

# In Response

*Response to a letter circulated by Growing Families International<sup>1</sup>*

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**An article I wrote** titled “Gary and Anne Marie Ezzo: What is Wrong with Their Teaching on Parenting?” was printed in *HELP for Growing Families*, a newsletter published by Mary Pride.<sup>2</sup> Since then, I have received numerous responses, almost all of them positive. Included with one of the letters was a copy of a letter written on the letterhead of Growing Families International and signed by Gary and Anne Marie Ezzo. This letter is apparently being distributed to those who contact the Ezzos with questions about my article. It attempts to deal with the issue of “Who is Rebecca Prewett?”

Unfortunately, the letter contains much misinformation, which I hope to clarify. I will be quoting from the letter and offering explanation and correction.

**Gary and Anne Marie Ezzo:** “Rebecca Prewett is part of the general group of mothers, who were highlighted in the recent *Wall Street Journal* article, *Dying for Milk* (Kevin Helliker, June 22, 1994), who believed such things as: ‘If you do not get an “A” in breastfeeding, you get an “F” in mothering,’ or ‘If you give your baby a bottle, he will probably end up in jail and as an adult have rage against his mother.’ From this line of thinking comes Rebecca Prewett.”

**Fact:** Not having read the *Wall Street Journal* article, I cannot comment on what sort of “general group of mothers” it is to which I’m being linked. However, these two quotes (too ludicrous in my opinion for me to bother refuting) have never represented my opinion. I have never made any statements that would support the allegation that I follow such a line of thinking. Thus, it would seem inappropriate to link me with a group whose beliefs I do not share.<sup>3</sup>

**Gary and Anne Marie Ezzo:** “But as those acquainted with Rebecca know, defending her parenting philosophy is her life.”

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<sup>1</sup> This is an updated version of my previous “In Response”. The updated material is found in the footnotes and in my closing sentence. The rest of the article is the same as the original.

<sup>2</sup> Rebecca Prewett, “Gary and Anne Marie Ezzo: What is Wrong with Their Teaching on Parenting?” *HELP for Growing Families*, Issue 18 Summer 1994, pg. 29-32. An updated version of this article is available on the Internet at <http://www.fix.net/~rprewett/fam.html> as “Some Concerns About the Ezzo Method of Parenting”.

<sup>3</sup> Since writing the first edition of this response, I have read the rather sensationalistic *Wall Street Journal* article. I can state emphatically that it expressed neither my beliefs nor my personal experiences regarding breastfeeding. Further, Growing Families did not accurately quote the article, particularly in their statement regarding the supposed correlation between giving a baby a bottle, adult rage towards parents, and criminal behavior.

**Fact:** The Ezzos' "acquaintance" with me consists of their having read about four of my letters and the HELP article. In addition, they probably listened to a tape of a radio program on a local Christian radio station where I was part of a panel discussing the Ezzos' teaching. (I did not discuss any of my personal parenting practices or philosophy on that program.) They have never met me personally, nor spoken with me, nor are they in a position to speak for anyone who is truly acquainted with me. They have no real knowledge of my life and absolutely no basis on which to make such a false statement.<sup>4</sup>

**Gary and Anne Marie Ezzo:** "Rebecca Prewett happens to be a La Leche League district representative, and a strong advocate of attachment parenting...She is a young mother whose entire world revolves around La Leche League doctrine."

**Fact:** The medical community considers me an "elderly multipara". I think I prefer "young mother" but even my husband gently informs me I'm not really that young anymore.<sup>5</sup> Lightheartedness aside, I must take issue with the rest of this quote. First of all, La Leche League does not have "district representatives". About six years ago, I was accredited with La Leche League to offer breastfeeding information and support in meetings and over the phone. (I am no longer active in this role.)<sup>6</sup> My involvement in La Leche League was motivated by a desire to help other women breastfeed and to reach out into the community, beyond our own church. Second, I have never been a "strong advocate" of any particular parenting philosophy, as my family has benefited from a wide variety of parenting wisdom over the years, from many different sources. Third, I'm not sure what the Ezzos mean by "La Leche League doctrine"; La Leche League does not have a proscribed set of "beliefs" to which members and leaders must subscribe.<sup>7</sup> Fourth, as a Christian, I prefer to think that my life is centered on my God and Savior Jesus Christ, on my family, and on my church. Thus, everything my husband and I have learned from La Leche League has been carefully examined in the light of God's Word. Again, the Ezzos

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<sup>4</sup> Since then, I did have the opportunity to introduce myself to the Ezzos. We were quite cordial with one another and chatted rather briefly in a friendly manner. Neither of us defended our respective parenting philosophies during that conversation. I found the Ezzos to be every bit as gracious and charming in person as I had been told.

<sup>5</sup> GFI has since, in writing, clarified their "young mother" comment. They see me as young in experience as the "jury is still out" on my parenting. Interestingly enough, they train "contact moms" who are far younger in experience than I am; yet GFI is confident about having these mothers express their parenting philosophy to others. It is certainly true that my children are, as yet, not fully grown. Thus, I cannot speak authoritatively on a number of topics. I would never presume to teach a course on parenting. However, I believe that I can share my experience as a mother of five children. Also, I believe I can share what my husband and I have discovered in our search of the Scripture. We encourage other parents to test our "discoveries" and experiences against Scripture. We are grateful for the many parents who have shared the benefits of their experience with us, even those parents who were still "young".

<sup>6</sup> At the time I wrote this, I was considered on "reserve" or "inactive" status. The Ezzos state that they were still able to get my name and phone number from La Leche League International. It is my understanding that my request for reserve status was not processed for quite some time on the international level of the organization, long after I had ceased taking an active role. Since then, I have "retired" as a leader. However, I do not believe that involvement with LLL should preclude a mother from offering her insights regarding breastfeeding, mothering, and the often conflicting assortment of parenting advice available today, nor do I believe that involvement with LLL lessens a Christian couple's ability to study Scripture and formulate a Biblical worldview. I would venture to assume that most Christians in LLL--even leaders--spend far more time at church and studying Scripture than they do at LLL gatherings and studying LLL materials. This was certainly true in my case.

<sup>7</sup> Members and visitors to La Leche League meetings are often encouraged to consider what they hear or read as a "smorgasbord" of ideas--to take only what would be of value to their particular family situation and to leave the rest.

have absolutely no direct knowledge of my “world”, or they would know their statement is false.

**Gary and Anne Marie Ezzo:** “...neither she nor Mrs. Pride made reference to her ties with the league in the article.”

**Fact:** I was writing as a mother within the Body of Christ, not as a representative of La Leche League. Given the fact that I was dealing with Biblical issues and thus not speaking on behalf of the League, expressing that organization’s viewpoint, acting in any way as their advocate, or even writing with their knowledge or consent, it would have been inappropriate for me to write as a La Leche League Leader. It is interesting that the Ezzos do not make reference to their own “ties” to La Leche League. “Ezzo has asked Nancy Williams to write parts of the new edition [of *Preparation for Parenting*]. He says she is ‘one of the top lactation consultants’ in La Leche League.”<sup>8</sup>

**Gary and Anne Marie Ezzo:** “Nor did she mention that most of the letters she cited were written by other faithful followers of La Leche League dogma.”

**Fact:** I cited five letters in my article. To my knowledge, only one of the authors has any connection to La Leche League. Since I did not identify the letters’ authors, I wonder on what basis the Ezzos make their statement; nothing in the quotes mentioned La Leche League or a particular parenting philosophy. I’m not sure what the Ezzos mean by “dogma” in this instance.

**Gary and Anne Marie Ezzo:** “Since we know what La Leche League believes about childrearing, we know what Rebecca Prewett believes...”

**Fact:** La Leche League concerns itself with breastfeeding and related issues. They are silent on many childrearing matters, especially beyond the baby/toddler years. I am not convinced that the Ezzos understand the real nature of La Leche League or the diversity of its members and their beliefs and parenting practices.<sup>9</sup> Certainly they have demonstrated that they do not know what I believe. Three examples, from many, will have to suffice.

**Example:** The Ezzos think that the quotes about getting an “A” in breastfeeding and the allegedly dire consequences of giving baby a bottle represent my thinking; nothing is further from the truth.

**Example:** In a letter to me dated January 22, 1992, Gary Ezzo wrote, “You

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<sup>8</sup> Thomas S. Giles, “The Brave New Baby” *Christianity Today*, August 16, 1993, pg. 35. This was also verified to me directly by Nancy Williams, who--after careful consideration--declined the offer.

<sup>9</sup> More recent statements from GFI have only served to convince me of the depth of their misunderstandings regarding LLL and attachment parenting advocates. For example, they speak of some “happiness doctrine” that “exalts a child to to center of the universe” without giving reference to where such statements can be found. On America Online, Gary Ezzo made the claim that someone is teaching parents, “Don’t think, just react”. However, despite a number of questions from others involved in the dialogue, he would not state who was teaching this, although he continued to quote it and implied that the originator of the statement was an advocate of attachment parenting and demand feeding. In my admittedly limited reading of attachment parenting sources, I have never come across anything remotely related to these sort of statements. I wish GFI would do a better job of documenting them and/or would stick to quoting statements more representative of the majority of attachment parenting literature.

used your son...as justification why all mothers should sling their babies so as to prevent the baby from crying and why also cribs and playpens should be banned from existence..."<sup>10</sup> I never stated either point. I shared my experience in using a sling for a critically ill infant and suggested that healthy babies might benefit as well. I own both a crib and a playpen and have used--and will use--both.<sup>11</sup> Never did I suggest, nor do I believe, that they should be "banned".

Example: In a letter to me dated April 27, 1993, Gary Ezzo implied that I believe in what he termed a "Satanic counterfeit" of love, "that has God sitting on the edge of His throne waiting to jump up at our every cry trying to prove He loves us."<sup>12</sup> I find this implication offensive, without basis, and in no way representative of my theological beliefs.

**Gary and Anne Marie Ezzo:** "Obviously, Mrs. Prewett was not aware of Dr. MacArthur's view of the psychology department of Fuller Seminary. Rebecca, not knowing any better and trying to prove an evangelical tie, revealed herself."

**Fact:** The mention of Fuller Seminary was made in a letter I cited in the HELP article regarding Lake Avenue Congregational Church. It stated: "The night that this program [the Ezzos' "Preparation for Parenting" course] was presented, they voted it down, based on strong objections brought by professors from the [Fuller] School of Theology, School of World Missions, and School of Psychology."<sup>13</sup> Having listened to Dr. MacArthur on the radio, read several of his books, and followed at least some of the events surrounding his church, I am aware of his stance regarding psychology in general. By quoting this letter, I was not attempting to "prove an evangelical tie". If anything, the beginning of the HELP article, which stated "my basic presuppositions regarding the Bible as a source of parenting instruction"<sup>14</sup> should have made clear my "evangelical tie". I'm not sure exactly what it is that the Ezzos think I revealed about myself.

**Gary and Anne Marie Ezzo:** "Regarding the substance of her accusations, please note that she did not document a single statement, nor quote from any of our writings. Lead-in statements such as: 'I know of,' 'A friend told me,' 'I heard about,' and 'I am told,' do not add substantiation or credibility to her claims."

**Fact:** I did not provide documentation for the instances of failure-to-thrive babies because to do so would have either violated the privacy of the families involved or been a breach of confidentiality. A careful reading of my article will reveal that I did not begin any of my statements with either "A friend told me" or "I heard about."

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<sup>10</sup> letter on file

<sup>11</sup> Based on a later public statement released by GFI concerning me, they found it puzzling how I could claim to own a crib and playpen, yet previously state in a letter to them that neither of these items would be seen by a visitor to my house. They implied dishonesty on my part or, at the least, a contradiction. To set the record straight, I own both a crib and a playpen. Over the course of the years, they have been set up, in storage, on loan to relatives, etc. At the time I wrote to the Ezzos, they were stored in our attic, a place that guests would be unlikely to see. We found little need for baby furniture at that point in the raising of our 16 month old and, although we are currently using a crib and high chair, still believe strongly that they are entirely optional in the raising of godly children.

<sup>12</sup> letter on file

<sup>13</sup> letter on file; previously quoted in my article in *HELP for Growing Families*

<sup>14</sup> my article in *HELP for Growing Families*

The length and scope of the article did not permit me to quote from the Ezzos' writings; however, I did mention several of their principles, using their own terminology, and I quoted pertinent phrases from Gary Ezzos' letters to me.

**Gary and Anne Marie Ezzo:** "With clinics, hospitals, and pediatricians using our program all over the country, you would think one of these professionals would have discovered the terrible evil that she purports to be in our teaching."

**Fact:** I have never purported that there is a "terrible evil" in the Ezzos' teaching, although that is an interesting choice of words. In the HELP article, I quoted one lactation professional--with a specialty in failure-to-thrive babies--who quoted a medical professional stating that she had "seen four Failure to Thrive babies in my practice that were a direct result of the teaching in the 'Preparation for Parenting' portion of the program."<sup>15</sup> That statement was made about three years ago; there is always the possibility she may have seen more such babies in her practice since then.<sup>16</sup>

**Gary and Anne Marie Ezzo:** "Considering there are over 200,000 failure to thrive cases in America every year, it is interesting that Rebecca Prewett found twelve that she claims were the result of *Preparation for Parenting*."

**Fact:** Actually it is interesting that, with no effort on my part, no medical research, I was able to learn of these twelve cases. Since then, I have received letters and phone calls from previous proponents and followers of *Preparation for Parenting* who have experienced problems with inadequate milk supply and failure-to-thrive babies--problems that were solved by following medical advice to abandon the program.

**Gary and Anne Marie Ezzo:** "Rebecca quoted some disapproving letters sent to the leadership of Lake Avenue Congregational Church...We cannot imagine that such a credible church would just turn letters over to an individual."

**Fact:** Several of the authors made these letters available to those in other churches who were also examining the Ezzos' teaching. It is my understanding that these letters were made public during the meeting at Lake Avenue where the *Preparation for Parenting* program was discussed. Two of the letters I cited were not written to the leadership of Lake Avenue Congregational Church; these letters were given to me directly by their authors.

**Gary and Anne Marie Ezzo:** "And how is it that she had reading access to other letters that we supposedly wrote? Unless, the original letters were from a network of her friends and La Leche League supporters..."

**Fact:** I was shown or given copies of letters written on Growing Families International stationery and bearing Gary Ezzo's signature. The "original letters"

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<sup>15</sup> letter on file; previously quoted in the HELP article

<sup>16</sup> Since writing this response, I have learned of two more cases seen by this particular professional. I have also learned of even more cases, either described to me by lactation consultants or directly by the parents.

were not from any “network” (I know of no such network<sup>17</sup>) and in at least one case, I have never met the author of the original letter.

**Gary and Anne Marie Ezzo:** “By trying to create the impression that she is acting in concert with Lake Avenue Congregational Church...”

**Fact:** A careful reading of my article in *HELP* will reveal that I never linked myself with that church. I was not involved in any of the meetings or letter writing; I only learned of the situation after the fact. I chose to quote these particular letters for several reasons: The church was mentioned in the article in *Christianity Today*<sup>18</sup>; the letters addressed valid concerns; the church involved is one that is known within evangelical circles in California.

**Gary and Anne Marie Ezzo:** “From failure-to-thrive babies to counties putting out warnings against our teaching, we regret to have to say it but, Rebecca Prewett for the most part, fabricated the truth claims of her letter.”

**Fact:** This is a serious accusation. The evidence with which to back it up is lacking. Furthermore, “counties putting out warnings against our teaching” is a misrepresentation of what I wrote in the *HELP* article, where I mentioned having received information “that one county in Southern California has *considered* declaring this to be a public health issue.” [emphasis added] None of this was fabricated by me.<sup>19</sup>

**Gary and Anne Marie Ezzo:** “Regarding Mary Pride’s evaluation and statement that the ministry of Gary and Anne Marie is evil...”

**Fact:** Mary Pride actually stated, “Since I don’t really enjoy slamming people, I held off on printing them [reviews of parenting programs from Growing Families International and Family Discipleship Ministries] hoping this movement would die a deserved natural death. However, now that this does not appear to be happening, and the evidence is increasing that the *fruit of this teaching* is not merely unhelpful but evil, I feel compelled to share the following critiques with you.”<sup>20</sup> [emphasis mine] Not only did the Ezzos misread that statement, they apparently misunderstood the entire point of her review of their program. She neither intentionally nor unintentionally in any way “affirmed” their teaching.

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<sup>17</sup> Gary Ezzo has repeatedly made reference to the existence of some sort of “network”. If anyone has any information regarding this “network”, please contact me at rprewett@fix.net

<sup>18</sup> Thomas S. Giles, “The Brave New Baby” *Christianity Today*, August 16, 1993, pg. 34-36

<sup>19</sup> I was quite surprised to read a later statement from GFI claiming that this the public health issue had all been a rumor begun by a La Leche League mother and, wondering if I had been the victim of some clever and diabolical hoax involving an elaborate impersonation, attempted to uncover the truth of the matter. My original source in the county health department was no longer there, but another contact was. She confirmed that the county had never issued a warning about the Ezzos’ teachings. (Note: I never stated that any warnings were issued, as this was never my understanding.) She also confirmed that my former contact had had grave concerns about the Ezzos’ parenting program and that there had been discussion of these concerns within the department. In fact, she had a “huge file” on this very matter. I pressed her for an accurate statement of what really happened and she replied that the Ezzos’ program had been a concern but that the county never took action. “The department did look into it. If we found widespread problems with parents carefully using ‘Prep’, we would investigate and do something about it.” My contact further stated that the Ezzos had refused to return her calls.

<sup>20</sup> *HELP for Growing Families*

It is interesting that the Ezzos offer no direct quotes, documentation, or real evidence for their assertions regarding me. It is also interesting that they do not choose to deal with the major points of my article:

1. Gary's insistence on labeling his personal parenting philosophy as exclusively biblical;
2. His misuse of Scripture to support that claim;
3. His ungracious response to those who would question him.<sup>21</sup>

I offered testimony that gave at least some support to my concerns, evidence in the form of letters from those who had been through the *Preparation for Parenting* course, or were familiar with the issues involved, as well as some of my own analysis, study, and experience of corresponding with Gary Ezzo. Gary and Anne Marie Ezzo respond with a description of me that can only be based on their own speculation and lack of information; certainly it was not based on fact or knowledge. Their publicly circulated letter is, in my opinion, only further evidence of the ungracious way in which the Ezzos respond to their critics. I had hoped that they did not spread the same sort of misleading letters, wild conjecture, and inaccuracies about others within the Body of Christ; however, I have been saddened to hear reports of others who have been similarly--and even far more grievously--maligned.

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*For further information...*

"Family Issues Page" on the Internet at <http://www.fix.net/~rprewett/fam.html>

Via email: [rprewett@fix.net](mailto:rprewett@fix.net)

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<sup>21</sup> *HELP for Growing Families; an updated version of this article, now titled "Some Concerns About the Ezzo Method of Parenting" is now available on our web site.*

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