the lives of victims.¹³⁸

The theological perspectives on cults considered thus far demonstrate that they suffer from a fundamental weakness: they lack a plausible explanation for the formation, attraction and power of such groups. It is difficult to understand how heresy could inspire the commitment witnessed in many cults.

There are other Christian assessments of cults that are interdisciplinary. A good example is provided by the Vatican Secretariat for Non- Believers and the Pontifical Council for Culture¹³⁹ which argues that cults develop due to the needs and aspirations of people during times of crisis or general vulnerability. These needs and aspiration are relational in that they are “centered upon ‘self’ in relations with ‘others’ (social), with

¹³⁷ Michael D. Langone, 1994. “Are ‘Sound’ Theology and Cultism Mutually Exclusive?” *Cult Observer*, 11. http://icsahome.com/infoserv_respond/by_article.asp?ID=27752 (Accessed 18/07/2012)

¹³⁸ Ronald M. Enroth, 1992. *Churches That Abuse*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House. p. 29.

¹³⁹ Vatican Secretariat for Non- Believers and the Pontifical Council for Culture, 1986. “Sects or New Religious Movements: A Pastoral Challenge”, *Cultic Studies Journal*, 3. http://www.icsahome.com/logon/elibdocview_csjvol.asp?Subject=The+Vatican+Report (Accessed 14/05/2012)

the past, present and future (cultural, existential), with the transcendent (religious). These levels and dimensions are *interrelated*.”¹⁴⁰ [Italics in original]

The report describes the needs and aspirations as follows:

- A need to belong created through the destruction of traditional lifestyles, relocation, divorce and loneliness.
- A search for answers and solutions in complex and confused personal and social situations.
- A search for wholeness originating in a sense of personal brokenness.
- A search for cultural identity due to urbanisation and/or Westernisation of traditional values, beliefs and practices.
- A need for personal significance.
- A search for transcendence in order to answer the ultimate questions of life.
- The need for spiritual guidance
- The need for a vision of hope in a broken world
- The need to participate and be involved in the creation of a better world.

The report declares that cults, by and large,

seem to live by what they believe, with powerful (often magnetic) conviction, devotion, and commitment; going out of their way to meet people where they are, warmly, personally, and directly, pulling the individual out of anonymity, promoting participation, spontaneity, responsibility, commitment and practicing an intensive follow-up through multiple contacts, home visits, and continuing support and guidance. They help to reinterpret one's experience, to reassess one's values and to approach ultimate issues in an all-embracing system. They usually make convincing use of the word: preaching, literature, and mass media (for Christian groups, strong emphasis on the Bible); and often also of the ministry of healing. In one word, they present themselves as the only answer, *the 'good news' in a chaotic world.*¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ Vatican Secretariat, “Sects or New Religious Movements”.

¹⁴¹ Vatican Secretariat, “Sects or New Religious Movements”.

The needs are experienced both cognitively and affectively by individuals, and are not met through the ministry of existing, mainline churches.

Secondly, the report stresses the highly sophisticated recruitment techniques of cultic groups in their development. It describes a deceptive approach of “contrived conversion and training methods (the social and psychological manipulation) to which [recruits] are subjected. The sects often impose their own norms of thinking, feeling, and behaving. This is in contrast to the church's approach, which implies full-capacity informed consent.”¹⁴²

The Vatican Secretariat’s use of psychological and sociological constructions is evident in this report.

Author LaVonne Neff makes the following observations: “The teachings of most new religious movements are incompatible with those of traditional Christianity. A few – the ones that virtually worship their leaders and tightly control their members – can be dangerous. And some may be just what the Christian church needs.”¹⁴³

She defends the final assertion by arguing that certain religious movements, like reform and renewal movements, have raised the standards of the church and have revitalised it. Other religions are also able to remind different denominations of what they have in common and thus inspire ecumenism; have helped Christians pay closer attention to their own beliefs and also understand the needs and aspirations of contemporary people.

From the discussion above, it can be argued that a theological approach to the definition and understanding of cults is limiting, and fails to account for the commitment and behaviours of cult members. However, cultic groups have a central ideology or belief structure and the analysis of this dimension requires the tools that the discipline of theology holds. Theology is thus an essential discipline in evaluating cultic groups, but it cannot be the only discipline employed.

¹⁴² Vatican Secretariat, “Sects or New Religious Movements”.

¹⁴³ LaVonne Neff, “Evaluating New Religious Movements” in Enroth, 2005. *A Guide to New Religious Movements*, p. 193.

2.6 Sociological perspectives

The sociological approach to cults could be described as a war that is fought on two fronts. Sociologists generally oppose both psychological and theological cult paradigms and largely do not regard cults with the same negativity as the other academic disciplines. This has often earned them the label of being “pro-cult” but it is probably more correct to state that sociologists have provided a needed balance and corrective to this field of study. However, their opinions have polarised the academic debate on cults and have contributed to the “cult-wars” between disciplines.

2.6.1 Defining cults sociologically

Eileen Barker, a professor emerita of sociology of the London School of Economics, founder of the Information Network Focus on Religious Movements (INFORM), and prolific author in the area of new religious movements offers seven characteristic features of cults: ¹⁴⁴

1. Members are largely first generation converts, and tend to be more enthusiastic and committed (perhaps to the point of fanaticism) than people who have grown up in a particular faith.
2. The membership tends to be atypical of the demographics of society. For example, there may be a disproportionate number of young people.
3. The group will have a founder or leader who wields charismatic authority. This leader will themselves be unbound by tradition or rules, but followers may give him/her the right to pronounce on any aspect of their lives: marriage partners, reproduction, employment, lifestyle and perhaps even whether they should live or die.
4. The “truth” will be more definitive than in older religions which have compromised their beliefs through accommodation to successive generations over time.

¹⁴⁴ Eileen Barker, “An Introduction to New Religious Movements”
http://web.archive.org/web/20060219080908/http://www.chaplaincy.ic.ac.uk/images/nrm_by_eb.pdf ,
p.3. (Accessed 21/3/2012)

5. The group will embrace a dichotomous worldview where the “us” are regarded as being all good and godly whereas the “them” will be regarded as uniformly bad, even satanic.
6. The group may experience suspicion or hostility from the society in which they find themselves.
7. New religions will change more rapidly and radically than the older and more established religious groups. This is largely due to the influence of a second generation born into the group and the death of the charismatic leader and initial convert. Both factors result in marked transformation of the group.¹⁴⁵

Barker is not afraid to acknowledge that cults may apply pressure to recruits and that they can become dangerous. She argues that they might, like evangelical groups who are committed to convincing others of their “truth”, pressurise potential members through love-bombing,¹⁴⁶ isolation, inducing guilt, and masking their true identity or agenda. Furthermore, when groups display characteristics like insisting that they alone have the truth; have no accountability structures for leaders and/or structures requiring unquestioning obedience; encourage an unhealthy dependency on the group for material, spiritual and social resources; and cut themselves off from the rest of society, whether socially or geographically, she declares that they have become dangerous.

Sociologists typically display a concern for the influence of social context on individuals. In general they suggest that during periods of socio-political turbulence structures, norms and rules in society are challenged and may be replaced. This very often leaves individuals alienated from themselves, their communities, their culture and even their spirituality and they long to be “found” and connected once again to what is meaningful. Cults so often claim to be able to offer renewed meaning and provide novel

¹⁴⁵ Eileen Barker, 2011. “Ageing in New Religions: The Varieties of Later Experiences.” *The Journal of the British Association for the Study of Religions*. Diskus 12. p. 3.

¹⁴⁶ A tactic frequently associated with cultic groups and used to recruit new members. Potential members are showered with affection, praise, and offers of friendship. Such offers are manipulative, geared to recruitment rather than based on any genuine regard for the individual, but are especially effective with vulnerable or insecure individuals.

and exotic compensators,¹⁴⁷ in response to the overwhelming challenges of a society in flux or distress.¹⁴⁸ This point reflects another central tenet of the sociological position on cults: that cults originate and develop around the need for meaning, which they meet in unique ways.

History appears to support a link between social upheaval and cult formation.¹⁴⁹ There are two eras in the last 150 years that are known for their tumult and their spawning of new and unusual religious groups, some of which could be accurately described as cults. A religious upheaval known as the Second Great Awakening¹⁵⁰ occurred in the United States between 1820 and 1860. The period in which this occurred was marked by rapid social and economic shifts in North American society and those whose needs were not met by the mainstream religions of the day – black people, women, and young people – joined or formed a number of new sectarian groups.

The 1960's in the West are synonymous with the psychedelic drug culture, anti-Vietnam War protests, civil disobedience, the sexual revolution and hippy subculture – all challenges to the existing social and political establishment. The alternative lifestyle of the 60's embraced self-transcendence and personal enlightenment and spawned many new and unconventional religious groups. Some of the best known neo-Christian and Eastern style cults began in this period – groups such as the Hare Krishnas, the Children of God, Transcendental Meditation, The Way International, the Tony and Susan Alamo Foundation, The Love Family, the Divine Light Mission, and the Unification Church [the Moonies].¹⁵¹

Singer contends, somewhat pointedly,

¹⁴⁷ William S. Bainbridge and Rodney Stark, 1979. "Cult Formation: Three Compatible Models": *Sociological Analysis* 40. p. 284.

¹⁴⁸ Vatican Secretariat, "Sects or New Religious Movements".

¹⁴⁹ Singer, *Cults in Our Midst*, p. 29.

¹⁵⁰ The First Great Awakening a.k.a The Great Awakening swept through Protestant Europe and the American Colonies in the 1730s and 1740s and emphasised the need for existing Christians to experience a personal and affective faith. The Second Great Awakening was a Christian revival movement aimed at non-believers in anticipation of Christ's imminent second coming.

¹⁵¹ Singer, *Cults in Our Midst*, p. 39.

...many folks in these volatile and unpredictable times feel some dissatisfaction in their lives and are quite vulnerable to the false promises and bogus ideology of such organisations.¹⁵²

...the cults' lure is, if you just come along, all will be fine, and everyone will live happily ever after.¹⁵³

An interesting observation made by Barker is that there is no evidence that the number of cults is growing:

...not, indeed, that their numerical significance has ever been as great as their social and sociological interest. Although it is possible that the number of cults (very widely defined) that have emerged since World War II could reach four figures, the actual membership of individual movements has seldom been more than a few thousand – many will not have secured as many as one hundred followers at any one time.¹⁵⁴

She also notes that an aging membership poses particular challenges of cults and their members. The consequences of certain beliefs and practices means that aged members lack educational qualifications, recognisable work experience, are frequently estranged from family and friends, and may have no official status in society as they have never owned property, opened bank accounts or registered for social services, and thus rely increasingly on the cult to provide care for them. However, particularly cults that espoused an “end times” philosophy may not have made any provision for the financial, medical and social care of an aging membership.¹⁵⁵

To a point, psychological and sociological theories on general cult characteristics overlap. But there is a vehement parting of ways in explaining why individuals join and remain in cults. Sociologists claim it is because the cult answers the felt needs of the individual. Psychologists argue that it is due to non-consensual psychological manipulation, commonly termed brainwashing.

2.6.2 Sociological critiques of psychological perspectives on cults

¹⁵² Singer, *Cults in Our Midst*, p. xvii.

¹⁵³ Singer, *Cults in Our Midst*, p. xxv.

¹⁵⁴ Eileen Barker. 1986. “Religious Movements: Cult and Anticult Since Jonestown.” *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 12. p. 339.

¹⁵⁵ Barker, “Ageing in New Religions”, p. 18.

Sociologists, in general, reject the brainwashing thesis. A typical perspective is provided by Hexham and Poewe:

By “brainwashing” we mean claims by apostates about sleep deprivation and other techniques that allow new religions to coerce people into membership against their will. Numerous scientific objections exist to show that the brainwashing understood in terms of an inexplicable decision to join a new religious movement is wrong. The brainwashing thesis actually fails to explain the full range of conversion experiences and discourages research into the real reasons why people are attracted to new religions.¹⁵⁶

It is possible that Hexham and Poewe have overstated their case as techniques like sleep deprivation represent the practices of only the most extreme cults and thus their reference to this should be seen as deliberately sensationalist. Furthermore, the “atrocious tales” of former members (“apostates”) may be influenced and distorted by their exposure to anti-cult counter-indoctrination if they were deprogrammed in any way.¹⁵⁷ It is thus not advisable to accept such claims at face value. Like many other sociologists, Hexham and Poewe reject the notion of the “irresistible manipulation” of recruits by brainwashing techniques, as a convenient absolution of both the convert and their family of any responsibility in the convert’s joining of a cultic group. For many sociologists, “brainwashing is whitewashing” - of the personal circumstances surrounding cult recruitment.

Brainwashing has also been argued to be based on the concept of “moral panic” that Jenkins (1998) defines as “socially constructed social problems characterised by a reaction, in the media and political forums, out of proportion to the actual threat.”¹⁵⁸

Langone however argues that such denunciations of the traditional psychological perspective of thought control within cultic groups appears to confuse the conditions associated with brainwashing, and one particular outcome of brainwashing, namely the creation of a deployable agent of the group: “The possibility that one brainwashing

¹⁵⁶ Hexham and Poewe, “The Erosion of the Social Link”, p. 127.

¹⁵⁷ James R. Lewis, 1989. “Apostates and the Legitimation of Repression: Some Historical and Empirical Perspectives on the Cult Controversy”, *Sociological Analysis* 49. pp. 386-396.

¹⁵⁸ Philip Jenkins, 1998. *Moral Panic: Changing Concepts of the Child Molester in Modern America*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, p. 158.

program might be ineffective, another moderately effective, and still another very effective seemed to have escaped notice.”¹⁵⁹

Barker appears to echo this sentiment by remarking that there needs to be recognition of the subtle interplay between the individual and the group, and given the wide range of different movements and different individuals who join them, it is probable that no single explanation of why people join such groups will suffice.¹⁶⁰ It is interesting to note that sociologist Ben Zablocki has defended the concept of brainwashing and has promoted a less caricatured notion of this process in the sociological literature.¹⁶¹

2.6.3 Sociological critiques of theological perspectives on cults

Hexham and Poewe take issue with evangelical Christian researchers who criticise cults for brainwashing members by pointing out British psychiatrist William Sargant’s use of the term brainwashing in connection with religious conversion in his book *Battle For The Mind* (1959):

...evangelical conversion from St Paul to Billy Graham can be explained in terms of psychological processes that he says are akin to what was called ‘shell shock’ during World War 1. Shell shock is a psychological process that can be engineered to produce personality changes, and Sargant claims that “brainwashing” to produce a religious conversion is a similar process.¹⁶²

By association then, if shellshock is equated with brainwashing, and both are related to religious conversion, Sargant was deliberately implying that the conversion process is pathological. Sargant further considered “evangelicals to be dangerous people who force religious mystique upon the minds of believers in a way that stunts reason... people like Billy Graham abuse people mentally and gain followers by brainwashing.”¹⁶³

¹⁵⁹ Langone, “Cult Awareness Groups”, p. 146.

¹⁶⁰ Barker, “An Introduction to New Religious Movements”, p.3.

¹⁶¹ Benjamin Zablocki, 1997. “The blacklisting of a concept: the strange history of the brainwashing conjecture in the sociology of religion.” *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*, Vol. 1, No. 1. pp. 96-121.

¹⁶² Hexham and Poewe, *Understanding Cults*, p. 8.

¹⁶³ Hexham and Poewe, *Understanding Cults*, p. 9.

The point Hexham and Poewe make is that evangelical Christians are swift to accuse certain religious groups of brainwashing, yet their own tradition has been cited for similar practices.

A further Christian objection to cult conversion is that cults believe something “unreasonable”. But as Hexham and Poewe point out, in Western society “...reason and nature are in alliance. What is reasonable is also thought to be natural, and so many hold that it is natural to convert to Christianity but it is not natural to convert to cults.”¹⁶⁴

Similarly, such critics also hold the assumption that Christianity is more natural due to its longevity, compared to the relative novelty of cultic groups. Barker points out that religious innovation and thus new religions have occurred throughout history: early Christianity was a new religion, so were Zoroastrianism, Islam and Methodism at their conception.¹⁶⁵ She contends that many of the characteristics nowadays associated with cults were manifest in these nascent religions too.

From a sociological perspective, perhaps the greatest mistake made by Christian apologists is to criticise cult conversion on the basis of Christian doctrine. This reduces conversion to an intellectual exercise, negates emotions, experiences, cultural issues and ignores the fragmentation of Christian belief in the modern era. As Hexham and Poewe point out:

The fact is that apologetics doesn't provide the best means for understanding the conversion experience. Apologists are principally concerned with intellectual reason alone, but sociological studies have shown that interpersonal relationships and communal feelings play a far more important role than coldly rational deliberation in the conversion process.¹⁶⁶

Consequently, Hexham and Poewe take issue with, for example, Walter R. Martin's assumption that traditionally conceived Christianity is the only reasonable religion and

¹⁶⁴ Hexham and Poewe, *Understanding Cults*, p. 2.

¹⁶⁵ Barker, “An Introduction to New Religious Movements”, p.1.

¹⁶⁶ Hexham and Poewe, *Understanding Cults*, p. 3.

that cults in their insincerity and deception, do not authentically meet the needs of their members.¹⁶⁷

What then drives cult recruitment and conversion, according to sociologists? Each cult will employ differing recruitment strategies but typically, cults use existing social networks to recruit. Friends invite friend, family or colleagues invite family or colleagues. Individuals will be more likely to join the group if it meets a perceived need in their life and allows them to create new social bonds.¹⁶⁸ The weaker the social and ideological ties outside the cult, the stronger the likelihood that an individual will become involved, emotionally connected to and converted to the ideology of the group. Recruits most often are individuals seeking answers to the philosophical questions of life, and as such predispose themselves to converting to the cult's worldview and doctrines. Lofland and Stark provide a seven-step model of the process of conversion based on predisposing conditions:¹⁶⁹

1. The experience of chronic, but acutely felt, tensions in the recruit's life.
2. This tension experienced within a religious problem solving perspective/worldview.
3. Tension experienced in this context allowing recruits to consider themselves religious seekers.

The following situational contingencies also need to be present:

4. The recruit needs to encounter a cult at a turning point in their lives.
5. The recruit needs to form an affective bond with one or more members of the cult.
6. The recruit needs to reduce or eliminate relationships outside the cult.
7. The recruit needs to be exposed to intensive interaction with other converts.

¹⁶⁷ Hexham and Poewe, *Understanding Cults*, p. 4.

¹⁶⁸ Hexham and Poewe, "The Erosion of the Social Link", p. 127.

¹⁶⁹ John Lofland & Rodney Stark, 1965. 'Becoming a World-Saver: A Theory of Conversion to a Deviant Perspective', *American Sociological Review*, 30. pp. 862-875. In Dawson, *Cults and New Religious Movements*, p. 118.

Dawson offers the following profile of the typical cult convert:¹⁷⁰

- They are idealistic
- They come from a reasonably happy, conventional and respectable family background where contribution to society was stressed
- They experienced a sheltered environment
- They were encouraged to be overachievers
- They have retarded emotional development as they were protected from the usual crises of adolescence and thus when making the transition to adult life are likely to experience disappointment and hurt. Thus the idealistic and structured/sheltered environment of the cult would suit them.

It has been noted that there is often a disproportionate representation of adolescents and young adults in cults. A simple explanation offered by Bainbridge and Stark is that “this segment of the population is relatively free of countervailing social and economic obligations and commitments. They have the time and the opportunity to indulge their spiritual appetites and experiment with alternative lifestyles.”¹⁷¹

As the recruit is drawn into the cult, they experience rewards such as “affection and heightened self-esteem, esoteric and exoteric knowledge that provides a sense of power and control over one’s life, as well as simple material and social aid, security, new career opportunities and forms of prestige.”¹⁷²

Hexham and Poewe also recognise the presence of what they term “primal experiences” in cults. These are unexpected, vivid, unusual experiences that can take many forms but which shock those that encounter them and change their relationship to the material world. Primal experiences serve to validate the teaching of the group and help convince recruits of the authenticity of the group’s relationship with the divine. “Before a person has a primal experience, he or she may view the new mythology as simply an unusual or

¹⁷⁰ Dawson, *Cults and New Religious Movements*, p. 124.

¹⁷¹ In Dawson, *Cults and New Religious Movements*, p. 120.

¹⁷² Dawson, *Cults and New Religious Movements*, p. 120.

even intriguing way of seeing the world. But following such an experience, even novel myths seem unremarkable and acceptable.”¹⁷³

They acknowledge that primal experiences can occur outside of religious groups but if they occur they will be unlikely to be validated by secular society and may indeed be labelled as abnormal. Within a cult, individuals may feel a freedom to speak about their experience and find that it is taken seriously. Consequently this affirmation reinforces the reality of the experience and gives it a theological interpretation.

Christian apologists are often critical of the conversion and primal experiences of those who join cults. Yet as Hexham and Poewe point out, a typical reaction of Christian converts is to claim that their conversion made sense of the Bible and their life because both took on a new meaning. Many Christians speak of how the Bible seemed meaningless until they were converted. Conversion, they say, removed blinkers from their eyes and enabled them to see the truth. Exactly the same claims are made by cult members.¹⁷⁴

Furthermore, the horror with which parents respond to their children joining a cult must be put into perspective. Hexham and Poewe point out that if a convert to Christian has parents or family that are not Christian they will potentially be as horrified or confused by the conversion of their child:

To the outsider the world of the believer is an alien culture. The easiest and safest reaction to an unfamiliar worldview of this sort is to simply say that it makes no sense, that it is irrational. Attempting to understand those unlike us entails looking closely at our own beliefs and way of life, and many people find that a threatening prospect.¹⁷⁵

In any case, sociologists view mainstream churches and cults as groups on a religious continuum. Although mainstream churches may present society with few controversial

¹⁷³ Hexham and Poewe, *Understanding Cults*, p. 60.

¹⁷⁴ Hexham and Poewe, *Understanding Cults*, p. 13.

¹⁷⁵ Hexham and Poewe, *Understanding Cults*, p. 14.

moral or legal issues this cannot provide a categorical distinction between them and cults. Beckford posits that the fact that cults tend to gain notoriety in the media is largely due to their unusual or negative practices and goes on to cite “examples of scandals, abuses, and problems in mainstream, supposedly respectable Christian churches...to draw attention to the disparity between the levels of public awareness and anxiety about problems in well-established religious organisations and the levels of concerns about so-called ‘cults’.”¹⁷⁶

Furthermore, he attributes the higher public profile of cults, inter alia, to the non-conventional lifestyles of their members, the use of modern and sophisticated methods of communication by both cults and ACMs, and enthusiasm and commitment of members of cults being notable against the religious apathy of much modern society. Sociologists also see cults as providing a valuable opportunity for researchers to understand what factors are involved in the development of religion. By studying their beginnings, it is assumed that light might be shed on the origins and development of the great world faiths. Bainbridge and Stark postulate that cults have a two-step process of development:

First, new religious ideas must be *invented*. Second, *social acceptance* of these ideas must be gained, at least to the extent that a small group of people comes to accept them... We conceptualise successful cult innovation as a social process in which innovators both invent new religious ideas and transmit them to other persons in exchange for rewards.¹⁷⁷

In conclusion, we are reminded by sociologists that cults do not develop in a vacuum, and they so often have their origins in the unmet aspirations and needs of individuals. It is somewhat ironic that it is the sociological perspective on cults, rather than the theological approach, that stresses the human needs of those that join cults. This suggests that a pastoral rather than polemical response to cults and cult members might be a more productive and Christian route of engagement.

¹⁷⁶ Dawson, *Cults and New Religious Movements*, p.27.

¹⁷⁷ Bainbridge and Stark, “Cult Formation”, p. 59.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter has briefly presented the discussion surrounding cult definitions, questions concerning cult development, and what motives inform the behaviour of cult members. There is clearly some overlap and also considerable divergence and disagreement between the approaches to the subject, and despite the opportunities presented this dissertation does not aim to resolve any of the tensions between the schools of thought. Rather by highlighting the different approaches to cults the point is made that cults are complex phenomena that are produced by social, psychological and theological dynamics. Chapter Five explores whether there is any correlation between the features of cults presented in the academic literature and data on GGC, in order to test the first part of the research hypothesis that GGC is indeed a cult.

The literature review has demonstrated that a broader, inclusive approach that reflects cult complexity would be valuable. In the following Chapter it is argued that Janja Lalich, in her book *Bounded Choice: True Believers and Charismatic Cults* provides such an approach and has used this model to evaluate the Heaven's Gate cult. The chapter begins with a brief biography of Lalich, and continues with a description of her four-dimensional analytical cult framework.

Chapter Three: Janja Lalich and the bounded choice of the true believer

3.1 Introduction

Following the theological, psychological and sociological perspectives on cults presented in Chapter Two, the bounded choice model provides another means of evaluating a group. If a group embodies the four dimensions of Lalich's model, it will constitute a cult according to Lalich, and it will promote the dynamics necessary for the psycho-social state of bounded choice to develop in members of the group. This state of bounded choice offers a compelling explanation for the self-defeating, destructive and seemingly irrational behaviour of certain members of cultic groups, without resorting to notions of spiritual possession or mental illness. Lalich contends that from her "years of study, writing, research, and hands on activities that the confounding behaviours of some cult members occur as a logical conclusion to lives that have been gradually constrained in an increasingly oppressive social structure."¹⁷⁸

A detailed description of Lalich's bounded choice model follows an introduction of Lalich and her work.

3.2 Janja Lalich: professional profile

Janja Lalich Ph.D. is Professor of Sociology at California State University and a researcher, author, and educator who specialises in cults and extremist groups. Lalich has a particular interest in "charismatic relationships, political and other social movements, ideology and social control, and issues of gender and sexuality".¹⁷⁹ Lalich has worked as a consultant to educational, mental health, business, media, and legal professionals, and has also worked with current members and former members of cultic groups, and their families.

¹⁷⁸Janja Lalich, 2004. *Bounded Choice. True Believers and Charismatic Cults*. Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, p. 2.

¹⁷⁹ Janja Lalich, "About Dr Lalich". <http://cultresearch.org/about/> (accessed 28/01/2012)

Lalich is a member of the American Sociological Association, the Association for the Sociology of Religion, the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, and the Pacific Sociological Association. She is the founder and director of the Centre for Research on Influence and Control, and serves on the Executive Advisory Board of the International Cultic Studies Association, as well as on the editorial board of its journal, the *Cultic Studies Review*. Lalich has appeared on numerous American television and radio news programs, such as *Meet the Press*, NPR's *Morning Edition* and *To the Best of Our Knowledge*, as well as BBC radio's *Thinking Allowed*.¹⁸⁰ Her numerous published works and articles are further indicators of her authority in the area of cultic groups.¹⁸¹

Lalich's interest in the cultic groups and their dynamics was inspired by her 11 year membership of the San Francisco Democratic Worker's Party (DWP), a radical left-wing political group of the 1970's and 1980's.

The Democratic Worker's Party began in 1974 in California through the charismatic leadership of former sociology professor Marlene Dixon. She wished to create a politically radical group, founded on Marxist-Leninist principles but also with strong feminist, anti-racist and gay liberation foci. Dixon's paper entitled *Principles of Dialectical Leadership* provided the ideological framework for the group. Recruitment of gay and straight people was encouraged and after recruitment, new members were given new names and were melded into a collectivist group culture requiring the pooling of income and resources, long hours of assigned tasks and extreme self-criticism. The group went through several name changes – originally being known as

¹⁸⁰ Janja Lalich, "About Dr Lalich". <http://cultresearch.org/about/> (accessed 28/01/2012)

¹⁸¹ Lalich's books include: *Take Back Your Life: Recovering From Cults and Abusive Relationships*, 2006; *Bounded Choice: True Believers and Charismatic Cults*, 2004; *Misunderstanding Cults: Searching For Objectivity in a Controversial Field*, 2001; "Crazy" Therapies: What Are They? Do They Work? 1996; *Cults in Our Midst*, 1995, with Margaret Singer; *Captive Hearts, Captive Minds: Freedom and Recovery from Cults and Abusive Relationships*, 1994. Her articles include: "Repairing the Soul after a Cult Experience", *CSNetwork Magazine*, Spring 1996, pp. 30–33; "Using the Bounded Choice Model as an Analytical Tool: A Case Study of Heaven's Gate", *Cultic Studies Review*, 2004, Vol. 3, No.3; "The Cadre Ideal: Origins and Development of a Political Cult", *Cultic Studies Journal*, 1992, Vol. 9, No.1; Introduction: "We Own Her Now", *Cultic Studies Journal*, 1997, Vol. 14, No.1; "Dominance and Submission: The Psychosexual Exploitation of Women in Cults", 1997, *Cultic Studies Journal*, Vol.14, No.1; "Women Under the Influence: A Study of Women's Lives in Totalist Groups", Guest Editor, Special issue, *Cultic Studies Journal*, 1997, Vol.14, No.1.

the Workers Party for Proletarian Socialism, then the Workers Party until eventually becoming the Democratic Workers Party in 1984. The DWP initially operated in a paramilitary and clandestine manner with members participating in activities among Leftist groups while keeping their membership and party secret. On 6 November 1979, the Party's existence was formally acknowledged through a public document issued by the Party, and from this point it grew from 125 to 175 full-time militants. Dixon became seen as a great figure within the Communist movement as a personality cult developed around her.

By the end of the 1970s Dixon had become more qualified in her revolutionary thinking and compromises she advocated alienated some members who saw this as an about-face. In time, Dixon distanced herself from Marxism-Leninism as she felt it had failed in the United States. By late 1985 Dixon began supporting the idea of leaving the party and setting up a think tank in Washington, D.C. This, together with her unstable behaviour, paranoia and alcoholism inspired her lieutenants in the Party to assess her leadership and the party's work, while Dixon was on a trip to Eastern Europe. On the night before Dixon was scheduled to return, party members convened and unanimously voted to expel the General Secretary (Dixon) from the party, and then to dissolve it. This resolution was upheld through a mail vote held in April 1986 and by August 1987 the Party had been dissolved and its assets distributed among members.

Lalich joined the DWP in 1975 and became a high ranking member of the group. After its dissolution, and while recuperating from the demands the group had made on her, a friend urged Lalich to read a book on Jonestown. She was surprised to discover that "the differences between the Party and Jonestown (and there were many) were not so great as the similarities."¹⁸² As she later declared, "I wanted to figure out what the heck happened to me"¹⁸³ and thus began her research of cultic groups. Lalich published her Ph.D. dissertation entitled *Bounded Choice: The Fusion of Personal Freedom and*

¹⁸² Lalich, *Bounded Choice*, p. xviii.

¹⁸³ 17 April 2003. "Cult Expert Janja Lalich Offers New Theory on Brainwashing", *Inside Chico State*, Volume 33, Number 14. <http://cultresearch.org/about/dr-lalichs-theory-on-brainwashing/> (Accessed 28/1/2012)

Self-Renunciation in Two Transcendent Groups in 2000.¹⁸⁴ It was later developed into the 2004 book *Bounded Choice. True Believers and Charismatic Cults*.¹⁸⁵ In *Bounded Choice* she compared and contrasted two very different kinds of cults in order to identify their similarities and differences: the DWP and the UFO cult Heaven's Gate.

Heaven's Gate was founded in the early 1970's by Marshall Applewhite (1952 – 1997) and Bonnie Lu Nettles (1911 – 1985) who believed themselves to be extraterrestrial beings from "The Evolutionary Level Above Heaven". Their philosophy was a blend of Christianity, theosophy and science fiction. They began to hold meetings, often on university campuses in California to offer information about UFOs to interested parties. At this point they were known as HIM (Human Individual Metamorphosis). Although they claimed that they were not proselytising, they began to attract followers with the promise of attaining "the next level", and by 1976 had around 200 members. This number was whittled down to 70 who were deemed worthy of progress to the next level. Applewhite and Nettles adopted the names Do and Ti respectively and demanded that their members make a complete break with their pasts, give up all material possessions, donate their money to the group, abstain from sex and adopt new names. The daily routine of Heaven's Gate was highly regimented with down to the minute scheduling and members were required to assume a common, androgynous look. These demands and disciplines were prescribed for those who wished to prepare for life on the next level and for the voyage on the space-craft that would transport them to this life. In the 1980's little was heard from the group but in 1993 they re-emerged through apocalyptic advertisements in the media. By 1996 they had rented a property in San Diego, California and had changed their name to Heaven's Gate. Precipitated possibly by his failing health, but also as a result of accepting the claim of an amateur astronomer that a UFO was tailing the Hale-Bopp comet as a portent, Applewhite made arrangements for the group's "departure" to the next level. Over several days, beginning on around 22

¹⁸⁴ Lalich, J. 2000. "Bounded Choice: The Fusion of Personal Freedom and Self-Renunciation in Two Transcendent Groups." Ph.D. dissertation, Santa Barbara, California: Fielding Institute.

¹⁸⁵ Janja Lalich, 2004. *Bounded Choice. True Believers and Charismatic Cults*. Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press.

March 1997, groups of Heaven's Gate's members committed suicide in their San Diego property. In all, 39 members died.¹⁸⁶

Lalich's research combines personal reflections and in-depth interviews of members of these two groups. In *Bounded Choice* her four dimensional model offers a new approach for understanding the dynamics of cultic groups.

Lalich used this model to examine and analyse the Heaven's Gate cult in the article "Using the Bounded Choice Model as an Analytical Tool: A Case Study of Heaven's Gate" which was published in the *Cultic Studies Review*.¹⁸⁷ Since then she has not revised her bounded choice model but has produced works that continue to explore the theme of psycho-social manipulation.

In *Take Back Your Life: Recovering from cults and abusive relationships*¹⁸⁸ Lalich and co-author Madeleine Tobias explore how individuals are drawn into abusive relationships, and how distress and even posttraumatic stress disorder may be experienced by people who have experienced such relationships. *Take Back Your Life* provides both insight and empowerment for victims of abuse.

3.3 Group social dynamics

How does one account for the bizarre, destructive and irrational behaviour displayed by individuals at Jonestown, the branch Davidian compound or perhaps by the Lotter siblings? Possession is a convenient, if inadequate, explanation for such behaviour. And, as has been argued in the previous chapter, the discipline of theology will similarly yield limited insights into cultic behaviour. Indeed, Lalich contends that "using solely a religious studies paradigm to study these groups hampers us"¹⁸⁹ as the existence of cults and people's behaviour in them is broader than a religious phenomenon. But, at the same time, she regards the beliefs of the group fundamental to

¹⁸⁶ Chris Mikul, 2009. *The Cult Files: True Stories From The Extreme Edges Of Religious Belief*. Miller's Point, NSW, Australia: Pier 9.

¹⁸⁷ Janja Lalich, 2004. "Using the Bounded Choice Model as an Analytical Tool: A Case Study of Heaven's Gate." *Cultic Studies Review*, Vol. 3, No. 3.

¹⁸⁸ Lalich, J. & Tobias, M. 2006. *Take back your life: Recovering from cults and abusive relationships*. Berkeley: Bay Tree Publishing.

¹⁸⁹ Lalich, *Bounded Choice*, p. 6.

the creation of a “true believer” and thus makes group ideology a key component of her interlocking framework.

Her theory of bounded choice is drawn from the field of social dynamics which, in broad terms, deals with the circular effect a group has on individuals within the group, and the effect that individuals in a group have on the group. It rests on a framework inspired by the work of sociologist Anthony Giddens whose theory of structuration¹⁹⁰ postulates that any group will have three defining dimensions:

1. *Signification* concerns the constitution of meaning
2. *Domination* has to do with expressions of power via resource authorisation and allocation
3. *Legitimation* is based in a code of conduct and upheld by normative sanctions.¹⁹¹

The social dynamics theory underlying structuration determines that these three dimensions do not just constitute the group - they also inform the knowledge base and actions of the group’s members, who then act in ways to recreate the group. Based on this thinking, Lalich developed a four-dimensional framework which similarly accounts for meaning making, and expressions of power, conduct and control in cultic groups. These four dimensions are charismatic authority, a transcendent belief system, systems of control, and systems of influence. They interlock and are interdependent.

3.4 Lalich’s social dynamics framework

This framework is constitutive for Lalich. It provides the basis for her definition of a cult, and accounts for the organisational structure and psycho-social state of members of cults.

In essence, the presence of these four dimensions creates an introspective, self-justifying group, closed to any information or influence that might challenge its beliefs

¹⁹⁰ Anthony Giddens, 1984. *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

¹⁹¹ Lalich, *Bounded Choice*, p. 222.

or practices. These dynamics serve to transform members of the group – some may undergo a relatively superficial personality shift and change, as their identification with and commitment to the group is limited. Others commit deeply and become what Lalich terms a “true believer” or “deployable agent”¹⁹² of the group. The true believer is the individual who acts in ways that appear extreme or irrational to outsiders of the group. But to the true believer their beliefs and actions express their highest aspirations and are consistent with their notion of personal freedom or salvation, and their beliefs and actions perpetuate the group. Lalich labels the psycho-social state of the true believer “bounded choice”, as the individual’s reality and freedom are severely limited by the horizons imposed by the group.

3.5 Boundedness

The notion of “boundedness” is a concept that Lalich draws from the work of economist, psychologist and Nobel laureate Herbert Simon who coined the term “bounded rationality” to refer to a situation where the rationality of decisions or actions is limited to the knowledge and resources available to an individual. Simon argues that in a perfect situation all potential options would be available to a person thus making a perfectly rational decision. But in reality, rationality is bounded by the limitations of knowledge, access to knowledge or personal resources. He used the term “satisficing” to refer to “good enough” decisions and actions in response to the complex realities of life.

Lalich makes the point that the palette of possible options available to a member of a cult will be severely curtailed by the options congruent with the group’s thinking and practice, and thus even basic satisficing is compromised.

Some cult members make seemingly irrational, harmful, and sometimes fatal decisions. Yet these acts are committed in a context that makes perfect sense at the time to those who enact them and are, in fact, consistent with an ideology or belief system that they trust represents their highest aspirations. I call this “bounded choice”.¹⁹³

¹⁹² Lalich, *Bounded Choice*, p. xvi.

¹⁹³ Lalich, *Bounded Choice*, p. 2.

3.6 Lalich's four-dimensional framework

For Lalich, a cultic group is defined and actualised by the interlocking and interdependent dimensions of the four dimensions of charismatic authority, a transcendent belief system, systems of control and systems of influence. They play a decisive role in the organisational structure of the group and the psycho-social moulding of group members as each dimension generates both a vision of freedom or salvation, as well as a demand for self-renunciation.

Lalich employed this framework and theory in her analysis of Heaven's Gate and the DWP, and it will similarly form the basis of the research into Grace Gospel Church. Each dimension is now described in some detail.

3.6.1 The relational dimension: charismatic authority

The framework's first dimension is relational and is centred on the emotional bond that develops between the leader of a cultic group and the members of the group. Lalich calls this dynamic "charismatic authority" as it is a power relationship that develops as a result of esteem and affection. The overall purpose of charismatic authority is to provide leadership for the group but it also serves to legitimate the authority of the leader to the group. Charismatic authority is promoted through privilege and command and it leads members to identify ever more deeply with the leader.

For Lalich, charismatic authority is extremely significant as it provides the foundation for all that follows: without a leader there would be no attraction or call or promise of salvation. Similarly without followers responding to the call, there would be no legitimisation of the leadership, no group, and no group dynamics.

Typically, charismatic authority in cultic groups is fostered by the leader using group-appropriate language, symbolism and ritual that makes a deliberate claim to personal pedigree and/or a lineage of authority. Examples include claims of a special connection to a higher power or to the source of the ideology; notions of the leader's perfection, and prophecy about the group, leader or future. Together with evasions of proof about

these claims, an unassailable level of authority is created, to which new recruits respond and which loyal members defend, and by means of which, all member are controlled.

In Heaven's Gate and the DWP the charismatic authority cultivated an essentially parental relationship. As Lalich posits, "A member's every need was met, or was supposed to be met, by virtue of participation in the group."¹⁹⁴ Both groups provided housing, finance for members and directed their major life decisions. Members submitted to this authority

as one does to a parent – sometimes with guilt or shame, sometimes with anxiety, sometimes with relief, and almost always with a mixture of love and fear. The personality regression apparent in at least some of the members, as well as the lack of independent thought and action on the part of members of both groups, indicated a type of developmental regression.¹⁹⁵

Charismatic leaders tend to keep a protective distance from followers. Access to them is limited and so is access to information on financial and strategic decisions. There may be strict policies controlling the dissemination of information, including any information on a leader's background. This naturally stifles discussion and evaluation of leaders. However there is frequently an inner circle of followers in cultic groups "...for consultation, for implementing and maintaining the status quo, for personal attendance, for moral support, and for sharing good and bad times."¹⁹⁶

The leadership may also promote distance from, and tension with, outsiders to the group. By deliberately antagonising outsiders they are able to fuel perceptions within the group of having enemies and being persecuted. This promotes a paranoia that serves to keeps members in a state of uncertainty and fearfulness which fosters a renewed reliance upon and submission to the leadership. The control dimension of Lalich's framework intersects with charismatic authority at the point where members submit their personal freedom, lifestyle and worldview to the authority of the group's leader.

¹⁹⁴ Lalich, *Bounded Choice*, p. 238.

¹⁹⁵ Lalich, *Bounded Choice*, p. 239.

¹⁹⁶ Lalich, *Bounded Choice*, p. 224.

Cult leaders are frequently responsible for modifying popular beliefs in their social milieus, thus creating a novel and attractive belief system which, combined with the leader's special relationship with the higher power or source, becomes a definitive formula for salvation. The interlocking of the dimension of charismatic authority and the transcendent belief system is here evident.

Charismatic leaders are held up as role models for their followers. They set the style and tone of the group, and are received by their followers as being exemplary and perfect. Members attempt to emulate their example. Paradoxically, double standards are common: leaders are not held to the strict standards they set for their followers. It is also common for leaders of cultic groups to demand absolute devotion and veneration from their followers. As Lalich points out, "All this, of course, is related also to issues of knowledge and power, because devotion to charismatic leaders is inseparable from a type of dominant power relationship based on the dissemination of, or the promise of the dissemination of, knowledge."¹⁹⁷

The knowledge that is synonymous with the leader is the knowledge of how to attain personal salvation or freedom. Veneration becomes a trade-off for the possibility of salvation which precipitates an increasing dependency on both the leadership and the group. In time adherents come to believe that they have no existence or value apart from the leader and group. Any thought of leaving the group inspires acute fear at the thought of losing contact with the source of salvation and of group support, and of potentially being required to undergo another major shift in worldview. There is therefore strong motivation for members to conform to the ideal promoted by the group and its leader, to model themselves on one another and thus to succumb to the power of influence - the remaining dimension of Lalich's framework.

Charismatic authority leads to authoritarianism and groups that lack democratic mechanisms for members. In time, the charismatic authority in the group becomes

¹⁹⁷ Lalich, *Bounded Choice*, p. 19.

institutionalised but this does not detract from the personal and unique devotion that individuals have for their leader.

In Lalich's words, charismatic authority "serves to lend legitimacy and grant authority to the leader's actions while at the same time justifying and reinforcing the followers' responses to the leader and/or to specific ideas and goals."¹⁹⁸

3.6.2 The soteric dimension: the transcendent belief system

The second dimension of the framework is termed "the transcendent belief system".

This dimension provides the

...overarching ideology that binds adherents to the group and keeps them behaving according to group's rules and norms. It is transcendent because it offers a total explanation of past, present, and future, including a path to salvation. Most important, the group also specifies the exact methodology, or recipe, for the personal transformation necessary to qualify one to travel on that path.¹⁹⁹

This dimension has two major components: a promise and a path. The promise is of personal freedom or salvation, whether political or metaphysical. In cultic groups, salvation tends to be presented in an urgent, all inclusive and exclusive manner. There is often an apocalyptic urgency that stresses that time is short; an all-inclusive claim that the group presents the "truth" about life, God or an ideology; and the engendering of a sense of significance and privilege amongst members which promotes an elitist separation from the world. Of Heaven's Gate and the DWP, Lalich writes, "they ridiculed other groups and belief systems and thereby were able to justify the requirements that adherents separate from people and activities that were not part of the group's elitist system."²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸ Lalich, *Bounded Choice*, p. 17.

¹⁹⁹ Lalich, *Bounded Choice*, p. 17.

²⁰⁰ Lalich, *Bounded Choice*, p. 227.

She makes the further observation that cults tend to be “serious and different”²⁰¹ from other groups.

Salvation is promised but conditional upon the group member’s commitment to a path of personal transformation. The path of transformation is unique to the group, prescriptive and ultimately based on impossible, unrealistic ideals. Typically, transformation occurs through the member’s strict adherence to the group norms and rules, self-criticism and the remodelling of self upon the group ideal, and a complete detachment from pre-cult thinking and behaviour. It is a process that is facilitated through intensive training and indoctrination programmes. Discipline and social sanction occur if members fail to exhibit appropriate beliefs or behaviours. The intersection of this dimension with the systems of control and systems of influence are evident in the various pressures that keep a member upon the path of transformation. The transcendent belief system is fully actualised when it is internalised in the group’s members and specifically when it enables a conflation of the notion of personal salvation and the group’s goals.

In some groups, the methods used to indoctrinate members are overtly manipulative and forceful. Lalich writes,

The substance of the indoctrination programs in both groups was not unlike thought reform and coercive persuasion. In the DWP and Heaven’s gate, change processes were based on highly emotional and psychologically intrusive stages that involved the rejection of the past and one’s previous identity, a shift in values and the recoding of preferences, and the rebirth of a new self.²⁰²

The transcendent belief system is integral to the formation and evolution of the group as it articulates a unique promise of salvation; provides substance to the leader’s charismatic authority and shapes the transformation of the member into a true believer. With the dimension of charismatic authority, the belief system makes up the core structure of the group.

²⁰¹ Lalich, *Bounded Choice*, p. 227.

²⁰² Lalich, *Bounded Choice*, p. 227.

3.6.3 The control dimension: systems of control

The third dimension of the framework, termed “systems of control” by Lalich, is concerned with the structure and daily operation of the group and includes such components as the organisational form, hierarchy, discipline, code of conduct and behavioural norms. She describes these components as the “network of acknowledged, or visible, regulatory mechanisms that guide the operation of the group. This includes the overt rules, regulations, and procedures that guide and control group member’s behaviour.”²⁰³

This dimension of the framework aims to create compliance and obedience within the group.

Lalich argues that, in general, cultic groups exhibit a pyramidal hierarchical structure: a top-down command structure that requires unconditional obedience. Decision making is strictly centralised with leaders being responsible for decisions affecting the organisation and the personal lives of members. There is a requirement for members to be totally, or nearly totally, submitted to the leader and the rules of the group. The charismatic authority of the leader and the transcendent belief system establish and confirm the leader’s “right of rule” over the group. A model of submissive, unquestioning obedience is promoted which applies social pressure on members to conform. It is disturbing to note that the type of obedience advanced through the interlocking the four dimensions in Heaven’s Gate and the DWP bore a striking resemblance to that observed in the classic Stanley Milgram’s “Obedience to Authority” experiment²⁰⁴ – that is, orders from those in authority were followed without questioning, however harmful or irrational they may have been.

²⁰³ Lalich, *Bounded Choice*, p. 17.

²⁰⁴ Stanley Milgram, “Behaviour study of obedience”. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 67 (1963), pp 371-378. Inspired by the question of whether leading Nazis like Adolf Eichmann could justifiably argue that they were just following orders, Milgram measured the willingness of study participants to obey an authority figure who instructed them to perform acts that conflicted with their personal conscience. His experiment required volunteers to administer incremental electric shocks to another participant, with an alleged heart condition, if this participant made learning mistakes. The “slow learner” was an actor who only pretended to be shocked but in spite of personal misgivings, two-thirds of volunteers continued giving the learner increasingly painful shocks when prodded by individuals in white coats (representing authority figures) to do so. A conclusion drawn from this was that ordinary people in

The groups that Lalich researched maintained rigid boundaries between themselves and the outside world, and between the group's internal divisions. Security was stressed due to the paranoid ideation promoted by the group's belief system. Movement and communication beyond the group was tightly controlled and collectivity was promoted by the pooling of money and resources, and living communally. Internally, a plethora of rules and regulations resulted in a highly regulated and tightly controlled daily existence for members. Access to information was restricted and based on a "need to know" policy. Particular areas, buildings and topics of conversation were off bounds for members.

Personal control was further applied by new members being required to take on new names and being instructed to refrain from speaking about their personal backgrounds or emotional matters. Punishments and sanctions were imposed for violations of the rules. Rule-breaking and backsliding were identified through self- and peer reporting. In time, life within these groups became rigid, legalistic and introspective which had the effect of moulding members into rigid, dogmatic and single-minded individuals.

The effect that systems of control have on members and the interconnectedness between control and the other dimensions are explained by Lalich:

[It was]... practically impossible for members to see any way through the boundaries of the system. Rules and regulations hardened into a numbing and oppressive reality. These institutionalized systems of control were justified in each group by its overarching transcendent belief system. Members understood them to be the right of charismatic leadership and accepted them as such.²⁰⁵

3.6.4 The social controls dimension: Systems of influence

The final dimension of Lalich's framework deals with the pressure social influence exerts on group members, inducing them to model their behaviour on an ideal of the transcendent belief system. Leaders or model members are esteemed leading to a general striving after these behaviours. However, the ideal is unrealistic and impossible

particular situations where they feel they are advancing some common good (like scientific progress) or ideal, and when instructed to do so by an authority figure, may engage in reprehensible acts.

²⁰⁵ Lalich, *Bounded Choice*, p. 230.

to attain for any length of time, and the pressure to conform to it causes members to constantly feel inadequate and thus live with a continuous self-critical monitoring. This personal focus prevents criticism of the system or its truths. Lalich observed the following in Heaven's Gate and the DWP:

Adherents were expected to reject their former lives and interests, shed their pre-group identities, and take on a new group-moulded identity. They were to have no loyalty other than to the leader and the group, and no interests other than working toward group-approved goals ...the object is the moulding of identities in the image of the leader.²⁰⁶

As discussed above, this identity shift is a fundamental aspect of the personal transformation required for salvation. In the DWP and Heaven's Gate the transformation was aided by the strict moral code and rigid daily discipline (systems of control), which promoted collectivity and conformity with the leaders' demands. Members strove to be crew-minded, to be a cog in the machinery of the group, to be a corporate actor. Whatever strictures members experienced in terms of their personal freedom as a result of this transformation they were able to rationalise as being required by the transcendent belief system. Moreover the belief system of both groups underscored the notion that personal transformation was something individuals could freely choose or reject. As Lalich notes,

This was an important aspect of securing members to their mission, for they clearly believed that they were the agents of their own transformation. They had made the commitment to change. No-one was doing this *to* them; they were doing it to themselves – sometimes contentedly, sometimes begrudgingly – and they understood that it would not be easy.²⁰⁷

Social pressure, expressed through an encouragement of members to act altruistically towards other members, identify with successful members, share important experiences, and allow control to rest in someone else, encouraged individuals to make the psychological shift of identifying with the leader and group. Ultimately, the systems of

²⁰⁶ Lalich, *Bounded Choice*, p. 230.

²⁰⁷ Lalich, *Bounded Choice*, p. 231.

influence aim to create conformity, mutual dependence and self-renunciation. “Eventually, life outside the cult becomes impossible to imagine.”²⁰⁸

The reality is that members of cultic groups are not making a free choice from any number of possible choices in moulding themselves in the likeness of the group and its leader. They are influenced by subtle but powerful psychological and social forces in the group to conform to the ideal of the group, to do what is required for salvation. It is also clear that when all members of a group have identical outlooks, a situation of optimal control exists for those in authority.

3.6.5 The self-sealing system

The interlocking and supporting dimensions result in what Lalich describes as a “self-sealing” or closed system. This is a type of closed system that serves to continually reinforce itself and is not open to disconfirming evidence or alternative view points. Any information that might discredit or challenge the group’s leadership, ideology or practice is rejected. In certain cases the group is exclusive and the belief system is all inclusive – that is, the group provides the only way to salvation and has the answer to everything. In such systems, the individual and group become merged, which creates for members an impermeable situation – that is, boundaries between self, others, and the outside world are closed off and sealed.²⁰⁹

In this context, organisational choices are made by the leader, for no one else is considered qualified or has the authority to do so. Personal choices, if and when they arise, are made in the context of bounded choice. First, choices are formulated within and constrained by the self-sealing framework and style of consideration, which always puts the organisation first. Second, those choices are bounded by the constriction of each member’s thought patterns, which once more, always put the organisation first.²¹⁰

The bounded reality of the group leads to the bounded reality of the group’s true believers. These members internalise the group’s worldview and identify intensely with

²⁰⁸ Lalich, *Bounded Choice*, p. 18.

²⁰⁹ Lalich, *Bounded Choice*, p. 232.

²¹⁰ Lalich, *Bounded Choice*, p. 246.

the group. This internalisation and identification brings meaning, purpose and a sense of belonging that together are experienced as a type of personal freedom and self-fulfilment. Paradoxically though, as self-sealing systems demand a high level of commitment and expressions of commitment from members, such members' sense of freedom develops inversely to their personal autonomy. Autonomy is compromised in ever-increasing acts of self-renunciation, for example, in relation to decision making, as the range of choices available to the member are constrained by the real or imagined confines of the group. As personal decisions and actions conform to the group's worldview and goals, bounded choice begins to emerge. It is clear that bounded choice does not represent an abrogation of human freewill but rather a limiting and distorting of freewill, thus leaving the member of the cult ultimately responsible for their actions.

The self-sealing system is a group that promotes bounded choice in its members. Individuals who are induced by these dynamics into a state of bounded choice validate and perpetuate the self-sealing system, thus creating a self promoting loop, consistent with social dynamics theory.

3.7 Lalich's cult definition

This brings us to Lalich's definition of a cultic group, which brings together the four dimensions discussed above:

A cult can be either a sharply bounded social group or a diffusely bounded social movement held together through shared commitment to a charismatic leader. It upholds a transcendent ideology (often but not always religious in nature) and requires a high level of personal commitment from its members in words and deeds.²¹¹

3.8 Recruitment of cult members

Drawing from her experience and research of the DWP and her research into Heaven's Gate, Lalich describes the development of the true believer. She regards the individual's social context an important departure point. In writing of the two groups Lalich notes:

²¹¹ Lalich, *Bounded Choice*, p. 5.

During the early 1970's, political activists and spiritual seekers were drawn to ideas, personalities, and activities present in their unique social environment. Through personal factors and circumstance, some of these individuals banded together under the guidance of Marshall Applewhite and Bonnie Nettles [leaders of Heaven's Gate] and Marlene Dixon [leader of the DWP], in the other.²¹²

Ideas and concepts held dear in a particular social milieu tend to influence leaders of cultic groups who incorporate these notions in their belief system and organisational structure, thus providing an attractive ideology and group for potential members.

Recruitment is most often undertaken by early devotees of the group and less occasionally by the group's leaders. Individuals that are perceived to be "primed" for involvement in the group are purposefully selected. Thus, in the early recruitment of the DWP, leftist and feminist activists were targeted; in Heaven's Gate, meetings that offered an opportunity to explore the unknown, the possibility of life after death and UFO's were held near progressive universities and communities. Curious individuals would attend gatherings of these two groups, having been invited by a friend, family member or colleague that was a member of the group, or as a result of a poster or advertisement. Lalich draws attention to the fact that in as far as individuals respond to invitation to join cultic group, the selection process may be considered interactive.

Lalich provides a general profile of those who joined Heaven's Gate and the DWP: at least some were frustrated at prior political or spiritual efforts they had made, and were seeking meaning, purpose and belonging; they ranged in age from early twenties to early fifties with an average between twenty-seven and thirty-two; some had stable relationships and employment, others did not have either. Lalich concluded that social stability is a less significant factor in joining a cultic group than an intellectual or emotional attraction towards the group, its leader and aims.²¹³

At the initial meeting with the group, the individual would be exposed to classic recruitment techniques including "flattery, positive reinforcement, peer pressure,

²¹² Lalich, *Bounded Choice*, p. 222.

²¹³ Lalich, *Bounded Choice*, p. 237.

involvement in group activities, emotional destabilisation, persuasive arguments, and separation from usual routines and social supports.”²¹⁴

Potential recruits would learn that membership in the group required a personal transformation, the ideal of which was presented in the group’s belief system. Cadres of the DWP and students of Heaven’s Gate, notes Lalich, took part in calculated and ongoing programs of directed change. The goal of these programs was individual transformation: to alter beliefs, attitudes, thinking, and values.²¹⁵

3.9 Commitment and conversion

For Lalich the complex processes of conversion and commitment are inextricably intertwined in cultic groups. As an individual becomes attracted to the vision or teaching of the leader or group, commitment develops. Integral to the commitment is the constant renunciation of who the individual was before joining this “life-saving” group. Lalich posits that the individual’s “pre-cult” identity is sometimes slowly, sometimes rapidly replaced by a cult persona:

This is not schizophrenia, nor the eruption of a split personality, as might be described in the psychological literature. Rather the cult member undergoes the development of a personality that stands for and stands with the newly adopted worldview and its practices. Total and unquestioning commitment requires a new self.²¹⁶

In the DWP and Heaven’s Gate, the degree of commitment was not just visible in group participation – it also became evident in the “changed thinking, attitudes, and behaviours as devotees strove to abide by the discipline and achieve the ideal.”²¹⁷ Commitment thus led the individual through a process of inner change and perspective shift in line with the ideology and practices of the group. This change was experienced deeply and often painfully as the individual’s personality, attitude and behaviours were modified.

²¹⁴ Lalich, *Bounded Choice*, p. 236.

²¹⁵ Lalich, *Bounded Choice*, p. 235.

²¹⁶ Lalich, *Bounded Choice*, p. 19.

²¹⁷ Lalich, *Bounded Choice*, p. 235.

The process of transformation is synonymous with the notion of conversion, but Lalich prefers the term “worldview shift” to conversion as she believes that “conversion” has strong religious connotations, and worldview shift can and does occur in non-religious contexts, such as the DWP. For example, the DWP professed a political goal of achieving working class salvation through social justice. Members aspired to be a “steeled cadre, a selfless worker for social justice and economic equality.”²¹⁸ To become this, members submitted themselves to criticism sessions, devalued their individualism and internalised Dixon’s belief in the imminent downfall of capitalism. A commitment to this process resulted in the adoption of a new worldview and set of behaviours, an outcome synonymous with conversion. As this research focuses on a religious group – Grace Gospel Church - the term “conversion” will be preferred to worldview shift.

Conversion leads “to complete identification with the leader and the group as well as a life-altering internalisation of the group’s worldview.”²¹⁹

In Lalich’s view conversion is “a fluid, gradual process, not a sudden, overnight occurrence. In some instances, the person may not be aware of the extent to which she or he is stepping into a new world – or a new way of grasping the world and understanding oneself.”²²⁰ However subtle the process of transformation may be, a totally transformed self is the outcome. It is a process well described in the religious cliché of death and rebirth.

It can also be understood as a process of re-education. Lalich records that social psychologist Kurt Lewin described conversion in the following manner: “It is a process in which changes of knowledge and beliefs, changes of values and standards, changes of emotional attachments and needs, and changes of everyday conduct occur not piecemeal

²¹⁸ Lalich, *Bounded Choice*, p. 141.

²¹⁹ Lalich, *Bounded Choice*, p. 235.

²²⁰ Lalich, *Bounded Choice*, p. 16.

and independent of each other, but within a framework of the individual's total life in the group."²²¹

Lalich allows for the fact that, in some instances, conversion may occur as a result of coercive persuasion²²² – that is, where external and often manipulative pressure is required:

Typically, it occurs through the use of a mixture of emotional appeals, rituals, instruction, self-examination, confession, and rejection, all in a context that deftly combines stress and harmony. Most often, guilt, shame, and anxiety are integral to this process. Responding to the demands can be exhausting and stressful, for it requires repeated acts of self-renunciation; at the same time, the person experiences relief at having “found the answer” which is associated with a kind of personal freedom.²²³

Lalich argues that the coercive persuasion type of conversion was evident in the DWP and Heaven's Gate, as both groups used thought reform or brainwashing techniques such as identity stripping, forced confessions, alternating periods of severity and leniency, symbolic death and rebirth ordeal.

At this point, it is important to stress that some members of cultic groups will undergo a relatively superficial conversion marked by insignificant personality and behavioural shifts and a limited commitment to the group (sympathisers and general members). Such individuals retain a degree of personal autonomy. However, the deeper an individual's commitment to the group, the stronger the possibility that “charismatic commitment”²²⁴ will develop. This commitment can develop rapidly and is motivated by the individual's belief that membership of the group will ensure an important life goal, such as salvation.

3.10 Charismatic commitment and the creation of the true believer

²²¹ Lalich, *Bounded Choice*, p. 15.

²²² Lalich, *Bounded Choice*, p. 15.

²²³ Lalich, *Bounded Choice*, p. 16.

²²⁴ Lalich, *Bounded Choice*, p. 15.

The point where the individual is able to reconcile and fuse the promise of personal freedom or salvation through the group and the group's concomitant demand for personal self-renunciation is when charismatic commitment is said to have happened. It is a fusion of opposites – freedom and constraint; life and death. In this reality

the believer becomes a “true believer” at the service of a charismatic leader or ideology. In such a context, in relation to personal power and individual decision making, that person's options are severely limited...in a state of ever present bounded choice, a narrow realm of constraint and control, of dedication and duty.²²⁵

Having reconciled the paradox of personal freedom and personal constraint in the name of the group and its goals, the member becomes a true believer, and a deployable agent of the group. In Lalich's words, “this fusion – which I call charismatic commitment – and its resultant social-psychological state – which I call bounded choice – is the force that time and again keeps people tethered to groups, relationships, or situations that many outsiders find incomprehensible.”²²⁶

It is the true believer who is capable of committing the most irrational or repugnant deeds within or on behalf of a group.

Charismatic commitment must not be understood as an irreversible and stable state of being but rather as a “recurring, renewable, and renewing process”.²²⁷ “Backsliding” in terms of commitment is anticipated and the resolution of such crises precipitates an even greater belief in the group. The commitment is cultivated and maintained by an interactive process, which is based on the charismatic relationship between leaders and their followers and between members and the group as a whole.

3.12 Analytical use of the bounded choice framework

In the year 2004 Lalich proceeded to use the bounded choice framework to examine and analyse the Heaven's Gate cult. This analysis was presented in the article “Using the

²²⁵ Lalich, *Bounded Choice*, p. 15.

²²⁶ Lalich, *Bounded Choice*, p. 18.

²²⁷ Lalich, *Bounded Choice*, p. 18.

Bounded Choice Model as an Analytical Tool: A Case Study of Heaven's Gate" and published in the *Cultic Studies Review*.²²⁸ Based on textual analysis and interview data, Lalich illustrated that the conditions for bounded choice were met in Heaven's Gate, and that this psycho-social state of the member, where personal freedom had become fused with the ideological aspirations of the group, could provide an explanation for the unusual and ultimately suicidal behaviour of its members.

Lalich's use of the bounded choice framework as a methodology to study the Heaven's Gate cult provides justification in using the same framework to investigate the radical degree of commitment displayed by members of GGC. It is a published and proven approach to cult analysis that avoids any reductionistic unidisciplinary methodology. Data drawn from testimonies and documents will be compared to the framework in Chapter Six. The results of the questionnaire that was based on the bounded choice model, and administered to former members of GGC will also be evaluated in Chapter Six.

3.12 Conclusion

Lalich's perspective on cults is based on a social dynamics framework and draws from the work of other cult theorists, such as Lifton's understanding of totalistic groups and thought reform, and Schein's ideas on coercive persuasion. But Lalich moves beyond these theories to develop the contextual theory of bounded choice. Her focal point is the "transformative demand"²²⁹ that motivates some members of the group to become "true believers" and thus deployable agents of the group and its leader.

Instead of focussing on one particular cult dynamic such as its withdrawal from society, leadership dynamics, belief system, membership or activities, and attempting to make that the defining feature of the cult, she identifies the four dynamics (transcendent ideology, charismatic leadership, systems of control and systems of influence) which together precipitate the unusual and often destructive human behaviour consistent with

²²⁸ Janja Lalich, 2004. "Using the Bounded Choice Model as an Analytical Tool: A Case Study of Heaven's Gate." *Cultic Studies Review*, Vol. 3, No. 3.

²²⁹ Lalich, *Bounded Choice*, p. 4.

cult membership. This can be argued to be a multidisciplinary approach as transcendent ideology is concerned with matters of worldview and belief, thus corresponding to the discipline of theology; charismatic leadership and systems of control are elements of the psychological understanding of cults, as demonstrated in Chapter 2; and systems of influence are the domain of social psychology and sociology.

In contrast to a purely psychological explanation of cult operation, Lalich avoids placing responsibility for all that happened on the cult leader, the individual who joins a cult, and the family who are often blamed for, in some way, psychologically grooming the individual for cult membership. She furthermore attempts to neither prove nor disprove the harm caused by cults, and takes a middle of the road view with respect to brainwashing.

Many scholars deny that brainwashing even exists and consider its use as a social science concept to be epistemologically fraudulent. Others make grandiose claims for the brainwashing conjecture, often using it to account for virtually everything about human behaviour in high demand religious organisations. Neither of these approaches is helpful...When brainwashing occurs, it is the result of a series of intense social-psychological influences aimed at behaviour modification. It is a complex, multilayered and time consuming process. Typically it is not used during the introduction and recruitment stages of cult contact. Brainwashing does not occur in every cult, and it can occur in other contexts. It requires a specific type of setting and interaction. Yet it is not foolproof, nor does it create a permanent state of mind or being.²³⁰

Unlike other sociologists she refrains from adopting an unduly sympathetic, apologetic or glorified perspective on cults. Her research on the DWP and Heaven's Gate did not rely on a superficial visit to cult's approved location or interview with the group's approved spokesperson or leader. Lalich is also unafraid to use former member informants believing that the notion that such informants are unreliable is an erroneous assumption. She does not deny the presence of positive aspects and experiences in cultic groups. "Given the complexity, and in some cases the sophistication, of many cults,

²³⁰ Lalich, *Bounded Choice*, p. 6.

individuals in the same group may have widely varying experiences, some positive, some negative, some even neutral.”²³¹

Lalich refuses to approach cults from a purely religious or theological perspective due to the wide range of cults that embrace non-religious ideologies, although she regards the belief system of the group to be an essential component for bounded choice to occur.

Having gained an overview of the academic literature on cultic groups, Lalich’s integrated approach, and its analytical application, it is possible to turn to the subject of this research, Grace Gospel Church and learn more of its beliefs and practices.

²³¹ Lalich, *Bounded Choice*, p. 4.

Chapter Four: Grace Gospel Church - Its beliefs, practices and opponents

4.1 Introduction

Grace Gospel Church (GGC) is a partner church of the Mauritian- based Church Team Ministries International (CTMI). Due to the nature of this partnership CTMI's polity and theology determine that of GGC's and so it is necessary to begin this chapter by providing an overview of CTMI. The origin and work of the Concerned Parents' Group – a group that formed to oppose and raise awareness about CTMI and GGC – will also be chronicled.

4.2 The origins and development of Church Team Ministries International

Church Team Ministries International claims to be an international Christian organisation. Its headquarters are at the Eglise Chretienne (The Christian Church) in Curepipe, Mauritius. Both the Eglise Chretienne and CTMI were founded by Michel Hardy (born in 1949 in Mauritius) and Hardy is listed as the pastor and one of the elders of Eglise Chretienne.

Mauritius was a place of great political, economic and religious turmoil during the 1960's and 1970's. In 1968 the island gained independence from Britain and political power began to move away from a Christian minority to a Hindu majority. Independence was opposed by some of the Christian population, and in the wake of independence there were mass emigrations of around 80 000 Christians to Europe, Africa and Australia. Ethnologist Bernard Bouter describes this period as “steeped in anguish and uncertainty” for Christians in Mauritius.²³² Mauritians also began to suffer economically from the 1970's onward due to the ailing sugarcane monoculture.

Michel Hardy was raised in the Roman Catholic faith, and qualified as a civil engineer. Around 1977 he encountered the Catholic Charismatic Renewal movement. This proved

²³² <http://bboutter.over-blog.com/article--miki-hardy-l-eglise-chretienne-de-curepipe-et-le-reseau-ctmi-40258124.html> 29 Novembre 2009 (Accessed: 27/07/12)

to be a spiritual turning point in his life, prompting him to leave the Catholic Church and join the Assemblies of God. He worshipped in the Assemblies of God church for a short period and then, in 1978, broke away from this church with a small group of like-minded individuals and formed an independent Pentecostal church.

The following year (1979) Michel and his wife, Audrey, left Mauritius to attend Bible School at Durban Christian Centre, in South Africa. They studied there until 1982, when Michel was sent back to Mauritius under the “apostolic”²³³ oversight of Pastor Fred Roberts of Durban Christian Centre. Hardy assumed leadership of the group he had formerly belonged to after leaving the Assemblies of God. This was not well received by all in the group and it divided. The group Michel led adopted the name “Eglise Chretienne” (The Christian Church) and he started becoming known as “Miki” Hardy. Eglise Chretienne allegedly experienced strong opposition from other churches and the government but grew rapidly over the next decade.²³⁴ This opposition was probably due to Eglise Chretienne’s well-publicised criticisms of other religious groups. In 1989 riots broke out in Curepipe following Eglise Chretienne making inflammatory statements about Islam.²³⁵

Hardy frequently travelled with Pastor Roberts to church groups in Southern Africa and Mauritius and in 1989 they met Basil O’Connell-Jones in Bulawayo. O’Connell-Jones was to become “profoundly impacted”²³⁶ by Hardy’s ministry. By 1991 Hardy and Roberts had fallen out over women in eldership roles and the Toronto Blessing

²³³ This notion of apostolicity is described well by S.B. Addison: “The spiritual gift of apostle is given to individuals to equip the whole church in its apostolic calling. Apostles are called by God, but their calling is to be recognized by the body of Christ. The ministry of an apostle is trans-local and involves both church planting and strengthening existing churches. The authority of an apostle is determined by the apostle’s willingness to be a servant of the gospel and of the body of Christ. Apostles are recognized by their pioneering and trans-local ministry of church planting and church strengthening. Apostles function best as leaders of apostolic bands that are in partnership with local churches.” (*The Continuing Ministry of the Apostle in the Church’s Mission*. D.Min. Dissertation, 1995), <http://www.movements.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/ApostolicMinistry-SteveAddison.pdf> (Accessed 18/08/12).

²³⁴ JOY! Magazine, Volume 15: Issue 5. <http://ctmi.mu/en/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/1-1.jpeg> (Accessed 14/04/12)

²³⁵ Sharlene Packree, Cult luring Christians. (*The Witness*, 06/02/2010), http://www.witness.co.za/index.php?showcontent&global%5B_id%5D=35431 (Accessed 07/07/12)

²³⁶ Basil O’Connell-Jones, 2000. *Amazing Grace*. (Hillcrest: Grace Gospel Church), p. 137.

phenomenon²³⁷ which was sweeping South Africa at the time through the ministry of Rodney Howard Browne. As a result of the dissociation with Roberts and Durban Christian Centre, Hardy and Eglise Chretienne no longer fell under “apostolic” oversight. Significantly, during the early 1990’s, Hardy’s preaching was centred on notion of apostleship and Hardy became increasingly regarded as, and referred to, as a “father in the Spirit” and “father of the church”. By appealing to a Pauline text such as 1 Corinthians 4:15 (“Even though you may have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel.”) he insinuated that, in a similar way to the oversight St Paul had over the Corinthians, he too should be regarded as an apostolic “father” of Eglise Chretienne.

During the course of the 1990’s, Hardy allegedly became disillusioned with what he perceived to be the wider Church’s brokenness, in-fighting, hypocrisy and immaturity. And “...as he sought the Lord for direction, the revelation of the power of the cross of Jesus Christ and of the grace of God came to his heart.”²³⁸ He came to believe that the problems he had experienced in the church were as a result of the state of his own heart, and the solution to them lay in embracing the cross in his own life. This revelation, which occurred around 1996, became a mystical turning point in his life and the foundation for his subsequent ministry.

Hardy realised that if his revelation was to be accepted by others, he would need to live it out in his own life. In doing so, and in sharing the revelation (or gospel) of the cross with others, he claims to have “...witnessed major changes in the church, which included a greater unity among the leaders as well as spiritual growth, stability and peace within the local church.”²³⁹

This “fruit” validated the revelation for Hardy and encouraged him to regard it as a message for the Church at large. At the same time, the fact that he had received such a crucial revelation appears to have confirmed in his mind, and in the minds of his

²³⁷ Revivalistic movement characterised by ecstatic worship, being “slain in the Spirit”, laughter, shaking, animal noises, and crying.

²³⁸ <http://ctmi.mu/en/about-us/history> (Accessed: 19/02/12)

²³⁹ <http://ctmi.mu/en/about-us/history> (Accessed: 19/02/2012)

followers, that the apostolic ministry which he had to this time only dared refer to obliquely, had been divinely bestowed upon him. Consequently, in 2001, which was a year marked by ethnic unrest in Mauritius,²⁴⁰ he established Church Team Ministries International (CTMI), with the vision of uniting churches under the revelation of the cross.

CTMI has since 2001 allegedly entered into partnership with churches in 22 countries around the world.²⁴¹ It claims to unite people from diverse cultural backgrounds who then work in unison to equip and encourage church leaders. Although it refrains from stating this explicitly, CTMI provides an apostolic ministry and oversight for its partner churches. The partnership spoken of is not a partnership of equals – CTMI’s doctrine and polity completely overshadow all partner churches. A loose but useful analogy is the relationship between the Vatican and individual Catholic parishes. In the same way that it would be impossible to imagine individual Catholic parishes deviating from fundamental Catholic doctrine or rejecting the ultimate authority of the Vatican, and remaining Catholic, so it is with member churches and CTMI. Consequently, in order to understand the beliefs and practices of GGC it is necessary to describe those of CTMI. From this point, where appropriate, the acronym CTMI/GGC will be used, to indicate a belief or practice that is synonymous with both organisations.

The vision of CTMI is described as follows:

- To present a living testimony to the Church of the power of the Cross of Jesus Christ that transforms lives, families, churches, and ministries.
- To strengthen, equip and help Church Leaders through the message of the Cross and the Grace of God, in order to see the Church restored and established on the foundation of Christ.²⁴²

²⁴⁰ The island’s Creole minority, feeling that they were excluded from the benefits of economic growth, access to education and health, and participation in government, launched protests across Mauritius.

²⁴¹ Inter alia - Mauritius; Paris, France; La Reunion; Harare & Bulawayo, Zimbabwe; England; USA; South Africa; Botswana; Kenya. <http://ctmi.mu/en/about-us/our-network> (Accessed: 20/02/12)

²⁴² <http://ctmi.mu/en/about-us/mission-vision> (Accessed 19/02/2012)

CTMI's mission is

- To hold conferences for Church Leadership
- To send teams on follow-up visits after conferences
- To establish relationships, equip Local Churches, and build up Teams of Ministries
- To provide direction, encouragement, and support to the churches forming part of the CTMI Network.²⁴³

The distinct doctrines of CTMI/GGC will be discussed at length below.

Hardy continues to be listed as the pastor of Eglise Chretienne which since 1978 has expanded into a fellowship of over 30 churches in Mauritius and Rodrigues²⁴⁴ and is also one of CTMI's partner churches. As Eglise Chretienne and CTMI are both led by Hardy, and CTMI has its headquarters in the church, Eglise Chretienne is regarded as the headquarters of CTMI. It is clear that CTMI has provided legitimacy and scope for Hardy's apostolic ambitions in a manner that Eglise Chretienne never could.

4.3 The origins and development of Grace Gospel Church

Miki Hardy's transnational ministry was first felt in Durban through the ministry of Pastor Howard Silk. Silk had initiated a small fellowship called Zoe Christian Church in February 1992. Silk had been a long time friend of O'Connell-Jones, who as stated above, had come under Hardy's influence. Silk, too, submitted his ministry to Hardy and thus Zoe Christian Church came under the oversight and shared ministry of Eglise Chretienne. Hardy directed that this small church be shut down so that Silk could be tutored and deployed by him in Mauritius and other places. Zoe Christian Church closed down at the beginning of 1993 but was briefly restarted by Silk between 1996 and 1998 when he was unable to obtain a further visa to continue ministry in Zimbabwe for Hardy. Between 1998 and 2003 many of the former members of Zoe Christian Church kept in contact and in 2003 O'Connell-Jones was sent by Hardy from Selborne Park Christian Church in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, to re-establish this group in Durban.

²⁴³ <http://ctmi.mu/en/about-us/mission-vision> (Accessed 19/02/2012)

²⁴⁴ <http://eglise.mu/eglise/> (Accessed: 29/07/12)

O'Connell-Jones had been at Selborne Park Christian Church for 22 years, and is well known in charismatic Christian circles for his autobiography, *Amazing Grace*²⁴⁵ which describes his faith journey after experiencing a near-fatal gunshot wound while serving in the Rhodesian Light Infantry. The group was initially known as Highway Gospel Church and then Grace Gospel Church. (GGC). Pastor Neil Martin joined the leadership team of GGC in 2008. Grace Gospel Church is currently a congregation of approximately 50 members²⁴⁶ that has met in various venues in and around Pinetown.

Pinetown is a town situated approximately 16 km west of Durban at an elevation of 305 to 395 m.²⁴⁷ It was established in 1850, and by 2001 had a population of around 100 000 people.²⁴⁸ It has three high schools, several primary schools and the shack dweller's movement, Abahlali baseMjondolo is prominent in the Motala Heights area of the town. Pinetown has historically been regarded as a light industrial town but is slowly becoming sought after among first-time home buyers.²⁴⁹

Grace Gospel Church (GGC) is one of CTMI's partner churches. On their website they present the following Statement of Faith:²⁵⁰

- We believe the Bible to be the inspired, the only infallible, authoritative Word of God.
- We believe that there is one God, eternally existent in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- We believe in the Deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, His virgin birth, His sinless life, His miracles, His vicarious atoning death through His shed blood, His bodily resurrection, His ascension to the right hand of the Father, and His personal return in power and glory.
- We believe that for the salvation of lost and sinful people, regeneration by the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential.
- We believe in the present ministry of the Holy Spirit, by whose indwelling the Christian is enabled to live a Godly life.

²⁴⁵ Basil O'Connell-Jones. 2000. *Amazing Grace*. Hillcrest: Grace Gospel Church.

²⁴⁶ GGC does not subscribe to the practice of a formal membership roll. This estimate was provided by former pastor of the group, Howard Silk.

²⁴⁷ Pinetown Fact File. <http://kwazulu-natal.co.za/122.Fact-File-Pinetown.htm> (Accessed 15/07/13)

²⁴⁸ <http://www.citypopulation.de/php/southafrica-ethekwini.php?cid=57271> (Accessed 15/07/13)

²⁴⁹ Pinetown Fact File. <http://kwazulu-natal.co.za/122.Fact-File-Pinetown.htm> (Accessed 15/07/13)

²⁵⁰ <http://www.gracegospelchurchsa.org/statement-of-faith/> (Accessed: 29/07/12)

- We believe in the resurrection of both the saved and the lost; they that are saved unto the resurrection of life and they that are lost unto the resurrection of damnation.
- We believe in the spiritual unity of believers in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Two issues should be immediately noted: firstly, this Statement of Faith is identical to that found on CTMI’s website; and secondly, it articulates an Evangelical Protestant understanding of the Christian faith. CTMI/GGC’s claim to fall within this tradition will be considered below.

Stephan Pretorius, who has authored two journal articles on CTMI and GGC, and managed to interview two of their young members, notes that O’Connell-Jones preaches the need for a change of heart through identification with Jesus Christ. For O’Connell-Jones identification with Christ leads to personal abnegation, revealed in an uncompromisingly righteous lifestyle. Pretorius concludes, “This belief in commitment seems to have far-reaching practical effects, not only in the lives of the members but also of their parents and families.”²⁵¹

Pretorius is correct in pointing out that the commitment of members in GGC have led to consequences such as family alienation. But it is what these members are committed to – in essence, the particular beliefs of GGC – that have raised the greatest ire and concern about GGC. Thus, their distinctive beliefs will now be considered in detail.

4.4 Distinctive CTMI/GGC doctrines and practices

Despite the evangelical Statement of Faith on both CTMI and GGC websites and Hardy’s claim to be part of the evangelical Protestant Christian tradition,²⁵² CTMI/GGC

²⁵¹Stephan Pretorius, 2010. “Family Alienation is Presented as a Requirement for Total Commitment in Some New Religious Groups”, *Journal for Christian Scholarship* 46. p.9.

²⁵² e.g. Herve Latars, The Christian Church restores its truth. (*Le Matinal*, 08/02/2010, <http://www.lematinal.com/news/local-news/3029-LEglise-chretienne-retablit-sa-verite.rss>), where Hardy declared that Eglise Chretienne was an Evangelical Protestant Church aligned with 500 million other evangelical Christians worldwide (Accessed 12/06/12); and The Editors, The Christian Church opens its doors Sunday. (*Le Matinal* 29/01/2010, <http://www.lematinal.com/news/local-news/2852-LaEglise-chrtienne-ouvre-ses-portes-dimanche.html>) where Hardy stated, “...This day is intended to publicize the operation and activities of the Christian Church and discover its activities by showing that the Protestant Church is a church open, accountable and transparent. Christian Church is a cultural, non-profit organization created in 1978 in Mauritius. It is part of the evangelical movement and has 11 churches in

display unique beliefs that set them apart from mainstream Protestant, Charismatic or Pentecostal churches.

Silk summarised the distinctive slant CTMI/GGC's doctrines took over time:

Initially the message was one that particularly espoused grace and the revelation of Jesus Christ, messages that I embraced and endorsed. However some years ago the message shifted and became one that almost exclusively endorsed a life dominated by the work of the cross in people's lives, and lives given to the church, the elders and "the apostle" or father, Miki Hardy. This message also majored on the church being the real family and encouraged members to become estranged from actual family members, wives from husbands and children from parents. There are many examples of family members rejecting spouses and parents as a result of this "doctrine", taken from basically 2 scriptures – The one where Jesus states that he has not come to bring peace but a sword (Matt 10:34) and where He says that his followers are his true mother and brothers (Mk 3:33).²⁵³

Each of these doctrines will be considered now in detail.

4.4.1 Apostolic anointing

The foundational CTMI/GGC belief is that Hardy is a divinely appointed, modern-day apostle tasked with bringing the revelation of the cross to the worldwide Church. Hardy's apostolic position is enshrined in the polity adopted by CTMI.

CTMI is structured according to a paradigm derived from Ephesians 4:11-13, known as the "five-fold" ministry. This structure stresses the need for the teamwork and co-operation of five distinct ministries, namely the ministries of apostle, prophet, teacher, evangelist and pastor. Hardy contends that this paradigm is "paramount" in order to establish contemporary churches upon "the true foundation so that they may become mature and reach unity in the faith."²⁵⁴ He argues that individual churches lack spiritual authority and fail to grow because they are generally served by only one of the ministries described, for example that of pastor. Hardy declares, "Today, many

the country. The evangelical movement currently has over 400 million members worldwide (60,000 in Mauritius)..." (Accessed 12/06/12)

²⁵³ Letter emailed from Silk to Erin Georgiou, editor of JOY! Magazine (03/10/2009) in Appendix "A".

²⁵⁴ <http://ctmi.mu/en/teaching/the-five-fold-ministry-by-miki-hardy> (Accessed 07/04/2012)

Christians are falling apart, being destroyed because they don't hear the right Gospel enough. As a result they backslide and leave the Church. Because of the lack of genuine Apostles carrying the true anointing, the message is absent from the Church today."²⁵⁵

By "right gospel" he insinuates that CTMI's beliefs, particularly those of the "five-fold ministry", are normative for the worldwide church. However, this "right gospel" is only allegedly brought by genuine Apostles. His circular reasoning notwithstanding, it is interesting to understand how a "genuine Apostle" might be identified. Hardy declares that they are known by message they preach:

What did Paul preach? What revelation had he received from the Lord? In 1 Corinthians 2:2, he states: "For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified". In 1 Corinthians 3:10, he writes that by the grace God gave him, he has laid a foundation as an expert builder. The true foundation of Christian life is not just our faith in Christ, but also our identification with Him in His sufferings, His death and His resurrection. This is the heart of Christianity... the Apostolic Gospel, the message of the cross, which he described as "the power of God!"...*The revelation of this Gospel is a sure sign of the Apostolic ministry, because it is the essence of God's entire, and only, plan for His Church, with which Apostles are called to build the Church.* That is why when the foundation is laid in a church by an Apostle, Christians receive a clear understanding of what God is asking of their lives, because the call becomes distinct and they have an example that they can follow. Present-day Apostles must receive and preach the same revelation as Paul did. The Lord Himself will enlighten the men who are called to this ministry and reveal to them the mystery of the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ.²⁵⁶ (Italics for emphasis).

It is evident that in Hardy's theology the apostolic ministry and the revelation of the cross are vitally complementary realities. His revelation of the cross will be discussed in the next section but it is important to note the reasoning embedded in Hardy's theology. He argues that

1. The "five-fold" ministry paradigm (as interpreted by him) is the only correct form of church polity

²⁵⁵ <http://ctmi.mu/en/publications/joy-magazine/an-interview-with-miki-hardy> (Accessed: 19/02/12)

²⁵⁶ <http://ctmi.mu/en/teaching/the-five-fold-ministry-n-%C2%B02-the-apostle-2> (Accessed: 19/02/12)

2. The “five-fold” paradigm requires a living apostle
3. An apostle is designated by receiving the revelation of the cross (as understood by Hardy)
4. Hardy claims to have received a revelation of a cross, therefore he is a contemporary apostle.

The CTMI website describes the important function of the apostle:

...he lays the foundation; he reveals Christ and the heart of Christ for the Church...The Apostle is a father to many churches, leaders and Christians, as he provides oversight, direction and protection to the church thanks to the anointing on his life...It is evident from the Bible that the Apostle carries greater spiritual authority than the other ministries, simply because it is part of the anointing he has received.²⁵⁷

A paradox emerges at this point. The apostolic office is obviously crucial in CTMI’s theology. O’Connell-Jones openly claims that the organisation has an apostle, “your church is scared of losing people because we have something you don’t have - apostolic anointing and revelation”,²⁵⁸ and Peter McKenzie goes as far as declaring who the apostle is:

...Soon I found myself, as a minister, travelling to churches in different countries and experiencing amazing prophetic manifestations of the Holy Spirit. The blessing of this ministry was clear to many, but I was alone and vulnerable! Through the grace of the Lord I met Miki Hardy and the apostolic call on his life confronted my independence and pride. I surrendered my one-man ministry and submitted my life to that authority.²⁵⁹

Yet, CTMI’s website fails to identify who its apostle is and in the Carte Blanche interview, Hardy ducked the question of whether he was the Apostle of CTMI by stating:

²⁵⁷ <http://ctmi.mu/en/teaching/the-five-fold-ministry-n-%C2%B02-the-apostle-2> (Accessed 07/04/2012)

²⁵⁸ Posted by “Keith B”. (04/07/12). <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=7&t=1566> (Accessed 14/05/12)

²⁵⁹ <http://ctmi.mu/en/teaching/the-five-fold-ministry-n-%C2%B03-the-prophetic-anointing> (Accessed 07/04/2012)

We are Church Team Ministries International – with 100’s of churches - not one person rules and reigns. There are seven of us on a committee. It can happen tomorrow that I am not on the committee... There is no structure whatsoever. We are not interested in taking over churches. Our affiliates are free to act and preach what is on their heart. They have their own websites.²⁶⁰

This statement will be more fully evaluated in the next chapter but it is sufficient to state that it is deeply disingenuous. There is only one individual who meets all the criteria for an apostle, and that is Miki Hardy. For members of CTMI and their partner churches he is the undisputed de facto apostle of the organisation.²⁶¹ A contributor to the CPG website comments:

...the fact that Miki is the apostle is plain to all members. They thank God in prayer for ‘the apostle’ or ‘the apostolic anointing over Miki’s life’. The most surprising thing to me is that he is not only the only apostle in CTMI but clearly he is also seen by CTMI members as the only living apostle in the world! And I don’t see how anyone else could be approved of as his equal. CTMI leadership is designed in such a way as to make the other elders ‘yes-men’ submitted to him. Everyone else is assigned a place under him. There is more than one person in the other ministries. Peter McKenzie and Marc Labonte are prophets. Basil and Lindsay Lajeunesse are both evangelists, etc. But the apostolic anointing it seems has been given to only one. He says he believes that every church needs an apostle but how could this be? The only way would be for Miki to be the apostle of all churches. What does it take to be an apostle according to CTMI? Direct revelation from God seems to be stressed upon.²⁶²

Based on this statement, it would appear that Hardy has subtly protected his position as apostle. He has received what is believed to be the most important revelation that God could entrust to humanity, and thus no other revelation could challenge his. If someone within CTMI claimed to have received any revelation, they would have first received the revelation of the cross from Hardy and this would accord them and their revelation a lesser status than apostle. Naturally, someone outside of CTMI claiming to receive a revelation would be a false prophet as they would not be begotten of “the gospel of the cross.” His position is unassailable and irreplaceable.

²⁶⁰ *Carte Blanche*: 7 February 2010

²⁶¹ E.g. Former member, “Mongoose’s” post, (25/11/09), <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=7&t=70> (Accessed 12/05/12)

²⁶² Posted by “Ella”, (05/10/10), <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=6&t=257&p=1692> (Accessed 14/05/12)

Exactly why Hardy shrinks from calling himself the apostle of CTMI, and why the organisation is similarly reticent to identify him as such, is unclear. Perhaps it is an attempt at humility, but it nonetheless has the appearance of deceit.

4.4.2 The revelation of the cross

The complementary doctrine to that of apostolic anointing is Hardy's "revelation (or gospel) of the cross". This revelation underpins all other key doctrines, and is the hermeneutical principle of CTMI and all its partner churches. Despite its importance, it is not included in CTMI's (or GGC's) Statement of Faith.²⁶³ But on the same website, the revelation of the cross is emphasised. For instance, CTMI describes their vision in the following manner:

- To present a living testimony to the Church of the power of the Cross of Jesus Christ that transforms lives, families, churches, and ministries;
- To strengthen, equip and help Church Leaders through the message of the Cross and the Grace of God, in order to see the Church restored and established on the foundation of Christ.²⁶⁴

This revelation appears to be the dominant narrative of CTMI and its partners. A contributor to the Concerned Parents' Group website remarks, "Their 'gospel of the cross' [is] mentioned in almost every sermon/conference/TV show/Magazine article/radio interview we have ever encountered..."²⁶⁵

Hardy does not regard his revelation of the cross to be a unique or extra-biblical revelation but rather a renewed emphasis on the most basic and powerful message of the first apostles. He declares, "What did Paul preach? What revelation had he received from the Lord? In 1 Corinthians 2:2, he states: 'For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified'."²⁶⁶

²⁶³ <http://ctmi.mu/en/about-us/statement-of-faith-2> (Accessed: 19/02/12)

²⁶⁴ <http://ctmi.mu/en/about-us/mission-vision>. (Accessed 19/02/2012)

²⁶⁵ Posted by "CPG Testimonies", (21/01/12), <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=6&t=1005> (Accessed 19/4/12)

²⁶⁶ <http://ctmi.mu/en/teaching/the-five-fold-ministry-n-%C2%B02-the-apostle-2> (Accessed 15/03/12)

Hardy consequently believes that he preaches the same message as St Paul, and his call for the wider Church to hear the “revelation of the cross” has all the appearance of a call for reform and repentance in the Body of Christ. It is a revelation that Hardy further contends is “caught” or “dropped into a person’s heart” and when it is caught and “carried” in the life of the individual it will change many aspects of that person’s life. The apostle carries this revelation and anointing in a particularly vivid manner.²⁶⁷

The revelation of the cross appears to promote psychological and spiritual self-crucifixion as a means to personal atonement. An example of this is found in Hardy’s blog of 9th January 2010 entitled “The Grace of God and our Heart”:

A pure heart is the key for this grace to be manifested and is the basis for God’s provision at all times. The Lord will not act on our behalf unless we have a clean and pure heart...I want to remind you that the New Covenant is a covenant of the heart, and God looks at the state of the heart before He does anything for His children. A typical example is found in Matthew 5:21-24. We see here that the Lord looks at even the smallest of attitudes that will prevent us from receiving the rewards and blessings He has for us. In other words, we cannot serve the Lord and receive the grace we need unless we have a pure heart.²⁶⁸

Hardy makes the human heart the locus of the New Covenant rather than the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. He presents the notion of a “clean and pure heart” the basis for God’s approval, making no reference in this or other teachings of an imputed righteousness obtained through faith in Christ. Rather, the conscious and daily self-crucifixion of the individual attempting to live the “given life” under the revelation of the cross achieves a clean and pure heart. Members of GGC attest to the importance of a pure heart:

Liezl Steenkamp in her blog (Jan 18) “It is the grace of God! We are called to walk with pure hearts, and what a privilege to be hearing a message that shows us how too.” And Levi Page (Jan 13) “There are so many ways to

²⁶⁷ From reports on the 2011 Bulawayo and Durban Leadership Conferences, composed by Audrey Hardy, and posted on the CPG website by “CPG Testimonies” on 05/04/2011.

<http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=6&t=410&p=2015&hilit=drops#p2015> (Accessed 20/07/12)

²⁶⁸ Posted by “CPG Testimonies”, (23/01/10), <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=6&t=179> (Accessed 13/07/12)

justify one's action on both sides but it all comes down to a state of heart, and that's what the Lord looks at."²⁶⁹

For CTMI members Hardy's revelation is "the pearl of great price".²⁷⁰ It separates and elevates their church from others and is the touchstone of Christian authenticity. Acceptance or rejection of this revelation is synonymous with acceptance or rejection of Christian salvation. Consequently, if commitment to the revelation calls for sacrifice, including that of family relationships or career, the sacrifice is believed to be justifiable.

4.4.3 Revelation and heart supersede Scripture

The place and authority of Scripture in CTMI/GGC is compromised by the revelation of the cross and the witness of the individual heart. It is clear that biblical authority is trumped by the personal authority, anointing and special revelation of preachers and leaders such as O'Connell-Jones and Hardy. Their interpretation of both Scripture and God's will supersede any other interpretation. Adherents submit thoroughly to the authority of these leaders to the extent of putting the leader's opinions, needs and preferences above their own or those of their families.²⁷¹ This relationship to Scripture immediately identifies CTMI/GGC theologically as a fringe Christian group.

In his document entitled "Six Warnings About GGC/CTMI"²⁷² Keith Brown, whose two sons joined CTMI and who has conducted extensive research on the group, noted that while the Bible is spoken of highly by the leadership of GGC/CTMI, it is used highly selectively and sporadically. He describes devotional "meetings" where the Bible is not opened and preaching is frequently not tied to Biblical texts. Deep and systematic study of the Bible is resisted and even regarded with suspicion. The text 1 Corinthians 1:8 ("...knowledge puffs up...") is frequently invoked to justify anti-intellectualism. A former pastor of CTMI, Patrick Monasie, supports these observations in recalling "one incident that occurred while I was on mission in Zimbabwe. One of the 'sons in the

²⁶⁹ Posted by "CPG Testimonies", (23/01/10), <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=6&t=179> (Accessed 12/07/12)

²⁷⁰ St Matthew 13:46

²⁷¹ See Heather Goddard's testimony, <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=9&t=19> (Accessed 05/10/12)

²⁷² In Appendix "A".

house' grabbed my Bible which I had been reading that morning. He said to me, 'you are still religious! Why do you need to pray and read your Bible?'"²⁷³

The group relies on a handful of stock Biblical passages that are persistently alluded to. They include Matthew 10:34ff, Matthew 12:46ff, Matthew 16:24ff and parallel passages which deal with themes of separation from family and persecution. It appears as if these passages are used eisegetically to support Hardy's revelation and the estrangement it causes between CTMI members and their families.

What is emoted by individuals is taken to be direct revelation from the Holy Spirit. Hardy illustrated this during the Carte Blanche interview when he declared, "I will speak to CPG when God gives me peace in my heart".²⁷⁴ Members are encouraged to allow their "heart" rather than Scripture to convince and convict them of the rightness of actions or ideas. It is obviously impossible to argue against such subjectivism, and CTMI/GGC leaders and adherents retreat to this defensive position when challenged. They give no consideration to the possibility that one's heart might be deceived, and appear to practice no attempt at spiritual discernment.

4.4.4 The relationship of CTMI/GGC to the wider Church

As CTMI and GGC believe that Hardy is an apostle and the recipient of an imperative revelation for the contemporary Church, it is not surprising that they and he display a high degree of self-importance and elitism. They see no hubris in believing that they are a more pure, more faithful group of believers than any other Christian church or group, historic or contemporary. The following statement from CTMI website reveals the divine mandate Hardy believes his organisation possesses:

The judgements of God upon the nations will increase in power and number. His judgement is also coming upon His church and will affect the pastors of many churches. The Lord has revealed the powerful gospel of the cross to us. He is now calling us to be a voice, firstly to warn pastors about the dangers of

²⁷³ From document entitled "Disturbing Revelations – Testimony of Previous Pastor", <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=9&t=251> (Accessed 05/10/12)

²⁷⁴ Hardy declared this on 07/02/2010.

persisting in many deceiving doctrines and practices, and secondly to make known the fact that the preaching of the cross is the ONLY power to save the church from a great falling away. Only God knows who will accept and who will reject this warning. The Holy Spirit will draw many Christians to the true gospel, and He will bring them to green pastures and deliver them from their bondages. Many who have backslidden will also join the church and it will be a time of restoration for those who have been far from the Lord. We will have to be ready to meet the needs of this incoming crowd.²⁷⁵

CTMI believes itself to be the true church that will provide leadership to an increasingly apostate church. Hardy notes, “first, recognize that the Church has more or less deviated from sound doctrine, which has affected the lives of Christians. I felt that it was time to tackle very clearly some of the current problems so that God's people will realize that the Lord has better things in store for him....”²⁷⁶

People may ask as Keith Brown, a parent of GGC members, did: "Are you really saying 'this gospel' is unique in all of Christian history - are you really the only guys who have it?" The response was "There may be others but we have not come across them yet."²⁷⁷ For Hardy and CTMI, Christian unity and maturity will be achieved only when all Christians accept his revelation and submit to his apostolic authority. A symptom of this thinking is CTMI's preference to set up their own fraternals rather than join existing clergy fraternals. They also do not invite preachers or teachers from other denominations to address their groups.

It seems that the criticism and contempt of other religious groups which marked the early days of Eglise Chretienne continue in CTMI. Silk reports that “other churches are mocked and ridiculed openly and slated for not being in this “true gospel” and the members are told other churches preach a “false gospel”, or “another gospel” as stated in Galatians.”²⁷⁸

²⁷⁵ Posted originally on the CTMI website, 14/04/ 2010. Re-posted by “Pilgrim” on the CPG website, (27/03/12), <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB3-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=6&t=1379>. (Accessed 14/05/12)

²⁷⁶ Posted by “Joel180”, (11/02/12), <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB3-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=7&t=1196&p=4200> (Accessed 20/04/12)

²⁷⁷ Posted by “Keith B”, (20/10/11), <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB3-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=6&t=457> (Accessed 14/05/12)

²⁷⁸ Letter emailed from Silk to Erin Georgiou, editor of JOY! Magazine (03/10/2009) in Appendix “A”.

It is also clear that CTMI's mission appears to be calling the church rather than the world to repentance. At the funeral of Stuart Brown (see below) O'Connell-Jones made the bold statement that "there are more unbelievers in the church today than in the world."²⁷⁹ On another occasion he observed that, "the church today is so full of the world, compromise and sin, not to mention that the gospel being preached is in most cases, either motivational speaking, pure heresy or dead sermons."²⁸⁰

It seems that the prime target market for CTMI is "churched" people, and particularly independent pastors who may be struggling with their ministries. The "covering" of CTMI is presented as a panacea to lack of church growth and disillusionment in the ministry.

In line with this observation, CTMI/GGC's missionary endeavours appear to be centred on "leadership conferences" for church leaders which are thinly veiled recruitment meetings aimed to bring leaders and their churches under the covering of CTMI.

If today is your day... go through the door, and He will help you and give you the grace to build relationships with those carrying the same gospel..." He encourages them look for those people, and to unite their hearts with them. "I know you have programs but it's more important at this time in your life to put your programs on hold... to stop, to be ready to sit, and find time to hear from those who are already begotten in the gospel," says Miki again with a heart of grace.²⁸¹

Silk also notes that "young people are the main focus of the church's proselytising and these are strongly encouraged to forsake their careers and education, again often against their parent's advice."²⁸²

The tension between parents and their adult children who were members of GGC proved to be the starting point of the opposition to GGC and CTMI. This will be more

²⁷⁹ Posted by "Pilgrim", (03/02/10), <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=7&t=188&p=1036> (Accessed 17/04/12)

²⁸⁰ Posted by "Pilgrim", (03/02/10), <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=7&t=188&p=1036> (Accessed 17/04/12)

²⁸¹ Hardy, Leadership Conference, Durban, 2009. Posted by "Pilgrim", (09/10/10), <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=6&t=257> (Accessed 14/02/12)

²⁸² Letter emailed from Silk to Erin Georgiou, editor of JOY! Magazine (03/10/2009) in Appendix "A".

fully dealt with below but CTMI/GGC's distinctive and destructive doctrine of the family will be dealt with now.

4.4.5 Family superseded by the CTMI/GGC spiritual family

In some instances it took less than a week for the spiritual family represented by CTMI/GGC to supersede the influence, control and affection of a member's biological family. Silk described this process as follows:

These young people are encouraged to move out of home in order to be instructed and have this "true gospel" imparted to them. This is normally because their parent's, [sic] again often believing church going Christians, are not in the "true gospel" or "this gospel", which gospel is the only one that will bring any believer to spiritual maturity.²⁸³

As tension between the CTMI/GGC member and parents "in the natural" (those not accepting Hardy's revelation) became unbearable for the young people, they would withdraw emotionally and physically from the biological family. Some moved in with CTMI/GGC "mothers and fathers" – those deemed spiritual parents; some composed martyrdom tales of how they were kicked out of homes for "this gospel".²⁸⁴ GGC endorsed the separation from biological family and the importance of the spiritual family:

Ex members spoke of being rebuked by the "mother" for not submitting to Basil, the "father"! Submissive and obedient "responsibles" are called "sons and daughters" in the house. Neil Martin standing up at family camp and saying "we were orphans until Miki came along". Leaders and our family members misquoting scripture out of context and telling us that "spiritual family and submission to spiritual parents" supersedes biological family (biological relationships are merely "emotional") which justifies all the hurtful separation in families and broken hearted parents. In fact those who "dropped their nets and left family" were given special honour for "walking the road of suffering and persecution".²⁸⁵

²⁸³Letter emailed from Silk to Erin Georgiou, editor of JOY! Magazine (03/10/2009) in Appendix "A".

²⁸⁴Posted by "CPG Testimonies", (09/04/12), <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=6&t=1429> (Accessed 17/03/12)

²⁸⁵Posted by "Keith B", (16/10/11), <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=6&t=457> (Accessed 17/03/12)

In response to the accusations that CTMI were encouraging children to turn against their parents, Hardy prepared the following teaching on children and parents. It presents a paradoxical belief about parents and allows the child's state of heart/affective reality to be the guide of Christian obedience:

If a Christian does not feel convinced he should do something that he has been advised to, but in his heart he is sincere and true, then Jesus is still well pleased with him, even though to the natural eye, it would appear that he is being disobedient or rebellious because he isn't doing what is asked of him. It follows, therefore, that a grown-up child can decide to do something against his parents' wishes and still honour and respect his parents sincerely in his heart.²⁸⁶

This appears to advocate a "schizophrenic" inner honouring of parents while outwardly and behaviourally dishonouring them. The trumping of Scripture by inner experience is seen again here.

One of the most disturbing alienations between a CTMI member and the biological family occurred between the Brown family and their son Stuart. Stuart Brown was terminally ill with cancer but left his parent's home where he was being cared for, without explanation. Stuart took up residence with GGC members. The Brown family were deeply hurt by this departure this but visited Stuart in GGC homes for the remaining seven months of his life. The Browns made a desperate appeal to care for Stuart during the last weeks of his life, but this was ignored by the GGC leadership. GGC members were present at Stuart's deathbed, preventing any family intimacy during his passing. After Stuart's death, his widow Louise informed the Browns that they had left due to the "active persecution of our leaders and members".²⁸⁷

4.4.6 Arranged marriages

CTMI/GGC leaders are reported to significantly influence romantic relationships by determining who should be in a relationship and who should be married to whom. This practice is attributed to elders and also Audrey Hardy who believes they are following

²⁸⁶ "Children, Honour Your Father and Mother", <http://ctmi.mu/en/teaching/children-honour-your-father-and-mother-2> (Accessed 04/08/2012)

²⁸⁷ Posted by "CPG Testimonies", (14/06/10), <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=6&t=280> (Accessed 20/04/12)

God's will. Potential marriage partners may only have a passing knowledge of one another. There is no courtship allowed and engagement is announced to the church often before parents are informed. Silk observed this practice and wrote:

The arrangement of inordinate numbers of marriages that [sic] is very prolific, and seems to be mainly at the instigation of the elders and in particular Audrey Hardy. If there is opposition from any parents, often very well founded, the church leaders do not take this into consideration, but strongly encourage the members to reject their families and sever ties with them.²⁸⁸

The most notorious recent example of this practice, publicised in the South African and Mauritian press and on Mauritian radio, concerned Hayley Goddard. Her parents, Steve and Heather Goddard, had previously experienced how one of Hayley's friends from CTMI who had no boyfriend, went to Mauritius and announced three weeks later that she was engaged. Hayley phoned from Mauritius where she was involved with CTMI to tell her parents that she was planning to marry someone they had never met. This announcement came a week after she had publically declared that "she was grateful to be under no pressure to make major decisions and that she did not know the direction for her life."²⁸⁹

When Steve asked her to put her marriage plans on hold until he had met her husband to be, Hayley broke all communication with him. In desperation, Steve flew to Mauritius. He was prevented by the CTMI members with whom Hayley was staying from seeing Hayley alone. They called the police and Steve was escorted away. Steve proceeded to meet with politicians, the press and church leaders and this story received much publicity in Mauritius. Steve and Hayley were interviewed on radio and in this interview Hayley stated that she did not know when she was getting married. It turned out that she was legally married that same afternoon. Steve and Heather discovered the subsequent church wedding had taken place when someone saw it on YouTube.

²⁸⁸ Letter emailed from Silk to Erin Georgiou, editor of JOY! Magazine (03/10/2009) in Appendix "A".

²⁸⁹ Posted by "CPG Testimonies", (17/06/10), <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=6&t=281> (Accessed 14/06/12)

Another high profile allegation of an influenced or arranged marriage by CTMI concerns the well-known tennis player Mary Pierce.²⁹⁰ Within weeks of going to CTMI in Mauritius she was engaged to David Emmanuel, an Air France pilot from Mauritius. Pierce had also broken contact with her mom, with whom she previously had an extremely close relationship. Later, Mary broke off the relationship with Emmanuel and with CTMI.

There is an obvious need for young people - adolescents - to move from dependence on their parents to personal independence, and this involves attaining emotional, social, and economic independence.²⁹¹ But this involves “progressing from emotional independence on parents or on others, to increased independence while still being able to maintain close emotional ties...”²⁹² Social independence involves becoming self rather than other directed. Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman make the point that adolescents tend to be other directed “because they are so strongly motivated for social acceptance that much of what the group says is what adolescents think and do.”²⁹³ Economic independence involves “earning sufficient money to meet one’s financial needs.”²⁹⁴ In CTMI and GGC it appears if there is simply a displacement of dependence on parents to a dependence on the leadership of either group. Instead of becoming independent, adolescents appear to depend on CTMI or GGC to direct their lives, while failing to maintain emotional ties with their families. Instead of being self directed, they appear to be directed by the ideology and practices of the group and due to the realities of the “given life” they remain financially dependent on others, including their parents. For these reasons joining GGC and CTMI might prove to be a regressive step in personal development for some.

4.4.7 Fear-based control of members

²⁹⁰ Posted by “pastorbobkraft”, (18/06/10), <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=7&t=265&start=10> (Accessed 14/06/12)

²⁹¹ Charles Zastrow & Karen K. Kirst-Ashman. (2001). *Understanding Human Behaviour and the Social Environment*. (Fifth Edition). Belmont: Wadsworth. p. 309.

²⁹² Zastrow & Kirst Ashman, *Understanding Human Behaviour*, p. 309.

²⁹³ Zastrow & Kirst Ashman, *Understanding Human Behaviour*, p. 309.

²⁹⁴ Zastrow & Kirst Ashman, *Understanding Human Behaviour*, p. 309.

If CTMI/GGC controls such personal domains as the choice of marriage partner it is not surprising to note that other areas of individual's lives are also controlled. This control is embedded in the apostolic authority attributed to Hardy. O'Connell-Jones, preaching in Botswana expressed this well:

Do we remain detached and in a place where the Lord has no access to our hearts; or do we decide to submit to the elders, be broken, and serve the Lord with our entire lives? Basil ended on a powerful note, saying that if we are standing on the outside and criticising people in the church, we are still babies. We need to submit to the five-fold ministry in order to come to maturity.²⁹⁵

Examples of control include the mass launch of blogs by young people in CTMI/GGC whose parents opposed the church. These blogs were all launched on the same day by the same service provider and contained startlingly similar defences of the "given" life of CTMI/GGC. Hardy admitted complicity in this. The blogs have all subsequently and simultaneously been taken down.

Control is exercised not so much in the form of overt instructions but rather by way of loaded suggestions. Monasie, the former pastor of CTMI, related the following story:

One day at church Audrey approached quite a few Christians to give them an "opportunity to be blessed and to invest and plant a seed" in giving a contribution for a gift for the 'apostle'. She asked me for Rs 500 when my salary was often less than Rs 2,700 a month. From this money I had also to pay tithes and offering, and of course I gave it to her. On Miki's birthday we were all asked to go to their beach cottage to offer him his speed boat. The same day my sister was getting married and I missed her wedding to go with the others to present to Miki his speed boat. All this because I was afraid to be rejected and to this day I am so sad for what I did to my sister and family.²⁹⁶

Monasie also remembers "that Audrey told us from the pulpit for which party we must vote."²⁹⁷

²⁹⁵ Posted by "CPG Testimonies", (07/05/10), <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=6&t=257&p=1398> (Accessed 17/07/12)

²⁹⁶ From document entitled "Disturbing Revelations – Testimony of Previous Pastor", <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=9&t=251> (Accessed 05/10/12)

²⁹⁷ From document entitled "Disturbing Revelations – Testimony of Previous Pastor", <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=9&t=251> (Accessed 05/10/12)

Hardy also brings “words from the Lord” that support his organisation’s goals:

Miki has a word from the Lord, “For a while now,” says the Lord, “I have been drawing your hearts and lives to the truth of my Word. The message of My gospel has touched your lives and brought hope and faith... Many of you have questioned it, but I am bringing you to the place where I am breaking down all your reasoning so you can embrace My gospel fully...For I am calling, working and equipping those I have chosen. The road is narrow, but I will take you by the hand and bring you to the place where, as you walk on that road, you will experience the power of My grace. I will shake many things, even some of the understanding you have of the gospel, but as you read my Word, I will open your eyes to discover the truth...”²⁹⁸

The manipulative power of this type of “word” is obvious, and impossible to gainsay. While such “words” are commonly expressed in Charismatic or Pentecostal churches, their usage in this highly authoritarian context is concerning. Equally alarming is the fact that individuals need to abandon all critical reasoning when receiving “this gospel”.

Ultimately, it appears that members of CTMI/GGC are controlled by fear: fear that if they question Hardy or his teaching, they are questioning God; fear that if they incur the wrath of Miki or Audrey they will be cast out of the only community that has the “true gospel”. They fear losing their salvation.

4.4.8 The relationship of CTMI/GGC to the world

Although CTMI/GGC appear to be more concerned about the state of the church than the world, they are critical of the world outside the church. In terms of the categorisation of sociologist Roy Wallis they could be described as a “world-denying”²⁹⁹ group. Among other characteristics, Wallis observes that in world-denying groups self-interest is eschewed in favour of a life of service to “the guru or prophet and to others who likewise follow him.”³⁰⁰ Furthermore, such groups view the prevailing social order as having departed from God’s laws and plans by becoming

²⁹⁸ Posted by “CPG Testimonies”, (05/04/11), <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=6&t=410&p=2015> (Accessed 15/07/12)

²⁹⁹ Roy Wallis, 2003. “Three Types of New Religious Movement” in Lorne Dawson (ed.) *Cults and New Religious Movements: A Reader*. Malden, USA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd. pp.36–44.

³⁰⁰ Roy Wallis, 2003. “Three Types of New Religious Movement” in Lorne Dawson (ed.) *Cults and New Religious Movements: A Reader*. Malden, USA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd. p. 37.

materialistically obsessed. This obsession has precipitated a polluted society and world. Consequently they condemn “urban industrial society and its values, particularly that of individual success as measured by wealth or consumption patterns...calling for a return to a more rural way of life, and a reorientation of secular life to God.”³⁰¹

Hardy is known for critiques of churches that appear to be materially obsessed:

If there is one area where Christians today are being manipulated and taught deceptive doctrines, it is definitely the area of finances and giving. To the great shame of the Church, many pastors are leading the flock astray with false promises of prosperity and blessings misleading them with laws and obligations. But saddest of all, is the fact that these poor believers never come to realize that this is not God’s heart for them.³⁰²

From the perspective that it is Hardy’s desire to model the revelation of the cross, it is paradoxical that he is wealthy and lives in luxury. In the incident where he was presented with a speed-boat, there is no record of him being uncomfortable with the gift. However, he does sound a healthy corrective to prevailing prosperity gospel teachings.

Other world denying behaviours witnessed in CTMI include the inspection of young people’s suitcases when they attend youth camps, for clothing that may be too revealing. Silk reported the following: “My teenage school children were openly preached against for having long hair, listening to unapproved music (Gospel and secular), having their boxer shorts sticking out above their jeans, watching Harry Potter or Lord of the Rings and other unapproved movies. The control exercised legalistically is extreme.”³⁰³

Members are discouraged from fishing with unbelieving friends in case their hearts are “twisted”. Collections of secular music are destroyed and even Gospel music is vilified because Hardy claims it has the world's beat or is “emotional”. Christian literature that

³⁰¹ In Dawson, *Cults and New Religious Movements*, p. 37.

³⁰² Miki Hardy, “The Christian and His Money”. In JOY! Magazine, (01/09/2010), <http://ctmi.mu/en/wp-content/uploads/JoyMagazine/TCAHM-2pg-CU.pdf> (Accessed 04/08/2012)\|\|

³⁰³ Letter emailed from Silk to Erin Georgiou, editor of JOY! Magazine (03/10/2009) in Appendix “A”.

is not approved by the leadership is destroyed.³⁰⁴ Together with the exclusivity and elitism promoted by Hardy's revelation, this perception of the world encourages an "us" versus "them" dichotomy and an associated paranoia about the things of the world.

4.4.9 The *kerygma* of CTMI/GGC

Distinctive doctrine will result in a distinctive *kerygma*. CTMI/GGC's proclamation does not, for example, follow the discipline of a lectionary or liturgical calendar, but is a constant reworking of the following themes, described by a contributor to the CPG website:

1. The gospel of the cross - which changed Miki's life can change yours. You need to "catch" this gospel
2. The church today is lukewarm and full of sin and trouble
3. You as pastors are part of that church guilty of trying to be in charge on your own, prosperity heresies and dryness
4. You need to repent and receive the revelation of "this gospel"
5. This can only be done if you are part of us who are founded/begotten in this gospel.³⁰⁵

4.4.10 Unorthodox and illegal activities

There are frequent reports of CTMI manipulating Mauritian emigration officials and rules to extend the usual tourist visas of 15 days into long stay permits, if not residence permits. Visas are extended by encouraging young people who are coming to CTMI headquarters in Mauritius to give false residence addresses and supplying them with church money to give the appearance that they have sufficient money for their stay. This money is then handed over to CTMI and recycled among other members to extend visas. Silk has observed CTMI fraudulently obtaining Mauritian residence permits, work permits and extended holiday permits "to facilitate the extended stay of the scores

³⁰⁴ Posted by "Keith B", (04/07/12), <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=7&t=1566> (Accessed 13/08/12)

³⁰⁵ Posted by "CPG Testimonies", (05/04/11), <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=6&t=410&p=2015&hilit=dryness#p2015> (Accessed 17/07/12)

of young people lured to the church in Mauritius. This also includes quickie marriages with residents in order to obtain permits for other members.”³⁰⁶

A prime example of such visa irregularity is Hayley Page (nee Goddard) who managed to stay and work in Mauritius for seven months despite being on a tourist visa and not having a work permit. In January 2010 fourteen young members, including Page, were told to leave Mauritius or face deportation within 24 hours.

The CPG website contains testimony of alleged sexual abuse by a CTMI elder Jean Claude Lajeunesse and a subsequent cover-up by Hardy.³⁰⁷ Similarly disturbing is the claim of a former pastor of CTMI, Patrick Monasie regarding the sterilisation of his wife, Christiane:

...Audrey strongly encouraged several couples amongst the leaders to get sterilized so that we would be more free to serve the church and receive people to live with us. To be accepted again by them I persuaded my wife to get sterilized, which she did along with others. Everything was organized by the church. This has been bad for our marriage and to this day she holds me responsible for forcing her to do it. (Christiane's testimony was in a local newspaper in 1997.)³⁰⁸

CTMI has gained negative press in the past for among other issues:³⁰⁹

- The adoption of the Attisse siblings, whose parents died in 1991 in a car accident in La Vigie, and who mysteriously appeared in Zimbabwe with a CTMI family
- The transportation to Zimbabwe of three children, Aasya, Abdurahman and Ali Alladee, in February 1997, when their mother died. This happened without the knowledge and consent of their father, Yusuf Alladee. The children were

³⁰⁶ Letter emailed from Silk to Erin Georgiou, editor of JOY! Magazine (03/10/2009) in Appendix “A”.

³⁰⁷ Posted by “CPG Testimonies”, (23/02/11), <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=5&t=406&p=1980> (Accessed 13/07/12)

³⁰⁸ From document entitled “Disturbing Revelations – Testimony of Previous Pastor”, <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=9&t=251> (Accessed 05/10/12)

³⁰⁹ Posted by “joce1180”, (03/06/12), <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=7&t=1566> (Accessed 12/05/12)

fraudulently adopted by Peter and Felicity Ann Blatch, members of a CTMI partner church.

- In January 2000 Carole Hardy, the daughter of Miki and Audrey, was appointed as communications advisor to Mauritian Minister Xavier Duval. The Swiss business partner of Xavier Duval, Eric Stauffer has made disturbing revelations of links between the Eglise Chretienne and Duval through Carole Hardy.
- The implication of Laureate Trust in fraud estimated at several billion rupees over a period of five years. While this trust is officially dedicated to charity, during its first three years its only beneficiary (to the amount of Rs 25 million) has been an NGO, the Protection of Animals Welfare Society (PAWS), whose director was one of the trustees and counts Audrey Hardy among its members. It is suspected that these transactions have been a cover up for real estate purchases and re-sales.

In 2009 the Concerned Parents' Group appealed to the Mauritian Prime Minister to officially investigate CTMI and its affiliates. This is an ongoing investigation.

GGC have also become embroiled in duplicitous property deals. For several years the group has been seeking land upon which to construct a church building. This desire had been heightened by the fact that the CPG had informed the landlords of each venue at which GGC was meeting, of the CPG's concerns, and this had precipitated a string of evictions. Audrey Hardy had also raised expectations at a family camp in 2010 by challenging GGC to raise funds for land and buildings, and had declared that CTMI would offer rand for rand financial support for this endeavour from Mauritius.

In early 2011 GGC, though a closed corporation front company whose members were GGC elders, entered into a sale agreement for Outlaw Farm, a former equestrian property, near Waterfall, KwaZulu-Natal. The property was allegedly to be purchased to create a special school for fifteen pupils. There were few initial objections to the rezoning process for such a project but this changed when the seller discovered that GGC was behind the deal and informed the neighbours. The neighbours contacted the

CPG for more information and then went to the press.³¹⁰ The journalist investigating the story discovered that the deal was processed through the deeds office at less than half of the price paid to the seller. The seller then prepared an affidavit declaring that forged signatures were used to defraud the receiver of revenue of transfer duties. She also spoke of mysterious secrecy clauses written into the sale agreement.

Neighbours to Outlaw Farm launched an appeal against the rezoning of the property which is ongoing and essentially prohibits development of the property until there is a response from the relevant provincial authority.

The evidence of fraud together with the seller's affidavit has been submitted to the South African Revenue Service as well as the Legal Society and the matter is currently under investigation.

4.4.11 Claims of changed lives

A frequent defence of CTMI/GGC offered by its leadership and members is that people's lives are changed positively through association with CTMI/GGC. Hardy, in his "Letter to Christians of the CTMI Network Churches" dated 18 September 2009 wrote:

2008 is now behind us... What has changed in our lives? The Lord has set many brothers and sisters free who were bound by their thoughts and reasoning. He has healed the sick; He has brought unity to many homes where there was strife; He has taken hold of the lives of the youth; He has provided miraculously for our needs; He has brought maturity to our lives... and many other things besides. And we thank Him for all of these things.³¹¹

Members of GGC/CTMI speak of drug addicts and homosexuals being healed and how their lives have been turned around from worldly misbehaviours to serving the Lord in Mauritius.

These allegations invite the following responses:

³¹⁰ *The Independent on Saturday* (29/10/11).

³¹¹ <http://ctmi.mu/en/report/letter-to-christians-of-the-ctmi-network-churches-3> (Accessed 01/10/12)

1. The traditional Christian belief is that God is sovereign and can work through any group or context
2. The strong sense of purpose and commitment inspired by groups like GGC has the ability to positively redirect some historically feckless lives
3. Cultic groups commonly deflect attention from their more questionable beliefs or activities by referring to testimonies of changed lives.³¹²
4. These testimonies have not been independently verified nor is there any longitudinal research done to establish whether any changes are permanent.

4.5 Opposition to CTMI/GGC

4.5.1 Growing concerns about “broken families”

By 2008 several parents of young members of CTMI/GGC had become concerned about strikingly similar behavioural changes noted in their children. These children were young adults ranging in age from 17 to 21 who had become preoccupied with GGC and its activities.

Parents witnessed a seemingly sudden change in their children, manifest in a desire to attend several GGC meetings a week, a desire to help build CTMI’s new building in Trianon, Mauritius, and attend youth camps in Mauritius or Zimbabwe. This preoccupation resulted in the neglect of long-standing friendships and social commitments, encouraged by the CTMI/GGC teaching that these relationships were “carnal”, of “the flesh”, and should be willingly sacrificed in favour of “spiritual” relationships, with members of GGC or CTMI. Such sacrifices indicate a “given life”, that is a life submitted to the revelation of the cross. Young people expressed the desire to abandon studies and/or employment, and go to Mauritius to live and learn from other “given” lives.

The following report provides examples of this trend:

³¹²Stephan P. Pretorius, 2007. “Seemingly Harmless New Christian Religious Movements in South Africa Pose Serious Threats of Spiritual Abuse,” *HTS Theological Studies* 63. pp. 266-267.

Steve and Heather Goddard, of Kloof, say their daughter, who they did not wish to name, has been a member of the church for almost three years and started avoiding her other Christian friends “in favour of members of Grace Gospel”. Anthony and Romaine Chaplin, of Durban North, say their son had been a top pupil at Kearsney College before going to study at the University of Cape Town. Last April, he abandoned his studies to go to Mauritius.³¹³

Parents also became concerned about the smothering attention and expressions of love their children received from other members of GGC. It was not uncommon for members to receive in excess of 40 sms’s per day from members of GGC. New members began to spend more and more time in this environment, wanting to attend four meetings during the week where they experienced a repetitive style of worship and the sharing of personal testimonies.

This affection and attention served to reinforce the “superiority” of the spiritual over the biological family. In even the most loving families it is impossible to give the amount of attention and care to an individual that GGC is reported to have offered, which may be an indictment of the sincerity of the church rather than that of the average family.

The young people also began to use expressions and jargon unfamiliar even to parents who were Christians. Examples include, “the given life”; “follow your heart”; “in the natural”; “in the flesh”; “that’s emotional”; “putting law”; “well with Jesus”; “love you guys”; “shared the pure gospel”; “identify with the cross”; “this gospel”; “twisted hearts”; “putting hands into”; “veiled hearts”; “lies and persecution”; “broken lives on the altar”; “we were orphans now we have a father”.³¹⁴

Most of this language is copied from the discourse of Audrey and Miki Hardy. Further changes in discourse include stilted syntax where people attempt to talk in the style of St Paul’s writings and/or phrases parroted from sermons of Hardy’s. Some young people even began to speak with a French Mauritian accent. This change of discourse to

³¹³Victoria John, Christian Cult stole our kids, say parents, (*IOL News*, 07/11/2009), http://www.iol.co.za/index.php?set_id=1&click_id=139&art_id=vn20091107072434816C446171 (Accessed 14/07/12)

³¹⁴ Posted by “Keith B” (07/10/11). <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=6&t=179>. (Accessed 15/02/12)

have been a common experience among parents: “We have all heard our children expressing identical views - even using the same language. This even applies to folks who write to us from other countries.”³¹⁵

A further development witnessed by parents was an unusual emotional modulation. This was either manifest in “Pollyanna” type positivity and/or an emotional callousness and indifference to the suffering GGC members were causing to their families. Emotions such as sorrow, anguish, anger, grief or hurt were regarded by young people as emotions “of the flesh” - that is, emotions that needed to be crucified. This created a situation where the natural emotions raised precisely by the individual’s growing separation from family, friends and normal life were minimised or dismissed instead of being seen as warnings. Through the scrupulous attempts to have a “pure heart”, individuals in GGC were encouraged to spend great effort repressing these emotions which leads to the characteristic “robotic” and inappropriate emotional responses to life.

Such changes in discourse and emotion naturally created further alienation and concern in parents about the influence of GGC over their children. Individual meetings between concerned parents and O’Connell-Jones occurred and he reassured parents that what they were witnessing were the changed lives of those who had embraced “the gospel of the cross”. He offered comparisons with young people who were leading debauched and worldly lives and told them to let their children “follow their hearts”. Parents, especially those without a Christian background, left these meetings somewhat mollified.

In several cases, the relationship between the member of GGC and their parents, and also with their wider family (siblings, grandparents, uncles and aunts, cousins) became so strained as a result of the GGC inspired behavioural changes, that the relationship was in danger of complete breakdown. Some parents became more strident in their concerns and O’Connell-Jones and GGC began to accuse these parents of persecuting the church. Challenges to the “given life” were interpreted as worldly, if not satanic, persecution and scripture passages such as St Matthew 10:34-37 and 12:46-50, were

³¹⁵ Posted by “Pilgrim” (27/03/12). <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=6&t=1379>. (Accessed 01/08/12)

cited to “prove” that the “true gospel” had the potential to divide families. This naturally did nothing to allay parent’s fears and thus concern about GGC escalated.

Community concern about GGC and CTMI can perhaps be gauged by the interest express by local media. “The Highway Mail” published by Caxton and CTP Printers and Publishers Ltd,³¹⁶ is a community newspaper distributed to around 50 000 readers in the outer West area of Durban, into which Pinetown falls. On 31st March 2010 an article on CTMI and GGC entitled “Son’s Cult Link, parents call in CIA” was published (author unknown).³¹⁷ Prior to this, on the 8th of February 2010, East Coast Radio, a commercial radio station in KwaZulu-Natal with a listening audience of just under 2 million people³¹⁸ interviewed Howard Silk and Keith Brown about their experiences of CTMI and GGC.³¹⁹

It is possible that a meeting held on the 5th August 2008 marked the beginning of the end of dialogue between GGC and those concerned with its practices. The meeting occurred between the Reverend Clint Archer, the Pastor of Hillcrest Baptist Church and Keith Brown, an Elder of the same congregation; and O’Connell-Jones, and Neville Fitzroy and Selby Mpofo who are Deacons in GGC. The primary point of discussion was the unexpected “desertion” of a Hillcrest Baptist Sunday School teacher, Rachel Gillon, to GGC. The meeting was marked by Archer and Brown attempting to understand what had prompted or influenced this Sunday School teacher to suddenly become judgmental about Hillcrest Baptist Church and to abandon her church in favour of GGC, and O’Connell-Jones’ defensive and often bellicose attempts to avoid responsibility for the teacher’s behaviour.³²⁰

³¹⁶ <http://highwaymail.co.za/about-us/> (Accessed 13/03/2013)

³¹⁷ <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=10&t=241&p=1342&hilit=highway#p1342> (Accessed 12/03/2013)

³¹⁸ www.ecr.co.za (Accessed 13/03/2013)

³¹⁹ <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=10&t=196> (Accessed 02/12/2012)

³²⁰ See Letter to CTMI Deacon over Watershed Meeting, <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=5&t=215> (Accessed 05/10/12)

Brown later came to hear that Mpfu (one of the GGC Deacons at the meeting) was portraying a significantly different account of this meeting and thus Brown wrote to him on the 12th October 2010 providing a transcript of the meeting and requesting that he either challenge or accept this version of what had transpired. This letter was ignored.³²¹

In December 2008, I was approached in my professional capacity as an accredited Pastoral Therapist of the South African Association for Pastoral Work, by a number of parents who were concerned about the behavioural changes of their children since they joined GGC. I soon became aware that the distinctive beliefs, commitment of members to the group and the group's relationship to the wider Church and society represented a unique phenomenon. I noted the following:

- An increasing involvement in the life of Grace Gospel Church to the detriment and exclusion of previously held hobbies, commitments, friends and ultimately of the individual's family;
- A dramatic change in study and career plans;
- A loss of independent and critical reasoning;
- Uncharacteristically stilted conversation heavily dependent on church jargon and discourse;
- A flattened and artificial affect: i.e. non-spontaneous "robotic" emotional responses;
- Growing arrogance and judgmental attitudes towards people outside of their church to the extent of paranoia;
- Growing deceitfulness;
- Increasing aggression in response to being challenged about the church;
- An obsessive conviction to move to CTMI's [then] building project in Trianon, Mauritius.³²²

³²¹ <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=5&t=215> (Accessed 07/04/2012)

³²² Extract from a letter dated 29/01/2009, composed by S.A.J. Semple, and used widely by the Concerned Parents Group to warn the community about Grace Gospel Church. One of three letters from Semple posted on the CPG website: <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com> on 31/10/09. (Accessed 25/10/2011)

Steve and Heather Goddard wrote to Miki Hardy on the 2nd February 2009 to express their deep concern about the wedge that GGC was driving between them and their daughter, Hayley. They specified her radical change of study plans, an email they had discovered in which she pledged total submission to Miki Hardy, Hardy's instruction to Hayley to not let her parents influence her and the advice she had received from GGC members to take out a restraining order against her parents.³²³ Hardy responded the following day with a brief, dismissive email disclaiming any wrong doing and inviting them to visit Mauritius to see how CTMI operates.³²⁴

The estrangement between the terminally ill Stuart Brown and his family has been described above.

The indifferent or defiant responses of GGC and CTMI to concerns and criticisms levelled at them from the community, made concerned parties realise that collective action would potentially be the only way in which to deal with these groups.

4.5.2 The formation of the Concerned Parents' Group (CPG)

Having been in contact with many concerned parties, I proposed the formation of a support group for those affected by GGC and CTMI.³²⁵ This support group first met on the 4th March 2009 and soon became known as the Concerned Parents' Group (CPG). During the course of 2009, I authored three documents outlining my concerns about CTMI and GGC for the CPG and they were widely distributed in the community.³²⁶ The CPG began to develop many similarities with an anti-cult movement and in September 2010 I withdrew from the leadership of the group. The CPG today comprises a loosely

³²³ Email to Audrey and Miki Hardy from Heather and Steve Goddard dated 02/02/2009, in Appendix "A".

³²⁴ Email from Miki Hardy to Heather Goddard and Basil O'Connell-Jones dated 03/02/2009, in Appendix "A".

³²⁵ Email to Heather Goddard dated 09/02/2009, in Appendix "A".

³²⁶ GGC CTMI Document 1, dated 29/01/2009; GGC CTMI Document 2, dated 03/04/2009; GGC CTMI Document 3, dated 01/07/2009. Available at <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=4&t=2> (Accessed 05/10/12)

associated group committed to conducting ongoing research into CTMI, engagement with CTMI leadership and raising awareness about CTMI.³²⁷

4.5.3 GGC and CTMI adopt a policy of non-engagement

Possibly due to the acrimonious meeting between Archer and Brown and the GGC leadership in August 2008, GGC and CTMI became increasingly reluctant to engaging with their critics especially if there was to be any record of the engagement.

Duncan and Wendy Gillon, the parents of Rachel Gillon who abruptly left Hillcrest Baptist Church for GGC, wrote a letter to “The leadership GGC and CTMI particularly Basil and Phil and Lyn Page” over their concerns in April 2009.³²⁸ They received neither an acknowledgment nor a reply to their letter.

Following the CPG’s widespread use of three documents I authored, Hardy phoned me on the 28th August 2009 requesting that I meet with him and some of his elders in Durban. When I insisted that members of the CPG be present and the meeting be taped, Hardy cancelled the meeting.³²⁹

The CPG wrote to Hardy, O’Connell-Jones and Neil Martin on the 5th September 2009³³⁰ requesting engagement with their concerns. This appeal was ignored. On the 10th September 2009 a second letter was sent expressing concern at the disregard for engagement with the CPG or other distressed families. This letter concluded with an ultimatum to respond by the 14th September 2009.³³¹ Again there was no response from the leaders of CTMI or GGC and feeling that they had no better alternative, the CPG launched a website outlining its concerns. This website contained a forum where contributor could record their experiences of CTMI and GGC. Due to CTMI’s hostility

³²⁷ <http://www.ctmiconcernedparents.com>(Accessed 25/10/2011)

³²⁸ <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=5&t=26> (Accessed 07/04/2012)

³²⁹ <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=7&t=14> (Accessed 07/04/2012)

³³⁰ Group Letter 1. <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=5&t=3> (Accessed 07/04/2012)

³³¹ <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=7&t=14> (Accessed 07/04/2012)

towards the CPG expressed in emails to people such as Keith Brown and Howard Silk, and particularly because many contributors had family members in CTMI churches, and feared a further alienation from their children, the forum encouraged the use of non de plumes.

The CPG then urged Church Fraternal in the western suburbs of Durban to engage with Grace Gospel Church. The Highway Ministers' Fraternal wrote to the CTMI leaders on the 27th September 2009 expressing their concerns and requested mediated engagement between CTMI and representatives from churches and parents. No response from either GGC or CTMI was received.

On the 7th November 2009, at the instigation of the CPG, GGC and CTMI made media headlines in the Independent on Saturday newspaper³³² where they were accused of brainwashing members, arranging marriages and encouraging the distancing of young members from their families.

On 6th February 2010, *The Weekend Witness*³³³ published an expose on GGC and CTMI, and on the next day, as a result of correspondence from the CPG, MNet's investigative journalism programme "Carte Blanche" dedicated a fifteen minute segment to the issues surrounding CTMI. Their journalist interviewed parents, young members of CTMI and GGC and Hardy. When Hardy was asked why he had not met with the CPG, his response was "I may if God gives me peace in my heart to do so."³³⁴ To date he has not met with, nor corresponded with, the CPG.

Peter Rasmussen, the pastor of Hillcrest Christian Fellowship, which is the largest church in Hillcrest, met personally with O'Connell-Jones and appealed for issues to be put right with concerned parties. O'Connell-Jones promised to take the matter "to the brothers for consideration" but nothing transpired from this promise.

³³² Victoria John, "Broken by heartache gospel: Parents tell of grief of losing children to church." *Independent on Saturday*, 7 November 2009, pp. 1,2,7.

³³³ Sharlene Packree, "Cult luring Christians." *The Weekend Witness*, 6 February 2010, pp 1,4,5.

³³⁴ *Carte Blanche* 07/02/2010.

On the 16th February 2011 the CPG send a letter to the CTMI leadership entitled “Earnest Appeal to CTMI Elders about Sexual & Verbal Abuse”³³⁵ after allegations of abuse were raised. In spite of the seriousness of the allegations, this letter was also ignored.

As previously mentioned, my request to engage with GGC for the purposes of this research was ignored.

4.6 Conclusion

GGC and its parent organisation, CTMI, represented a phenomenon that few people understood or knew how to respond to. The behavioural changes and commitment of young people alarmed many parents, clergy and community members because they happened so suddenly and intensely, and undermined important relationships and commitments. Many people felt that something was wrong, that GGC and CTMI were influencing young people too profoundly, but it was difficult to identify how this was happening. Terms like “brainwashing” and “cult” were quickly and loosely applied to the situation. Having provided an overview of the academic literature on cults in Chapter 2, GGC/CTMI theology and practices have a credible yardstick against which they can be measured. This analysis forms the basis of Chapter 5.

³³⁵ <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=5&t=402> (Accessed 07/04/2012)

Chapter Five: Evaluating Grace Gospel Church/Church Team Ministries International against the cult literature review

5.1 Introduction

Having provided an overview of Grace Gospel Church (GGC) and Church Team Ministries International (CTMI) it is now possible to evaluate their beliefs and practices against the literature on cults provided in Chapter Two. This will provide a multi-disciplinary (theology, psychology, sociology) perspective on CTMI/GGC's beliefs and practices.

5.2 Evaluating GGC/CTMI against theological perspectives on cults

It bears recalling that a theological approach to cultic groups is centred on the notion of orthodoxy. GGC's (and CTMI's) Statement of Faith indicates that they adhere to what may be called an "orthodox" evangelical Protestant understanding of the Christian faith. However, as has been noted in the previous chapter, Miki Hardy's particular theology is the de facto theology of GGC by virtue of GGC being a partner church of CTMI, and this theology is not congruent with several basic tenets of the evangelical Protestant tradition. A specific way of illustrating this is to compare the articles of GGC's Statement of Faith with Hardy's theology.

The first article declares that GGC "believe the Bible to be the inspired, the only infallible, authoritative Word of God". However, as previously noted, biblical authority is trumped by the apostolic anointing and revelation of Hardy, the authority of other leaders like O'Connell-Jones, and also by the subjective inner experience (the "heart") of GGC members. Biblical texts tend to be employed largely to defend CTMI's notion of the five-fold ministry, Hardy's revelation of the cross and family alienation.

On this last point, namely the use of Scripture to justify family alienation, texts such as St Matthew 10: 34-37,³³⁶ and 12: 47-50³³⁷ are frequently used. Pretorius notes:

³³⁶ "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn 'a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law— a man's enemies will be the members of his own

The poor members are placed in the middle. They suppress their feelings for their family, because they are taught “your emotions may never get the better of you”, on the one hand, and on the other, for fear of disappointing God, they have no choice but to remain truthful to the “church” (although they interpret this as meaning truthful to “God”). The Scriptures so often quoted by GGC and CTMI to defend the alienation between their members and the member’s families do underscore the cost of discipleship. Who wants to disappoint God? Who wants to restore family relationships if it will cost you your salvation?³³⁸

But Pretorius makes an interesting observation that the same passage of Scripture can be used to obtain another goal that members appear oblivious to:

The important aspect of these scriptures is that the focus is on Jesus, a personal relationship with him and the impending sacrifice. The sacrifice is thus connected with the person of Jesus. The same scriptures can be cunningly used and the accompanying sacrifice presented as a sacrifice for Jesus, whilst it is really for the benefit for something or someone else.³³⁹

In other words, GGC and CTMI can use these Scriptural texts to encourage personal sacrifices that legitimate their doctrine and secure the submission of members. Pretorius accuses GGC of having an ulterior motive in their application of Scripture and goes on to declare that:

...using these scriptures to condone and justify breaking up Christian families is not only deceitful but amounts to twisting scripture to suit the church’s own selfish desires and goals, especially as most of the parents of the young people belonging to GGC are confessing Christians. The division that these scriptures bring promotes antagonism and elitism instead of uniting Christians. It is clear that the original intention of the cited passages of scripture is not to promote division amongst family members. Furthermore, they do not imply that family members should live in disharmony if they belong to different religious groups, especially if the different family members all confess Jesus Christ as Lord. It is

household.’ Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.” *New International Version*. (1986) Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

³³⁷ “And someone said to him, ‘Look, your mother and your brothers are standing outside, waiting to speak with you.’ But he answered, saying to the one who had told him, ‘Who is my mother? And who are my brothers?’ And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, ‘Look, here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven, he is my brother and sister and mother.” *New International Version*. (1986) Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

³³⁸ Stephan Pretorius, 2010. “Family Alienation is Presented as a Requirement for Total Commitment in Some New Religious Groups”, *Journal for Christian Scholarship* 46. p.23.

³³⁹ Pretorius, “Family Alienation”, p.19.

important to note that commitment to the gospel and message of Christ calls for a sacrifice: but nowhere is the intention expressed that such a sacrifice is intended to break up families or divide families even more in an already broken world. The serious commitment that is expected from believers also has a very important purpose, namely to influence others to commit as well.³⁴⁰

In summary then, Pretorius argues that GGC have misinterpreted and misused Scripture to support their own particular doctrine. He finds it ironic that CTMI's conviction and vision is the restoration and unification of a divided Church when, in his opinion, their ministry has sown distress and destruction, and damaged the reputation of the Church.

The second article of GGC's Statement of Faith states: "We believe in the Deity of our Lord Jesus Christ...His vicarious atoning death through His shed blood..." While Hardy's revelation of the cross may seem, at first, little more than a Pauline emphasis, it conceals a unique and heretical theology of atonement. If an Evangelical source on atonement is consulted, such as Elwell's *Evangelical Dictionary Of Theology*³⁴¹ (thus working within the purported theological paradigm of GGC and CTMI) we learn that the cross of Christ is seen to be the only and effective means by which sinners can find pardon and peace before God³⁴² – that is, an imputed righteousness. But precisely how the death of Christ achieves this is not stated in Scripture, and consequently there has been no standard or orthodox position on atonement ever developed. Of the three main theories of atonement (the Christus Victor, Satisfaction and Subjective theories),³⁴³ Hardy's teaching comes closest to the Subjective theory. This view emphasises the importance of the effect of Christ's cross on the sinner: in seeing the greatness of God's love displayed by Christ's death on the cross, the sinner is delivered from fear and an answering love towards God is kindled in them. This love moves the individual to

³⁴⁰ Pretorius, "Family Alienation", p.23.

³⁴¹ Walter A. Elwell, (ed.) 1984. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books.

³⁴² Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary*, p.100.

³⁴³ The Christus Victor or Ransom theory is arguably the earliest view of the atonement. It describes how God redeemed humanity, made subject to the devil by the Fall, through ransoming his Son. Ultimately, as the resurrection proved, God is victorious over sin and evil and through Christ paid the price of human sin. A second theory is known as the Objective or Satisfaction theory of atonement and is based on Anselm's view that Christ suffered as a substitute for humankind satisfying the demands of God's honour. This theory was later developed by Protestant scholars into the notion of penal substitution – that is, Christ is punished in the place of humanity, so that God's perfect justice can be satisfied.

repentance and faith. Elwell points out that “the thrust in all this is on personal experience. The atonement, seen in this way, has no effect outside the believer. It is real in the person’s experience and nowhere else.”³⁴⁴

Despite the Subjective theory of atonement emphasising personal experience, it is not a theory of self-atonement. Thus, Hardy’s revelation of the cross, promoting as it does human effort to achieve spiritual purification, represents a theory of atonement that falls not just outside the Evangelical tradition, but outside any Christian notion of atonement.

From a different perspective, it can be argued that Hardy’s revelation minimises the notion of justification while maximising the concept of sanctification. Concerning justification, Elwell writes

...Paul proclaims the present justification of sinners by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, apart from all works and despite all demerit (Rom. 3:21ff.). This justification, though individually located at the point in time at which a man believes (Rom. 4:2; 5:1), is an eschatological once-for-all divine act, the final judgment brought into the present. The justifying sentence, once passed, is irrevocable. ...Paul’s thesis is that God justifies sinners on a just ground, namely that the claims of God’s law upon them have been fully satisfied. The law has not been altered, or suspended, or flouted for their justification, but fulfilled – by Jesus Christ, acting in their name. By perfectly serving God, Christ perfectly kept the law (cf. Matt 3:15).³⁴⁵

In justification, God at the beginning of Christian life, declares us acquitted. Justification is unashamedly Christocentric and is focused away from human self-justification. Hardy’s revelation of the cross, by teaching the need for daily, conscious and deliberate acts of self-renunciation in order to achieve purity before God, undermines the gracious action of God in human justification.

He further distorts the attendant concept of sanctification which Elwell defines as follows:

³⁴⁴ Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary*, p. 101.

³⁴⁵ Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary*, pp. 594 - 595.

In sanctification, God accomplishes his will in us as Christian life proceeds. Sanctification never replaces justification. ...Justification – the privileged status of acceptance – is achieved through the cross; sanctification – the ongoing process of conformity to Christ – is achieved by the Spirit. But not as sudden miraculous gift: the NT knows nothing of any shortcut to that ideal.³⁴⁶

The theological implication of Hardy's revelation fall within the shadow of the Pelagian heresy which, inter alia, contends that human justification and cleansing of personal sin come through faith in Christ, but that sanctification can be achieved through human moral strength aided by asceticism – that is, without God's grace or the working of the Holy Spirit. The value of the Christ's redemption, within this thinking, is limited to instruction and example to encourage humanity to strive for virtue.³⁴⁷

If there was any doubt about the heterodox nature and implications of Hardy's revelation, a declaration by Audrey Hardy in a joint interview with Miki during a Trinity Broadcasting Network broadcast of the 4th October 2009 puts the issue beyond doubt:

People put the blood of Jesus on them believing they are going to be protected but what is our greatest protection? It is to walk without sin, it is to have a pure life, to have a righteous life. What's the purpose if I harbour sin in my heart, if I've got grudge, if I've got unforgiveness. If I've got things in my heart what will the blood of Jesus do to protect me? That's an opening anyway to works of the enemy...If I walk with a heart that's clean and pure why do I need the blood of Jesus? My protection is the state of my heart! Some people put Buddha, some put the blood around their necks. If my heart is not right what will I do with the blood of Jesus?³⁴⁸

By declaring "If I walk with a heart that's clean and pure why do I need the blood of Jesus?" Audrey Hardy completely rejects any concept of Christian atonement and justification. In the words of a contributor to the CPG website: "Hardy's gospel...is

³⁴⁶ Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary*, p. 971.

³⁴⁷ The Catholic Encyclopaedia, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11604a.htm> (Accessed 02/10/12)

³⁴⁸ Posted by "Ferret", (31/10/09), <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=7&t=7> (Accessed 03/05/12)

based on the extent to which they are taking up THEIR cross daily - living the given, sacrificed life. NOT resting in the complete and perfect work of Christ!”³⁴⁹

To reiterate - Hardy’s revelation of the cross is a unique teaching on human atonement falling outside the Christian tradition.

The fifth clause of the Statement declares GGC’s belief “in the present ministry of the Holy Spirit, by whose indwelling the Christian is enabled to live a Godly life.” What is notably absent from any teaching or preaching in GGC is the concept of discernment, (except perhaps for that of Hardy’s). The general understanding appears to be that any emotional fluctuation, thought or impulse a member experiences can be regarded as the prompting of the Holy Spirit. This is a naive, if not dangerous, notion. It fails to accept the complex reality of a Christian’s inner world with its various “voices” and avoids critical self-reflection. This is particularly concerning in a highly authoritarian religious group where mental and emotional manipulation by the leader and group processes are likely to be evident.

The last clause of the Statement of Faith – “We believe in the spiritual unity of believers in our Lord Jesus Christ” is denied by the exclusivity and elitism of Hardy’s apostolic office and revelation. Unity in Christ is not regarded as a measure of the true spiritual unity of believers– rather spiritual unity for CTMI consists of all Christians submitting to Hardy’s authority and revelation. If anything CTMI promote Christian disunity by their open criticisms of other religious traditions and their refusal to work within existing Christian fraternals.

The exclusivity of their belief – that individuals need to come to CTMI to hear the true gospel - undermines the biblical understanding of the gospel being openly revealed to all nations, 350 and Christ’s own commission to take the gospel to all nations³⁵¹

³⁴⁹ Posted by “CPG Testimonies”, (21/01/12), <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=6&t=1005> (Accessed 03/05/12)

³⁵⁰ Romans 16:26

³⁵¹ St Matthew 28:19

GGC's beliefs and practices do not conform to an Evangelical Protestant understanding of the Christian faith, and at points, do not conform to what might be considered basic Christian orthodoxy. Consequently the presence of the Statement of Faith on their website is misleading and another instance of the disingenuity that is associated with the group.

For Burrell (1981), the fact that GGC fail to adhere to orthodox beliefs would be sufficient reason to consider them a cultic group. Enroth (2005) would take issue with the fact that GGC's beliefs deviate from the historic Creeds, at very least, in reference to the nature of the Church, and Martin (1996) would naturally point to the fact that GGC are gathered about Hardy and his misinterpretation of Scripture. For Gomes (1995), GGC would constitute a cult of Christianity as they embrace a particular doctrinal system taught by an individual leader, which denies both explicitly and implicitly one or more of the central doctrines of the Christian faith. GGC would also fulfil at least the following 10 (of 19) theological characteristics of a cult according to Gomes:

- a denial of salvation by grace through faith (salvation through submission to Hardy, his revelation and a pure heart)
- a devaluation of the work of Christ (the "given life" leads to a pure heart before God)
- a reduction of the absolute authority of Scripture (Hardy's revelation is primary, and inner experience can also trump Scripture)
- an exclusivistic belief system (Only Hardy has this revelation for the worldwide Church)
- a compartmentalisation of conflicting facts (e.g. Hardy preaching the sacrifices of the "given life" but living in luxury; the emphasis on a pure heart but the manipulation of visa regulations)
- an emphasis on experience over doctrine (heart rather than sound teaching)
- an emphasis on direct revelations and visions from God (Hardy's revelation of the cross)

- a disregard for sound hermeneutical principles (Hardy’s understanding of the five fold ministry and revelation of the cross are the only hermeneutic principles)
- a tendency to see Scripture as alluding to their cultic movement (emphasis on particular verses about estrangement with family)
- an emphasis on minor points of theology. (Salvation and ecclesiology are not minor points of Christian theology but GGC’s particular emphasis on Hardy, the five-fold ministry and the revelation of the cross represent an unbalanced and incomplete Christian doctrine.)

A further theological concern is Hardy’s belief that he holds apostolic office. In the previous chapter, an attempt was made to portray the process of reasoning behind this assumption. At each point in his reasoning dangerous assumptions are made: that the “five-fold” ministry paradigm is the only form of ecclesiology anticipated in Scripture; that the office of apostle continued after the death of the first century apostles that Christ appointed; that apostleship and the revelation of the cross (as understood by him) are mutually inclusive; that St Paul’s revelation and Hardy’s are identical (and this has been argued above to be untrue) and that St Paul and Hardy share the same calling. Indeed, those who have experienced Hardy’s ministry first-hand believe that he deliberately aligns himself with St Paul and expects to be seen in the same light as this apostle: “It certainly seems like Miki is positioning himself, like Paul, as the apostle who brings what he has received from God to the people. ‘Without this you pastors are deprived – come and join our team under the Apostle - then you can be like a church in the New Testament.’”³⁵²

In attempting to understand Hardy’s reluctance to identify himself as the Apostle of CTMI during the Carte Blanche interview, only two logical options present themselves: excessive humility or deception. Apart from the testimonies of members of the CPG and CTMI leaders like Peter McKenzie that Hardy is the Apostle, there is the telling statement on the website of Selborne Park Church, Bulawayo, a CTMI partner church:

³⁵² Posted by “CPG Testimonies”, (97/05/2010), <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=6&t=257> (Accessed 01/02/12)

In 1989, while attending a Leadership Conference in Durban, Richard Langworthy heard Miki Hardy speaking on the Restoration of Apostolic Ministry to the Church. A friendship was started which opened the door for Miki Hardy to take an Apostolic role within the Church shortly after. Miki Hardy brought to the Church the clear message of the Cross and the Grace of the Lord.³⁵³

Further evidence is provided from one of Pretorius' GGC interviewees: "The leader is a man of God that is truthful. He is an apostle of God based on Ephesians 4."³⁵⁴

In the Carte Blanche interview, Hardy declared: "We are not interested in taking over churches. Our affiliates are free to act and preach what is on their heart. They have their own websites."³⁵⁵

Disregarding the febleness of his argument, it must be noted that affiliates' websites all celebrate their link with CTMI and their proclamation of the "gospel of the cross". One only needs to consider the websites of GGC³⁵⁶ or Selborne Park Christian Church³⁵⁷ to note that Hardy's revelation of the "gospel of the cross" is central to their mission or doctrinal statements and also tends to be a frequent theme of their pastor's preaching and teaching.³⁵⁸

Hardy claims to be answerable to a group of elders in CTMI: "We are Church Team Ministries International – with hundreds of churches - not one person rules and reigns. There are seven of us on a committee. It can happen tomorrow that I am not on the committee."³⁵⁹

Since Ephesians 4 makes no mention of committees, and it would be difficult to understand how the apostle with his "greater spiritual authority" could submit to those

³⁵³ <http://www.selbourneparkchurch.com/who-we-are/> (Accessed 07/04/2012)

³⁵⁴ Pretorius, "Family Alienation", p.15.

³⁵⁵ Posted by "CPG Testimonies", (07/05/10), <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=6&t=257&p=1398> (Accessed 01/02/12)

³⁵⁶ www.gracegospelchurchsa.org/ctmi-family/ (Accessed 07/04/2012)

³⁵⁷ <http://selbourneparkchurch.com/index.php?id=31> (Accessed 07/04/2012)

³⁵⁸ E.g. O'Connell-Jones' sermon "The simplicity of the gospel", downloaded on 01/06/11 to the Grace Gospel Church website. (Accessed 26/10/2011)

³⁵⁹ Posted by "CPG Testimonies", (07/05/10), <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=6&t=257&p=1398> (Accessed 14/07/12)

of a lower office, the conclusion drawn is that Hardy deliberately misleads CTMI-outsiders about his claimed apostolic office. This is highly reminiscent of the “heavenly deception” practiced in cults. Morantz notes that the Moonies used the term “heavenly deception” to indicate deliberate deceit “in the furtherance of God.”³⁶⁰ It is largely used to protect the cult and its leaders from outside scrutiny. Within CTMI there does not appear to be any doubt about who the apostle is, but from the outside it is difficult to absolutely link Hardy and the apostolic office. Speculatively, Hardy’s obfuscation may be designed to protect his apostolic office from the probing scrutiny of those outside his organization.

CTMI’s Leadership Conferences focus on the personal struggles of those in ministry, particularly those in independent ministries with little or no organisational support. Audrey Hardy, reporting on the Bulawayo and Durban Conferences in 2011, quoted Miki:

Today, men of God are isolated in the ministry, and completely independent; leaders are threatened by each other and are afraid to allow the other ministries to enter their church for fear they will lose their people. “It’s very sad to see so many leaders who love the Lord struggling on their own, lonely, doing as best they can, but they can’t trust other men of God; and deep down, they are crying out for something real and other men around them so as to build the church together.” Miki declares that today, if we desire to live what the early church lived, there is only one road.³⁶¹

This “one road” leads to CTMI. Hardy’s rhetoric is manipulative and deliberately emphasizes the struggles of the ministry, and ignores its joys and successes. It further discounts any activity of God in the lives of these pastors and places before them a panacea in the form of Hardy’s apostolically led CTMI:

I strongly believe God wants to raise up spiritual fathers in the church, and build relationships between fathers and sons in the spirit... He is calling men to rise

³⁶⁰ Paul Morantz, “Characteristics of totalistic movements (destructive cults)”, <http://www.paulmorantz.com/cult/characteristics-of-totalistic-movements-cults/> p.8. (Accessed 03/06/2012)

³⁶¹ Posted by “CPG Testimonies”, (05/04/11), <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=6&t=410&p=2015> (Accessed 15/07/12)

up in the different ministries, leaders who will be ready to humble themselves and submit to those that God has brought to help them... If you feel you are called, you love the gospel and it is a part your life, I believe you must re-look at God's plan for your life... You can't compromise what you are receiving, you need to take a stand, unite your hearts with those carrying the same gospel and trust the Lord for whatever happens...³⁶²

Singer's observation that cult leaders offer an innovative panacea to life's problems and their members regard themselves as being unique and exclusive recipients of this truth provides a fitting comment on Hardy's pronouncements.

Enroth argues that cultic groups reject Christian orthodoxy, disrupt and divide families, foster an unhealthy dependence of members on the leadership, and create spiritual confusion in the lives of their members.³⁶³ Given what has been described of GGC/CTMI above, it would appear to fit this description.

5.3 Evaluating GGC/CTMI against psychological perspectives on cults

The basis of the psychological approach to cults is the understanding that such groups psychologically manipulate and control members. Allegations of such manipulation and control have been made by former members and leaders. Silk, for instance, declares:

Church direction is always disseminated from the "apostle", Miki Hardy and his wife Audrey, through the elders and to the people. Anyone questioning this is quickly ostracised and sidelined, subjected to strong and abusive chastisement, preached about, and people warned against associating with them. They are called immature, "not well" and having "twisted hearts".³⁶⁴

Such allegations and examples will be considered against psychological models of cultic groups to ascertain whether they provide evidence of cultic dynamics.

From Singer's (2003) perspective, cults are defined through the processes and interactions in the group that promote a dependent cultic relationship. This relationship

³⁶² Posted by "CPG Testimonies", (05/04/11), <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=6&t=410&p=2015> (Accessed 15/07/12)

³⁶³ Ronald M. Enroth, 1992. *Churches That Abuse*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House. p. 29.

³⁶⁴ Letter emailed from Silk to Erin Georgiou, editor of JOY! Magazine 03/10/2009 in Appendix "A".

is created through the charismatic authority of a leader who claims a special mission or knowledge; the belief that the group has been given a unique, exclusive truth which offers a solution to life's problems and a demand from the group to commit increasing amounts of time, energy, and resources to the group's goals. GGC, through its relationship to Hardy and CTMI, fulfils all these requirements and consequently a dependent cultic relationship should logically exist between the group and its members.

Verification of the psychological manipulation of members of GGC is found in Pretorius' 2010 research of the group.³⁶⁵ He argues that, in general, classical psychological conditioning occurs in certain religious groups, particularly in the form of fear conditioning. Classical conditioning was discovered by Russian physiologist, Ivan Pavlov, in 1901, and it describes how responses to new stimuli are learned through association. Classical conditioning relies on involuntary responses that are controlled by the autonomic nervous system and are thus beyond the individual's control or rational decision making. John B. Watson is credited with demonstrating that phobias could be explained through a process of classical conditioning in his famous Little Albert experiment of 1920.³⁶⁶

In GGC, members are estranged from family and friends, and this isolation combined with the spiritual elitism of the group, provide the necessary conditions for classical conditioning, according to Pretorius.³⁶⁷ While GGC members are indoctrinated into believing that they are an elite group, those outside the group, especially those opposed to GGC in any way, are negatively labelled as having "twisted hearts". Members of GGC come to fear losing their chosen status by interacting with those with "twisted

³⁶⁵ Stephan P. Pretorius, 2010. "Family Alienation is Presented as a Requirement for Total Commitment in Some New Religious Groups", *Journal for Christian Scholarship* 46. pp. 1 – 23.

³⁶⁶ The participant in the experiment was a nine month old child that Watson and his assistant Rayner called "Albert B", popularly known as "Little Albert". Watson and Rayner exposed the child to a series of stimuli including a white rat, a rabbit, a monkey, masks and burning newspapers and observed the child's reactions and recorded that he initially showed no fear of any of the objects. Thereafter when Albert was exposed to the rat, Watson created a loud noise by hitting a metal pipe with a hammer, causing the child to cry. After this pairing was repeated several times, Albert began to cry simply after seeing the rat. The experiment is used to demonstrate how classical conditioning can be employed to condition an emotional response.

³⁶⁷ Stephan Pretorius, "Family Alienation", p.10.

hearts”. This fear of “contamination” develops into a phobia of contact with outsiders and contributes to the withdrawal of individuals from their families of origin. As GGC and the homes of its members are perceived to be safe environments where the “given life” may be lived, members come to spend more time in these places and are in turn more influenced by the dynamics of the group. It should be remembered that as classical conditioning occurs without conscious decision making, it will have an effect without individuals being aware that they are being conditioned.

While classical conditioning may occur in some religious groups, Pretorius argues that operant conditioning, which operates through rules, regulations, peer pressure, group conformity and role modelling is the usual type of conditioning that occurs in cultic groups. Operant conditioning was first formulated by psychologist Edward Thorndike (1874 – 1949) and holds that behaviours are learned through reward or punishment. Rewards motivate a particular form of behaviour and conversely punishment inhibits particular behaviours.

...when members enter a group, the expected and acceptable behaviour becomes evident through the actions of the other members. The unity and bond amongst members sends a strong message to the new member to conform. Without a word being spoken, the new member will start to modify his or her behaviour in order to fit in. Reinforcement in the form of praise or disappointment will strengthen the behaviour. These practices seem to be present in GGC.³⁶⁸

From his interviews of two members of GGC, Pretorius reports that commitment to the group is positively reinforced by verbal praise or silent approval from the leader or leadership; and negative reinforcement occurs through reprimand or warning, or “silent rejection by the leader, and even avoidance and excommunication by other members.”³⁶⁹

To avoid these negative behaviours from GGC’s leaders or other members, Pretorius contends that members will modify their behaviour. As this process of behaviour

³⁶⁸ Pretorius, “Family Alienation”, p.10.

³⁶⁹ Pretorius, “Family Alienation”, p.12.

modification is ongoing it ensures the internalisation and reinforcement of the belief system of GGC.

Pretorius makes the perceptive comment that one young man who left his biological family for the spiritual family of GGC did not seem able to question whether his actions were aimed at pleasing God or pleasing GGC and its leader. For Pretorius, “this demonstrates the effect of the conditioning on members, which seems to be nothing more than getting members settled in the ways of the church without the ability to prioritise actions.”³⁷⁰

A former pastor of CTMI, Patrick Monasie, confirms Pretorius’ assessment: “I see now that I was confused thinking that I had to choose between my love for the Lord (which in the church is the same as serving the Hardy’s) and anything else – including the family He had given me.”³⁷¹

Pretorius also documents how the use of passages such as Matthew 10:34-37 and Matthew 12:47-50 (which deal with Christian commitment and the family) do not only allow GGC to feel justified in promoting the spiritual family above the member’s biological family, but also play a role in the psychological conditioning of members. This conditioning occurs through both classical and operant conditioning. The scriptures and their ardent usage by GGC appear to offer the member, troubled by the tension between GGC and family, an approved and godly way forward to ease their tension. Pretorius observes that “the acceptance of these scriptures is not only essential because it is God’s word but also because it provides a spiritual status and maturity. It brings a sense of being specially elected by God.”³⁷²

However, the same scriptures can also promote fear conditioning. From the perspective of a member of GGC, rejection of the group’s interpretation of these texts is to deny the uniqueness of GGC and the authority of God’s word. It is inevitable that individuals

³⁷⁰ Pretorius, “Family Alienation”, p.13.

³⁷¹ From document entitled “Disturbing Revelations – Testimony of Previous Pastor”, <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=9&t=251> (Accessed 05/10/12)

³⁷² Pretorius, “Family Alienation”, p.12.

sincerely attempting to honour God would be profoundly fearful of both scenarios. They might also fear rejecting their family, but this would not seem to have the eternal consequences that rejecting the church/bible would have. Consequently, members of GGC are likely to choose the “lesser of the evils” – in this case, choosing to reject their biological family.

When a GGC member chooses the spiritual family above the biological family, they are rewarded by the approval of GGC leaders and members for their commitment to the “given life” which then reinforces this type of behaviour through operant conditioning. Pretorius quotes a mother whose son is a member of GGC: “We know from attending services and from speaking to him that this total devotion to his church and the exclusion of his natural family are praised by the elders and these individuals are put forward as examples of truly committed members.”³⁷³

Pretorius, then, clearly demonstrates that psychological manipulation of members occurs in GGC. For researchers such as Singer, Lifton and Schein this would provide evidence that GGC is a cult. Further substantiation of this conclusion is provided by considering Schein’s three-stage identity change³⁷⁴ that individuals undergo when thought-reform is present (the “unfreezing” of the individual’s historic identity; a “changing” into a identity acceptable to the group and a “refreezing” or consolidation of the new group-approved identity). Keegan O’Connell-Jones, Basil’s son, appeared to describe this process of personal change:

The power of the cross and God’s grace can lead us to true freedom in the Lord; Christ must be our focus and we can’t allow the things of this world to bind us. Thus, there must be a severing of ties from emotional relationships in our lives, and a building of spiritual ones, which was encouraging and challenging at the same time. The Lord is shaking His people.³⁷⁵

Parents of GGC members report sudden and negative behavioural changes in their children:

³⁷³ Pretorius, “Family Alienation”, p.13.

³⁷⁴ Edgar H. Schein. 1961. *Coercive Persuasion*. New York: W. W. Norton. pp. 125-134.

³⁷⁵ <http://ctmi.mu/en/report/keegan-o%E2%80%99connell-jones-durban-rsa> (Accessed: 29/07/12)

All of us have experienced our children fairly suddenly changing their attitude towards us. From former openness to closeness, respect and enjoying our company they have withdrawn, conversation is shallow and there is a smug and superior aloofness...He completely alienated himself from long-standing, beautiful Christian friends and we noticed a complete personality change. From being a gentle child he became judgemental and arrogant.³⁷⁶

Testimonies of parents record a concern about similar, if not identical, behavioural changes in their children and a growing estrangement after these young people joined GGC or CTMI: “We have all heard our children expressing identical views - even using the same language. This even applies to folks who write to us from other countries.”³⁷⁷

Thought reform, as described by Schein, appears a plausible explanation of the personality changes observed by parents and others, in GGC members. And, according to Pretorius, it is GGC members that undergo personality shifts, rather than outsiders: “Conditioned behaviour that takes place in GGC seems to destroy relationships and changes loving family relationships into uneasy complex relationships, eventually resulting in alienation...Alienation seems to be mostly initiated and established by the member, despite attempts by the parents to reconcile.”³⁷⁸

It is clear that CTMI have an agenda to change the relationship between parents and children. This testimony from Satish, a CTMI pastor, posted on the CTMI website on 20th August 2012 is revealing:

Last week I spent two days in prayer and fasting in the south of the beautiful Island of Mauritius together with other Pastors of CTMI. We felt on our hearts the need to spend time with God in these days of trials. During this time of fellowship, the Lord spoke to us through brother Miki Hardy and other Pastors. “Fellowship with the Lord and prayer are the key to the ministry and to experience the power of God in our lives.”

³⁷⁶ Pretorius, “Family Alienation”, p. 14.

³⁷⁷ Posted by “Pilgrim”, (27/03/12), <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=6&t=1379> (Accessed 28/6/12)

³⁷⁸ Pretorius, “Family Alienation”, p. 17.

The Lord reminded us that we should have spiritual relationships with our children. As concerned parents, we should not have emotional relationships with them. It is very important to allow God to deal with our children using His servants and become Christians the way He wants. As concerned parents, we can only do our part realising how limited we are!! We must be careful not to put our hands in their lives but to make sure that we fully collaborate with the Holy Spirit for their spiritual growth.³⁷⁹

Further behaviours observed in GGC point to the presence of thought reform. In terms of Lifton's eight psychological themes quoted in Singer,³⁸⁰ GGC appears to meet the conditions for most. Milieu control exists in the form of group approved discourse, discouragement of contact with outsiders and of reading unapproved material; and the discrediting of negative reports about CTMI/GGC as "persecution from twisted hearts in the emotions".³⁸¹ Lifton's second theme concerns the loading of language which is the formulation of thoughts in the jargon of the group. This constricts thinking and impedes critical reasoning. CTMI/GGC's unique jargon, with its emphasis on pure or twisted hearts, has been described above. A CPG contributor expresses this cultic use of language well:

...the 'state of the heart' explains everything and is the end of any discussion... Information is labelled as coming either from a 'pure heart', or from a 'twisted heart'. This is useful in 'dismissing dissent' or answering opposition as it doesn't matter if information coming from a source considered as a 'twisted heart' is valid or has been proved. It is always bad (lies and persecution). Fallacious or deceitful arguments go undetected. Information is not processed. People are conditioned to file the information without it being fully understood.³⁸²

There is, thirdly, a demand for purity in cultic groups based on the dichotomous view that the group is pure and outsiders are impure. Hardy's revelation of the cross creates a distinction between those who live the "given life" and are thus said to have pure hearts, and outsiders to the group who have "twisted hearts" as they do not accept the

³⁷⁹ <http://ctmi.mu/en/christian-testimonies/pastor-testimonies/two-days-in-prayer-and-fasting> (Accessed 07/08/12)

³⁸⁰ Singer, *Cults in Our Midst*, p. 71.

³⁸¹ "Group Letter 1". <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=5&t=3> (Accessed 05/10/12)

³⁸² Posted by "Ella", (02/10/11), <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=6&t=179&p=2082> (Accessed 27/05/12)

revelation. The “given life”, with its emphasis on a pure heart, promotes behavioural and attitudinal change through a constant personal striving for purity.

Lifton’s theme of confession would seem to be present in the form of GGC members’ dramatic testimonies of “changed lives”. Testimonies form a large part of both GGC and CTMI’s websites and group meetings. This practice promotes group bonding and creates alienation from non-members.

The theme of mystical manipulation, which deals with the member’s perception that their new feelings and behaviours have arisen spontaneously in the group, is promoted through the leaders’ teaching that CTMI and GGC are unique and that individuals are there by their own free choice. Both fear of losing their special status and social pressure mould members’ into believing that they are in CTMI/GGC of their own volition and that their behaviours are freely chosen. Beatrice Hope of *lexpress.mu*, an online newspaper, interviewed Hardy and when he was asked about Hayley Goddard, he responded, “*Je peux affirmer qu'en ce qui nous concerne, elle est totalement libre de ses actions et de sa parole,*”³⁸³ essentially claiming that she had acted in total freedom in rejecting her parents and marrying Levi Page.³⁸⁴ The notion that members have made totally free decisions to act in favour of CTMI/GGC’s ideology is expressed by many young people in CTMI/GGC. A good example is Travis Chaplin (a member of GGC) whose testimony appears on the CTMI website dated 20th January 2010:

There have been comments passed recently that I rejected my family in favour for CTMI...I had to way [sic] up the costs, either to stay home and serve the Lord under the constant pressure and within the boundaries given or leave home and serve the Lord in freedom. To leave home was not my first option, but there was a point where as a twenty year old able to now take my life in my own hands I decided it was time to leave home as this would allow me to take the responsibilty [sic] for my life. It was not an act of rejecting my family in favour of another group, but simply a decision that allowed me to excercise [sic] the direction of life I wanted to pursue, the freedom to live my Christian life. I am grateful for Basil O’Connell Jones for opening his home to me...I have a friend

³⁸³ “I can say that as far as we are concerned, she is totally free in her actions and words.” Translation provided by Google Translate.

³⁸⁴ <http://www.lexpress.mu/news/197-interview-miki-hardy-l-eglise-chretienne-ne-recherche-les-faveurs-d-aucun-politicien.html> (Accessed 27/08/2012)

who is 17 years old. The gospel has seized his heart and he desires to serve the Lord. However his parents have recently forbidden him to meet with or have any contact with the church. Next year he is 18 and leaving school. And if his desire to serve the lord is still there, and he desires to serve Jesus in freedom I'm sure he will make the obvious decision to leave home.³⁸⁵

Mystical manipulation also provides a psychological explanation for the experience CTMI/GGC members have of suddenly experiencing prospective marriage partners "being laid on their hearts". This is interpreted as the Holy Spirit indicating that they should marry the person that has been drawn mystically to their attention.

Lifton's sixth theme is termed "doctrine over person" where cult members rewrite their personal histories and present perceptions according to the group's reality and concepts. "Greg G"'s testimony on the CTMI website, dated the 8th August 2009, describes a personal journey reinterpreted from the perspective of conversion at GGC:

I've attended Grace Gospel Church for the last 5 years and was privileged to spend the past 10 months in Mauritius with CTMI. I am 34 years old and have recently gotten married. I've lived in the Upper Highway area for 25 years. During this period, I was a member of two well established churches, and also visited 2 others, before finally deciding to join Grace Gospel Church.

In all this time I sincerely loved the Lord, but my life that was no different to that of my friends who weren't Christians. Today, I realise this was due to me not hearing the gospel of the cross, and my unwillingness to surrender my life fully to Jesus. Since I first heard the preaching of the cross by Basil O'Connell Jones and other CTMI leaders, the Lord has shown me who I really am, and has given me the grace to change.³⁸⁶

The seventh theme is that of "sacred science" whereby a leader's wisdom is given credibility by connecting it to respected historical leaders or by arguing that the leader follows in the tradition of great people. The following account is illuminating:

During the 2009 Youth Camp they showed the young people a movie about A.A. Allen showing clips of healing services. I was quite surprised because it was rare that they approve of another preacher (as questionable as the preacher

³⁸⁵ <http://ctmi.mu/en/uncategorized/leaving-home> (Accessed 27/08/2012)

³⁸⁶ <http://ctmi.mu/en/christian-testimonies/greg-g> (Accessed 27/08/2012)

seemed). At the end of the movie Peter McKenzie clarified a point. He said A.A. Allen's success wavered and he died an alcoholic because he was independent. He did not yet have the revelation of the cross and the fivefold ministry. Now they knew better... They also showed a movie about Martin Luther as a sort of parallel with Miki's revelation.³⁸⁷

By associating Hardy and Luther, Hardy is obviously given enormous credibility as a Christian leader.

Lifton's final theme is the dispensing of existence. The totalistic environment of the cult reinforces the fact that members are select and superior individuals to those outside the group. Thus, for members there is no existence except for the group and the lives of outsiders to the group could be seen as dispensable. This is a theme that is not fully present in CTMI/GGC currently. The exodus of individuals from the homes of their biological families to homes of CTMI/GGC members is strongly indicative of members' belief that the group offers a preferable existence to that of their historic homes. The Church and world outside of CTMI is regarded as being corrupted and impure and inferior to life within the group. At this point there is little evidence that the lives of those outside CTMI/GGC are regarded as being dispensable – the closest example is possibly Hayley Goddard's libellous attack on my personal and professional reputation. However, given the fact that all the other themes are present, it is fair to assume that there is potential for this final theme to develop in CTMI/GGC. If it were to do so, CTMI/GGC would have developed into what is labelled a "death cult".

Other evidence of control and manipulation by CTMI leadership is the simultaneous launching of blogs by Hayley Goddard, Levi Page, Keegan O'Connell-Jones, Basil O'Connell-Jones, Liezl O'Connell-Jones, Travis Chaplin, Rachel Gillon, Geoff and Terri Brown and Louise Brown in late November 2009. All these individuals except Basil O'Connell-Jones had parents or parents-in-law in the CPG, and blogs appeared to be carefully orchestrated defences of CPG allegations. The timing and the blatantly similar content of the blogs led some on the CPG forum to make the following remarks:

³⁸⁷ Posted by "Ella", (23/10/11), <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=6&t=457> (Accessed 30/04/12)

“AND all 3 of them follow the same format! They all posted a blog about their marriage ON THE FIRST OF DECEMBER, [sic] their latest [sic] posts are about CPG. Does "God" (Miki) perhaps [sic] tell them what to write and when??"³⁸⁸ “You know what is so funny is to see half a dozen or so blogs spring out of the mulch simultaneously, all saying the same thing (more or less) which is nothing, and at the same time saying "we are not being manipulated or brainwashed"!! I mean really think about it!"³⁸⁹

These blogs – only by a select few who are directly related to the CPG – and which were launched at the same time (and most likely financed by CTMI) and are so cloned in content - prove the very manipulation, control and brainwashing the blogs seek to deny. As if denying brainwashing by the perpetrators and the victims carries any weight! Who admits to brainwashing??"³⁹⁰

There is little doubt that the blogs were part of campaign to defend CTMI/GGC from the accusations levelled at them by the CPG and others. It is ironic to note that a year earlier Hardy had roundly criticised social media as “a trap” that he, in a rather manipulative manner, discouraged his followers from using.³⁹¹ (CTMI ironically has a Facebook page.) The fact that these blogs were launched by several members of CTMI/GGC following Hardy’s pronouncements, and by high profile individuals such as members of Basil O’Connell-Jones’ family, suggests Hardy’s knowledge of, if not

³⁸⁸Posted by “crayonsiheart”, (04/12/2009), <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=7&t=84&p=312> (Accessed 10/07/12)

³⁸⁹ Posted by “Mongoose”, (03/12/2009), <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=7&t=82> (Accessed 11/07/12)

³⁹⁰ Posted by “CPG Testimonies”, (09/12/2009), <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=6&t=107&p=493> (Accessed 19/07/12)

³⁹¹ “On the 25th January 2008, Miki Hardy addressed the youth in the church in Curepipe regarding Blogs and Facebook. ‘As far as I’m concerned, I believe that Facebook is not only a waste of time, but also a trap for you,’ he declared. ‘You spend more time on internet than reading the bible.’ He then went on to ask if that which was being written was actually constructive. ‘You probably think that it’s a way to evangelise and testify about your christian [sic] life, but this is an illusion...’ Before an attentive audience, he reminded them that on internet, whatever is written, photos as well as videos which have been put on line can be accessed and manipulated by anyone, and we don’t know how it can be used one day.’ ... He added that as far as he was concerned, he believed that if we wanted to communicate, it would be better to do it by mail. Finally, he wanted to make it clear that he was not asking them to stop their blogs or to quit Facebook. ‘Its up to you to do as you wish, when you wish.... But as for me, I am telling you this to make you aware of it as it is a trap... a real trap.’ To conclude, he encouraged them to spend time before the Lord, so that He himself would convict them.” Posted by “Mongoose”, (03/12/2009), <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=7&t=82&p=289> (Accessed 19/07/12)

consent to, their existence. Most of the blogs were also simultaneously withdrawn in 2012 with the exception of Louise Brown's.

Morantz describes coercive persuasion in cults as the process of convincing people to accept a new belief system involuntarily while simultaneously convincing the individual that they have accepted the belief voluntarily. This is akin to Lifton's mystical manipulation theme. However, Morantz argues that coercive persuasion is achieved through the "double bind" of accepting paradoxical beliefs. It is apparent that many paradoxical beliefs are required to be internalised by members of CTMI/GGC. Examples include inter alia: Hardy's claim to live and model the "given life" but the fact that he lives in luxury; members claiming to embrace self-sacrifice for the cross, yet being unable to cope with the sacrifice of honouring their non-CTMI parents; the disparity between Hardy's evident apostleship to insiders and his denial of this position to outsiders, and pilgrims to Mauritius making false declarations to customs officials yet claiming to have a pure heart.

Morantz further claimed that it was common for cult members to have their relationships and marriages controlled by the group. This has been widely alleged by parents of GGC members, particularly Steve and Heather Goddard. Pretorius quotes an unpublished letter from the CPG to the leadership of GGC dated 01/09/2009 which relates the "total opposition" of parents of a GGC member to

...the hasty legal union of their daughter and the pastor's son. Arrangements were made urgently without their involvement – apparently because the transaction would facilitate a visa for Mauritius. The parents were invited to the event [their daughter's wedding] via a cell phone text message sent to all church members (Concerned Parents Group 2009:3).³⁹²

To conclude, CTMI/GGC contains all the necessary dynamics to fulfil Singer's definition of a cult; its members appear to undergo a personality shift in line with Schein's model of thought reform; at least seven of eight of Lifton's themes occur in CTMI/GGC and the cloned orchestration of a media campaign by members who all

³⁹² Pretorius, "Family Alienation", p.16.

claim to have acted with perfect freedom, together make a strong argument for the presence of thought reform processes in CTMI/GGC. From a psychological perspective, both CTMI and GGC could readily be termed cults.

5.4 Evaluating GGC/CTMI against sociological perspectives on cults

As noted in Chapter Two, sociologists typically display a concern for the influence of social context on individuals, linking periods of socio-political turbulence with individual alienation. Cults claim to be able to offer renewed meaning and provide novel and exotic compensators for distressed and alienated individuals. We are reminded of the “anguish and uncertainty” of post independence Mauritian society out of which Eglise Chretienne emerged and then the Creole ethnic violence that preceded the formation of CTMI. It is likely that Eglise Chretienne provided novel compensators for people who had become alienated spiritually and socially during these situations of turmoil.

GGC came into being in its present form in 2003 in Pinetown, KwaZulu-Natal. The Human Sciences Research Council’s report entitled “State of the Nation: South Africa 2003 - 2004”³⁹³ provides an overview of the nation at this point in time. The year 2003 was described as a time of reflection and transition: the country had experienced a decade of democratic government and it was becoming clear that social and economic transformation would be a longer process than had been promised or expected. This ten year period was overseen by the presidencies of Nelson Mandela (1994 – 1999) and Thabo Mbeki (1999 to 2004). These presidencies were marked by different priorities: “Mandela’s presidency was marked by reconciliation, which Mbeki is said to have abandoned for empowerment and narrow African nationalism... Mandela is thus seen as the reconciler and democrat, while Mbeki is perceived as the ultimate technocrat, busy centralising power in an ‘imperial presidency’.”³⁹⁴

³⁹³ John Daniel, Adam Habib & Roger Southall (eds.), 2003. *State of The Nation: South Africa 2003 - 2004*. Cape Town: HSRC Press.

<http://www.hsrcpress.ac.za/product.php?productid=2055&freedownload=1> (Accessed 01/08/12)

³⁹⁴ Daniel, Habib and Southall, *State of The Nation*, p.3.

Portraying South Africa as consisting of “two nations” Mbeki called for the prosperous, developed “nation” to practice magnanimity in order for reconciliation that is based on social justice. He argued that without such justice, racial reconciliation and nation building would be impossible. Mbeki created employment in the middle sectors of the economy and oversaw a fast growing black middle class with the implementation of Black Economic Empowerment. It could be argued that this time of transition and process of reconciliation would create stress for some members of society, who might turn to novel religious compensators to assuage their anxieties.

Official crime figures for Pinetown from April 2003 to March 2004 also reveal a community beset with violent crime: 27 murders, 68 attempted murders, 698 robberies with aggravating circumstances, 88 sexual crimes, 1188 residential burglaries and 118 carjackings.³⁹⁵ It is possible that CTMI, through GGC, offered a sense of psychological and spiritual security to individuals threatened by the crime of the Pinetown area – in other words, a set of compensators.

GGC would likely also appeal to the idealist who encountered the “love bombing” of the group and interpret it as a church where love was more demonstrably real than at other churches; it would appeal to those whose had lost connection with family through emigration by offering a strong sense of family under the headship of a “father”,³⁹⁶ the significance of being a spiritual elite through Hardy’s revelation would attract those who felt insignificant for any reason, and the security of believing that they had found the true faith would draw those insecure in their standing before God.

³⁹⁵ Crime information management, South African Police Service, “Crime in Pinetown (KZN) for April to March 2003/2004”, <http://warwickchapman.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/2CE0100910-annual-crimestats-pinetown.pdf> (Accessed 01/08/2012)

³⁹⁶ According to Statistics South Africa’s 2005 *Documented Migration: Report No. 03-51-03 (2003)*. Pretoria: Statistics South Africa. p. iv, <http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/Report-03-51-03/Report-03-51-032003.pdf> (Accessed 20/07/2013), for 2003 the number of self-declared emigrants from South Africa was 48,4% higher than that of 2002, increasing from 10 890 in 2002 to 16 165 in 2003.

GGC furthermore fulfils five of the seven defining characteristics of cults, according to Barker.³⁹⁷ The one characteristic that cannot be determined due to lack of data is an atypical demographic among members.

1. Members of GGC are first generation converts, and tend to be more enthusiastic and committed than people who have grown up in a particular faith. It was the radical commitment of individuals to GGC that led to initial concerns about the group.
2. CTMI and its member churches including GGC have Hardy as founder and ultimate leader. He undoubtedly wields charismatic authority.
3. GGC's "truth", that is, Hardy's revelation, is more definitive than in other religions, to the point of being exclusive.
4. GGC embrace a dichotomous worldview where they are regarded as being all good and godly and non GGC members tend to be regarded as uniformly bad, even satanic.
5. GGC has experienced suspicion and hostility from the society in which it find itself. This is demonstrated in the formation of the CPG and the various media articles about them.

There has yet to be an emergence of a second generation of GGC or CTMI, and Hardy as the charismatic founder of CTMI remains the leader of CTMI and its member churches.

For Barker, GGC would undoubtedly be a dangerous group as they, in line with CTMI, insist that they alone have the truth; they demand little accountability from Hardy while he requires unquestioning obedience to his apostolic authority; members develop an unhealthy dependency on GGC for material, social and spiritual resources, cutting themselves off from society by wanting to live the "given life" in another member's home and in Mauritius.

³⁹⁷ Eileen Barker, "An Introduction to New Religious Movements" http://web.archive.org/web/20060219080908/http://www.chaplaincy.ic.ac.uk/images/nrm_by_eb.pdf , p.3. (Accessed 21/3/2012) and Eileen Barker. 2011. "Ageing in New Religions: The Varieties of Later Experiences." *The Journal of the British Association for the Study of Religions*. Diskus 12. pp 1 – 3.

Sociologists such as Lofland and Stark³⁹⁸ claim that individuals join cults because the cult answers the felt needs of the individual. Reading the testimonies of GGC members there is ample evidence that they have found renewed meaning in their lives. There is much talk of lives that have allegedly changed for the better: “A few months ago, I was completely in the world... The Lord has set me free of so many things that I held on to, and that I would never have been able to on my own! I know that he will test certain relationships after this camp, but His grace will be sufficient for me. I want the Lord to mould me and equip me.”³⁹⁹

The “primal experiences” described by Hexham and Poewe⁴⁰⁰ are experiences that dramatically change the relationship between those that have them, and the material world. “MZ”, a CTMI pastor from Tanzania offers the following account of what could be termed a primal experience. He was in an overcrowded bus on the way to a wedding and feeling disconsolate:

Just as I was wallowing in this cesspool of self-pity, my cellphone rang. The last thing that I needed at that time was a conversation, so I just let the phone ring. But inside the bus people began looking at me, so I was forced to answer. The minute I said “Hello” someone on the other side answered with the loudest “Praise the Lord, servant of God!” you ever heard. I replied with the smallest, quietest “Amen” that I could muster. In fact I was praying that he wouldn’t add another word!

But the man went on to tell me that he was a pastor deep in the Maasai steppes, that they had just read Pastor Miki Hardy’s articles for the very first time, and they were thinking they had hit a gold mine. They had been in such spiritual darkness for so long they couldn’t believe what they were reading in the rare copy of ‘Msemakweli’ that had somehow wandered miraculously into their remote town. He wanted to know how they could get into contact with us, and if possible, meet us face to face, and get more of what they’d just read. As the man talked on, my heart began to warm. In fact, within less than a minute I was in

³⁹⁸ John Lofland & Rodney Stark, 1965. ‘Becoming a World-Saver: A Theory of Conversion to a Deviant Perspective’, *American Sociological Review*, 30. pp. 862-875. In Dawson, *Cults and New Religious Movements*, p. 118.

³⁹⁹ Testimony of “Chanel C” on CTMI website. <http://ctmi.mu/en/christian-testimonies/the-fruits-of-the-ctmi-youth-camp> (Accessed 28/08/2012)

⁴⁰⁰ Irving Hexham and Karla Poewe, 1986. *Understanding Cults and New Religions*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. p. 60.

gear and making real spiritual contact with this man of God. By the time we finished our conversation, my heart was so touched there were the beginnings of tears in my eyes.

I couldn't believe the Lord would bless me so, just when I didn't deserve it. Suddenly, everything around me became bright. I even looked at the people pushing against me in the bus, and I loved them once again. Just a few bus stops ahead, the old lady stood up to get off the bus, and she gave me back my seat with a big thank you. I sat down gratefully. But a few stops ahead, an elderly man got in. With much joy in my heart, I indicated for him to come over and have my seat. I felt great joy in my heart, thinking about that Maasai man, about what God was doing in our country through this great door of media outreach to CTMI and the message it proclaims... I couldn't believe I had been so blind only a few moments ago. But God, who is rich in mercy, opened my eyes again, to see the great riches that He has for us in the spirit...and He restored my joy. When I went to that wedding, I was the happiest man. As you know we Africans dance...I was the most vigorous dancer at that wedding!⁴⁰¹

As Hexham and Poewe contended such experiences validate the teaching and authenticity of the group, as this experience clearly did for "MZ".

Beckford⁴⁰² attributed the higher public profile of cults to the non-conventional lifestyles of their members, their sophisticated use of media and the enthusiasm and commitment of their members. There is little doubt that CTMI and GGC exemplify these characteristics.

Sociologists report that cults will employ differing recruitment strategies but typically, they use existing social networks to recruit. As there has been no possibility of interviewing members of GGC the precise psychological, social and spiritual predispositions of individuals joining GGC cannot be described.

The formation of the CPG is further circumstantial evidence that CTMI/GGC can be regarded as a cult. The CPG started as a support group for parents and family who had experienced alienation after a family member had joined GGC/CTMI. In time, partially

⁴⁰¹ Testimony entitled, "Love Lifted Me Up" on CTMI website. <http://ctmi.mu/en/christian-testimonies/love-lifted-me-up>. (Accessed 31/08/2012)

⁴⁰² In Lorne Dawson (ed) 2003. *Cults and New Religious Movements: A Reader*. Malden, USA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd. p. 27.

fuelled by CTMI's non-response, the CPG began to strongly resemble an anti-cult movement, dedicated to raising awareness about CTMI and confronting it. A propaganda war ensued which escalated tensions on both sides. However, this war is at time of research in a state of stalemate with both the CPG and CTMI having entrenched positions and being unwilling to give any ground. To date there has been no meeting or constructive dialogue between the groups.

5.5 Conclusion

Each of the academic disciplines employed in the analysis of GGC – theology, psychology and sociology – has produced particular markers to distinguish a cult from other groups. This represents a categorical approach to cult research where if a certain number of criteria are met, a group is defined as a cult rather than, for example, a church. The categorical approach has both merits and disadvantages.

Its merit is seen in its attempt to clearly define what a cult is and for contributing to the taxonomy of groups. However, each discipline regards distinct criteria normative for cult classification and then fails to provide more than a nominal scale for each criterion. For instance, how much mind control is required to satisfy a psychological definition of a cult? How is the novelty of compensators measured in the sociological approach? How is heterodoxy determined in the theological approach?

If anything, it would seem that a broad categorical approach that includes as many disciplines as possible would stand the best chance of accurately determining whether a group could be considered a cult or not. As an example, if a group met the criteria for a cult within all three disciplines of theology, psychology and sociology, it could be seen to indicate a high probability that the group was a cult.

An alternative to the categorical approach is a dimensional approach whereby a continuum is constructed, with healthy groups and cults on opposite poles of the continuum. Having provided a definition of both healthy groups and cults, groups would be graded along the continuum, depending on the extent to which they embodied the qualities of each pole. In the dimensional approach it would be possible to regard a group as having some of the characteristics of a cult while failing to meet all criteria

required to be classified as a cult. Thus a group might be cultic in orientation and practice but might fall short of being defined a cult.

A dimensional consideration of groups reflects the complexity, uniqueness and also the relatedness of groups. In this it is a valuable perspective. However, it fails to overcome the weakness of the categorical approach in that both poles of the continuum need to be defined according to categorical criteria, and then along the dimensional continuum a group might become “cult-like”, then “cultic in orientation”, then “cultic in practice” and eventually a cult. What criteria and scale would be used to determine these transitions?

A further concern about using dimensional considerations in dealing with cultic groups, is that it may dilute concerns about a potentially dangerous group. If legitimate criteria were found to label a group “cultic in orientation” or “cultic in practice” but not a cult, it is envisioned that public concern about such group would be minimal. While moral panic is to be avoided, so is indifference to potentially dangerous groups through innocuous labelling.

While both the categorical and dimensional approaches have their weaknesses, the position taken in this research is that a categorical approach is to be preferred. However, given the varied definitions available, a categorical approach that included several disciplines was adopted. It was demonstrated in this chapter that GGC and CTMI display characteristics that correlate positively with those that define cults in the disciplines of theology, psychology and sociology. Thus from a categorical perspective, GGC could legitimately be termed a cult. However, mindful of the limitations of such an approach, another approach was used to analyse GGC. Lalich’s bounded choice framework, used by her to analyse the well-known Heaven’s Gate cult was employed. The results of this analysis provide the content of Chapter Six.

Chapter Six: Evaluating GGC against Lalich's theory of bounded choice

6.1 Introduction

Lalich's four-dimensional framework describes the interlocking and interdependent dynamics that characterise cultic groups and accounts for the psycho-social state of their members.⁴⁰³ This chapter evaluates whether Lalich's dynamics are present in GGC using data drawn from testimonies and from a questionnaire survey of former members of GGC.

6.2 Evidence of Lalich's 4 dimensions drawn from testimonies

Lalich's first dimension is termed charismatic authority and it refers to the power relationship that is established between the group's leader and member as a result of the affection of the member for the leader. GGC is led by two pastors, Basil O'Connell-Jones and Neil Martin, who are held in affection and esteem by their members:

I am grateful for Basil O'Connell Jones for opening his home to me. It is something special to have men of God who regard there [sic] own reputations as nothing in their service to Jesus, he is still paying the price for helping me. I praise Jesus for his provision and grace during that time.⁴⁰⁴

However, each pastor of a CTMI affiliated church submits to the apostolic authority and revelation of Hardy, and it is consequently Hardy who receives the greatest adulation of all CTMI leaders. He is evasive about the proofs for his claims of apostleship and revelation, which as Lalich argues, creates an unassailable level of authority for him, as well as loyalty and group control.⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰³ Janja Lalich, 2004. *Bounded Choice. True Believers and Charismatic Cults*. Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press.

⁴⁰⁴ Testimony of Travis Chaplin, (Posted 20/01/2010), <http://ctmi.mu/en/uncategorized/leaving-home> (Accessed 15/09/12)

⁴⁰⁵ Lalich, *Bounded Choice*, p. 239.

As was seen in Heaven's Gate and the DWP, the charismatic authority of Hardy creates a parental relationship between himself and members of CTMI and their affiliated churches. This relationship is overt, with Hardy being termed a father and members being called "sons and daughters in the house." It is a relationship that demands and receives both devotion and unquestioning obedience:

To anyone who has been a part of CTMI it is clear that Miki is the father. It is also clear that he is the apostle. It is also clear that he is the guy in charge (though it is also evident that Audrey is the power behind the throne). Everyone knows that and will acknowledge that Miki is the father and not much can happen without his say so... I can't tell how many times I've heard the message preached about "Sons in the house". In these sermons (they don't like the term "sermon" but prefer "message" or "sharing") the congregants are told that unless they are totally given to the apostle they are outcasts, orphans, prodigals and thus not part of the household of the church and thus far from where God wants you to be.⁴⁰⁶

Hardy has encouraged distance from, and tension with, outsiders to the group. This has been created by his criticisms of the wider church, and CTMI's leadership conferences which are aimed at drawing clergy away from their denominations or associations and into the CTMI fold. He is evasive or unresponsive to critics like the CPG, lacks transparency and real accountability, and plays the persecution card when criticised. Lalich posits that this leadership style promotes the development of paranoia that serves to keep members in a state of uncertainty and fearfulness, and in turn, fosters a renewed reliance upon and submission to the leadership.⁴⁰⁷

Hardy is the "source" of the transcendent ideology known as the gospel or revelation of the cross. This novel and attractive belief system combines an apparent biblical emphasis on the cross of Christ and a particular ecclesiastical structure which is presented as a more powerful and authentic version of Christianity. Together with Hardy's special relationship with God through his revelation and apostolic office, he offers a definitive formula for salvation which he calls the world and the wider Church to heed.

⁴⁰⁶ Posted by "Mongoose", (03/10/2010), <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=6&t=257> (Accessed 14/07/12)

⁴⁰⁷ Lalich, *Bounded Choice*, p. 224.

Hardy holds himself up as a role model for his followers and is regarded as being an exemplary example of the “given” life. Hardy’s luxurious lifestyle and lack of veracity in interviews provide a clear set of double standards.

Lalich argued that veneration of the leader would become a trade-off for the possibility of salvation precipitating an increasing dependency on both the leadership and the group. Hardy is venerated as the apostle of CTMI and members of GGC express their devotion to him by attempting to travel to CTMI headquarters in Mauritius as frequently as possible. This veneration compromises relationships with non-GGC members and life outside the group. As has been reported in Chapter Four, studies and career plans are abandoned, and alienation from the biological family is typical.

Charismatic authority, according to Lalich, leads to authoritarianism and groups that lack democratic structures. Hardy makes a bid for a pseudo-presbyterian style of polity in CTMI by speaking of a committee of elders⁴⁰⁸ that oversee CTMI but this was argued to be a deliberate obfuscation of the truth. It would appear that CTMI and its affiliates are governed dictatorially by Hardy without any recourse to democratic process.

Lalich’s second dimension is known as “the transcendent belief system” and provides the group’s soteric ideology. To recapitulate: cults tend to promise an all inclusive (all the answers) and exclusive (the only way) path to personal freedom or salvation. This path requires members to commit to a process of personal transformation towards an ultimately unattainable goal.

GGC’s transcendent belief system or theology is that of the parent organisation CTMI, which in turn, is based on Hardy’s apostolic leadership and revelation of the cross. It is an all inclusive belief system for it claims that the path to God’s approval and blessing lies in submission to Hardy, and believers developing a “pure heart”. A pure heart is understood by CTMI to not necessarily mean a perfect heart but rather the cultivation of an inner disposition where the believer sacrifices and repents of impure thoughts and

⁴⁰⁸ Carte Blanche 07/02/2010. <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=6&t=257> (Accessed 15/09/2012)

attitudes. Thus, for CTMI, so long as the believer has a pure heart, they exist in a sanctified relationship with God (which obviates the need for Christ's atonement, according to Audrey Hardy). It is a belief that shifts the focus of members of GGC from Christ to their own psycho-spiritual reality, preoccupying them with attempts to root out impure inner impulses, and is reminiscent of Pelagianism. The GGC member thus strive to remodel their identity on that of the group ideal, and to concurrently break with their pre-GGC lifestyle.

Hardy presents the salvation that CTMI has been entrusted with as something that is available to any who will embrace the "given" life, and it thus appears as if those who hear his message have a choice to accept or reject it. However, the theology of CTMI is so negatively critical of all other churches that if one accepts CTMI's worldview, there is only one real choice available to those who seek spiritual maturity - and that is to commit to "this gospel". And as "this gospel" is presented using biblical concepts and terminology, claims an Evangelical Protestant Statement of Faith, and is variously identified with the Protestant and Charismatic traditions by Hardy, committing to the revelation of the cross does not appear to be contentious.

The principle of *caveat emptor*⁴⁰⁹ is nullified when a seller deliberately conceals defects in order to make a sale. Hardy conceals the fact that he is the apostle of CTMI and the ultimate authority over all CTMI affiliated churches. He conceals the fact that the revelation of the cross is extra-biblical and heterodox. Hardy conceals the fact that the customary consequence of committing to his organisation is alienation from family and friends, is the probability of an "invisible hand" guiding the choice of marriage partner, and the likely redeployment of the member's skills and experience to serve CTMI. Such unpleasant realities emerge after a member has committed to an exclusive theology that teaches that commitment to anything else is a greater evil. One is reminded of discovering disagreeable small print on a document only after signing. Nonetheless, zealous members of GGC sacrifice any doubts or concerns about being

⁴⁰⁹ "Let the buyer beware"

deceived, in pursuit of a pure heart, and thus internalise the goals of the group as their own personal goals.

Lalich observed that indoctrination in some groups occurs through manipulative and coercive methods resembling thought reform and coercive persuasion.⁴¹⁰ As was demonstrated in Chapter 5, Pretorius has argued that psychological manipulation and conditioning exists in GGC.

The third dimension of Lalich's framework concerns the systems of control of the group. This includes such components as organisational form, hierarchy, discipline, code of conduct and behavioural norms which creates compliance and obedience within the group. Cultic groups, according to Lalich, display a top-down authority structure where leadership demands unconditional obedience and submission. This is clearly evident in GGC and CTMI with apostolic authority being vested in Hardy and through him to the pastors of CTMI affiliated churches. The clearest example of a member's unconditional submission to Hardy's authority was provided by Heather Goddard, the mother of Hayley, in a letter emailed to Erin Georgiou the editor of JOY! magazine dated 13 May 2009:

I became very concerned and looked at her email in and outbox to see the level of her commitment to this cult. In one of her letters to Miki Hardy in which she told him that we were calling CTMI a cult, she stated: "I completely submit myself to you and the elders. Whatever you have planned for me I will do." He [Hardy] also told her not to be manipulated by her parents.⁴¹¹

Lalich noted that the DWP and Heaven's Gate maintained rigid boundaries between themselves and the outside world, controlled movement and communication beyond the group, and promoted collectivity.⁴¹² These features are evident in GGC: GGC does not fellowship with other Christian groups or churches; it has a critical/negative perception of the secular world, it and encourages young people to go to Mauritius or GGC homes

⁴¹⁰ Lalich, *Bounded Choice*, p. 227.

⁴¹¹ In Appendix "A".

⁴¹² Lalich, *Bounded Choice*, p. 230.

to learn from other given lives.⁴¹³ This drawing of people to a particular location appears to be a trend towards collectivity, as is the controversial purchase of Outlaw Farm in Waterfall, KwaZulu-Natal. GGC claims this property was to be used for a school but it could readily become a compound for the group.

Personal control appears to be exercised in an indirect manner through loss of attention, exclusion, shunning, and demonising choices not congruent with GGC's ideology:

Being a "son in the house" has nothing to do with being a son to Father God, but Father Miki. And Mother Audrey...Then you will be accepted, acknowledged, uplifted, made a fuss of and recognised by the rest of the folk as approved. And the oppsite [sic] is also true. If you question, say the wrong things, don't "speak the lingo" of the apostle, read books by other Christian authors, don't hang on the words of the elders (as well as the Alpha Females, Audrey, Dane, Brigitte, Kamla etc) and be at their beck and call 24/7, you suddenly become invisible. People will ignore you, look away and not respond to you in conversation. This is strong peer pressure. And it breeds blind obedience as surely as Pavlov was able to make his dogs drool by the ringing of a bell.⁴¹⁴

Initially I was very involved, having been the founding pastor in Durban, but some time later began to question the activities of the elder and other church goings-on. These questionings were met with aggressive and abusive responses and I was quickly excluded from all leadership and decision making involvement.⁴¹⁵

What lies behind all of these forms of castigation is a threat of losing one's place in this exclusive group with its special relationship with God. This threat of "soul death" serves to condition members of GGC into a state of phobic fear of life outside GGC/CTMI. Lalich posits that in time, life within cultic groups became rigid, legalistic and introspective thus moulding members into rigid, dogmatic and single-minded individuals. Once again Hayley Goddard's behaviour provides an illustration of this type of moulding in GGC:

⁴¹³ "Group Letter 1". <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=5&t=3> (Accessed 05/10/12)

⁴¹⁴ Posted by "Mongoose", (03/10/2012), <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=6&t=257> (Accessed 29/07/12)

⁴¹⁵ Letter emailed from Silk to Erin Georgiou, editor of JOY! Magazine 03/10/2009 in Appendix "A".

During one conversation with us, she started crying and begging us to pay for her to remain in Mauritius. We insisted she return to SA at the end of her 6 month stint. She did this reluctantly...Once back in South Africa we, (and many family friends) were concerned at how she had changed. Dull expression, no spontaneity, robotic response, repetitive jargon i.e. I have it on my heart, when confronted we were told "that is emotional," She spent every minute with the church, either at meetings – Monday evenings a 2 hr hour prayer group. Wednesday morning – 2 hour woman's meeting – although any unemployed attend, whether male or female, Wednesday evening another prayer meeting lasting 3 hours, Youth on a Friday, although again this was just another church service and all and sundry attended – from 15 years old to 60 years old and then the Sunday morning church service – 9.30am to 12pm. She did not want to participate in any family gatherings. One evening she had to attend a school computer course and it ended earlier than expected. She asked me to take her to Basil O'Connell Jone's [sic] house to listen to an elder from Mauritius. She was already quite late for the meeting and I declined to take her as I too was tired. She then tried to get a taxi to collect her from our home – this was the level of her desperation and commitment to the church.⁴¹⁶

The final dimension of Lalich's framework deals with the pressure social influence exerts on group members, inducing them to model their behaviour on an ideal of the transcendent belief system.⁴¹⁷ Leaders and/or exemplary members are esteemed leading to a general striving after these behaviours. However, the ideal is unrealistic and impossible to attain for any length of time. The pressure to conform to it causes members to constantly feel inadequate and thus live with a continuous self-critical monitoring which prevents any criticism of the system or its truths. Lalich writes of how social pressure contributes to members believing that they have freely undertaken to mould themselves in the image of the leader in order to live out the ideal of the ideology.⁴¹⁸

Hardy is the exemplar for the group. He claims to be modelling the revelation of the cross and cites how after receiving this revelation his relationship with his wife and colleagues was transformed. In GGC the theology of the "pure heart" is a prime example of the unattainable ideology that Lalich postulates. Striving to have a pure heart – an absence of impure inner attitudes – will consume the attention of the member

⁴¹⁶ Letter from Heather Goddard to Erin Georgiou dated 13/05/2009 in Appendix "A".

⁴¹⁷ Lalich, *Bounded Choice*, p. 230.

⁴¹⁸ Lalich, *Bounded Choice*, p. 231.

preventing them assessing the validity of Hardy's authority and teachings. Lalich points to the presence of social pressure providing the means by which individuals conform to a cultic group's ideology and behaviours, and the discipline of social psychology, as was seen in Chapter Two, provides a detailed explanation exactly how powerfully and insidiously this process can be.

Classical and operant conditioning have been argued to operate in GGC, and this conditioning is regarded as a primary method of attitude shaping in social psychology. Social psychology makes it abundantly clear that through belonging to a group that is esteemed by its members, as GGC is, and by merely observing how other members of the group behave, conscious and unconscious attitude moulding occurs. Consequently, it becomes impossible to argue that notions and decisions of GGC members (or members of any group, for that matter) are strictly personal and uninfluenced choices. The inner attitudes of "heart" and mind (affect and cognition) of GGC members must be regarded as partially determined by the group and its ideology and leadership. The extent to which the group moulds individual attitude and behaviour is debateable, but the very fact that "cloned" behaviour including speech, socialising, a growing detachment from family, friends, planned activities and careers, and sudden marriages have been observed among GGC members argues for significant social pressure to conform to the group's norms. Former members claim that sometimes the pressure to conform is not subtle:

I once heard Audrey saying that 'this man left his job to serve the Lord' publicly just to incite others to imitate those people. So when Audrey mentions the names of all people who left their family, she's justifying that it's normal and that people should do the same (sounds like *ad populum*?). It's not God who is asking them to leave everything, it's Audrey and Miki.⁴¹⁹

It is also important for members and leaders of GGC and CTMI, as well as concerned non-members and researchers, to acknowledge that subliminal social influences exist. These subtle forces do affect and can change human behaviour. According to the "less is more" hypothesis, minimal incentive is required in order to overcome any dissonance

⁴¹⁹ Posted by "Berean", (06/10/2010), <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=6&t=257> (Accessed 21/07/2012)

to change, so the absence of any obvious force does not disprove coercion. Hence it is not defensible for CTMI/GGC to contemptuously reject any notion of influence over members as Hardy attempted to do in the Carte Blanche interview:

[Interviewer] But they are saying you brainwashed their children. How do you do that? How do you get these children to give up their lives in SA and come here and give up their studies?

Miki – laughs. I wanted to ask you that question. How can we do that? I just wanted to ask you the same question! We can't tell them that. It's impossible to tell them that. This is the desire of their hearts.⁴²⁰

Neither is it helpful for those shocked by the dramatic changes witnessed in their children to assume that the changes are the result of demonic spiritual forces. In the final analysis, theories of social psychology describes how subliminal forces can mould behaviour in ways acceptable to the leadership and ideology of GGC.

The degree of social pressure in any group depends on the degree to which the group answers the psychological needs of those in and drawn to the group. The greater the dovetailing of individual need and group dynamics the more powerfully the individual will be affected by the group and moulded by it.

6.3 Evidence of Lalich's four dimensions drawn from a survey of former members

The research also included a survey of former GGC members using a confidential, standardised, self-administering questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to answer whether Lalich's four dimensions were perceived to be present in GGC. The degree to which respondents reported such dynamics would be seen as the degree to which they were present in GGC, and thus the potential for bounded choice to be operational in this group.

6.3.1 Results

Only four questionnaires were returned by the cut off date of 15 July 2012 which indicates a response rate of 10%. No respondent requested trauma counselling. There

⁴²⁰ <http://ctmiconcernedparents.com/phpBB-3.0.5/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=6&t=270> (Accessed 05/10/12)

was an equal representation of gender among the respondents – two male and two female. Three respondents were over the age of 50 and the fourth was under the age of 30; all had tertiary qualifications; and the mean length of time each had been associated with GGC was 3.67 years.

Although the statistical power of this survey is non-significant due to the low response rate (anything less than 50% is not regarded as scientifically acceptable,⁴²¹ the results are recorded for interest:

| Respondent 1 | Personal score/Maximum possible score of 20 |
|-----------------------|--|
| Charismatic Authority | 20/20 |
| Transcendent Ideology | 14/20 |
| Systems of Control | 17/20 |
| Systems of Influence | 19/20 |

| Respondent 2 | Personal score/Maximum possible score of 20 |
|-----------------------|--|
| Charismatic Authority | 18/20 |
| Transcendent Ideology | 16/20 |
| Systems of Control | 12/20 |
| Systems of Influence | 19/20 |

| Respondent 3 | Personal score/Maximum possible score of 20 |
|-----------------------|--|
| Charismatic Authority | 20/20 |
| Transcendent Ideology | 16/20 |
| Systems of Control | 18/20 |
| Systems of Influence | 18/20 |

| Respondent 4 | Personal score/Maximum possible score of 20 |
|-----------------------|--|
| Charismatic Authority | 13/20 |

⁴²¹ L. Bickman, and D.J. Rog, 1998. *Handbook Of Applied Social Research Methods*. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, Inc. p. 404 – 405.

| | |
|-----------------------|-------|
| Transcendent Ideology | 14/20 |
| Systems of Control | 19/20 |
| Systems of Influence | 11/20 |

Mean Scores for each dimension and percentage

| | | |
|-----------------------|-------|--------|
| Charismatic Authority | 17.75 | 88.75% |
| Transcendent Ideology | 15 | 75.00% |
| Systems of Control | 16.5 | 82.50% |
| Systems of Influence | 16.75 | 83.75% |

6.3.2 Evaluation of results

It is axiomatic that cultic groups will present research difficulties, not least when it is impossible to ethically interview group members, and when the group practices deception and obfuscation. Although the results, particularly of the survey are disappointing, they strongly suggest that the dynamics required for bounded choice exist in GGC.

Low response rate is a known disadvantage of emailed surveys but it is possible that the minimal response is due to confounding personal and historical factors such as a fear that involvement in research might result in further alienation between the respondent and loved ones still in GGC, embarrassment about former association with the group or a lack of desire to engage with a disturbing subject that had been over-exposed in the media. It is also likely that some might have regarded the research as being biased and polemical due to the researcher’s former work with the CPG. One individual that had been approached by Silk emailed me to declare that any academic endeavour “is only a theory”, that we should pray for those doing wrong, and that this research should not cloud my personal faith. Perhaps others who failed to respond had similar concerns. The precise reasons may never be known but even with Silk’s assistance to promote rapport and support for the research, there was an undeniably poor response to the research method. The questionnaire results would also have been given greater significance by a cross-sectional comparison with a control group, perhaps drawn from another Christian group in Pinetown.

6.4 Bounded choice

The four interlocking and supporting dimensions of Lalich's framework, when concurrently present, result in a "self-sealing" or closed system that continually reinforces itself and is not open to disconfirming evidence or alternative view points. In such systems, organisational choices are made by the leaders, and personal and individual choices, if and when they arise, are made in the context of bounded choice. These choices are firstly formulated within and constrained by the four dynamics of the self-sealing framework, and are then processed according to the belief that the organisation must come first.⁴²²

Data drawn from the testimonies of former members and individuals who have encountered GGC, indicate that the dynamics of charismatic authority, a transcendent ideology and systems of control and influence exist in GGC. It is thus concluded that the bounded reality of GGC can foster a bounded reality in its members. For individuals who may have significant commitments beyond GGC that cannot be neglected (perhaps such as long term employment or family dependents), it may only be possible to offer a limited commitment to GGC, and consistent with this limited commitment will be a limited degree of boundedness. However, the more time and energy an individual is able and willing to commit to GGC (perhaps as a young, unattached person or someone who naively believes that a group can offer all the answers to life), the more likely they will be to undergo an ideological/theological conversion, and be able to reconcile the promise of salvation with the constrictions of the "given life". When a member of GGC is able to fuse personal loss of autonomy with salvation they become charismatically committed to GGC and a true believer in the service of O'Connell-Jones and Hardy, validating and perpetuating GGC and its dynamics, thus creating a self promoting loop, consistent with social dynamics theory. Any personal choices such a true believer makes can be described as bounded choices.

6.5 Conclusion

⁴²² Lalich, *Bounded Choice*, p. 246

Due to their boundedness, true believers are capable of committing the most irrational or repugnant deeds within or on behalf of any group while nonetheless believing that such acts are justified and indeed required for their salvation. Abandoning studies, biological families and former churches; allowing arranged marriages and defaming critics all makes sense when viewed within the boundedness of GGC's worldview. Perhaps, when the bounded worldview of Hardus and Nicolette Lotter and their charismatic commitment to Matthew Naidoo is considered, the murder of their parents will be understood neither as demonic possession or mental illness, but rather as an appalling but bounded choice. What is clear is that groups that promote bounded choice cannot be ignored. They pose potential hazards to their members and society at large. The final chapter makes some suggestions for further study and engagement with cultic groups.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion and suggestions for further study

7.1 Review

The research sought to account for the strength of commitment observed in members of Grace Gospel Church: What motivated young people, in particular, to become obsessed with this group: more committed to GGC's ideology than anything they had learned at their parents' knees; more committed to spiritual fathers and mothers than their biological parents; more committed to the future offered by the group than to self determination; and in some cases, more committed to protecting the group than themselves? GGC had clearly tested the "boundaries of permissible behaviour..."⁴²³

To answer these questions data on GGC was required. In Chapter One, the research methodology was outlined and particular emphasis was placed on the entangled relationship between the researcher and GGC. This entanglement meant that interviews with existing members of GGC were unavailable and thus other sources of data were sought. Consequently, data was gathered from the websites of GGC, CTMI, the CPG, the media (newspapers and television programmes) and also from a questionnaire. This data was then organised and reviewed in light of theological, psychological and sociological theories on cults, and against Lalich's bounded choice model.

In Chapter Two of this dissertation the dominant approaches to studying cults – psychological, sociological and theological paradigms – were described. It was concluded that cults are complex phenomena that defy adequate analysis by one discipline. This conclusion allowed the work and multidisciplinary "bounded choice" model of Janja Lalich to be described in Chapter Three.

The history, theology, and practices of Grace Gospel Church (GGC) were the subject of Chapter Four. Included in this chapter was an account of GGC's relationship to Church Team Ministries International (CTMI), and the formation of the Concerned Parents' Group (CPG) which has become a particular type of anti-cult movement (ACM)

⁴²³ Eileen Barker. 1986. "Religious Movements: Cult and Anticult Since Jonestown." *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 12. p. 331.

dedicated to exposing, confronting and raising awareness about CTMI and its partner churches.

In Chapter Five, GGC's beliefs and practices were evaluated against the literature on cultic groups presented in Chapter Two. It was concluded that in terms of each discipline – psychology, theology and sociology – GGC and its parent organisation displayed obvious characteristics of a cult.

It remained to evaluate GGC against Lalich's theory of bounded choice, which formed the content of Chapter Six. This was accomplished in two ways: firstly by comparing accounts of GGC drawn from the CPG website, the media, and GGC/CTMI's own documents with Lalich's theory and noting similarities; and secondly through administering a questionnaire to former members of GGC. From the review of primary and secondary sources emerged numerous indications that all four dimensions of Lalich's framework, necessary for bounded choice, were present in GGC. The results drawn from the questionnaire were statistically insignificant due to a low response rate.

The results appear to indicate that bounded choice provides a plausible explanation for the unusual commitment seen in members of GGC.

7.3 Conclusion

Failing to obtain rich data from in-depth interviews of members of GGC limited the research and the conclusions that can be drawn from it. Nonetheless, it is possible to note the following:

There are significant correlations between typical cult characteristics (as presented in the academic literature) and features of GGC. These include theological aberrations, psychological manipulation and control of members, and mores at odds with the religious tradition and society in which the group is found. As GGC meets the criteria for cult classification in three different academic disciplines, it is concluded that it can legitimately be considered a cult.

Furthermore, Lalich argues that her four dimensional interlocking framework is characteristic of cultic groups.⁴²⁴ If there is evidence of all four dimensions in GGC, this would lend further weight to the group being considered a cult. From analysis of the limited data on GGC it appears that these dimensions are present in GGC and this is likely to promote the charismatic commitment and “bounded choice” of members. Consequently, at least some of GGC’s members – those who are most committed – will experience the limited scope of choice and rationality consistent with the psycho-social state of bounded choice. Such individuals have the potential to be deployable agents of the group and could act self-destructively to protect the group. It is hoped that this potential will never be realised, but as long as the potential exists GGC finds itself on the same continuum as groups such as Heaven’s Gate, the DWP and Jim Jones’ People’s Temple.

From the limited data available for research it is concluded that there is validity in using the term cult to describe Grace Gospel Church, as it has many features and dynamics associated with cults in the academic literature. Bounded choice provides a plausible explanation for the unusual behaviour of members that join this group, and this raises concerns that charismatically committed members, in a state of bounded choice, could pose a threat to themselves and others. While Grace Gospel Church does not presently appear to be a group that endangers human life to a significant degree, it has harmed family groups, churches, reputations and individuals’ study and career options. It has been implicated in illegal and immoral activities. Consequently, there is justification in sounding a warning about this group – that it is a cult that has developed in the suburbs of KwaZulu-Natal, and that since it appears to exercise a powerful degree of control and influence over its members, its members have the potential to do anything their leaders suggest – however bizarre, illegal or destructive. It is a group that in the opinion of the researcher needs constant monitoring. However, establishing a monitoring agency raises questions of composition, authority and mandate. These questions will not be addressed in this work but are considered in a general sense in the following section.

⁴²⁴ Janja Lalich. 2004. *Bounded Choice. True Believers and Charismatic Cults*. Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press. p. ix.

7.3 Suggestions for further research

There is need for further research in the area of cults in KwaZulu-Natal and South African, for that matter. As this research has unfolded, I encountered the notion in academic circles, the Church and society that cults do not develop or exist in KwaZulu-Natal. This denial is compounded by a general ignorance about how a cult is defined and how individuals or groups would deal with one if they were to encounter it. This is, in my opinion, an untenable position for at stake are issues of social justice and social concern. Cultic groups have the potential to be destructive forces in society and they should not only become worthy of research when they contribute to the death of people.

Academia has a responsibility to conduct research into local examples of this type of phenomenon; to teach students about cults, and guide public perception. It is possible that researchers from the disciplines of psychology and sociology may be regarded as more impartial observers of cultic groups than theologians or researchers affiliated to a particular religious group, and so may be allowed greater access to groups. However, as this research has attempted to show, there is a need for a multidisciplinary approach to cults and thus cross-disciplinary co-operation.

The Christian Church must also exercise responsibility in this regard. Through its denominational structures, local interdenominational associations such as “Minister’s Fellowship” groups, and national interdenominational organisations such as the South African Council of Churches, it must come to a clear (and multi-disciplinary) understanding of what cults are. It needs to model perspicacious usage of the term “cult”, using it when it remains the only possible term that fits the group being considered. The Church has the spiritual and social responsibility to prophetically challenge any group that appears to be bringing the Body of Christ into disrepute and/or is bringing harm to its members or society. The Church must further strive for ethical leadership and growth paradigms that do not incorporate cultic dynamics. It should also care pastorally for those confused and damaged by cultic groups. It is of the utmost importance that the Church begins to understand where the boundaries between inspiration and manipulation, holiness and obsession, and obedience and bondage lie.

Both the Church and Academy in South Africa can benefit from studying how the issue of cults has been dealt with in Europe. The Council of Europe (COE 1992) proposed that any response to cults lay not in legislation of religious groups, whether healthy or unhealthy, by a secular or political system, as this would obviously be strenuously opposed as Erastian by most religious groups. And in the constitution of many countries, South Africa included, the concept of religious freedom is enshrined. Rather the Council of Europe proposed “research and dialogue with these groups in order to obtain an understanding of their functioning and dynamics”.⁴²⁵

It seems then that a dialogical, rather than polemical, approach is essential in dealing with cults and consequently informed and skilled dialogue partners need to be sought to facilitate this discussion. For Pretorius, information gathering about cultic groups and dialogue should be facilitated by those from a religious background: “...a solution must first be obtained through sound information about these groups. This must occur in consultation with these groups. A religious platform rather than a political or legal platform should be used.”⁴²⁶

Pretorius suggests that information gained through such encounters should be disseminated to the public to create greater awareness about cults, particularly in schools, and advocates the establishment of an ombudsman-like “Religious Freedom Centre” which could investigate alleged violations of religious freedom. He also recommends that religious groups consider adopting voluntary codes of conduct thus promoting self-regulation.

These suggestions are salutary but there first needs to be the will to recognise that such groups do exist in KwaZulu-Natal (and, obviously, anywhere else) and that in the times of turbulence are likely to proliferate. Since it is largely the Church and academia that will be called to deal with cultic groups, these organisations need to adopt or incorporate codes of conduct promoting healthy group leadership, and set up task

⁴²⁵ Stephan Pretorius, 2012. “Coercion in New Religious Movements”, (*International Journal for religious freedom*, Vol 5:1). p. 155.

⁴²⁶ Pretorius, “Coercion in New Religious Movements”, p. 156.

groups to be trained as sensitive and skilful dialogue partners with cultic groups. At the risk of belabouring a point, these groups – whether from Church or Academy – need to adopt a multidisciplinary approach to understanding cults, to avoid a blinkered and relatively ineffective response to such groups.

The CPG attempted for several years to create dialogue with GGC/CTMI but to no avail. Reflecting on the correspondence between the CPG and GGC/CTMI it is possible to argue that some emails were emotionally loaded and theologically polemical. As members of the CPG had “lost” family members to GGC/CTMI and as core members of the CPG were deeply committed to a scripturally based Christian tradition, such correspondence was authentic, but not necessarily useful in promoting dialogue. A professionally detached and disinterested approach might be more successful, and hence the need to create these resources in the Church and academia.

My hope is that this research will inspire further research on cults and the formation of such dialogue groups.

Appendix “A”: Documents

Open letter 1

29 January 2009

To Whom It May Concern:

Grace Gospel Church

Over the course of the last two months I have been approached by several parents concerned about the influence of Grace Gospel Church over their children. These children are young adults ranging from 18 to 20 years of age who have become increasingly involved in the life of the aforementioned church. Grace Gospel Church is led by Basil O’Connell-Jones and is a “partner church” of Church Team Ministries International (CTMI) which in turn is led by Miki Hardy, and based in Curepipe in Mauritius. As the involvement of the young people in this organisation has increased, their behaviour has changed - becoming obsessive, negative and destructive. I have met with some of the young people, representatives of Grace Gospel Church, and have also been shown relevant correspondence. The following negative behavioural changes have been observed to a greater or lesser extent in each of the young people’s lives:

- An increasing involvement in the life of Grace Gospel Church to the detriment and exclusion of previously held hobbies, commitments, friends and ultimately of the individual’s family;
- A dramatic change in study and career plans usually in favour of study or work for CTMI;
- A loss of independent and critical reasoning;
- Uncharacteristically stilted conversation heavily dependent on church jargon and discourse;
- A flattened and artificial affect: i.e. non-spontaneous “robotic” emotional responses;
- Growing arrogance and judgmental attitudes towards people outside of their church to the extent of paranoia;
- Growing deceitfulness;
- Increasing aggression in response to being challenged about the church;

- An obsessive conviction to move to CTMI's building project in Trianon, Mauritius.

Church Team Ministries International claims an authority and validity for their organisation that is not substantiated by the theology of the historic Christian Church or the contemporary Church itself. It advocates an unbalanced theology which depersonalises and disempowers individuals. Currently there are several church leaders in Durban who have spoken out against the ministry of this organisation and Grace Gospel Church, and there is growing unease among schools whose pupils have come under the influence of CTMI. At best CTMI could be described as a sectarian group, and at worst as a cult. There is justification in using the term "cult" as the young people I have worked with exhibit symptoms of extreme and unhealthy indoctrination.

Basil O'Connell-Jones and Miki Hardy have been made aware of the damage they are causing to the young people I have met but they fail to accept that what they are doing is unhealthy or irresponsible.

I am deeply concerned about the influence Grace Gospel Church and Church Team Ministries International have particularly over the psychologically vulnerable and spiritually immature. If a tree is to be judged by its fruit, then this church must be judged for its reckless damage to family life, its negative manipulation of the impressionable and its isolating and arrogant spirituality.

Please contact me if you wish to discuss any of the above points.

Yours faithfully

Sean Semple

Open letter 2

3 April 2009

Dear Community Member

Grace Gospel Church/Church Team Ministries International

In a letter dated 29 January 2009 I raised the concerns I had about Grace Gospel Church (GGC) and its parent body, Church Team Ministries International (CTMI). This letter was widely circulated and reinforced similar concerns previously highlighted by Church leaders in the Highway area and several individuals. In the last two months I have continued to meet with people whose lives and families have been negatively affected by GGC/CTMI. These meetings have provided an even clearer picture of how individuals are drawn into this church, indoctrinated and isolated from their families, friends and careers. The observations listed below will, I hope, continue to raise awareness about this group and may enable an early and successful intervention in the lives of people influenced by GGC/CTMI.

Behavioural Changes

One of the first signs of behavioural change is a marked self-isolation from previously held friendships and social groups. This isolation may be rapid (1 week) or gradual (several months) and will include even long standing friendships and best friends. Anchoring this isolation is an understanding that such relationships are “carnal” - of “the flesh” - and are to be willingly sacrificed in favour of “spiritual” relationships, by which is meant association with members of GGC/CTMI. By most theological standards this understanding is distorted and promotes a false dichotomy between the believer and the world.

However, this flesh-spirit tension is used even more powerfully to create an unnatural emotional modulation in CCG/CTMI adherents by claiming that normal emotions such as sorrow, anguish, anger, grief or hurt are “of the flesh” - that is, symptomatic of fallen human nature. This creates a situation where the natural emotions raised precisely by the individual’s growing separation from family, friends and normal life are minimised or dismissed instead of being seen as warnings. Individuals spend great effort repressing these emotions which leads to the characteristic “robotic” and inappropriate emotional responses to life. Thus emotionally injured, the adherent will exhibit a callous or superior indifference to the suffering their actions are causing loved ones.

CCG/CTMI ensure that adherents are blanketed with attention and love, and are kept busy attending meetings. The affection and attention powerfully draws those who have had a deficit of this in their lives and reinforces the “superiority” of the spiritual over the biological family. In even the most loving families it is impossible to lavish the amount of attention and care on an individual that GGC/CTMI do, which is an indictment rather of the sincerity of the church than the average family. It is not uncommon for adherents to receive in excess of 40 sms’s per day from members of CCG/CTMI encouraging their separation from their former life and their attachment to the church. At least 4 meetings are held during the week where the focus is repetitive worship and the sharing of personal testimonies.

Thus, the first characteristic behavioural change observed is a growing focus on the people, life and work of CCG/CTMI to the exclusion of former interests and responsibilities.

Adherents soon adopt the discourse of the group. A French Mauritian accent is sometimes adopted and speech becomes peppered with clichés such as the following: *Given life; the Heart – Follow your heart; In the Spirit; In the Natural or Flesh; That’s emotional; Confronted; Anointed; Take up a position; Putting law; Well with Jesus; Speak into my life; Love you guys; Free in Christ; Shared the pure gospel; Identify with the cross.*

Most of this language is copied from the discourse of Audrey and Mikki Hardy. Further changes in discourse include stilted syntax where people attempt to talk in the style of St Paul’s writings and/or phrases are parroted from sermons.

Any objection to these behavioural changes is immediately seized upon as a form of persecution. A common theme from the pulpit of the group is that any challenge to their “new life” should be interpreted as worldly, if not satanic, persecution. An unhealthy paranoia is thus encouraged.

Doctrines and Indoctrination

Perhaps the most distinctive aspect of GGC/CTMI is their claim to a unique and superior understanding of Christianity. They see no hubris in believing that they are a more pure, more faithful group of believers than any other Christian church or group, historic or contemporary. This further encourages a “us” versus “them” dichotomy and its associated paranoia.

The place and authority of Scripture at CCG/CTMI is of interest. While the Bible is spoken of highly, it is used highly selectively and sporadically. There are devotional “meetings” where the Bible is not opened and frequently preaching is not tied to Biblical texts. Deep and systematic study of the Bible is resisted and even regarded with suspicion. 1 Corinthians 1:8 (“knowledge puffs up”) is frequently misquoted to justify this anti-intellectualism and what is emoted is taken to be revelation. The group relies on a handful of stock Biblical passages that are persistently alluded to. They include Matthew 10:34ff, Matthew 12:46ff, Matthew 16:24ff and parallel passages.

The passages concerning the cost of discipleship are key. A powerful but skewed theology of the cross emerges here which promotes the notion that the adherent needs to respond to Christ with a “given life”. The “given life” is strongly implied to be one where one gives up or at least marginalises one’s “carnal” life including family and friends in favour of a spiritual family. Hereafter, the “given life” involves abandoning studies or employment, and going to Mauritius to live and learn from other “given” lives. Much of this learning takes place on the building site of the new church at Trianon.

The over-emphasis on a few texts forms part of the process of indoctrination – repetition wears down critical faculties. Furthermore, the over-emphasis distorts Christian principles to a degree that is theologically and psychologically unhealthy.

A further distinctive practice of GGC/CTMI involves the trumping of Biblical authority by personal authority. There is much talk of the “anointing” and “special revelation” of preachers and leaders such as Basil O’Connell-Jones and Miki Hardy. Their interpretation of Scripture and God’s will supersedes any other interpretation. Adherents submit thoroughly to the authority of these leaders to the extent of putting the leader’s opinions, needs and preferences above their own or those of their families. Of particular

concern is the fact that GGC/CTMI leaders significantly influence “romantic relationships” i.e. who one should or should not be in a relationship with and who one can and should not marry. There is also evidence of leaders significantly influencing adherents to close businesses in favour of moving to Mauritius, and influencing dependent children to leave home to live with GGC/CTMI “family”.

GGC/CTMI have displayed a disregard for the sanctity and authority of the family unit and justify their undermining of family relationships by quoting passages of Scripture such as Matthew 10:34-37 and Matthew 12:46-50. To draw the inference that these passages justify the type of damage done to families by GGC/CTMI is to grossly misread Scripture and to harm the witness of the Christian Church.

Whether it is consciously planned or not the type of indoctrination mentioned above serves to undermine all other authority – whether that is Biblical, parental, clerical or medical and entrenches the authority of the leaders of GGC/CTMI.

Much emphasis is placed on an inner experience of God speaking directly to the individual, and of the individual’s heart convincing and convicting them of the rightness of actions or ideas. It is obviously impossible to argue against such subjectivism, and as a result GGC/CTMI leaders and adherents retreat to this defensive position when challenged. They give no consideration to the possibility that one’s “heart” might be deceived.

Possible preventions and interventions

The adage that prevention is better than cure applies. The greater the degree of indoctrination the more difficult it will be for the adherent to accept any viewpoint except that of the GGC/CTMI leadership. Below are some issues to consider and suggested responses if someone you know becomes ensnared in this group.

Young people are more susceptible to the group’s teachings on exclusivity and purpose, and are powerfully drawn by the intense “caring” that is offered. GGC/CTMI fulfil the psychological need to belong by providing a group that appears more understanding and

caring than the biological family. The group offers a simplistic dualistic worldview (us vs. them, good vs. evil) that is attractive to young people struggling to make sense of life. Their exclusivity and claim of a special relationship with God satisfies self-esteem needs which are often unfulfilled in early adulthood, and their mission work supplies a noble sense of purpose.

Parents have a responsibility to provide a safe and loving environment wherein which values, morals and dreams can be discussed and explored. It is also part of parental responsibility to provide guidance about spirituality and spiritual growth. Leaving the young person to make up their own mind about complex moral and theological issues requires them to have more wisdom than is possible for their stage of life. At very least, the family should immediately investigate a young person's attendance of any activity related to an unfamiliar religious group or church. It is useful to attend services or meetings with the young person to obtain an informed opinion. Gather information about the church group from the Internet and other local churches. If justifiably alarmed about the information on such a group, it is important to continuously but non-confrontationally offer an alternative view of reality and faith, *while parental authority still remains*. e.g.. Acknowledge the church's good points but also draw attention to the fact that a small church is unlikely to have a better understanding of faith than other churches which have been around since Christianity began. It can also be useful to arrange a meeting with a trusted member of the clergy or a professional counsellor. What is sought here is for internal dissonance to grow in the adherent and prevent further indoctrination.

Prayer is always important.

If someone becomes more indoctrinated that this, it will be necessary to consider professional assistance and becoming part of a supportive group. I can be of assistance if these are avenues you wish to explore.

Yours sincerely
Sean A.J. Semple

Open letter 3.

1 July 2009

Dear Community Members

Around a year ago I began to encounter people through my counselling practice whose lives had been adversely affected by Grace Gospel Church (GGC) in Pinetown and its parent body Church Team Ministries International (CTMI), which in turn prompted the letters that many of you have seen.

These letters have been well received, with the only concern from some being that I used the term “cult – like” in referring to GGC. Many Christians, I believe, shy away from using the term “cult”, because the term has often been used in a cheap and pejorative manner, rather than accurately. However, cults can be defined in a precise and academic manner and such destructive groups do exist in our midst, often masquerading as legitimate members of the Christian community.

Dr Stephan Pretorius, a leading South African expert on cults and academic at UNISA, offers the following definition of a cult:

A group of people zealously following a leader with a special gift. The cult exhibits radical new religious beliefs and practices in opposition to traditional Christian beliefs. The leader and his or her followers believe that they are the final arbiters of what is or is not the truth. The cult isolates itself from the outside world, exhibiting inward innovative behaviour that both differentiates and makes for conformity among group members thus establishing a group identity. Sophisticated techniques are utilised in order to bring about thought reform (mind control), group identity and dependence on the group.

Each of the key issues in the definition will now be briefly considered.

The leader of a cult is frequently charismatic, self-appointed and persuasive, and claims to have a special mission, gift or knowledge. This leader will be charming and will tend to focus his/her follower's love and allegiance on him/herself. He/she will be the supreme arbiter of truth and justice and no appeals outside the leadership system will be tolerated. The leader and leadership of a cult are extremely controlling of their members' lives, discouraging independent thinking and decision making in favour of submission to the leadership and its discernment of God's will. This micromanagement often extends to the leadership determining who members should be romantically linked with and married to.

A cult's beliefs deviate substantially from historical and orthodox Christianity at key points. Common heterodox practices are to speak about the authority of Scripture but in practice to place the leader's inspiration above Scripture and also to avoid a relationship with the wider Church. This aversion will have its origin in the cult's belief that they are the true or pure Church and thus superior to other Christian groups. A self righteous and arrogant demeanour evolves and is justified by the cult as they see themselves as "special" or "chosen" by God. Conversely, non-members will come to be considered less spiritual, less knowledgeable and generally inferior or defective.

A curious but distinct aspect of the cult's departure from authentic Christianity is its embrace of a double set of ethics. Cult members are strongly encouraged to confess their innermost experiences to fellow cult members and the cult leadership, but simultaneously to actively deceive and manipulate non-members (who often include family). These actions are defended using the utilitarian concept of "the ends justifying the means". In time deceit comes to be seen at many levels – from dishonesty about personal whereabouts and plans to financial and immigration fraud.

The marks of a cult discussed thus far might not be immediately obvious to family friends or associates of someone who has joined a cult. What will stand out is their sudden, dramatic and negative change in personality and behaviour. In particular one will encounter an antagonism towards family, friends and institutions in disagreement with the doctrines and practices of the cult. Their financial commitments change in

favour of the aims of the cult and it is common for cult members to break ties with their family and friends, leaving them without any support system outside the cult.

While committed Christianity sometimes implies a radical lifestyle change from previous living, any commitment to orthodox Christianity will never encourage the active destruction of family relationships, duplicity, arrogant judgmentalism, rejection of a relationship with the wider Church, and an abandonment of historical Christian teachings.

A question that is frequently asked is how a person comes to join a cult. It is essential to understand that a person does not decide freely to join a cult – they are recruited and become victims of a subtle and systematic recruitment process that relies heavily on mind control, which is commonly spoken of as “brain washing.”

A typical recruitment process begins with a “first contact” between an individual and the leader or members of a cult usually through an invitation to an event of the cult⁴²⁷. During this first contact the newcomer is “love bombed” that is, exposed to an intense but feigned show of affection and caring which has the sole purpose of manipulating the newcomer⁴²⁸. Love bombing is a coordinated effort, usually under the direction of the leadership that involves long-term members flooding recruits with flattery, verbal seduction, affectionate but usually nonsexual touching, and lots of attention to their every remark⁴²⁹. It is vitally important to note that this “love” is not a genuine expression of how cult members feel about an individual nor is it divinely inspired by the Holy Spirit. Love bombing goes beyond a warm welcome or friendliness. It is a technique that aims to draw the recruit into the cult.

During recruiting, and often at the first contact, the predisposition of new members is also addressed. Predisposition refers to psychological issues such as feeling “different” or being socially isolated or having insecurities. By drawing attention to these

⁴²⁷ Singer & Lalich, 1995:112

⁴²⁸ MacHovec, 1989:82

⁴²⁹ Singer & Lalich, 1995:114

commonly felt issues the individual feels understood, and listened to⁴³⁰ and combined with the love bombing a powerful illusion is created of a group that is safe, caring and interested in the well-being of the individual. This naturally prompts a desire in the individual to return and make more contact. As the individual feels safe in this environment they will begin to lower their psychological defence mechanisms and suspend their critical thinking, which facilitates the next stages of recruiting.

What is already operational here is mind control. Mind control suggests visions of people being hypnotised and turned into human puppets, which is an unhelpful caricature about this process. Singer & Lalich (1995:62) provide a useful definition: *Mind control is a concerted effort to change a person's way of looking at the world, which will change his or her behaviour*

The aim of mind control is replace a person's individuality with a persona acceptable to the cult. Thus individual ambitions, opinions, critical thinking and decision making ability are challenged and undermined to bring about conformity to group or cult thinking. Typically, a person who has undergone mind control is incapable of thinking critically, is indecisive, dependent and lacks ambition. This guarantees dependence on the guidance of the leader and thus the leader's control over the cult member.

It is difficult to imagine how such change can happen without the knowledge or consent of a person. Yet an individual who finds him/herself in a group where they appear to be loved, appreciated, understood and seen as special is well on the way to becoming "brain-washed". As mentioned earlier this atmosphere causes individuals to lower their critical defences. Hence when the cult leadership proposes something that contradicts what a recruit has historically understood about themselves or the world, the recruit is very likely to resolve the resulting cognitive dissonance by abandoning the historic belief rather than challenging the leader, whose group is so affirming and different from any group in which they have previously been. In cults, members are confronted with the proposition that the worldview and life style of the cult is "pure" compared to the

⁴³⁰Whitsett, 1992:36

bad, evil and unfulfilling world-view of their former lives. The cognitive dissonance created by this proposition is dispelled by the individual redefining themselves in terms that are acceptable to the cult.

Through this process, the recruit is unknowingly led and manipulated to make certain choices⁴³¹ which they believe they have made of their own free will. This erroneous belief also prevents the leader of a cult being identified as being responsible for the behavioural changes of followers.

It is often asked whether cult leaders knowingly implement such mind control techniques. It is unlikely that such leaders have studied mind control or implement a conscious strategy of mind control. Nonetheless, they uncritically use techniques that achieve their goal – which is the conformity of individuals to the cult’s worldview and ambitions.

After the manipulation of first contact, the individual is “loosened” from their existing way of life. This is achieved by inducing guilt about a recruit’s personal connections which are declared evil by the cult. Further, any ambivalence felt by an individual about people and the world around them is exploited to further seduce the recruit into adopting the worldview of the cult, which is often a compellingly simplistic dualism where what is congruent with the cult is good and Godly and what is outside the cult is fallen and evil.

The third step in cult recruitment involves fundamental personal change and increased commitment to the cult. Change and bonding are promoted by self revealing public confession sessions, and information overload in the form of lengthy teaching session or frequent meetings. Any misgivings felt by an individual are soon swallowed by the innate desire to conform to the thinking and behaviour of the group. Prolonged dietary changes and exhaustion from sleep loss are forms of sensory deprivation used to further

⁴³¹ Hassan, 1988:56

lower personal defences and mould the identity of the individual to the prescribed behaviour of the cult.

Commitment to the cult is presented as a death to a former way of life – finances are sacrificed, as are possessions, family and friends. All bridges to a life outside the cult are burned, which further makes the recruit dependent on the cult as they have no other support network. The commitment to cult identity and lifestyle are promoted by subtle techniques such as fear, guilt, internal spying, and punishment if someone does not act according to the rules of the group or leader⁴³². Punishment includes being ignored or rejected by cult members until the victim confesses while reward frequently takes the form of praise given by the leader.

It is clear how powerfully an individual is ensnared by a cult and why they find it difficult to escape:

- They believe that the choices they have made are God's way and will for them;
- They are loyal to the group and desire to keep promises made to God and others;
- They respect the leadership that has understood them and given them answers to their existential questions;
- They experience peer pressure. Since no one else is speaking out or has a problem, if they have any doubts they can only be a fault in the individual;
- Their physical and mental exhaustion and lack of information cause psychological paralysis;
- They have burned bridges outside of the cult;
- They fear punishment and also life outside the cult;
- They may have married into the cult.

In conclusion, a helpful perspective is to consider a continuum which has healthy churches on one end, unhealthy churches in the centre and cults on the other end. The unhealthy churches in the centre of the continuum will have features of both healthy churches and cults but only the cult would fit the majority of criteria mentioned above. It is thus important for Christians to begin to understand where the boundaries lie between inspiration and manipulation, holiness and obsession, obedience and bondage.

Yours sincerely

⁴³² Singer & Lalich, 1995:77

Sean Semple

Letter to Pastor Basil O'Connell-Jones requesting permission to conduct research on GGC.

7 November 2011

Dear Pastor Basil

I am registered for a Master of Theology degree at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Pietermaritzburg) and am in the process of drawing up a thesis proposal on the topic of commitment in Grace Gospel Church.

It would be of value for the research to interview members of your congregation or ask them to complete a questionnaire on their commitment to the Gospel. This would naturally provide the most accurate data and would be preferable to obtaining information solely from ex-members. It is entirely possible for respondents to be anonymous and/or to have their desire for confidentiality respected. I aim to present my findings in the most objective manner possible.

I consequently request your permission and assistance in pursuing this research with members of your congregation. Please would you respond by 30 November 2011 or I will understand the lack of response to indicate your unwillingness to support the research.

Yours sincerely

Sean Semple

Six Warnings About GGC/CTMI. Author: Keith Brown (Unpublished and undated)

SUMMARY OF GGC/CTMI CONCERNS

At a meeting of concerned parents and friends of folks caught up in GGC/CTMI we agreed that we would share our concerns regarding their doctrine and practice so that

others could be aware and go in prepared for the following issues. It is our prayer that this will reduce the degree of apparent —blind following that has become evident to so many who have loved ones involved there.

We suggest all other differences flow from the first two mentioned below – so this is where folks need the clearest warning!

1. We have a special and unique gospel revealed to Mikki Hardy and only preached among us. Other churches do not preach “the true gospel.” (“Other churches are on broad road – we are on the narrow road”)

A young man who has left GGC reported that it was the repetition four times a week of this —unique gospel that only CTMI preach and understand that began the process of him and his girlfriend leaving. This and the discouragement of him attending the Embo church —that did not preach the true gospel even though the pastor had been invited to speak at GGC, that caused him to wonder how it can be that only these 4000 people in the whole world and in the whole of history can know the truth available in the bible for all.

A young lady who attended a youth conference in Mauritius asked for discussion with Miki Hardy after a meeting. She specifically asked if their unique gospel was the only way to be saved. He concurred. She then asked whether what was being said about other churches not understanding and preaching this gospel was really true. He again agreed. She then said she has a problem with that because then her parents, long standing and active believers in another church are going to hell. She asked if Miki really believed this. He made no comment and excused himself.

The —us vs —them distinction is taught very early. When the daughter of a deacon in a local Hillcrest church said she was leaving for GGC, the main reason given within only a week was the preaching of a —different gospel a —false gospel Since this church preaches the same gospel as the apostles, the reformers (Luther, Calvin, Knox etc) the Puritans, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Spurgeon etc, etc consistent with many creeds and confessions forged by spiritual and intellectual giants, the question has often been asked

—how is it different/false? The only answer is —the given life as given by special revelation to Miki.

We have private correspondence from various GGC folks that speak repeatedly of the given life as the key differentiator! Yes we must preach the —normal gospel but that has no power unless there is the anointing of the —the given life of the cross in the preacher and also in the one receiving the message. Some mystical, special commitment is required to receive the fullness of the —resurrection life. In their view, most churches have pastors who do not —carry this revelation of the true gospel in their hearts like Mikki Hardy does! Only when the pastor's heart is —broken can God work. When Basil (GGC pastor) was asked what differentiates GGC from another evangelical church in Hillcrest, the answer was —apostolic anointing and revelation.

There is no evidence that they approve of any other church. We have pages of extracts from sermons, news letters, reports and Joy Magazine articles that contain sweeping criticisms of —the church today and its leaders with broad generalizations that it is complacent, compromising, preaches prosperity, does not preach the pure apostolic gospel and the leaders do not carry the anointing and revelation in their hearts and are not broken. In fact the stated motive for the large new church building in Mauritius is to provide a home for those who are escaping such churches. There is much evidence of young people in other church youth groups being targeted. This contradicts Christ's commission to evangelise the lost (Matt 28:19) and Paul's desire not to build on another's work. (Romans 15:20). While in many cases, their concerns about other churches may be legitimate, it results in followers, especially young people who hear this message so often, indiscriminately and with spiritual pride applying this to all other churches they encounter.

In stark contrast to the emphasis on anointed leadership, the apostle Paul points to the messengers as —earthen vessels (2Cor 4:7) —so that the surpassing power belongs to God not us. Paul says the gospel itself is the power of God for salvation. Not the man himself (Romans 1:16) For this reason Paul could even approve of the true gospel being preached from bad motives. (Philippians 1:15-18) Their gospel says the bible is a

—dead letter unless delivered by an anointed, broken person. In contrast Hebrews 4:12 makes it clear that it is the word of God itself that is the sword of the spirit – living and active. While the state of heart of the preacher is important, the true gospel places the real power in the word of God and the gospel itself – in objective truth. GGC/CTMI shift the emphasis to a mystical anointing in a man.

The Christian gospel is unique among all religions in that what saves happened objectively for us in history outside of us in the finished work of Christ. This finished work becomes ours by faith alone. What puts us in right standing with God was done by Christ in history and is finished. Not in us mystically or through any works or response of man. All communication we have from GGC/CTMI illustrates an emphasis on man's inner, uncompromising given life response. The terms "from the heart, in the heart, feel the heart of God, follow your heart, my heart is pure" are very common. They hereby add to the pure gospel like the Galatians were adding circumcision (adding a human response to finished work of Christ) resulting in Paul's strongest letter!

Galatians 3:1 O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. (ie the external finished work of Christ alone)

Philip. 3:9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God (not from inside man) that depends on faith.

Romans 1:16-17 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. [17] For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

1 Cor. 15:1-6 Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, [2] and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you— unless you believed in vain. [3] For I delivered to you

as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, [4] that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, [5] and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. [6] Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. [14] And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.

Yes, the bible teaches that we must respond once saved and grow in grace over time by taking up our cross, denying self and following Him in heartfelt devotion and love. But this is a response to the gospel, not the gospel itself. CTMI emphasis in sermon after sermon, article after article, testimony after testimony is our identification with the cross in our hearts – OUR given lives instead of Christ's given life. They call this personal identification the —gospel of the cross to which the church must return. Here is a typical example of this confusion “That's why the Church needs to come back to the simple message – the cross of Christ. Christians should be given the opportunity to deny themselves, take up their cross and lose their lives to gain the life of Christ. This is blessing and spiritual life in its fullness” – (Miki Hardy Where is the Church Going? Joy Issue 06/08) Hardy is saying the —cross of Christ is actually our given life!!

This results in young people's testimonies consisting mainly of how they once again have come to a place of —complete surrender, of once again being —broken thus identifying once again with the cross in their lives. On the other hand the true gospel says Christ died —once and for all and no amount of surrendering on our part makes us any more acceptable to God. That is the gospel of the cross. GGC's —given life gospel enables conference after conference and meeting after meeting of appeals for more given life! (This mainly involves expensive trips to Mauritius!) How does one know when one is given/surrendered enough? This pattern also involves more and more guilt (a powerful weapon!) at not being surrendered enough vs the wonderful freedom of being —Justified by Faith in the finished work of Christ!!! A righteousness from God – credited to our account vs our own meagre surrendered life which is never good enough.

The true and pure gospel of the cross is Christ's finished work – that is the power of God unto Salvation. Not the ongoing work of the Spirit in the believer's heart. The difference is subtle but hugely significant!

In summary and in terms of the language of systematic theology - CTMI are confusing —Justification and —Sanctification. This is an upside down gospel – placing Christianity on the religious supermarket of the world. All other religions focus their attention for salvation on mystical, inner experience.

Another young man who left GGC mentioned that he agreed that there needs to be a —given life in response to the gospel. That's biblical. However he left because he objected to their narrow definition of the —given life – giving up education, careers and family to go to Mauritius.

So, in summary, expect to hear that GGC/CTMI have the only true gospel by special revelation to Miki Hardy; that this involves our own versus Christ's —given life and that there is a strong implication that this involves going to Mauritius to live and learn from other given lives and build the new church.

2. Deep and systematic study of the bible and healthy debate is resisted – even frowned upon. Much talk of anointing and direct and special revelation. When the bible is mentioned it is repetition of a few “favourite” passages.

As soon as the bible is used to —rightly divide the word of truth and question leaders and members in any way the following responses have been received:

- —Knowledge puffs up
- —our faith is of the heart - not intellectual
- —That's a dead letter – put the book aside and let God speak to your heart
- —You have been mining the bible for so long but you have missed the main point – the pearl of great price
- —don't take up positions
- —Don't put law on us like pathetic Pharisees (In response to new testament passages from Paul about family)
- —Your pastor preaches with notes – this stifles the spirit – he must be broken and speak from the heart
- An article written by Audrey Hardy indicates that God told them to deal with a particular pastor living in sexual sin in a way directly contradicting scripture.

- Truth is secondary to changed lives – —Paul did not preach doctrine he just lived the given life
- In debate with a prominent member in Mauritius over the —five-fold ministry the actual meaning in the Greek was persistently explained by a pastor to which the response was always to point to personal experience and —anointing – to which the well taught pastor kept saying —but it’s in the bible. Eventually the response was —I do not care if it is in the bible!

Some young people invited to their meetings did not return because – —the bible was not opened once. Meetings consist mainly of people sharing —what God is doing in their hearts vs systematic bible study.

We have the testimony of a man wonderfully saved in GGC but who left after three years saying —I heard a sermon where a man actually opened the bible and I realized how hungry I was! In three years I have not even been taught how to read the bible. I listened to a whole series from Miki with a pen and paper to write down bible references. My page was blank! We do not have bible study – we sit and talk about our lives and wonder all the time if we are in the spirit or the flesh!

When challenged on this low view of God’s inerrant and sufficient word there is usually the indignant response – —Of course we love and believe the bible – come to Mauritius and see we have a bible school When asked the qualifications of teachers in that —bible school the answer is —that does not matter – the most important qualification is an apostolic anointing, revelation and the given life. Members are discouraged from attending any other bible teaching institution.

The following extracts from the CTMI website illustrate the lack of emphasis on —study to show yourself approved – a workman rightly dividing the word of truth exhortation of Paul to Timothy. Rather the emphasis is on —anointing on life and special revelatory gifts and submission to the —apostle.

“They were submitted to the apostolic anointing on his life, which enabled him to proclaim to them the whole will of God. This confirms to us that the Apostle is a father to the churches he works with.

The Apostle, as a result of the revelation he carries, the anointing over his ministry, and the example of the life he lives, brings security and stability among the people of God. Soon I found myself, as a minister, travelling to churches in different countries and experiencing amazing prophetic manifestations of the Holy Spirit. The blessing of this ministry was clear to many, but I was alone and vulnerable! Through the grace of the Lord I met Miki Hardy and the apostolic call on his life confronted my independence and pride. I surrendered my one-man ministry and submitted my life to that authority.”

3. Expect to encounter people who are enamoured with their leaders who are not questioned. Awe and submission is obvious and these leaders’ views play a very significant role in all decisions made - especially by the younger people.

- We have examples of letters written to indicate complete submission to leaders
- When faithful parents point out blatant error and even undeniable examples of deceit the simple response is —I trust the elders
- When these leaders make requests – even personal vs church related – all else is dropped for immediate response (e.g. helping widowed mother with household upgrade deserted for work on Basil’s house)
- Most seem to take on personal preferences of leaders – even dietary and sports stars!
- There is evidence of leaders significantly influencing who marries who even against the will of parents
- There is evidence of leaders significantly influencing closing businesses in favour of moving to Mauritius
- There is evidence of leaders significantly influencing dependent children leaving home to live with CTMI —family
- Most children are influenced not to celebrate Christmas with their families
- Many have removed themselves from Facebook since Mikki recommended this.
- One family member said of a brother in his 30’s —he changes completely when with Basil or receiving a call from Basil – he becomes almost like a young school boy!
- There is evidence of leaders significantly influencing financial donations (even from credit card and extension of bonds) to fund travel to Mauritius, the new building, registering churches overseas, injections into accounts to enable pastor’s personal mortgage applications etc.
- A young man who has left GGC said that this is the main message he would want to give anyone thinking of joining – —Miki and Bas and the others are human beings with faults – they are not God Himself!

The anointed apostle Paul said when preaching the gospel that the Bereans were more noble than all the others because they questioned what he was saying against the scriptures. (Acts 17:11) Any questioning of leaders is highly unlikely – only unnatural awe and wonder! There is also evidence of a pattern where those who do question leaders suffer a similar process of isolation and eventually aggressive confrontation and public denigration. The —leadership closes ranks on those who ask awkward questions. Even those in sympathy practice non engagement with the dissenters.

4. Expect the sanctity and authority of the family unit to be undermined

Different young folks have quoted the following two passages to their parents and it was the first quoted by Basil in a meeting with another church's leaders – indicating that it is a deliberate strategy

Matthew 10:34-37 "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. [35] For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. [36] And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. [37] Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

(The context is clearly between believer and unbeliever in time of persecution – the context speaks of fear for those —who can kill the body. See many passages on Christ's love of and prayer for unity as well as Paul's deep concern for unity between believers and harsh criticism of factions and those who are divisive)

Matthew 12:46-50 —While he was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his 1 brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him. [47] [48] But he replied to the man who told him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" [49] And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! [50] For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

(Jesus the son of God about his crucial ministry and teaching Jews that there are no favourites in the Kingdom of God and the importance of new Christian family vs reliance on being Jewish. Arrogant to believe that young believers can use same attitude with their parents when they are not the Messiah and in many cases their families are

Christians! Ignoring host of scriptures on God's very high view of family unit which He designed!)

- When Basil was told by elders in another local church how upset one young lady's parents were at her sudden departure from the home there was not a hint of compassion - rather —then she can come to my place or to Lyn Page who is her mother. (A leading —mother figure in the church) Shortly afterwards that is exactly what happened. We have a number of further examples of the same invitation/pressure resulting in similar departures and heartbroken parents.
- On a number of occasions children have quoted the above passages and referred to the difference between biological and spiritual family. e.g. The day a young man arrived home from Mauritius after many months away he went straight to Basil's instead of joining his family for a dinner prepared for him. When his grand mother reminded him of the importance of family his reply was —they are my family. There have been numerous similar examples.
- When families express deep concern about these issues and seek to intervene, CTMI leaders have even gone to the extent of advising the threatening of restraining orders!
- While there may be sincere use of above scriptures there is the more sinister motive of undermining all authority other than their leaders. (In a meeting between Basil and another churches' leaders the authority of other church leaders was undermined —you are pathetic Pharisees take the planks out of your eyes and stop finding specks in others' then the authority of scripture undermined — that's a dead letter — don't come here and quote scripture at us — put the book aside and let God speak to your heart then the authority of the family undermined —let the daughter follow her heart, she is an adult - if the parents are upset Jesus says I have come to bring a sword that divides families — let her come live here or with her mother, Lyn Page (A leading mother figure in the church).

5. Expect much intense and sincere love and attention and to attend many meetings

- Those who have left GGC indicated that they had never felt so loved and important in their lives! The group became the most important thing to them — something they looked forward to. Many sms's per day. A US pastor, experienced in cults, commented —The sincerity is the main hazard.
- Four meetings a week where much the same happens — praise and worship with songs sung many times over followed by —sharing.
- Important to support given life and leaders to be —in
- —Confronted if miss meetings or meet with outsiders or question decisions of leaders
- Group encouraged to invite other Christian friends to their better church with only true gospel
- Much hugging and —love you guys.
- Expect to start speaking a new and unique language used by all members

- Given life
- The Heart – Follow your heart, my heart is pure, only mix with people with pure hearts
- In the Spirit
- In the Natural or Flesh
- That's emotional/in the emotions
- Confronted
- Anointed
- Take up a position
- Putting law
- Well; Well with Jesus
- Speak into my life
- Love you guys
- Free in Christ
- Shared
- Linking/linked
- Walk the road
- Life on the alter
- Putting hands into someone's life
- The pure gospel
- This gospel
- Identify with the cross
- Broad Road and narrow Road
- Twisted

Most of this language emanates from Audrey and Miki Hardy.

Letter from Howard Silk to Erin Georgiou, editor of JOY! Magazine, dated the 3rd of October 2009. Permission to use this letter was obtained from Mr Silk on the 14th August 2012.

Dear Erin,

I believe that there is concern over the participation of Miki Hardy though the submission of articles in Joy magazine and have been requested to contribute my experiences with CTMI. Please note I would prefer that this letter is not for publication or dissemination and is kept confidential.

I first became attached to what was to become CTMI in 1992 and have been closely allied to the group until recently.

I have gradually come to realise that many of the activities of the church require serious scrutiny and that the community, other churches and schools in particular should be alerted to these activities in order to protect them from what I consider to be a seriously suspicious agenda.

I was a pastor of a church in Durban, the Lord's Place, and closed the church down in 1993 and moved to Mauritius under advice from Mike Hardy. When I had finally exhausted my visas (mostly acquired through deceptive misrepresentation), the church leaders felt it expedient for me to move to Zimbabwe where there "was a church" as opposed to coming back to Durban where my home was.

During the next three years I applied and appealed for a Zimbabwe residence permit six times, all unsuccessful. As a result I had to take my wife and four small children out of Zimbabwe at least every second month and drive to Durban to stay with family or friends.

This was very traumatic and disruptive to the family. Eventually in 1996 I was told by Immigration that I had two weeks to remove my family from Zimbabwe or face arrest and deportation. I informed the elders that I was now moving back to Durban and they encouraged me not to but to continue to fight. We left and I had to try to start a career at 43 as my church was disbanded.

After running small fellowship in our home for some years, linked to CTMI, then disbanding it again at the advice of the elders, an elder, Basil O'Connell-Jones came and restarted the church. Initially I was very involved, having been the founding pastor in Durban, but some time later began to question the activities of the elder and other church goings-on. These questionings were met with aggressive and abusive responses and I was quickly excluded from all leadership and decision making involvement.

I did make appeals to Miki Hardy to intervene but these were not responded to. Then recently as a result of an altercation with Basil O'Connell-Jones in which he was again abusive, and involved deception I decided to not continue with that group.

I have had extensive contact with the leaders, including Miki and Audrey Hardy. All of my observations are not surmised nor hearsay. I have been a first hand witness to all that I am writing about.

Initially the message was one that particularly espoused grace and the revelation of Jesus Christ, messages that I embraced and endorsed. However some years ago the message shifted and became one that almost exclusively endorsed a life dominated by the work of the cross in people's lives, and lives given to the church, the elders and "the apostle" or father, Miki Hardy.

This message also majored on the church being the real family and encouraged members to become estranged from actual family members, wives from husbands and children from parents. There are many examples of family members rejecting spouses and parents as a result of this "doctrine", taken from basically 2 scriptures – The one where Jesus states that he has not come to bring peace but a sword (Matt 10:34) and where He says that his followers are his true mother and brothers (Mk 3:33).

Some of my other concerns centre on

- The arrangement of inordinate numbers of marriages that is very prolific, and seems to be mainly at the instigation of the elders and in particular Audrey Hardy. If there is opposition from any parents, often very well founded, the church leaders do not take this into consideration, but strongly encourage the members to reject their families and sever ties with them.
- Young people are the main focus of the church's proselytising and these are strongly encouraged to forsake their careers and education, again often against their parent's advice.
- These young people are encouraged to move out of home in order to be instructed and have this "true gospel" imparted to them. This is normally because their parent's, again often believing church going Christians, are not in the "true gospel" or "this gospel", which gospel is the only one that will bring any believer to spiritual maturity.

- Other churches are mocked and ridiculed openly and slated for not being in this “true gospel” and the members are told other churches preach a “false gospel”, or “another gospel” as stated in Galatians.
- It seems that the prime target market for CTMI is “churched” people and not the lost. They promote dissent with established Christians in order to win them to their organisation.
- Church direction is always disseminated from the “apostle”, Miki Hardy and his wife Audrey, through the elders and to the people. Anyone questioning this is quickly ostracised and sidelined, subjected to strong and abusive chastisement, preached about, and people warned against associating with them. They are called immature, “not well” and having “twisted hearts”.
- Unorthodox and illegal activities are used both in Mauritius (in particular) and elsewhere. These include various tactics designed to obtain residence permits, work permits and extended holiday permits to facilitate the extended stay of the scores of young people lured to the church in Mauritius. This also includes quickie marriages with residents in order to obtain permits for other members.
- I believe that to a first time visitor, especially someone the church wishes to impress, there would be little to fault in the church in Mauritius or anywhere else, however under careful scrutiny, I believe that the activities of the church prove unequivocally to be very concerning.
- Miki Hardy has come out strongly against Christian gospel singers and groups that play any genre of music that he (and the elders) deem to be emotional or have a beat that is not considered to be acceptable. This he has done repeatedly from the pulpit and on TBN.
- My teenage school children were openly preached against for having long hair, listening to unapproved music (Gospel and secular), having their boxer shorts sticking out above their jeans, watching Harry Potter or Lord of the Rings and other unapproved movies. The control exercised legalistically is extreme.

I feel that these concerns and others that I might have omitted are issues that should be considered when assisting the CTMI churches in their outreaches, whether that be through the printed or electronic media.

Howard Silk

Letter from Heather and Steve Goddard to Miki Hardy, dated 2nd February 2009.

To Audrey & Miki Hardy

Destructive cults, groups, movements and/or leaders "maintain intense allegiance through the arguments of their ideology, and through social and psychological

pressures and practices that, intentionally or not, amount to conditioning techniques that constrict attention, limit personal relationships, and devalue reasoning."

-- Margaret Singer, Ph.D.

This letter serves to advise you that we are most distressed at the advice you are giving to our daughter, Hayley Goddard.

In the past she was a good Christian daughter, but since involving herself with you and your group (CTMI) she has changed has become impossible to reason with. You tell her "your parents are obviously trying to manipulate you" when in fact you are doing exactly that. You are brain washing her to believe that the good lord needs her to sever ties with her parents, friends, etc to follow you to Mauritius to build on the building site. Surely this is not permitted by the Mauritian authorities.

I am so disgusted that a man who professes to be a man of such deep Christian faith, can stoop so low as to suggest to my daughter that she should obtain a restraining order against us. This is so unchristian and another reason as to why we are so concerned about her being involved with you.

Our many concerns are:

- She is told not to allow her parents to manipulate her.
- She is advised to get a restraining order against us, her loving parents. (how despicable!)
- She is encouraged to cut all ties to previous Christian friends.
- She is kept so busy (being a maid to Val & Neville) and with church group meetings, that she does not have time to pursue her own ambitions.

Any other person with ½ your "supposed" faith, I am sure would do everything to ensure that relationships are not harmed by following Jesus.

Many parents here in South Africa are becoming very disgruntled with Grace Gospel and the CTMI group and I would like to draw your attention to the fact that our

dissatisfaction will not go away until we are satisfied that you are suitably exposed and that no other young mind will become corrupt.

Warning signs regarding people involved in/with a potentially unsafe group

1. Extreme obsessiveness regarding the group resulting in the exclusion of almost every practical consideration. **She no longer wishes to study at a University in South Africa**
2. Individual identity, the group, the leader and/or God as distinct and separate categories of existence become increasingly blurred. Instead, in the follower's mind these identities become substantially and increasingly fused--as that person's involvement with the group continues and deepens. **She has written to you saying that she completely submits to you and the elders. This should not be allowed or encouraged. No one should ever submit to another.**
3. Whenever the group/leader is criticized or questioned it is characterized as "persecution". **Basil's talks are now filled with the fact that you are being persecuted and that now is the time to take up the cross. What rubbish!**
4. Uncharacteristically stilted and seemingly programmed conversation and mannerisms, cloning of the group/leader in personal behaviour. **She now has standard replies that come directly from you, Basil, Nev or Van. Our daughter has completely changed in the way she speaks to us. Previously she had respect for us, now she is argumentative and sarcastic.**
5. Dependency upon the group for problem solving, solutions, and definitions without meaningful reflective thought. A seeming inability to think independently or analyze situations without group/leader involvement. **Never ever would she have turned against her parents and family in this way. To get a retraining order against us is so barbaric and just goes to show what lengths you would go to keep her in your church. Shame on you.**
6. Hyperactivity centred on the group/leader agenda, which seems to supersede any personal goals or individual interests. **She has no time for anything else, but CTMI.**
7. A dramatic loss of spontaneity and sense of humour. **She is pale, withdrawn and very embarrassed about how she is behaving.**

8. Increasing isolation from family and old friends unless they demonstrate an interest in the group/leader. **She avoids all contact with all her Christian friends. In fact, she is quite rude to many. Wonder why?**
9. Anything the group/leader does can be justified no matter how harsh or harmful. **All the pain she is causing she justifies it as God's will. God would never ever in his wildest dream wish this pain on her and our family. In fact Hayley is the one suffering most through all of this**
10. Former followers are at best-considered negative or worse evil and under bad influences. They can not be trusted and personal contact is avoided. **Kathy, Basil's estranged wife was treated very badly by her husband, children and other church members. This is so ungodly.**

Heather and Steve Goddard

Response from Miki Hardy to Heather and Steve Goddard's email of 2nd February 2009

From: Miki Hardy [mailto:hardy.miki@gmail.com]

Sent: 03 February 2009 17:11

To: Settings; Basil O'connel Jones

Subject: Re: Hayley Goddard

Dear brother and sister,

I am sorry to hear the contents of your mail, but I do not carry any grudge against you at all. I certainly cannot reply to all that has been written and I can affirm that if you want to talk with me you are welcome in Mauritius anytime you want except when I am travelling and am not home. You would be able to see how we live and to hear what we preach, which is certainly so different to what you have heard from people and what you have interpreted. We would be happy to accomodate you at home if you like.

I am sorry if you are deeply hurt about your daughter's convictions. I can only advise

her to keep a good heart and attitude towards you which I am sure is the case.

Regards

Miki Hardy

Email from Sean Semple to Heather Goddard proposing the establishment of a support group for those affected by CTMI

From: Sean A.J. Semple [mailto:therapist@telkomsa.net]

Sent: 09 February 2009 06:34

To: Settings

Subject: Re: FW: Hayley Goddard

Dear Heather

Do you think it would be a good idea to have a support group for those affected by CTMI? Perhaps we should see if others are interested in forming such a group not only for support but also for a sharing of information and resources.

Take care

Sean

Letter from Sean Semple to Hayley Page

04 January 2010

Dear Hayley

I am in receipt of a letter from Levi Page's email address that appears to be from you and which was posted on the CPG forum on the 1st January 2010 under the author "Truth".

Today I write to you simply as a Christian. In this spirit I would like you to please do the following:

1. Explain exactly what “lies and stories about CTMI and the youth” you allege I am responsible for;
2. Previously other members of CTMI have claimed that I was a psychologist. This seems to be an error perpetuated only by members of CTMI as I have only ever claimed to be a Pastoral Therapist (clearly stated on my letterhead). I suggest that you have adopted this same error and this underlies your accusation that I am using a “psychologist’s letterhead” or a “psychologist symbol” (sic). Unless you are able to provide evidence to the contrary, I believe it is your misunderstanding and not any misrepresentation on my part that leads you to allege what you do.
3. Explain why you believe I am not entitled to my professional title and in what capacity you make this judgment;
4. Prove that I linked your name to any of my opinions about Grace Gospel Church or CTMI and thus betrayed your trust;
5. Prove, beyond your subjective recall, that I attempted to deliberately influence your opinions about Grace Gospel or CTMI during our counselling session;
6. Explain in what capacity and with what personal qualifications you can allege that I am “under-qualified” or have a lack of qualifications to write what I have;
7. Prove that I have ever been paid by the Concerned Parents Group (CPG) for any report writing;
8. Prove that I have ever had direct email contact with you before today;
9. Prove that my prominence within the CPG is anything less than it used to be;
10. Prove that I am a “conman”.

I understand that you may be angry and may desire to bring harm to me through defamatory accusations. But please remember the challenge from St Paul to all of us: “...Put off falsehood and speak truthfully...in your anger, do not sin” (Ephesians 4:25-26). If your accusations are without foundation you will have broken one of the Ten Commandments by bearing false witness against me. But it is not only God’s law which you will have broken; it is also the law of the country. You have wrongfully and intentionally published a letter containing a number of defamatory statements which damage or injure my personal and professional reputation.

Anyone “in the flesh” (to use a term familiar to you) would immediately respond to your letter with a libel suit for defamation. I would prefer to settle this issue in a Christian fashion, privately between us. I thus request that you respond by email to me and explain or provide evidence for the accusations I have listed above. If you can prove that I have done what you have accused me of, I will repent and make reparations to those concerned. But if you cannot offer any evidence for your allegations, then I need

you to repair the potential damage you may have caused to my reputation by retracting these false allegations and apologising for them both on your blog and the Concerned Parents' Forum. I would like this retraction and apology to appear no later than 17:00 on 6 January 2010.

Hayley, I would like to avoid taking this further, but if you do not offer a full retraction and apology as requested, know that I intend exercising my right to protection from defamation by instituting a libel suit against you in your personal capacity and also as a member of CTMI.

There are two questions that bear thinking about: Why do you think CTMI have not accused me in writing of the things you have? And why have they not sued me for libel if my letters are the lies you claim them to be?

I pray that our Lord Jesus would inspire you with His wisdom and truth as you decide what to do next.

Yours in Christ

Sean Semple

Letter from Heather Goddard to Erin Georgiou, editor of JOY! Magazine:

On 2009/05/13 3:15 PM, "Settings" <logo@iafrica.com> wrote:

Dear Erin

We are the parents of a 19 year old daughter (Hayley) who has joined CTMI through their partner church, Grace Gospel Church in Pinetown, Kwa Zulu Natal.

She was recruited to join Grace Gospel by a school friend, Kim Slement, who has belonged to this cult via her parent's involvement for many years. They came to Durban from Zimbabwe about 6 years ago and she joined the School SCA (Student Christian Association). They encouraged Hayley to attend church with them on

Sundays. Although we had an uneasy feeling about this church, we were always supportive and assisted her in her endeavours to follow a good Christian life. She has always been a deeply committed Christian and worshiped at the Kloof Baptist Church and at the Kloof Harvest Church prior to joining Grace Gospel.

She started neglecting and avoiding her other Christian friends in favour of members of Grace Gospel. Then at the end of her matric year she asked whether we would find it in our hearts to bless her with a trip to Mauritius so that she could be part of the Youth Camp in Mauritius. As she was such a studious child and very seldom asked for anything, we felt that at least we could give her this gift as a reward for always being such a well behaved and considerate daughter.

She spent 5 weeks in Mauritius at the end of 2007 returned home to Durban in time for Christmas that year. Although the plan was for her to attend UCT to study Film and Media at the beginning of 2008, she started making comments that she would like to take a gap year and spend it in Mauritius. After many lengthy discussions, and because she was young for her year at school, we gave in to her request to spend 6 months in Mauritius and to postpone her studies for 1 year. We asked her to communicate with the University and to ask them to defer her application to study for 1 year. This she did and wrote a letter to UCT telling them that she would be taking a gap year and that she would be resuming her studies in 2009.

Whilst in Mauritius for the 6 months gap year, we noticed a marked change in her personality. She removed herself from facebook, deleted all her music (most Christian songs) off her ipod, stopped communicating with us regularly and avoided any contact with school friends who did not belong to Grace Gospel. When the time came for her to come home, she skyped us, desperately begging us to make a plan for her to remain in Mauritius, either to study there or she asked us to put money in a company so that she could get a business visa. By this stage we started realising that she had no plans to study. During one conversation with us, she started crying and begging us to pay for her to remain in Mauritius. We insisted she return to SA at the end of her 6 month stint. She did this reluctantly.

Once back in South Africa we, (and many family friends) were concerned at how she had changed. Dull expression, no spontaneity, robotic response, repetitive jargon i.e. I have it on my heart, when confronted we were told "that is emotional," She spent every minute with the church, either at meetings – Monday evenings a 2 [] hour prayer group. Wednesday morning – 2 hour woman's meeting – although any unemployed attend, whether male or female, Wednesday evening another prayer meeting lasting 3 hours, Youth on a Friday, although again this was just another church service and all and sundry attended – from 15 years old to 60 years old and then the Sunday morning church service – 9.30am to 12pm. She did not want to participate in any family gatherings. One evening she had to attend a school computer course and it ended earlier than expected. She asked me to take her to Basil O'Connell Jone's house to listen to an elder from Mauritius. She was already quite late for the meeting and I declined to take her as I too was tired. She then tried to get a taxi to collect her from our home – this was the level of her desperation and commitment to the church.

In October 2008 they were organising a Leadership Conference in Kloof. As they do not have their own facility to host the conference, they started shopping around the highway area for an venue for the conference. They approached St Agnes who agreed to allow them to use their church hall. Once a month all the pastors in the highway area meet to discuss any items that may be of interest to all the churches in this area. At one of these meetings, Nigel Jukes (St. Agnes Pastor) mentioned that they would be hosting CTMI in October. Peter Rasmussen told Nigel that he had very real concerns about this group and that they had cultish tendencies. It was not what they preached, but the behaviour of the members was very concerning. Young members where leaving their families, giving up their studies, alienating themselves from friends and getting married very young to members within CTMI on the recommendation of the Elders. Nigel then sent out a letter to all his leaders with the church, advising them of his concerns and encouraging them not attend the CTMI Leadership conference.

At this time we had 2 of the CTMI members staying at our home. They were both young and unmarried. One lived in Mauritius and the other had moved from Zimbabwe

to study and live in Mauritius for 3 years and was now relocating to South Africa.

During one of our conversations with them, I asked whether any of them had boyfriends. Both responded that they did not – they were young and Valerie was returning to Mauritius to pursue a career in real estate. She did not have a boyfriend or was not in a relationship with anyone. Two weeks after her return to Mauritius she was engaged and got married 3 months thereafter. When I question Hayley about this strange setup, she stated that if the elders felt that it was God’s plan, which it was because the elders had it on their heart, then it was wonderful. What had actually transpired is that Roland, Valerie’s father and an elder in the Church, had been approached by another elder in the church who had a son who was getting on (30 + years) and asked whether Valerie had him on her heart. After discussing the fact that he had Valerie on his heart, it was announced in church that Valerie and he would be married 3 months from then. There is a pattern of arranged marriages at CTMI – Liezl Steenkamp and Keagan OCJ, Valerie, Clint, etc (many many young adults – I can provide names if you wish)

In November we contacted Sean Semple (Pastoral Therapist) to discuss our concerns.

We sought him out as we knew Hayley would never take advice from anyone who was not Christian. He listened to our worries and asked to see Hayley independently.

Hayley did not want to see him and asked whether she could take Van (an elder in the church) with her. She no longer did anything without their approval and consent. We said it would be fine for Van to attend, but that it wasn’t necessary. At the very last minute she agreed to see Sean without Van. At a follow up meeting between Sean and ourselves, he advised that he was astounded at the level of control they had over her. He said that she was at about stage five of joining a cult, which was that she was ready to alienate herself from her parents and realign her life to live with the cult.

I became very concerned and looked at her email in and outbox to see the level of her commitment to this cult. In one of her letters to Miki Hardy in which she told him that we were calling CTMI a cult, she stated : “I completely submit myself to you and the elders. Whatever you have planned for me I will do.” He also told her not to be manipulated by her parents.

I was completely stunned by how badly she was brainwashed and also at his advice to her.

In another email to Miki she told him that the previous evening they had gone to the local police station to get a restraining order against us and that she did not have it in her heart to follow it through. We have always been a very close family and neither my husband or myself have ever lifted a finger to her or her brother. This revelation about the restraining order was incomprehensible. This is definitely not the behaviour of a daughter and is entirely on their direction.

In December, we were planning to go to the Eastern Cape, as we do every year for 3 weeks. As our mother was very ill and in hospital we decided to delay our departure till she was well enough to be discharged. The night before leaving Hayley informed my husband that she would not be coming with us as she did not want to spend 3 weeks with us and away from the Church. We made her feel uncomfortable because of her association with CTMI. I explained to her that after the holiday without her, she would have to live with us again and that this sounded odd to us. (Double standards) She admitted that she did not want to be away from church for 3 weeks. In anger, I told her that she needed to decide whether to go on holiday with us and if she chose not to then we should need to realise that when we returned from holiday we would still be opposed to Grace Gospel and did not expect her to live with us then. We put the ball in her court. She said she would make a decision once she had spoken to the elders at church. She did not come home that night and when we phoned her to say we wanted to leave for holiday and what her decision was, she said that she would not be coming with us.

We then requested a meeting with the leader of her church – Basil O’Connell-Jones, Neville and Van Fitzroy and ourselves. At this meeting Basil was very angry and told us that we should leave Hayley alone to follow her heart and that this was more important to her than taking advice from us. We discussed with them how our daughter had changed – they had an answer for everything. When we asked them why they discouraged their members from attending University, they replied that university

campuses where evil and their members should not be exposed to that evilness. When we asked why they encouraged children to leave their families, they replied that the spiritual family was more important than the biological family.

We left the meeting very discouraged and worried. After receiving an sms from her advising us that she loves us, but that she no longer wished to discuss her beliefs with us, we wrote her a letter (copy attached) letting her know that we love her, we will honour her wishes and that our door will always be open to her.

Hayley moved in with the elders. Her duties are to cook and clean the house and take care of their 3 years old in the mornings whilst the wife home schools the other 2 children. One evening she arrived at our home and found the key to my husband's safe. Opened the safe and removed her passport. We always kept the passport locked away. We only know that this is what she did because she mentioned this to Miki in an email to him. He encourages and promotes this type of behaviour. We wrote to Miki and received a response from Audrey. We have since established that Audrey is the driving force behind CTMI. Copies of this correspondence is attached.

The status quo at the moment is that Hayley still lives with Neville and Vanessa Fitzroy. I believe she still wants to go to Mauritius, but without our financial assistance, this is proving difficult. As soon as she can save enough money, she will go to Mauritius – not on mission work, but to help with the building of the new church. She visits us from time to time, but at these visits we never discuss CTMI or Grace Gospel or any member of the church. It is all very pleasant, but so superficial. We have been advised to maintain a loving relationship with her and to put no pressure on her about belonging a cult.

If we had been educated about cults and how they recruit, we would have been able to prevent our family from being devastated by CTMI. I sincerely hope that no other family should go through what we have had to endure. Your readers should be warned about the subtle ways in which Christian cults operate.

Kind regards
Heather Goddard

Appendix “B”: Questionnaire

Confidential Questionnaire

Thank you for agreeing to complete this questionnaire. It forms an important component of research into the congregational dynamics of Grace Gospel Church and will be used in a dissertation to fulfil the requirements for a Master of Theology degree at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The research is supervised by Professor Susan Rakoczy (033 343 3293).

Participation in the research is **voluntary** and **confidential**: no responses or findings will be used in any way that can be traced back to particular individuals. If you experience any distress during or after completion of the questionnaire, please be advised that it is possible to stop participating at any point, and that I will be available in my role as a Pastoral Therapist to offer free and immediate support. My telephone number is 0825581069.

The cut-off date for questionnaire returns is 15 July 2012. Please could you email or fax your completed questionnaire to me before this date.



Email: therapist@telkomsa.net

Fax: 031 765 1746

Respondent's details

Name:

Date of birth:

Gender:

Highest academic qualification:

Date of joining Grace Gospel Church (month and year)

Date of leaving Grace Gospel Church (month and year)

How did you come to know about Grace Gospel Church?

.....
.....

The questionnaire is divided into four sections dealing with different aspects of Grace Gospel Church (GGC). Please indicate your answer by ticking either the “yes” or “no” box.

Section A

1. Did you believe that the pastor of GGC had a unique relationship with God?
YES NO
2. In your opinion, were there any other churches similar to GGC?
YES NO
3. Did the pastor claim to have had an extraordinary calling from God?
YES NO
4. Did the pastor make you feel that you were needed at GGC?
YES NO
5. Were you aware of any other church that presented the gospel in the same way as GGC?
YES NO
6. Could members question the pastor’s teaching?
YES NO
7. Did you believe that it was a privilege to belong to GGC?
YES NO
8. Was the “Last Days” a frequent theme of the pastor’s preaching and teaching?
YES NO
9. Was there a strong sense of community within GGC?
YES NO

10. Did having a clearly defined leader of Grace Gospel Church make you feel unsafe?
YES NO
11. Could the pastor have been described as mysterious and intriguing?
YES NO
12. Did members feel special because the pastor was special?
YES NO
13. Did you ever feel the need to defend GGC and its pastor at any cost?
YES NO
14. Was the pastor's lifestyle consistent with his teaching?
YES NO
15. Over time, did members become less reliant on the pastor and the church in order to make decisions in life?
YES NO
16. Was the pastor always believed to be right?
YES NO
17. Was it important to obey the pastor without question?
YES NO
18. Were the leadership of GGC open with the congregation about what was happening at GGC?
YES NO
19. Did you feel any pressure to deny the faults of the church leadership?
YES NO
20. Did you believe that the leadership of GGC could burnout through over-work?
YES NO

Section B

1. Was it important for people to undergo a personal transformation in order to become true members of GGC?
YES NO
2. Did GGC believe that members had a "higher calling" than other Christians?
YES NO

3. Did your life feel aimless after joining GGC?
YES NO
4. Was GGC able to answer important life questions for you?
YES NO
5. Did you find a sense of meaning at GGC?
YES NO
6. Did GGC offer a way of salvation only available to members?
YES NO
7. Was there a clear programme for spiritual growth at GGC?
YES NO
8. Was there a sense of urgency at GGC because of the belief of being in the End Times?
YES NO
9. Was GGC ever accused of being a cult?
YES NO
10. Did GGC promise you personal freedom?
YES NO
11. Did GGC offer hope for the future?
YES NO
12. Could the church be described as being “worldly”?
YES NO
13. Did GGC’s teachings become more dogmatic over time?
YES NO
14. Was there a sense that GGC was the only church with the truth?
YES NO
15. Did the church promote belief in healthy compromises?
YES NO
16. Was there any emphasis on becoming a “true” believer?
YES NO
17. At GGC, was sacrifice more important than personal freedom?
YES NO
18. Did GGC promote engagement with the community in which it existed?

YES NO

19. Were outsiders hostile to the church?

YES NO

20. While at GGC, did you feel that you were in a constant fight against personal sin and the devil?

YES NO

Section C

1. Was unconditional obedience important at GGC?

YES NO

2. Was the congregation responsible for imposing discipline on members?

YES NO

3. Was it necessary to attend many meetings or services at GGC?

YES NO

4. Did GGC promote communal living?

YES NO

5. Were important decisions for the church made by the congregation?

YES NO

6. Did you feel pressurised to join GGC?

YES NO

7. Did you feel that you had been “told the whole story” before joining GGC?

YES NO

8. Were members expected to “make a break” with their pre-church past?

YES NO

9. Were members of GGC expected to give a majority of their income to the church?

YES NO

10. Was a strict code of conduct enforced at GGC?

YES NO

11. Was there ever a need for GGC members to provide physical security for the leadership?

YES NO

12. Was it clear who had authority at GGC?
YES NO
13. Were you allowed to act on your own initiative at GGC?
YES NO
14. Could GGC be described as democratic?
YES NO
15. Did you feel overworked at GGC?
YES NO
16. Did members of GGC enjoy much personal time?
YES NO
17. Could you spend your money as you wished?
YES NO
18. Did members live in fear of rejection or expulsion from GGC?
YES NO
19. Was there a distinct “first-” and “second class” of membership at GGC?
YES NO
20. Did you frequently experience guilt, anxiety and the fear of making mistakes while at GGC?
YES NO

Section D

1. Was there a strong sense of belonging at GGC?
YES NO
2. Did members of GGC enjoy a sense of comradeship?
YES NO
3. Were you always striving to be a better member of the church?
YES NO
4. Were members of GGC role models for one another?
YES NO
5. Was it acceptable to be a member of GGC but to be not particularly committed to the church?
YES NO

6. Did you experience a “new birth” at GGC?
YES NO
7. In submitting to the church authority did you feel that you were part of something greater than yourself?
YES NO
8. Did members tend to lose a sense of self while belonging to GGC?
YES NO
9. Did members of GGC monitor one another and report to the leadership?
YES NO
10. Could your lifestyle remain as it was before joining GGC?
YES NO
11. Were your own needs and happiness more important than the church?
YES NO
12. Was uncritical obedience expected of you?
YES NO
13. Did members of GGC share sins and mistakes with one another?
YES NO
14. Did members ever feel exploited or abused by GGC?
YES NO
15. Did you feel a constant inner tension while belonging to the church?
YES NO
16. Did GGC emphasise group thinking and criticise individual thinking?
YES NO
17. Was it important to continually monitor oneself for sin?
YES NO
18. If members were criticised, could they defend themselves?
YES NO
19. Was your privacy respected by GGC?
YES NO
20. Did GGC silence external critics through slander?
YES NO

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