

# ‘I, Jehovah’: Mary Ann de Grimston and The Process Church of the Final Judgment

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## INTRODUCTION

CHRIST said: Love your enemies.

CHRIST’s Enemy was SATAN  
and SATAN’s Enemy was CHRIST.

Through Love enmity is destroyed.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter will try to shed light on this unique figure in the history of new religious movement: alleged former fiancé to world-renowned boxer Sugar Ray Robinson (1923–1989), and head of a ring of prostitution involved with the Profumo scandal in London in 1963, founder of a new religious movement, which even to this day titillates the minds of musicians, artist and members of the counterculture: Mary Ann MacLean’s character and leadership methods within The Process Church will be assessed thanks to interviews with surviving member of the Church and

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previously unreleased documentation linked to the social dynamics of the movement.

The scope of this chapter is twofold: its main aim will be, of course, that of highlighting Mary Ann de Grimston (born Mary Ann MacLean 1931–2005) position of leadership within The Process Church of the Final Judgement (est. 1966): through the use of material hitherto unpublished in an academic endeavour and interviews with ex-members of the NRM, I am confident that this theory will prove to satisfy even the most sceptical of readers. The second aim of this chapter is strictly linked to the first, and it is that of reassessing the conclusions drawn by previous academic work on The Process Church: the only work devoted entirely to The Process is William Sims Bainbridge's *Satan's Power: a Deviant Psychotherapy Cult*, published in 1978, and never really scrutinized up to now: the very first sentence of the opening chapter of the book reads '[t]his book is an analytic ethnography, a psycho-history of a Satanic Cult [Bainbridge 1978, p.1]'. The claim of The Process being a 'Satanic Cult' is most problematic when analysing the writings of Robert de Grimston (born Robert Moor 1934) putative leader of the movement together with Mary Ann, and in particular his work *The Gods and their People* [de Grimston 1970, p. 2], where the author clearly states the fundamental role played by the four divine beings as mere aspects of one omnipotent God: 'Jehovah is the God of battle[...], Lucifer is the God of love [...], Satan is the God of Ultimate Destruction [...] while Christ is the Unifier: he brings together all the pattern of the Gods, and resolves them into one'. It is clear then that while containing a distinct satanic element, Process teaching counterbalanced it with the presence of Jehovah and Christ. Moreover, Bainbridge's trustworthiness when it comes to providing an unbiased view of The Process Church and its leadership is called up for scrutiny by one of the very first members of the movement, Timothy Wyllie (Father Micah in his days as a Processean): in an interview conducted with Wyllie, he was adamant in telling me that 'Bainbridge joined the Process in 1974, when de Grimston position was already irreparably compromised: I cannot see how he could avoid having a very partial and biased idea of what was happening around him (Wyllie 2017, 10 April)'.

For the sake of providing the reader with sheer facts and clear hypotheses, then, I will trace the history of The Process from its earliest days, including statements and opinions by members or people close to the



NRM [see Wyllie 2009, 2017, Verney 2009, Papa 2013, Taylor 1987 and 2017] and pamphlets and magazines distributed in the late 1960s and 1970s, to which Bainbridge probably did not have full access. It is my firm conviction that, far from being the uncontested leader of The Process, Robert de Grimston was but the mouthpiece of Mary Ann, the (not-so) charismatic facade, behind whom the real leader of The Process could act, detached and isolated from the majority of members: Mary Ann de Grimston.

### THE EARLY YEARS: SCIENTOLOGY AND COMPULSIONS ANALYSIS

Robert Moor and Mary Ann MacLean first met at the London Church of Scientology (est. 1954) headquarters in 1962. The two could not have hailed from more disparate backgrounds: born in Shanghai, Robert had relocated to Britain in his infancy. In a private school, Robert had received a very strong Christian upbringing. Upon ending his period in public school, Robert was drawn to military life, and first joined the *Lifeguards* display cavalry unit, but quickly transferred to the 15th King's Royal Hussars. According to Moor [Bainbridge 1978: 22]), it was there that he developed an 'aristocratic poise and a dignified bearing, great assets for the charismatic leader of a cult'. Mary Ann, on the other hand, had grown up in a very poor area of Glasgow and had learned to fend for herself since a very early age, her father abandoning the household soon after her birth, while her mother repeatedly entrusted her to the care of relatives. According to some sources [Terry 1987: 210], Mary Ann had travelled to the USA and had become engaged to boxing legend Sugar Ray Robinson (1921–1989), before moving back to London, and had become embroiled in the Profumo affair, a prostitution-ring scandal initiated by a sexual liaison between 19-year-old Christine Keeler (b. 1942) and British Secretary of State for War John Profumo (1915–2006). These wild allegations have been put to rest by Wyllie, who when interviewed by myself replied: 'Mary Ann told us everything that she had done: had she been involved in the Profumo scandal we would have been the first to know'.

Mary Ann had joined Scientology a year prior to Robert, quickly becoming an auditor for L. Ron Hubbard's (1911–1986) NRM: auditing essentially represented a series of psychotherapy sessions aided by the

use of the electro-psychometer, or e-meter for short. According to Hugh Urban [2013, 82],

the meter is believed to measure physical responses that identify [problems] in need of clearing from the reactive mind. While [patients] hold two metal cylinders (originally, ordinary tomato cans) attached by wires to the meter, the auditor asks him or her a variety of questions and observes the fluctuations of the meter's needle.

Bonding over their experiences within Scientology and their interest in the works of psychotherapist Alfred Adler (1870–1937), the two quickly grew tired of the strict rules of Hubbard's creation, and [Parfrey 2009: 7] 'grumbled that its teachings were turning people into little L. Ron Hubbards'. Soon after, Moor and MacLean left Scientology, not without first subtracting an e-meter, intended for private use, from the auditing offices.

The first step towards the creation of The Process Church was the foundation of a psychotherapeutic group they called Compulsion Analysis [Papa 2013, 10]: the aim of the group was to explore Adler's theories on the dynamics of self-actualization in order to connect people with their inner selves. Robert's best friend, Timothy Wyllie, who had shared 3 years of Engineering at university with Moor, was asked to join the core group as the first 'guinea pig for e-meter' [Parfrey 2009, 8]: compelled by Mary Ann's magnetic persona, Wyllie complied. Leaving Scientology was not the only big change for Moor and MacLean in the early days of Compulsion Analysis: under Mary's strong influence, Moor was first forced to end his first marriage and then to change his name into de Grimston, under MacLean's conviction that the new, more exotic name would attract more clients for their new endeavour. The audits at Compulsions Analysis proved to be successful and attracted more and more people from Wyllie's and de Grimston circle of friends: soon Robert and Mary Ann were able to rent a space for auditing sessions in the central Wigmore Street, as more and more clients seemed to flock to their fold. As the couple were the only ones who conducted the sessions, 'they were starting to attain a degree of specialness [...]. Given the circumstances it was inevitable that [the group] would put the pair up on pedestals. They seemed so much wiser [...]' [Wyllie 2009, 28]. The two also began to be seen less and less during the informal meetings that



would be organized between psychotherapeutic sessions, thus creating an even more awe-inspiring aura of mystery [Bligh and Riggio 2012, 1–12].

The couple's next move was to organize more structured by-weekly meetings, which they called 'Communication Courses', in order to tie the group of clients closer together. Robert and Mary Ann were striving to dissolve all of the taboos that the average middle-class man or woman could have in early- 1960s England, and the results were quick to follow. Soon the whole group was able to move to more spacious premises at Balfour Place, in the fashionable Mayfair district, and a major, inevitable progression was decided upon by the two leaders: the core group of clients from Compulsions Analysis would permanently move into Balfour Place to live communally, with Robert and Mary Ann living in secluded quarters on the very top floor: what Bainbridge calls a 'social implosion' took place, once the group moved to Balfour Place:

in a *social implosion*, part of an extended social network collapses as ties within it strengthen and, reciprocally, those to persons outside it weaken. It is a step by step process [...]. [T]he introduction of a new element of culture, a therapy technique that increased the intimacy of relations around a point in the network, triggered the implosion [Bainbridge 1978, 52].

This 'implosion' was strengthened even more by the de Grimston creation of new techniques, which only they could teach: by doing so, the couple achieved two distinct goals: on the one hand, they could delegate other members of the group with the menial task of auditing; on the other, by proposing new techniques, they still kept the knowledge capital, cementing their role as leaders. The street distribution of pamphlets and flyers, illustrating the activities at Balfour Place, made the group known to the outside, and soon their extreme psychotherapeutic techniques caught the attention of the yellow press, who labelled the group as 'the Mindbenders of Mayfair'. It was in the heart of the swinging London that the name Process was adopted for the first time by the group, the word referring to the process towards inner freedom undergone through auditing and other forms of group psychotherapy.

The question of minors joining the group and living at Balfour Place was also a cause for concern: the case of Alistair Cooke (1908–2004), at the time a very prominent BBC personality, is emblematic. In his biography, Cooke recalls his young daughters' involvement with the Balfour Place group:

Susie was 16 years old and had just finished her first year at boarding school; she found herself staying with a much-admired elder sister at the heart of “swinging London” and was full of teenage curiosity about the Process. With real reservations, Holly took her to meet the Grimstons, who welcomed her with open arms. The first the Cookes knew about the crisis was a telephone call announcing that Susie would not, after all, be going to France. She intended to remain in London, where - Holly had established - there would be no problem finding her a good school. Cooke was devastated [Clarke 1999, 88].

Whether the attention of tabloid press had finally become too irksome to the leadership, or whether dealing with the law for cases such as Susie Cooke’s had taken its toll, it was decided that The Process should move to a remote location, in order to create an ideal society and continue practicing their breaking down of taboos without hinderance. The idea seemed to be on the mind of many, but Wyllie seems to have understood who, in primis, had decided to leave England: ‘I’m perfectly certain that the main instigation for leaving London came from Mary Ann and I can only admire the way she manipulated the group into thinking the idea sprang from us collectively [Wyllie 2009, 34]’. With the injunction to sell all worldly possessions in order to gather money for the trip to their utopia, most members of The Process happily complied, convinced that they were leaving England behind for the rest of their lives. Later on, turning in all worldly possessions to The Process would become a requirement for anyone interested in joining the group. Not long after, in mid-1966, twenty-six Processeans and six German shepherd dogs left England in order to fly to Nassau, in the Bahamas. What would happen in the following year would change the group and the life of its members forever.

### ROBERT AND MARY ANN DE GRIMSTON: AN (UN)EASY LEADERSHIP

Since the early days in Wigmore Street, Mary Ann had been happy to remain out of the limelight, preferring to support Robert as the visible head of the group: under Mary Ann’s supervision, Robert’s hair had been coiffed to resemble a Christ-like mane and he had started taking care of his appearance much more than before, his suits ‘expensively tailored and buttoned to the neck in the style favoured by the Beatles’



[Wyllie 2009, 29]. Between the period spent in Balfour Place and Nassau, a marked phenomenon started occurring: no matter how hard Mary Ann pushed for Robert to be the recognizable face of the Process, those involved could not help but notice that she, and not Robert, was really the driving force behind The Process. To Wyllie, there was never a doubt that Mary Ann was the true leader of the Process, and in my interview with him clearly expressed that, having known Robert since the days before The Process, he ‘couldn’t look at Richard as a charismatic leader, he was the least charismatic figure I can think of. And I know it because we used to be best friends!’ [Wyllie 2017]. In *Satan’s Power*, Bainbridge quotes Robert saying how ‘the [Process] started off purely as psychotherapy. But the more we worked with our clients, the more we realised we were closer to a religious approach. Nearly everyone kept coming up with their religious goals’ [Bainbridge 1978, 55]. Mary Ann had tried to sponsor Robert as the messianic reference figure in the group that was becoming more and more rooted in spirituality, but it was she who actually came to be seen as a quasi-divine being: a member named Claudia had first come up with the idea that Mary Ann was in all effects the Goddess, Mother of the World. And she was not alone in thinking this: ‘[w]e all knew who She was and I suspect we felt it was too sacred to be bandy about’, recalls Timothy Wyllie, ‘And to be more down to earth, maybe if we had talked about it more openly, the concept would not have had quite the same hold’.

A young English girl, Sabrina Verney, who joined the Process in the Nassau days had had time to observe the group’s dynamics and had noticed a similar pattern even from outside the group. In her memoirs of her short time with The Process, *Xtul: an experience of the Process*, she offers a vivid recollection of Mary Ann’s role in the group:

Taking care not to draw attention, I study the pattern of the group. Circular, like a mandala, with Mary Ann at the center, surrounded by the power elite. Then radiating outwards those who hang around the edges. Literally, the edges. They keep to the wall, and never move too close to the core members. It isn’t difficult to figure out which is Mary Ann’s room. It has a separate sliding door onto the patio, the curtains are kept closed, and there’s always someone on guard outside, at ease but watchful. [Verney 2011, 44].

When describing Robert de Grimston, Verney calls him Bob and writes that she was captivated by his Scandinavian looks and piercing eyes: there is no mention of private rooms or people emanating from him in a mandala-like fashion. The rest of the memoirs, while keeping Robert in very high esteem, seem to display almost a veneration towards Mary Ann that almost verged on the devotional:

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].<sup>2</sup>

One of the most intriguing stories Timothy Wyllie told me during my interview took place in Nassau, at the same time as Sabrina Verney joined the group, and really show how strong Mary Ann's grip had become on the psyche of everyone involved: during a group meditation session, Timothy had visualized being in a river and being dragged by its strong currents: his body had been sucked down to the riverbed and dashed against the rocks, a mere puppet under the power of the elements. The end of the vision sees Timothy's body surrendered to death in the river's tranquil stream. That particular meditation session had had a great influence on the young Processean, who, upon opening his eyes, had noticed that only Mary Ann had remained on the patio. Timothy then asked Mary Ann, 'were you the river?', to which she had replied in the affirmative [Wyllie 2017]. Recalling this very vision, he has written: '[i]f I'd known then what I know now, that the whole drowning scenario was typical of a shamanic initiation, would I have given my power away to Mary Ann in such a cavalier fashion? [Wyllie 2009, 37]'.

Bainbridge's account focuses much more on Robert's figure, as the author himself met de Grimston when he had just been cast away from The Process, so his narration is bound to paint a different picture, which most of the people acquainted with The Process still hold as true: that the 'Christ of Carnaby Street', as the tabloid press had labelled him, was indeed the leading figure of The Process, and that 'his physical presence



and manners radiate dignity. A slim man, over six feet tall, his leonine features and sandy mane project strength. His regal bearing was the outcome of his elite cavalry training, and his intelligence was refined in his private school education' [Bainbridge 1978, 71].

### NASSAU AND XTUL: FROM PSYCHOANALYSIS TO RELIGION

In Nassau, the group was taught astral travelling and different forms of meditation by Mary Ann: while lower members of the group took up day jobs to help finance the villa with swimming pool they had rented, Mary Ann would remain in her air-conditioned room all day, emerging only late at night, when the temperature had become bearable. She would then supervise group sessions of travelling and meditation, much like the river experience Wyllie had. During one of these group meditations, the focus had been on receiving a communication on where to go next, since Nassau did not seem to satisfy the needs of the group. New Mexico was the chosen place, because, to most, 'it seemed to have the more positive projections' [Bainbridge 1978, 60]. From Mexico, guided by the group meditations, they had had a vision of a small abandoned town, which turned out to be Xtul, an agglomerate of houses on the southern coast of the Yucatan peninsula: the trip to Xtul, laden with difficulties, shortage of water and food, assumed mystical overtones when, in the neighbouring town of Chuburna Petro, the group were told by Mayan Indians that their presence there had not been a surprise to them:

We had found Xtul by taking a jump of faith. We had found Xtul by a miracle. And the place was miraculous: we knew we had been guided to it. Some of the Mayan Indians at the nearby village, Chuburna Petro, told us that they had been waiting for us [Bainbridge 1978, 62].

The days at Xtul were spent in rebuilding the decrepit houses that constituted the tiny village, fishing and collecting coconuts. While work occupied most of the day and afternoon, the evenings were almost exclusively dedicated to workings with Mary Ann and Robert, and it was during this time that Process theology began developing, and that the beings, the nondescript entities which had guided the Processeans to Xtul, became the four gods of the universe in the nascent Process theology. Robert had begun writing the first of what would become better known as his prophetic writings. Others began composing hymns

to the newly recognized gods of the Processean pantheon. The auditing sessions had quickly given way to a more religious approach to life and to its interpretations: vigils, meditations, religious discussions, fasting and dreaming had become the norm, and along with a change in the activities a change of the name of the members soon followed: the group, during the Xtul period and beyond, had focused on the prophets of the Old Testament, so the ordinary identities of the members were dropped in favour of more apocalyptic namesakes, such as Micah, Malachi, Jethra and Aaron. Still, even though Robert de Grimston had produced his mystical writings, the *Xtul Dialogues* [de Grimston 1966], an early reflection on The Process' new apocalyptic theology, the mastermind behind it all was still Mary Ann: 'the inspiration almost entirely came from Mary Ann. Robert, although he was writing away in the background, was going through a period of being out of his wife's favour [Wyllie 2009, 41]'. The group began acting out psychodramas, with the setting changing from day to day, and each member enacting a different character from Old Testament stories: 'the aim of these reenactments is to bring back the psyche of the group members to a more pristine state. For some, the technique seemed to have worked just fine'. Sabrina Verney describes her life as 'being filled with joyfulness. Truly this is Paradise right here on earth. And we've found it. We're living it. I'm strong. Whole. Complete'. This earthly paradise was not to last though. As if the atmosphere of isolation and deep mystical practices were not enough, two events were to bring the Process members even closer together in the conviction that it was the group against an apocalyptic world: firstly, and most devastating in its entity, Major Hurricane Ines was directed towards the Yucatan peninsula and happened to hit the tiny conglomerate of buildings in Xtul at its full force [Hurricane Archive, 1851–2017]:<sup>3</sup> none of the members were killed, but the buildings, after all the toil and effort put into their restoration, were not safe to be inhabited anymore; secondly, Verney's father had grouped with some other parents whose sons and daughters were under the age of twenty-one and had sent a lawyer to the British Ambassador in Mexico to bring back the youngest members. The return to England was a shock for the three youths: Verney's own words,

And there they are. Our parents. A group of cardboard cutouts come to life. With phony smiles and fake- odiously, odiously fake- heartiness [...].



We find a table in the airport café, each one of us placed next to their parents. We have been claimed, like baggage [Verney 2011, 140].

The Processeans who were not forcibly expatriated to England soon decided that rebuilding all the edifices, which had crumbled down, would have been too great an effort: the time had come to go back to civilization and communicate what they had seen in their visions. What had left England as a group of individuals interested in psychotherapy and looking for a paradise on earth had come back home as a cohesive religious group, ready to spread its message through the streets of London. The return to England, though, coincided with Mary Ann's and Robert's even more decreased visibility: they now called themselves The Omega, with Robert being labelled 'the Teacher' and Mary Ann 'the Oracle'.

### THE PROCESS CHURCH IS BORN: CHARISMATIC LEADERSHIP AND INSTITUTIONALIZATION

The group settled back into its old haunt in Balfour Place, where the Processeans began the transition from psychotherapeutic group to fully fledged religious organization. In his later writing *The Gods and their People* (1970), de Grimston would explain the budding cosmology of the new religion by creating a pantheon of four gods: Jehovah, Lucifer, Satan and Christ. Each member of the Process would identify himself as representing a living expression of one of these four gods, reminding the reader of Carl G. Jung's (1875–1961) theories on archetypes and on quaternity as the expression of wholeness and of the perfect nature of God, or the gods: 'as the symbol of completeness and perfect being, it is a widespread expression for heaven, sun, and God; it also expresses the primordial image of man and the soul' [Jung 1954: 44]. The gods, as envisioned by de Grimston, would be in opposition, and Jehovah, Lucifer and Satan would only find their true nature when harmonized with the figure of Christ the Unifier:

Jehovah is the God of battle; the God of vengeance [...]; Lucifer is the God of Love; the God of harmony [...]; Satan is the Great God of Ultimate Destruction; the ruler of extremes [...]. Christ is the Unifier. He brings together all the patterns of the Gods and resolves them into One. He is the emissary of the Gods upon earth; their link with men,

by which men have the opportunity to know them and understand them [de Grimston 1970: 21].

Quite expectedly, Mary Ann was to identify with Jehovah, the God of the Old Testament, wrathful and vengeful. Liturgies were also prepared in order to celebrate the gods in a proper religious manner, music playing a large part in the Processean canon. Very few copies of the hymnal survive nowadays, but the interest that The Process exerts on people in the twentieth century has prompted the band Sabbath Assembly, named after the main ceremony in Process theology, to interpret them anew, record them and make them available to the public: through The Process' music the listener may glean much of what the general mood of the impending Armageddon was, and how the gods, or archetypes, were revered and cherished. With the first three albums titled 'Restored to One' (2012), 'Ye Are Gods' (2012) and 'Quaternity' (2014), offering songs with titles like 'The Time Of Abaddon', 'Glory To The Gods In The Highest', 'Christ, You Bring The End' and 'Jehovah On Death', the reader may formulate an idea of what subjects the central themes of the religious ceremonies circled around. Balfour Place seemed to have become too small for the ever-increasing numbers of people joining the religious movement, as may be gleaned by a *Daily Mail* article titled "“God” must take his Gong Bangers out of Mayfair' [Daily Mail 1966: np.]. The article, deeply satirical in nature, began by reading 'God has been given 3 months to leave Mayfair, and he has to take his Gong Bangers with him'. Balfour Place now also had a coffee house in the basement, its name, 'Satan's Cavern', attracting the hippest representatives of Swinging London: as Wyllie recalls, 'I remember sitting one afternoon with a very morose and tearful Brian Epstein, who felt safe enough to blurt out his troubles: the management mistakes he'd made with the Beatles [...]; the constant struggle of having to hide his homosexuality. If Brian Epstein was moved to open to a complete stranger then I like to think we were of some value to others' [Wyllie 2009: 49]. Indeed, frequenters of Satan's Cavern featured many of the days greatest celebrities, ranging from spiritual thinkers such as Chögyam Trungpa Rimpoche (1939-1987) to stars of the music system such as Paul McCartney (b. 1942) and Marianne Faithfull (b. 1946).

In 1967, the bulk of Processeans moved to the USA, with the idea of opening new chapters and initiating more people into the religious movement. The first chapter to be established was based in New



Orleans. The year 1967 saw another fundamental step in the institutionalization of The Process: in order to legitimize the street begging that members would usually resort to while selling Process magazines in the streets, and to justify the public activities in the chapters themselves, The Process became incorporated under the Louisiana law with the official name of The Process: Church of the Final Judgment. The attainment of conventional and legal church status was fundamental, in that it gave the Process a new aura of credibility and respectability. Still, as Mother Morgana, who had joined The Process in those years, stated: 'The Process was much more concerned with the basics: with the End of the World, detaching from the establishment, being a group unto ourselves' [Bainbridge 1978: 75]. The emphasis was never on the number of people to recruit, but on finding fellow Processeans who still did not know of the New Dispensation given by Robert de Grimston, and the Processeans were incredibly active, selling their magazines and offering classes in their chapters, in wanting to save the few who would hear their message.

A special mention must be made about *The Process Magazine*, wildly coloured, where dark prophecies and light-hearted humour went hand in hand. If there is something that separates The Process from the other movements of the day, it was the quality of its publications and the high profile of those who chose to write or be interviewed in them. Each issue, in the beginning, had a theme devoted to it, be it sex, death or love. The tone of the articles was often tongue-in-cheek, and within the very first pages of each issue, the reader could find references to The Process next to slogans such as 'invest in the end of the world' or 'how to dissipate your fortune' [The Process Sex Issue 1967: 3]. The Sex Issue had very sober articles written by advocates of Jehovah, Satan and Lucifer, but immediately counterbalanced it with a board game supposed to reveal what God-archetype the reader represented. The Fear Issue included a comic based on a Hulk-like character, but then proceeded to offer very serious letters by readers on the subject of fear and spiritual matters. The most famous issue of *The Process Magazine* was without a doubt the Death Issue, mainly for the infamous interview with Charles Manson on page 36 of the magazine. This interview would, in the future, create problems for The Process, with wild connections to Manson's Family and Satanic practices being thrown at them by authors such as Ed Sanders in his *The Family: The Story of Charles Manson's Dune Buggy Attack Battalion* dated 1971. The Death Issue also proves how

strong the link between celebrities and The Process had become: in asking the question ‘how do you feel about death?’, the range of celebrities who took the time to answer to a comparatively small magazine was staggering: among the most striking we find Salvador Dali, Charlie Watts of the Rolling Stones, boxer Muhammed Ali, folk singer Donovan, actor Robert Mitchum, TV personality Ed Sullivan, actress Ingrid Bergman and comedy duo Morecombe and Wise. Quizzes, interviews and advertisements for Robert de Grimston publications rounded up the topics covered by the magazines, which, even by today’s standards, appear to be light-years ahead of their time.

The Process seemed to adapt well on American soil: chapters seemed to spring up in every major city, and their cafés seemed to attract the ‘right’ kind of people for the Processeans. In the memoirs of his encounter with The Process Church of Final Judgment, folk singer Robert N. Taylor of the band *Changes* offers a vivid and engaging account to the reader:

Much of my attraction to The Process lay in my Grail quest out of the morose atmosphere that soulless technology and bureaucracy had imposed upon our lives [...]. Unlike the alien and decadent garb of the Guru cults from the East, The Process had a distinct Western, neo-Gothic exterior: Neatly trimmed shoulder-length hair and equally neat beards, all set off by tailored magician’s capes with matching black uniforms [Taylor 1987: 160].

The sight of Processeans selling their magazines or distributing pamphlets in their black garb, at the height of the hippy era, must have been quite a spectacle to behold: Taylor also performed in the Chicago chapter’s café with his band *Changes*: with song titles such as ‘The Twilight of the West’, ‘Satanic Hymn’ and ‘Fire of Life’, the band must have found The Process café to be quite an agreeable location. Taylor also participated in one of the chapter’s main religious functions, the Sabbath Assembly, which was held at the top floor of the chapter: the ceremony set forth the main tenets of The Process, such as the *coniunctio oppositorum* between Christ and Satan, the coming of an end, which would give way to a new beginning and the birth of an Age of Love. In his account of his time spent with The Process, Taylor recollects: ‘[a] large portrait of Robert de Grimston hung prominently in the main room. With long blond tresses and neatly outlined beard he looked down from the wall



with piercing eyes' [Taylor 1987: 164]. Portraits of Mary Ann had initially hung on the walls of the chapters, until, in line with her reclusive inclinations, she had decided to remove all pictures of herself from every Process house. Another important clue is given to us about Process activities from Taylor's account: Father Matthew of the Chicago chapter had invited Taylor and his partner to participate to what he referred to as an Aesop: 'we have a little private party after closing we call an "Aesop", we sort of get loose and have a good time'. Although Taylor did not participate, the sexual nature of the gathering was evident, and even this seems to have stemmed from Mary Ann's mind.

In his account of his years spent with The Process, Wyllie refers to sexual orgies held among the inner circle and a small group of carefully selected inner members of the organization. Both Wyllie and other participants did not seem to enjoy what, in plain words, were sexual encounters organized by Mary Ann for her personal amusement:

Mary Ann maintained complete control while she and Robert sat back from the melee, with her instructing who should be with whom, without any explanation [...]. Although Mary Ann stated the aim was to get us through any residual sexual repression and inhibitions, there was clearly another edge to these orgies. While none of us would have been able to acknowledge it at the time, it seems obvious now that her other agenda was to control us to sexual guilt and humiliation [Wyllie 2009: 64].

While keeping Robert as the official face of the Church, Mary Ann had slowly introduced subtle changes that turned the higher echelons of The Process into what can only be defined as a matriarchy: when the Omega was not present to personally care for the Church's business, Mary Ann would keep informed on the goings-on through a group of four or five women. 'This point', Wyllie ads wryly, 'can also be seen as the start of the matriarchy- these were the women who now wielded the power directly devolved from Mary Ann [Wyllie 2009: 48]'. Up until the early 1970s, Mary Ann's iron grip on The Process seemed to be accepted by all and, as far as the Church's expansion was concerned, that too seemed to benefit from her Jehovian strict overseeing. Trouble, though, seemed to be brewing within the higher ranks of The Process. Robert seemed to be spending more and more time with Mother Morgana, a more recent convert to the Church, who often travelled with the Omega, as Alessandro Papa has noticed, while the two were at first encouraged by

Mary Ann to explore their feelings and mutual attraction, it was clear that such an occurrence constituted a stain on her otherwise pristine position of leadership within The Process, and that, as the news of Robert's affair trickled down to the lower rungs of the organizational ladder, some solution should be found. The frequent confrontations of Robert and Mary Ann on the topic culminated in the first momentous event in The Process' history: what Processeans and researchers on the Church's history have defined as 'the Great Schism' or 'the Beginning of the End'. In a full-force display of power in 1974, in the words of Alessandro Papa, one of the most competent historians on The Process Church and its various incarnations, 'she [Mary Ann] was accustomed to feel like a Goddess, the only Goddess in The Process. A Jehovian [...] Goddess that could not endure any rival' [Papa 2013: 177].

### THE END OF THE PROCESS CHURCH AND ITS NEW INCARNATIONS

In a letter with Process heading dated 6 April 1974, Robert de Grimston was informed of his expulsion from the Church, with retroactive effect dating 23 March 1974. When the decision was reached by Mary Ann and the higher echelons of The Process, the overwhelming majority of the members, including Robert's own brother Andrew Moor, abandoned the 'Christ of Carnaby Street' to his fate, standing up for Mary Ann's vision and reasons. Wyllie recalls,

With hindsight, it is crystal-clear that Mary had made everything in her power to assume sole leadership of The Process, but it is not something you can see with clarity when the two people most important to you are trying to destroy one another [Wyllie 2017].

The Process Church of the Final Judgment was no more, and Mary was quick to move on and organize a new religion with a new board of directors called 'The Four', comprising the most trustworthy and oldest members of The Process. The Process' name was first changed to Foundation Church of the Millennium, and very soon after to Foundation Faith of the Millennium, and tried to avoid any allusion to Robert de Grimston influence on their earlier religious endeavour: 'Mary Ann's Church obliterated de Grimston past contributions, works and theology' [Papa 2013: 178]. 'As extreme as Mary Ann was when she partnered with Robert, alone she soon became a monster' [Wyllie



2009: 65]: gone were the black robes and long haircuts, substituted by more 'acceptable' grey suits. The complex theology crafted by Robert was expurgated, so that in the end only Jehovah, Mary Ann's archetype of God, remained relevant to the movement. The Process communities, in the meanwhile, seem to crumble in every city. The story of the New York chapter is interesting in this regard: having left the city for Arizona, and then for Utah, they became the animal sanctuary 'Best Friends', one of the USA's biggest animal charities to this day. The Process had always been close to animal rights and had promoted anti-vivisectionist propaganda from the start, and, besides, raising money for animals had always proven to be a remunerative endeavour even back in the 1960s. After her short and disappointing experience with The Foundation, Mary Ann had joined the other founders of Best Friend's Animal Sanctuary. Frater Aaron is quoted having said:

The animals were beginning to take over! For many of us, they'd always really been our passion. And when a few of us got together one evening at the ranch to talk about what next and where next, we were all feeling that it was time to devote ourselves to that true passion<sup>4</sup>

In 2005, Mary Ann passed away at the animal sanctuary: the rumour for the cause of her death is that, while taking a walk near her home, she was attacked by a pack of dogs from the shelter, her body ripped to shreds [Wyllie 2009: 124]. The veracity of such a story is entirely debatable. Robert de Grimston, who took back his last name Moor, dropped out of the limelight, and according to Papa, 'some countercultural researchers found out that Robert de Grimston was back in the East Coast of the USA. Robert was living a normal life with an office job in a telephone company'. The menacing Omega, who had dazzled 1960s Swinging London and the hippy-fuelled culture of America's late 1960s and early 1970s, had spent the last years of their lives in anonymity and away from any religious institution.

### CONCLUSION: THE LEADER OF THE PACK

This chapter has charted the rise into leadership positions of Mary Ann de Grimston, arguing that she was clearly the person in charge throughout all the phases that The Process went through, from Compulsions Analysis to the Best Friends days. Statements provided by various members of the NRM attest to the validity of my claim. Wyllie, quoted

throughout this chapter, has always been adamant in this sense and has denounced members of The Process, who did not grasp this fundamental truth, writing that ‘[t]hey were all convinced that Robert was the group’s leader’ [Wyllie 2009: 26]: while, to the lower ranks, it could appear to be this way because of Robert’s picture adorning the rooms of every chapter and because of all The Process literature being published with his name as the author. ‘I was never able to take Robert seriously. We had been friends before he became the head of The Process you see’, Wyllie told me, ‘and I never really could take him or his writing seriously. Mary Ann was a different matter altogether: she would push him in the forefront and preferred to remain outside of the limelight [Wyllie 2017]’. Another Processean, Father Malachi, added his point of view to his theory, writing that

Mary Ann was definitely the powerhouse. If she needed an intellectual rationalization for something, Robert would step forward and back her up. [...] Mary Ann had much more of an effect on our lives than Robert [...]. I think she always had had contempt for anybody she could control, which was pretty much everybody [McCormick 2009: 150].

Even Sims Bainbridge, who had joined the ranks of The Process and become himself an auditor in the tumultuous days of Robert’s expulsion from the Church, who had quickly risen up the ranks with Robert’s help, and who had offered his house to Robert and Morgana, when the two had left The Process, has admitted to Mary Ann’s charisma: ‘[a]lthough [Mary Ann] has been described as the strongest personality in the group, she did not become its charismatic figure. Rather, she gave that role to [Robert] and withdrew from public sight to exert her influence through more hidden means’ [Bainbridge 1978: 44].

We must conclude with a quote by Adam Parfrey, who was the first to elicit this hidden leadership dimension from Father Micah, in a 2009 interview: ‘for the first time I discovered that The Process Church was in fact a matriarchal cult ruled by co-founder Mary Ann, who was treated like a Goddess by all of its members’ [Parfrey 2009: 8]. Like the divine persona that she was said to embody, the Jehovah of the Old Testament, Mary Ann ruled her flock from afar, liaising with her people through the intermission of a prophet, and only appeared in all her fierce magnificence when exuding her most powerful manifestations of love, wrath and vengeance.



## NOTES

1. Robert de Grimston (25 December 1970), *Why The Unity Between Christ and Satan?*, n.p.
2. Italics mine.
3. <https://www.wunderground.com/hurricane/atlantic/1966/Major-Hurricane-Inez> [Last Access 29 April 2017].
4. Skeptigalthurgist.blogspot.com. Post of 22 May 2005 [Last access 29 April 2017].

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