International Journal for the Study of New Religions 10.2 (2019) 139–158
ISSN 2041-9511 (print) ISSN 2041-952X (online)
https://doi.org/10.1558/ijsnr.42007

The Process Church of the Final Judgment: The Demise by Transmutation and Replacement of a Controversial New Religion

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This article examines a new religious movement (NRM) founded by charismatic leaders in the mid-1960s from the viewpoint of its demise. The Process Church of the Final Judgment was founded in 1966 in London by Mary Ann MacLean and Robert de Grimston. The Process developed a theology melding esoteric Biblical motifs with psychoanalysis. The Process ceased to exist two decades later due to changes in belief and affiliation; members adopted other, mainstream, identities. De Grimston was expelled from The Process in 1974, after which it transformed into The Foundation Faith of God under MacLean's leadership. The Foundation Faith of God later morphed into the Best Friends Animal Society in Kanab, Utah, abandoning a religious identity in favour of an animal rights-based identity. Until recently little attention was paid to how NRMs ended; the academic focus was overwhelmingly on the origins of such groups. This study builds on new research to argue that The Process ended via activities of transmutation and replacement. In 2020 The Process is a defunct religion with extensive online archives, curated by ex-members and enthusiasts. Processean ideas are kept "alive" and potentially able to be revived; the status of virtual communities and attempted revivals is also discussed with regard to identifying the precise date of the demise of NRMs.

Introduction

This article uses the lens of demise by "transmutation and replacement" (Wright, Stausberg and Cusack 2020) to study The Process Church of the Final Judgment, founded in 1966 by Mary Ann MacLean (1931–2005) and

Keywords The Process Church of the Final Judgment, Robert de Grimston, Mary Ann MacLean, William Sims Bainbridge, Timothy Wyllie, Best Friends Animal Society, new religious movement (NRM)

Robert de Grimston (né Moor, b. 1935). MacLean and de Grimston met at the headquarters of the London branch of the Church of Scientology (est. 1954) in 1962 (Giudice 2017, 123) and drew on L. Ron Hubbard's ideas and practices in Compulsions Analysis, a psychoanalytic movement they founded in 1963. Later, they developed a distinctive theology based on four gods, Jehovah, Lucifer, Satan and Christ (Bromley and Ainsley 1995, 405). The Process was a creative organisation, characterized by ritual innovation, non-conventional sexual and living arrangements, and a publications strategy that produced distinctive, arresting magazines. Its members, known as Processeans, wore dramatic costumes and were highly visible on the streets of American cities in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Bainbridge 1991, 297). Yet, two decades after MacLean and de Grimston met The Process was effectively defunct. In 1974 de Grimston was ousted as Teacher of the religion after the break-up of his marriage to Mary Ann, and the group transformed into new entities. Various names were adopted, including the Foundation Church of the New Millennium and the Foundation Faith of God, until in 1984 the group became as Best Friends Animal Society, America's largest no-kill animal shelter in Kanab, Utah (Bainbridge 2015).

It is argued that The Process emerged in the 1960s, underwent a formal change of leadership in 1974, and gradually altered. The strategy of abandoning esoteric beliefs and replacing them with more "acceptable" views ("nominally" Christian- and then animal rights-based) resulted in the demise of the original group. The mythic history of The Process is now part of the conspiracist subculture, and claims that it persists underground have been made by sensationalist authors such as Maury Terry, in *The Ultimate Evil* (1989 [1987]), which alleges that David Berkowitz, the "Son of Sam" killer, belonged to a Process offshoot called The Children based in Venice California. There is no evidence that this is true, or that another alleged offshoot, the Four P Movement ever existed (Rowlett 2017 [2008], 89). The conspiracist narrative that cloaks the Process Church is largely due to the limited connection that The Process had with Charles Manson (1934–2017), who became notorious for the 1969 Tate-La Bianca murders committed by members of his "Family" (a name Processeans used for their own group), and the allegations of Satanism that connected The Process to the Manson Family (Bainbridge 1978, 119–124).

The notion that religions can reach an endpoint or demise via transmutation or replacement is one that has not featured in academic literature until recently.[1] In new religious movements (NRMs), several classic studies map

1. A new book, *The Demise of Religion: How Religions End, Die or Dissipate,* edited by

the opposite trajectory; that a group that was not initially religious may, over time, undergo transformations such that it becomes a religion. An example is Richard Ofshe's analysis of Synanon (Ofshe 1980). Synanon transmuted to a religion from a therapeutic community between 1958 and 1975. There are commonalities shared by Synanon and The Process that merit further attention, although it took a mere three years for Compulsions Analysis to transform into a religion, compared to twenty for Synanon (Toti 2008). My focus is on the replacement of Processean deviant religious identity with a more socially acceptable Christian-seeming image, and finally with secular animal rights activism. Thirty-one Processeans founded Best Friends in 1984 (around half are still active in the sanctuary); they included Michael Mountain and Steven Hirano (editors of *Best Friends* magazine, the group's main outreach prior to the internet), Gabriel DePeyer (Mary Ann's second husband), and (though she is not mentioned on the website), Mary Ann MacLean, who died at Kanab in 2005 (Giudice 2017, 137).

The emergence and demise of new religions

New religious movements (NRMs) became a focus of scholarly attention in the 1960s, when the retreat of Christianity from the public sphere combined with the (post-colonial) phenomenon of Asian religious teachers moving to the West to establish non-traditional organisations, that were significantly different to the "official" traditions in India, Japan, and Tibet, and other countries. Additionally, home-grown Western gurus and religious leaders came to prominence among countercultural youth (Cowan and Bromley 2015, 5–10). Initially, NRMs were not treated as authentic religions that offered credible alternative beliefs and values to traditional religion(s). Gordon Melton argues that scholars began studying NRMs "by trying to explain their emergence: What was wrong that people were turning to new religions?" (Melton 2007, 109). The founders were deemed con-artists or psychopaths, and their followers styled drop-out members of deviant subcultures (Bainbridge and Stark 1979). In terms of fixing dates of origin and tracking societal and internal changes that result in demise, however, NRMs present certain advantages over older religions. Foundation documents are often available: it is a fact that in December 1953 "the Church of American

Michael Stausberg, Stuart A. Wright, and Carole M. Cusack (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2020) has advanced the study of the diverse endings of NRMs. It is the first book dedicated to how NRMs demise. However, transmutation and replacement is one of the less-studied modes of demise, with a greater number of chapters given over to violent or sudden endings (by murders, raids, suicides, and sexual scandals, for example).

Science, the Church of Scientology, and the Church of Spiritual Engineering" were founded by L. Ron Hubbard in Camden, New Jersey (Westbrook 2017, xi), though the official date the incorporation of the Church of Scientology in California in February 1954.

The moment of demise is, however, difficult to pinpoint for both old and new religions, although it is possible to state, for example, that the Shakers, founded by Mother Ann Lee (1736–1784) in 1770 have only two members and will soon be a dead religion, as they neither reproduce nor accept converts (Blakemore 2017). To date there has been little research that addresses this issue directly.[2] The focus when discussing NRMs is often the charismatic leader or guru, whose oratorical power and spiritual authority attracted members in the first place and established about the new faith. The death of the leader is the most traumatic event in the lifecycle of a new religion (Melton 1991): yet, prophecies that are not fulfilled may also be fatal; as may internal struggles. Melton gives examples of groups that ended with their founders or shortly after: Frank B. Robinson (1856–1948) founded Psychiana in 1929, which met its demise in 1952, despite the efforts of Robinson's son to continue; and the Spirit Fruit Society, incorporated by its founder Jacob Beilhart (1867–1908) in Lisbon, Ohio in 1901, ended in 1930 (Melton 1991, 9). Other examples include the UFO group led by Dorothy Martin ("Marion Keech," 1900–1992), which began around 1954 in Chicago, and ended with her death in Sedona, Arizona in 1992 (Clark 2007). This group is also core to research on failed prophecy, being the subject of the influential study by Leon Festinger, Henry Riecken and Stanley Schachter, *When Prophecy Fails* (2009 [1956]).

In the study of religions in general and NRMs in particular there has been greater attention paid to narratives of origin and stories of success, than to decline and the demise. Yet Rodney Stark's article positing ten conditions for success rather than failure opened by throwing down the gauntlet: "no more than one religious movement out of 1,000 will attract more than 100,000

2. James Bissett Pratt (1921) published a note in *The Journal of Religion*, 1(1): 76–78 titled "Why Do Religions Die?" which remains valuable. Pratt identifies religions that died (for example, ancient polytheisms) and others that "perished from the land of their origin" or are "having difficulty sustaining a precarious life" (Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, and Jainism) (1921, 77). He notes "some religions die from violence while others fall prey to internal and more subtle evils" (1921, 78). He is more interested in religions that decline and become moribund than those that end in violence; he argues that research considering all the "social and psychological factors" is the way forward (1921, 78). He states: "The intrinsic interest of such an investigation must be evident to all." Pratt's short piece poses questions; he does not possess the research data necessary to answer them.

followers and last for as long as a century" and nearly "every new group will have one thing in common; eventual failure" (Stark 1996, 133).[3] Timothy Miller, in an issue of *Nova Religio* on intentional communities, agreed that "[o]f the plethora of new religions that emerged in the United States after 1965, many are defunct or essentially defunct; some survive but in a heavily modified form; and a few survive without massive changes" (Miller 2010, 14). The six movements he focused on all survived, but the general principle stands. One explanation for this is proposed by Colin Campbell; he argues that groups emerge from the "cultic milieu," a reservoir of philosophical, spiritual, religious and alternative ideas that have never been fully accepted in the West (Campbell 1972). Examples of such ideas would include reincarnation, alchemy, astrology, tarot, and many other beliefs and practices that are now termed "New Age." Such groups are unstable and temporary; "seekers" in the cultic milieu move rapidly from one to another, and few, if any, groups establish an institutional presence.

A final consideration is that with regard to the demise of NRMs, the issue of real-world groups being replaced by online communities has arisen in recent years. The best example is The Family International (TFI), the successor institution to the Children of God (COG), founded by David Berg, also known as Moses David or "Mo" (1919–1994) in 1968 (Nilsson 2011, 159). Karen Zerby (Maria Fontaine), Berg's second wife, devised the "Reboot" in 2010 with her husband Steve Kelly (Peter Amsterdam). The Reboot dissolved communal living, permitted outside jobs and dating with non-TFI members, and resulted in major defections from TFI (Borowik 2018, 66). Almost a decade on from the Reboot, Claire Borowik claimed that a virtual community had replaced the "communal society model" (Borowik 2018, 79). Thus, at present it cannot be confidently stated that TFI has become extinct through transmutation and replacement. Considering the demise of NRMs, the UFO religion Heaven's Gate and the intentional community Kerista may be more relevant cases. Both are extinct (Kerista disbanded in 1991 and Heaven's Gate effectively ended with the suicides of thirty-nine members in 1997) but online archives preserve the ideas and are sites of mass dissemination to audiences much larger than the small real-world groups had in their heyday

3. Stark's position is similar to that of Günter Kehrer (1986), who affirms that new religions have a high mortality rate, that they tend to die rather than to thrive. I owe this reference to Janne Arp-Neumann (University of Göttingen). Elisabeth Arweck (2006) assesses Kehrer's ideas, noting that his study of NRMs had ceased by 1990, due to pressures in the German academic environment. Kehrer worked mainly on the Unification Church, a successful NRM. Stark builds on research he did in the 1980s with William Sims Bainbridge, so the two scholars reached the same conclusion independently, at the same time.

(Cusack 2019). Neither group has been effectively revived; that replacement is yet to be attempted and documented.

The Process Church: Psychological origins and transformation to religion

Within the Process Church, Mary Ann MacLean and Robert de Grimston formed a spiritual entity known as the Omega; Mary Ann was the Oracle and Robert was the Teacher. A complex web of myth surrounds the de Grimstons. Robert Moor was born into an upper-middle class family in Shanghai, came to England as an infant, attended a private school, joined the army, and was married when he met Mary Ann at Scientology's London headquarters in 1962 (Wyllie 2009, 19–21). Mary Ann claimed to have been born into poverty in Glasgow and to have little or no formal education. She moved to London in the 1950s and was apparently a prostitute "under the sway of a group of Maltese pimps" (Wyllie 2009, 55). It is rumoured that she was engaged to the American boxer Sugar Ray Robinson and was linked to the Profumo Affair in 1961 (Giudice 2017, 123). The rumours were refuted by ex-Processean Timothy Wyllie (Father Micah, 1940–2017), in *Love Sex Fear Death: The Inside Story of the Process Church of the Final Judgment* (2009).

This valuable insider publication contains a timeline of Process history, Wyllie's testimony, the reminiscences of six Processeans, extracts from de Grimston's writings, and essays by occult publisher Adam Parfrey (1957–2018), and Genesis P-Orridge (1950–2020), alternative musician, artist, occultist, and major archivist of Process materials. Wyllie, apart from his time with The Process, was a prominent figure in the alternative spirituality scene who published books omn a wide range of topics. After a near-death experience in 1973, he studied "communication with non-human intelligences, such as Dolphins, ETs, and Angels" (Robinson 2017), and became a popular commentator on these topics on the internet. *Love Sex Fear Death: The Inside Story of the Process Church of the Final Judgment* provided a corrective to the official narrative of the Process that was established by William Sims Bainbridge in *Satan's Power: A Deviant Psychotherapy Cult* (1978). This study was based on fieldwork among Processeans in America in 1970, and in 1974–1975 after various schisms and splits occurred. In addition to this monograph, Bainbridge has written articles and chapters on The Process and, recently, a novel titled *Revival: Resurrecting the Process Church of the Final Judgment* (2017a).[4] From the viewpoint of academia, Bainbridge

4. Bainbridge's study of The Process Church employs an older model of participant observation sociology in which the names and identities of individual members and whole movements are pseudonymized. Thus, he calls L. Ron Hubbard "Gordon Rogers" and

is synonymous with The Process and has published most about them: The Process is also featured in the Italian sociologist Massimo Introvigne's *Satanism: A Social History* (2016); and Christian Giudice has published a study of MacLean as a charismatic female NRM leader (Giudice 2017).

When Robert and Mary Ann met in Scientology she was a trained auditor. As the dominant personality, and via auditing—Hubbard's question and answer therapy using the "e-meter" (a galvanometer)—she gained influence over Robert:

> Mary Ann practiced a psychoanalysis-like technique on Robert, causing him to re-live emotionally charged experiences from his past … One result was that Robert developed an immensely powerful emotional attachment to Mary Ann, as clients in psychoanalysis often do to their doctors.
>
> (Bainbridge 1997, 246)

They grew closer and diverted from Hubbard's set rules in the use of the e-meter while experimenting on other students. Mary Ann persuaded Robert to leave his wife, then to leave Scientology and use some of Hubbard's ideas and a stolen e-meter (which was later re-named the P-Scope), to start Compulsions Analysis, a psychotherapy group that drew on both the work of Alfred Adler (1870–1937) and Scientology in 1963 (Giudice 2017, 124).

Mary Ann and Robert married in 1964 (Smithells 1967, 17) and in 1965 adopted the surname de Grimston. In March 1966, after acquiring a clientele largely from Robert's friendship network, and adding group sessions to supplement the initial one-on-one therapy, they moved headquarters to 2 Balfour Place, Mayfair, an upmarket location. In 1965 de Grimstons were declared "Suppressive Persons" (SPs) by Hubbard. This term is used in Scientology for enemies of the religion. In fact, the de Grimstons were "Squirrels," a Hubbard term for those who used the "Tech" in unauthorized ways outside Scientology; that is, "teachers who learned about Scientology in various ways, legitimate and illegitimate, and taught their own versions of it" (Cusack 2017, 488). Compulsions Analysis became popular and grew rapidly; Julian Smithells estimates that "between 200 and 300 attended Process courses for long or short periods" (1967, 17).

With a view to mapping the experiences that transformed Compulsions Analysis into The Process, Bainbridge argues that Compulsions Analysis underwent a "social implosion" after the introduction of the group sessions.

Scientology "Technianity," Robert and Mary Ann are "Edward de Forest" and "Kitty MacDougal" and the Process Church is designated The Power. The use of pseudonyms for members makes cross-checking Bainbridge's monograph with Timothy Wyllie's book difficult. Bainbridge's later work is not anonymized.

He defines this as "social ties within it [an inner group] strengthen, and… [ties] to persons outside it weaken" (Bainbridge 1997, 248). Wyllie confirms this, stating that ten to twelve members became very close, and believed they had been together in the past in the legendary land of Atlantis (Wyllie 2009, 28). This type of bonding is commonplace in NRMs; the gradual tightening of loyalties that occurred in Heaven's Gate is a case in point. Like Mary Ann and Robert, Marshall Herff Applewhite (1931–1997) and Bonnie Lu Nettles (1927–1985) had around 200 followers when they went into seclusion for four months in late 1975 to early 1976. Defections reduced the group to 88, and some twenty more members left by the end of the year (Balch 1985). This reduction to a core membership strengthened the bonds between those who remained.

The Balfour Place headquarters was the communal living quarters of the inner circle of Compulsions Analysis. Robert and Mary Ann trained others as therapists as there were too many clients for them to handle personally. The inner group broke with the open clientele, and therapy drifted toward religion, resulting in a new entity, "The Process." Members were "Processeans" and the "monogram of the letter P" was adopted as a symbol (Bainbridge 1997, 250). The inner group decided to "build a new civilization in a tropical island paradise" (Bainbridge 1997, 250). On 23 June 1966 the de Grimstons and some twenty-five to thirty followers (and six German Shepherd dogs) left for Nassau in the Bahamas, where they began to contact non-corporeal "Beings" via meditation; the Beings told them to move to Mexico. They reached Xtul (pronounced *Shtool*) on the Yucatan peninsula, and lived in spartan conditions in an old salt factory (Edwards 2015). Robert wrote seven *Xtul Dialogues* in a process akin to channeling or automatic writing, and members continued their contact with supernatural entities. Processeans were also concretising their beliefs about Mary Ann, whom Wyllie says they all knew was the true power in The Process. She was acclaimed as a goddess by her followers, and later self-identified as Hecate and Kali (Wyllie 2009, 36).

During their time at Xtul, Processeans gathered around Mary Ann and Robert at night, and enacted "psychodramas" from history. Wyllie recalls taking on the role of the serpent in Eden (Mary Ann had told him of his extraterrestrial reptilian ancestry while still in London) and flagellating in penitence (Wyllie 2009, 23–24, 32). The theology of the three gods, Jehovah (identified with Mary Ann), Lucifer (identified with Robert) and Satan, with their emissary Christ, was born in Xtul. Hurricane Inez struck Xtul on 7 October 1966; the Processeans interpreted their survival in religious terms and The Process transformed into The Process Church of the Final Judgment (Bainbridge

1978, 66–70). This transmutation completed the shift from psychotherapy to religion. Introvigne notes that the sojourn in the Yucatan was brief but "was later mythologized as part of the sacred history of the small group. In Xtul, according to de Grimston, The Process "met God face to face," living an experience similar to that of Israel in the desert" (Introvigne 2016, 330).

In late 1966 the de Grimstons returned to London (a few Processeans remained in Xtul) after a parent-led raid caused the departure of three underage members (Bainbridge 1997, 250). In London, the first Process Church magazine issue, *Common Market*, was published and the first Coffee House was opened, in the basement of Balfour Place. In 1967 the de Grimstons and certain of their inner circle travelled to the Middle East, reaching Israel in May and Turkey in June. In Turkey Robert commenced writing apocalyptic texts and produced *As It Is* and *A Candle in Hell* (The Process Church of the Final Judgement 1968). Two important magazine issues, *Freedom of Expression* and *Mindbenders*, were printed that year. The remaining Xtul Processeans migrated to New Orleans and opened a branch on Royal Street in the French Quarter, and Robert and Mary Ann joined them in late 1967, renting a house in Slidell. The Process Church of the Final Judgment was incorporated in Louisiana, marking the formal establishment of the religion (Wyllie 2009, 20). In December a San Francisco chapter was opened, and in 1968 chapters in New York and Munich followed. Robert and Mary Ann travelled in Europe seeking a permanent centre for The Process in October 1968 but did not settle. In 1969 the *Fear* magazine issue appeared, and a chapter opened in Paris, although the main focus had shifted to North America. Processeans, in their dramatic black, cloaks, adorned with the swastika-like "P" symbol, and the "Sabbatic Goat" of Eliphas Levi (or the "Goat of Mendes") prominently displayed, became a frequent sight on the streets of Boston, New Orleans, Chicago, and other American cities (Bainbridge 1978, 3, 186).

The Process Church after 1974: Transmutation and replacement

In retrospect, 1971 was a year of great changes that point to the altered identity of the group and its leadership that became apparent in 1974. The Process had relocated permanently from the United Kingdom to America and Canada, and the Balfour Place headquarters was closed. In addition to the three gods that had emerged in the Xtul experience, Jehovah, Lucifer and Satan (the "Three Goat Gods of the Universe"), the emissary Christ was accepted as a fourth god (Bainbridge 1991, 299). One reason for this changed public face was that in 1969 Charles Manson (1934–2017) and his "Family" captured the media's attention and put "cults" and fringe religions in

the spotlight (Bainbridge 1978, 119). Manson's interest in both Scientology and Satanism drew attention to The Process, and members had visited him in prison in 1970 and the *Death* issue of its magazine from 1971 featured a short letter written by Manson (Toti 2008, 245). Introvigne suggests that the de Grimstons "probably wanted to take advantage of the strange popularity the criminal was enjoying in some youth groups" (2016, 333).

The result was a disaster from which The Process would never recover. Satanism was unpopular, and those authors who painted The Process as a dark cult also linked the group to fascism (their P symbol being reminiscent of a swastika) and admiration of Adolf Hitler (Taylor 1990, 167). Ed Sanders' bestseller *The Family: The Story of Charles Manson's Dune Buggy Attack Battalion* (1971) was a lurid, somewhat fictional amalgam of conspiracism, Satanism and gossip, but Sanders did implicate "an English occult society dedicated to observing and aiding the end of the world by stirring up murder, violence and chaos, and dedicated to the proposition that they, the Process, shall survive the gore as the chosen people" (Bainbridge 1991, 297). In a 1972 lawsuit, the publisher Dutton agreed to remove all references to The Process in later editions of Sanders' book. The Process received no monetary compensation. Bainbridge notes that its press release after the settlement simply stated: "The Power [Bainbridge's pseudonym for The Process] is a religious organization devoted spreading the work of Christ" (Bainbridge 1978, 123).

In 1971 the black uniforms and cloaks were abandoned, and a new uniform of grey casual suits was adopted, to "mainstream" the Process Church image. The suits had fashionable front pockets and flared pants and the Mendes goat badges were replaced by tiny triangles with goats on them. Bainbridge is scathing with regard to this sartorial decision; the new uniforms were drab compared with their dramatic predecessors, and the Processeans now "looked like stewardesses from a third-rate airline" (Bainbridge 1978, 124). Mary Ann and Robert moved to Toronto, and The Process became involved in new activities, included winning grants to engage with social welfare and setting up soup kitchens. Bainbridge claims this was motivated by a change in their clientele; many new Disciples (entry rank) were psychologically and physically unwell, and when they advanced to the level of Messenger (second rank), longer-term Messengers were demoralized by their unsuitability for that fundraising and missionising role (Bainbridge 1978, 134–138).

New communications emerged: the Toronto chapter made a radio programme; the *Facts N' Figures* pamphlet advertised "a membership in excess of 100,000" (Wyllie 2009, 21); and *The Processean*, a new newsletter, debuted in 1974. Tensions between Robert and Mary Ann came to a head in 1974 when

Robert left The Process Church with his lover Morgana (Wyllie 2009, 105). He was formally expelled by the Council of Masters in a letter backdated to 23 March. Robert then spent time in Xtul, New Orleans, Boston and Canada attempting to re-create The Process as he imagined it. He last met with Mary Ann in late 1974. No reconciliation was possible, and they divorced in 1975 (Wyllie 2009, 21). By 1976 Robert abandoned hope of reviving The Process, and in 1979 he had reverted to his original surname (Moor), married Morgana, and taken an office job (Bainbridge 1978, 288–289).

Mary Ann became sole leader of The Process, which became the Foundation Church of the Millennium, then the Foundation Faith of the Millennium, and in 1978 the Foundation Faith of God (Bainbridge 2015). It may be hypothesized that the split in 1974 originated in the breakdown of Robert and Mary Ann's marital relationship (Giudice 2017, 135–136). Mary Ann asserted the worship of Jehovah alone after the split, and the Biblical or even "Christian" flavour of the new names was at least in part to distance the religion from accusations of Satanism (Bainbridge 1991, 300). The Manson murders were in recent memory and Eileen Barker has argued that the Peoples Temple mass death at Jonestown, Guyana on 18 November 1978, in which 909 died, triggered a "cult panic" that impacted controversial and minority religions (Barker 1986). Yet, Bainbridge was predominantly interested in Robert; he termed Mary Ann's groups "the Establishment" and claimed that they compensated for the loss of The Process doctrines "with occult and psychic speculations" such as astrology and eurythmy (Bainbridge 1978, 238–239). This is evidence of his bias, as he was enthusiastic about Process practices such as telepathy and psychometry and asserts that "psychotherapy is a kind of magic" (Bainbridge 1978, 196). Wyllie, who left the Foundation Faith in 1977 with about fifteen others, acknowledges innovations and successes: "[w]e were the first to create Psychic Fairs; we started a Healing Ministry; we put on conferences on subjects as varied as Alternative Medicine and UFO Contactees" (Wyllie 2009, 108). Mary Ann soon remarried, replacing her ex-husband Robert ("the Christ of Carnaby Street") with a new messiah, Gabriel DePeyer or Father Christian (Wyllie 2009, 65).

Bainbridge's focus on Robert meant that he failed to understand the structure of The Process. Wyllie insists that the real leader of The Process was Mary Ann and Robert was no more than an attractive spokesman for her ideas. Wyllie states that he watched "while an original and effective psychotherapeutic system was gradually usurped and bent to the desires and fantasies of one terrifyingly powerful woman, Mary Ann" and that his book was "an attempt to understand this strange woman and the extraordinary hold

she had over me, and so many others" (Wyllie 2009, 15). Initiates viewed her as an incarnation of the goddess Kali or Hecate "who in ancient mythology was always accompanied by dogs, just like Mary Ann" (Introvigne 2016, 334). This fact is a plausible explanation of why the bulk of the Processeans stayed with Mary Ann, while Robert's attempts to rebuild the group failed (Giudice 2017). Sabrina Verney's memoir of Xtul refers kindly to Robert, but is fervently devotional when discussing Mary Ann:

> Those green eyes certainly are extraordinary, but it's her manner—unruffled, lucid, authoritative, confident, razor-sharp—that draws me. Once settled in her chair, her gaze moves slowly around, making eye contact with each person, instantly assessing their state of mind. Some people can't meet her eyes at all—I can't either—and some she deliberately skims over. She notices everything, is afraid of nothing. *Plainly, she is the undisputed leader of the group. It isn't long before I realise I am in the presence of a natural teacher.*
>
> (Verney 2011, 62)

The inner circle of The Process was fully aware of Mary Ann's power. Members sought to touch her when she walked by and cried openly in her presence; they believed she could astral travel and revered her unerring ability to "read" people (Edwards 2015). She broke up relationships, directed orgies among the inner circle, and devised "sex magic" rituals. Her dogs were also treated with respect; Sammy M. Nasr (Father Joab) recalled that the "dogs were thought to be aspects of the gods" and were included in telepathy sessions (Wyllie 2009, 129).

The Foundation Faith of God was moderately successful for a while. However, in 1977 Mary Ann sued Wyllie, who had founded a group in New York called the Unit, which he wanted recognized as an independent chapter of the Foundation. Mary Ann lost her case against Wyllie, but despite the court victory the Unit disbanded (Introvigne 2016, 335). The Foundation was then briefly based in Prescott, Arizona and began to take in stray and maltreated animals. In 2004, Michael (né Hugh) Mountain was interviewed by a journalist, Lou Kilzer, regarding the origins of Best Friends Anima Society, and he explained:

> Some members had been animal advocates for years, and German shepherds had been associated with them since they first left London in 1966. Mary Ann Degrimston [sic], for one, had been active in the anti-vivisectionist movement. Although members had worked in a variety of charities for humans, they came to realize that love of animals was one thing they all shared.
>
> (Kilzer 2004)

In 1984, after selling its ranch in Arizona, the Foundation moved to Kanab, Utah, where it bought 3,000 acres of land established a no-kill shelter, Best Friends Animal Society (Glen 2001). Mountain was not entirely comfortable with being questioned by Kilzer about Best Friends' origins in The Process, but he dismissed rumours that Lake House, the home of Mary Ann and her husband Gabriel, was a "religious site" and the group was still, secretly, a "cult," saying of his time with The Process, "We were not trying to be sensible at that point in time ... [It] was wonderful fun, it was nutty" (Kilzer 2004). In 1993 the Process Church's faith and teachings were declared obsolete and its archives were destroyed, and the group formally disbanded. In that year Best Friends was incorporated, removing all religious language, and avowing its purpose was the care of animals in need (Bainbridge 2017b, 65). The final transmutation/replacement had occurred.

Final Replacements? Internet archives and modern groups inspired by The Process

Bainbridge has argued that from the earliest days of Compulsions Analysis Mary Ann's concern for animal rights was a vital concern, and given that The Process had published a text claiming that animal abuse was "the ultimate sin" the shift that transformed The Process into Best Friends "was a logical progression rather than some kind of conversion—a concentration on one element of an originally complex system" (Bainbridge 2017b, 66). Mary Ann's beloved German Shepherds were a constant presence in the group, participating in ritual and being involved in The Process' telepathy circles, and they were present during the crucial Xtul experience. Bainbridge claims this is part of a process of "paganization." He says:

> Best Friends extols humane values but does not publicly worship Jehovah or Christ, let alone Lucifer or Satan. It illustrates one of the fundamental mechanisms of paganization in the modern world: preservation of some cultural element of a religion but disconnection from supernatural beliefs.
>
> (Bainbridge 2015, 8)

Bainbridge describes "paganization" as a process where there is "disconnection from supernatural beliefs" although the group retain some aspects of its original religious identity (Bainbridge 2017b, 67). The website of the animal sanctuary contains a short history that states:

> The founders of Best Friends began their work 20 years before they founded the Sanctuary. They came together in the turbulent 1960s in an effort to sort out personal conflict and live a better life. They saw the problems that bedeviled the larger society as scaled-up symptoms of the pettiness and problems that trouble and destroy personal and family relationships. While the obvious

> answer of kindness was a glib toss-off for most, the discipline of observing a life committed to kindness was of a different order of commitment. The very simple principle of the Golden Rule, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," was and is their guiding philosophy, and they extended this essential guide to life to the animals with whom we share the planet and especially to those with whom we share our homes.
>
> (Best Friends: Save Them All 2018)

Bainbridge's use of the term "paganization" is idiosyncratic, and his argument regarding Best Friends is dubious, if the intention is to indicate that The Process somehow continues as an inner, gnostic reality concealed by the outer-directed guise of a "secular" animal shelter.

The model of demise by transformation and replacement is complicated by the schisms and splinter groups that emerge during changes of leadership and teachings. The internet has compounded this problem in a number of significant ways. First, materials that were distributed in paper copies or were restricted to inner circles of members are available online (The Process Church of the Final Judgement 1968). Ex-members, enthusiasts and archivists upload images and documents, and the once esoteric or secretive (or limited in circulation) becomes available to all. That means that although the physical group has not existed for decades, the ideas are available for anyone to revive (Bainbridge 2017b). In fact, Bainbridge's proprietorial position with regard to The Process is problematic (his favouring of Robert over Mary Ann has been noted above), and specifically, he has fomented confusion around the issue of whether the religion is defunct. His "paganization" thesis is in fact conspiracist, as it obliquely suggests that The Process lives on and that Best Friends Animal Society is merely a front for this notorious, controversial religion.

I contend that no such survival or revival exists in the case of The Process but am aware that Bainbridge accords far greater significance to a range of pop cultural phenomena (including bands, websites, books and artists) that reference the aesthetics and ideas of The Process (Bainbridge 2017b). In addition to Wyllie's reminiscences, there are three self-published books by ex-members. Sabrina Verney's *Xtul: An Experience of the Process* (2011) has been mentioned above and is of value for its account of the group's sojourn in Xtul. A second memoir, *Coast to Coast*, is by Jonathan DePeyer, son of Gabriel and stepson of Mary Ann, who lived in The Process as a child but was later reunited with his mother (DePeyer 2007). The novel, *Beyond the Cabin* by Jared Nathan Garrett, describes in fictional form the experience of growing up in Garrett the Foundation Faith (Garrett 2014). Bainbridge himself has written a novel and one short story which he describes as "science fiction science fic-

tion that plays with the group's beliefs and practices, thus exploring possible future religious innovations" (Bainbridge 2017b, 74). Memoirs and fictions, however, even those authored by religious studies scholars, do not amount to the revival of The Process.

Bainbridge also thinks it is significant that a variety of alternative bands have written songs inspired by The Process and otherwise make use of Processean materials: the band Psychic TV and associated esoteric "order" Thee Temple ov Psychick Youth, founded by Genesis P-Orridge, included "many references to The Process… Usually covertly… To try to set up a new climate that would enable a re-evaluation and rehabilitation of the IDEAS which I found constantly relevant and powerful" (P-Orridge in Bainbridge 2015); Sabbath Assembly has performed Process hymns and has a presence on YouTube (Giudice 2017, 132, 134); and in the early 1970s George Clinton's band Funkadelic had Processean lyrical content due to Clinton's involvement in the religion. Also, a member of Skinny Puppy, William Morrison, "was inspired by The Process to start Process Media Labs, a multi-media company" (Wyllie 2009, 13), and "members of New Processean Order and Lay it On The Line are … self-professed Processeans, despite being too young to have belonged to the original group" (Bainbridge 2015). Also, there are sites that archive Process literature, and the Process Church YouTube Channel, which claims to be run by Processeans in England, hosts videos of readings of Robert de Grimston's work and also music videos (Bainbridge 2015). Yet this interest in Processean ideas similarly does not amount to a revival of a defunct religion.

These "virtual" groups raise questions about the types of relationships and encounters that are possible in the "meat world" and what can be achieved in online environments. Wyllie has detailed the group sexual activity that the de Grimstons mandated, activity that involved restrictions on members and increased control by the Omega. First, when sex was banned and members lived in dormitories, the Omega identified members as either sons, daughters, fathers and mothers, and allowed sons and daughters to choose partners from the fathers and mothers. The couple was then given a week together in a private bedroom (referred to as "Absorption"), which Wyllie states was often unsuccessful. He argued with his partner and beat her, which he attributed to being beaten at school (Wyllie 2009, 60–61). Mary Ann developed sex magic rituals for the couples described above. The "spiritually married" couples "after a short prayer…brought themselves to orgasm. The male of the pair emptied himself into a carefully placed silver bowl, the content of which, with the addition of a splash of paraffin, was then…burnt along with

another short prayer" (Wyllie 2009, 61). The third type of sexual activity that took place among the inner circle was group sex, which the Omega abstained from. Wyllie thought the sexual rituals were "to control us through sexual guilt and humiliation," and that these practices ultimately contributed to the demise of the group (Wyllie 2009, 64). It is clearly the case that the central place accorded to bodily practices (rituals, attire, coffee shops, street evangelism, and so on), would render a virtual revival of the Process Church impossible. The absence of Mary Ann, the embodied goddess and leader of the religion, makes that doubly true. The two things cannot be the same; the original religion had ended by transformation and replacement, and any "revival" (digital or otherwise) would be an entirely different phenomenon.

Conclusion

I have argued that The Process Church of the Final Judgment was a controversial new religion founded by Mary Ann MacLean and Robert de Grimston in 1966. It was led by Mary Ann (and to a lesser extent by Robert) until their marital break-up in 1974 (Giudice 2017). Subsequent groups that stemmed from the original religion, including the more mainstream Foundation Church/Foundation Faith churches led by Mary Ann from 1974 into the early 1980s, all evidenced the process of transformation and replacement (Wright, Stausberg and Cusack 2020). This involved abandoning the radical theology of the four gods, Jehovah, Satan, Lucifer and Christ, and making public statements, engaging in charitable work, and changing the costumes of members, to bring The Foundation closer to the socially acceptable, broadly "Christian norm" of a religion (Bainbridge 2015). The last incarnation of The Process, Best Friends Animal Society, a no-kill animal shelter in Kanab, Utah, despite the involvement of original Processeans, is clearly not The Process Church; its demise by transmutation and replacement is final.

Acknowledgments

This study was written for "The Demise of Religion" project at the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters, Oslo (2018–2019) led by Michael Stausberg (University of Bergen) and James R. Lewis (Wuhan University). I thank my colleagues for feedback on earlier drafts of this article.

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