

Post-MCGI Society Research Team

Working Paper

Charismatic Insulation and The Great Collapse in a High- Control Religious Organization

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Abstract

This paper examines collapse dynamics in a high-control religious organization through a socio-economic lens, using Members Church of God International (MCGI) as a case study. It argues that founder charisma previously functioned as charismatic insulation—a legitimacy buffer that suspended ordinary cost–benefit evaluation among members and enabled intense extraction of time, labor, and money while keeping resistance manageable.[1] After the founder’s death and leadership succession, this insulation weakened and the organization became exposed to ordinary constraints. Our research results show (a) a sharp decline in monthly average baptismal intake after 2021; (b) a collapse of attention conversion on official media channels despite retained subscriber infrastructure; (c) founder-archive discontinuities (including AngDatingDaan.org deletion of founder exposition materials); (d) persistent founder-identity dominance in public search interest versus successor-era charity branding; and (e) contraction signals and steep revenue drops in overseas filings. In response, the organization increasingly substituted doctrinal persuasion with performative charity—lugaw drives and medical missions—programs that are labor-intensive and, based on our documentation, increasingly optimized toward prospects with “conversion capacity.” This paper reframes decline not as theological failure but as a structural process: when symbolic authority weakens in an extraction-based system, operational pressures intensify, legitimacy is pushed into visible output, and exit cascades accelerate.[2][3]

1. Introduction

Religious organizations often survive doctrinal contestation, internal dissent, and external criticism. Yet some experience rapid, difficult-to-reverse decline characterized by recruitment contraction, financial strain, legitimacy erosion, and exit cascades. In MCGI's case, these indicators have become increasingly visible in the post-founder period.

So the central question is not simply “why do people stop believing?” It is: why does organizational collapse occur even when belief remains intact for many adherents?

This paper argues that MCGI's decline is best understood as a socio-economic collapse following the weakening of charismatic authority that once insulated the organization from ordinary constraints. Once insulation weakens, members return to calculation: time lost, wages forgone, family strain, exhaustion, and the growing sense that burdens rise while leadership remains insulated from sacrifice. This cost recognition spreads through networks, lowering the threshold for exit and accelerating The Great Collapse.[3]

2. Research basis and intellectual guardrails

This working paper reflects Post-MCGI Society's research results compiled across recruitment intake, media attention, platform continuity, public search interest, overseas footprint, overseas revenue, and documentation of performative charity targeting. We publish for open review: strong enough to be checked, corrected, and criticized without pretending peer-reviewed finality.[4]

2.1 Triangulation

We do not rely on one evidence channel. For each major claim, we seek convergence across multiple streams: intake series, view-velocity logs, platform/archive discontinuities, Google Trends comparisons, jurisdictional filings, and structured interviews plus captured internal

instructions. Where sources converge, we treat the pattern as structural rather than anecdotal. Where they diverge, we mark uncertainty instead of forcing a clean narrative.[4]

2.2 Reflexivity

We are exiters and former members. That standpoint creates insight and risk. We manage the risk by separating observation from inference, preserving originals privately, publishing redacted exhibits when needed, and allowing documented counter-evidence to revise our claims.[4]

2.3 The “so what?” factor

This paper is not only about MCGI. It proposes a general model for founder-led high-control groups: when a system depends on unpaid labor and constant giving, maintains high fixed commitments, and fails at charisma transfer, it becomes structurally prone to rapid decline. The organization typically responds by intensifying extraction and substituting charisma with output—high-visibility programs that require even more labor—thereby accelerating exit cascades.[1][2][3]

3. Conceptual framework

3.1 Charismatic authority and succession

Weber’s concept of charismatic authority describes legitimacy grounded in the perceived extraordinary qualities of a leader rather than tradition or rational-legal procedures.[1] Charisma mobilizes compliance at scale and makes sacrifice feel meaningful. But charisma is personal, unstable, and difficult to routinize. Succession often preserves titles and structure while failing to reproduce the same legitimacy effect.[1]

3.2 Charismatic insulation

This paper uses “charismatic insulation” to name a specific economic effect: charisma suspends cost recognition. Under insulation, labor becomes devotion, money becomes faith, exhaustion becomes virtue. This allows institutional commitments to expand beyond sustainable limits because members internalize costs rather than challenge them. When insulation weakens, ordinary constraints reassert themselves—especially in time, labor, and money.[1][2]

3.3 Hegemony, compliance, and exit cascades

Gramsci’s cultural hegemony helps explain how control persists through internalized norms rather than constant force.[2] In such settings, refusal carries penalties that can be social, moral, or reputational. When legitimacy weakens and costs rise, fear and stigma begin to collapse. Exit then spreads as a threshold cascade: once enough people speak, leaving becomes thinkable and rational for others.[3]

4. Results: The Great Collapse made visible

4.1 Decline in recruitment intake after 2021

Our compiled monthly average baptismal intake series based on data published by MCGI shows a post-2021 contraction:

Year	Average Monthly Baptismal Intake	Notes
2018	2,500	
2019	3,000	
2020	2,000	
2021	4,500	Temporary surge after Soriano's Death
2022	2,500	
2023	1,800	

2024	1,200	
2025	1,100	Contested flatline; field reports allege reporting manipulation at KNP layers

From the 2021 peak to 2025, intake drops by roughly 76%.[4] This matters because recruitment is not a cosmetic metric in an extraction-based organization—it is the inflow that sustains labor and funding operations.

4.2 Attention collapse despite retained subscriber infrastructure

We documented a sharp mismatch between official subscriber scale and active attention. UNTV’s YouTube channel, despite ~5 million subscribers, shows an average of roughly 2,300 views within 24 hours in our logged samples.[4] That early view velocity is comparable to the Post-MCGI Society’s own livestream attention (including streams featuring Jr Badong and other exiter voices) within equivalent windows.[4]

We also documented that the MCGI Cares channel—despite its institutional backing—now often registers under 2,000 views in the same early period, while it reportedly peaked around 100,000 views during the founder era.[4] In collapse terms, this is a legitimacy signal: the institution retains infrastructure, but it fails to convert it into attention and engagement.

4.3 Founder-archive discontinuity: deactivation and deletion

Founder authority often continues after death through archive circulation: sermons, expositions, and legacy content functioning as a substitute charisma machine. Our research documents the opposite trend: AngDatingDaan.org has been deactivated, and founder exposition videos were deleted from official access points.[4]

Whatever the internal rationale, the structural consequence is the same: the organization weakens its ability to “borrow” founder charisma post-succession. If the successor cannot reproduce charismatic insulation, disrupting the archive accelerates exposure.

4.4 Founder identity remains stronger than successor charity branding

We documented that Google Trends continues to show “Ang Dating Daan” ranking higher than “MCGI Cares.”[4] This is not a branding trivia point. It suggests the public hook remains founder-centered even as successor-era legitimacy leans toward charity signaling. That mismatch is a symptom of failed charisma transfer and incomplete identity transition.

4.5 The Great Collapse occurs in layers and bursts

Our model treats collapse as layered, not smooth.

First layer: the Brazil period (Soriano’s self-exile to Brazil) constrained mainstream integration and limited growth trajectory. The system could still intensify extraction internally while founder charisma remained strong, but the ceiling narrowed the recruitment horizon.[4]

Second layer: the founder’s death in 2021 ruptured charismatic insulation. Cost recognition returned. Recruitment capacity weakened. Attention conversion weakened.[4]

Third layer: under Daniel Razon, the shift toward performative charity increased labor intensity while the weakened charisma made extraction harder to sustain. This contradiction produces resistance and accelerates exits.[4]

4.6 Contraction markers abroad and sharp revenue drops

We documented closures of missions/chapters such as Papua New Guinea and signs of consolidation in North America, including the recall of a minister and a shift to less regular reporting outside special gatherings.[4] We also documented steep revenue drops from overseas filings: approximately 60% down in MCGI Australia (2023 vs 2024), around 40% down in MCGI UK, and about 55% down in MCGI Canada.[4]

These results matter because they indicate material contraction across jurisdictions. When overseas inflow drops, extraction pressure rises on remaining bases elsewhere.

5. The performative charity turn: legitimacy replaced by output

The key update in this edition is treating performative charity as a central mechanism of post-founder survival, not a side theme.

After succession, MCGI increasingly substituted doctrinal persuasion with output-centered legitimacy: lugaw drives, medical missions, and continuous “good works” routines. This is rational organizational behavior under charisma loss: when persuasion weakens, the institution manufactures legitimacy through visible performance. But performance requires labor, logistics, staffing, and coordination—costs the institution can reduce by converting member time and expertise into duty.

5.1 Targeting logic: charity optimized for prospects, not need

Our research documents internal instructions to prioritize middle-class prospects during lugaw feeding drives. We also documented videos showing volunteers distributing porridge and bottled water to people arriving by cars and motorcycles while ignoring beggars and those who walk.[4] This aligns with a ministerial pronouncement we have on file (attributed to Josel Mallari in our archive) emphasizing that recipients should be people who can attend indoctrination sessions—implicitly, prospects with “conversion capacity” and future contribution potential.[4]

This pattern supports a direct inference: charity is being optimized as a recruitment funnel. The “target” is not simply hunger; it is absorption into future inflow.

5.2 Profession-based mobilization increases extraction efficiency

We documented a further layer of efficiency: free labor solicitation organized by profession. Doctors and nurses are tapped for medical missions; lawyers for legal tasks; businesspeople for accounting and office work; engineers for technical roles.[4] This extends extraction beyond manual work into credentialed work and reduces real operating costs by internalizing professional services as “tungkulin.”

5.3 Ponzi-like incentive structure as organizational logic

This paper does not claim a strict legal classification. It identifies a Ponzi-like incentive structure: present members supply free labor and resources to generate new members who will later replenish the same machine with labor and giving. Under founder charisma, this logic can be concealed by devotion. Under weakened charisma, it becomes visible—and politically explosive inside the locale—because members now feel the costs as costs.

6. Exit infrastructure, comparative precedents, and contingencies

6.1 Exit infrastructure as a collapse accelerator

The post-founder period is marked not only by declining inflow, but by the emergence of an organized “exit infrastructure” that did not exist at comparable scale in earlier schism waves. In our mapping of the current ecosystem, two major Ex-MCGI subreddits operate alongside a wider ring of decentralized communities—podcasts, Facebook pages, and chat-based groups—dedicated to exiter narratives, mutual aid, and doctrinal critique. We also observe a notable feature: former church workers and other “insider-role” members increasingly function as public-facing nodes in the exiter ecosystem.

This matters because exit is not merely an individual psychological event. It is a threshold event shaped by social visibility and information availability. When credible insiders exit and speak, they lower uncertainty for others, reduce fear costs, and make departure legible as a rational

option rather than a moral catastrophe.[5] In threshold terms, the exiter ecosystem reduces the perceived cost of exit while increasing perceived feasibility, which accelerates cascades once legitimacy weakens.[1]

A concrete indicator of novelty is the appearance of large chat-based clusters. One example in our research notes is a group chat formerly known as “Foreign Ministry,” later renamed “Sant. 1:27,” reportedly peaking around 300 members. Analytically, the exact number matters less than what it signals: the shift from isolated private doubt to a shared social identity with coordination capacity.

6.2 Public reunions and face-visibility as stigma reversal

A second marker of this shift is the rise of exiter reunions and public-facing gatherings, especially in jurisdictions where expression and association are practically protected. These events attack a core disciplinary device: the threat narrative that “lahat ng lumabas ay napapasama.” When former members appear publicly—coherent, socially connected, and stable—the stigma story loses plausibility. The mechanism is direct: public presence reverses the organization’s monopoly over reputational outcomes.

In collapse terms, reunions do more than comfort individuals. They manufacture an alternative site of belonging. Once members see that exit can preserve community rather than destroy it, the emotional “price” of leaving falls sharply, and the threshold for departure drops across a wider band of marginal members.[3]

6.3 Operational definitions and measurement rules

Because “exit infrastructure” can be dismissed as impressionistic, we specify operational rules for how we treat it as evidence.

We classify an “active exiter community” as a distinct channel (subreddit, group chat, page, or podcast community) that meets at least two of the following within a rolling 90-day window: (a) recurring content production (e.g., weekly posts or episodes), (b) sustained engagement (comments, replies, live participation, or cross-sharing), (c) evidence of network linkage (shared moderators/hosts, referral traffic, or coordinated amplification), and (d) growth signals (membership increases, new satellite groups, or rising participation).

We classify “insider-role defection” as cases where individuals with recognized internal roles (e.g., former church workers, officers, or equivalent leadership-adjacent roles) become visible contributors or organizers in exiter networks, because this category has disproportionate informational impact on fence-sitters and late doubters.[5]

These definitions do not require perfect measurement. They require consistency: critics can challenge counts, but they must then challenge the operational rule, not merely the conclusion.

6.4 Comparative precedents: founder-linked crisis and regulatory shock

MCGI’s decline trajectory is not historically unique. Precedents show that founder-linked legitimacy crisis can combine with external shocks—legal, political, reputational—to produce sharp contraction in high-control groups.

Japan’s Unification Church controversy is a contemporary example of how public scandal around donation practices can drive legal response. Following the political shock that brought the issue into national focus, Japan enacted a law aimed at restraining coercive fundraising and improving relief for victims of “unjust solicitation” of donations.[6]

Later developments included a Tokyo District Court order dissolving the organization’s religious-corporation status (with the group appealing).[7]

The comparative point is not theology. It is that extraction-linked legitimacy crises can trigger state action that radically changes an organization's operational environment.

The Worldwide Church of God illustrates how founder death can initiate sweeping institutional transformation and fragmentation.[9]

Other precedents illustrate different collapse pathways. Rajneeshpuram's collapse in Oregon shows how high-visibility infrastructure can unravel rapidly under legal and political crisis.[10]

These comparisons matter because MCGI's structure, is not a low-maintenance system capable of quietly shrinking. Overexpanded organizations with high fixed commitments and public-facing assets tend to face harsher discontinuities when legitimacy breaks, because they cannot "soft land" without surrendering status and infrastructure.

6.5 Contingencies and black-swan risk as structural byproducts

A rigorous collapse analysis must distinguish between endogenous mechanisms (declining inflow, attention decay, labor resistance, exit cascades) and contingent shocks that can accelerate instability. Here a normative statement belongs in the paper: we reject political violence and do not seek it. Still, high-control environments generate family conflict, financial desperation, and psychological strain. Those conditions can increase the probability of unpredictable incidents that carry major reputational and legal consequences, even if no one "plans" them.

A separate class of shock is public-health or mobility disruption. Systems that depend on long in-person gatherings, extended containment, and immediate "cornering" for pledges and targets become structurally vulnerable when gatherings are interrupted. This is less a moral argument than an operational one: extraction capacity falls when physical control over time collapses.

Finally, leadership uncertainty functions as a catalyst. Succession fragility invites elite bargaining and local power consolidation inside centralized systems. Even the perception of

uncertain succession can destabilize, because sub-leaders begin to secure their bases and renegotiate loyalty terms precisely when the organization needs cohesion.

6.6 Stabilization scenarios and constraints

Intellectual honesty requires stating what could weaken or falsify the collapse claim. Two stabilization pathways exist in principle.

First, a credible “charismatic restoration” could temporarily re-insulate the system—either through a leader who generates genuine authority or a media strategy that successfully reproduces founder-like persuasive force. Yet Weber’s caution remains: charisma is difficult to manufacture on demand, and “borrowed charisma” through tapes or archival replay often intensifies succession insecurity rather than resolving it.[1]

Second, the organization could attempt structural survival by downsizing into a low-cost, decentralized format—shedding high-maintenance assets and scaling operations to reduced inflow. But this requires willingness to retreat, liquidate, and accept loss of status. Overleveraged systems often resist that move until it becomes forced, at which point fragmentation becomes more likely than orderly restructuring.

Taken together, the rise of exit infrastructure, the collapse of stigma through public presence, cross-case precedents, and the organization’s structural constraints reinforce a single direction: once charismatic insulation weakens, exit becomes socially supported and materially rational, and The Great Collapse becomes difficult to reverse.

7. Discussion

The MCGI case supports a general model: founder-led high-control systems that depend on extraction can temporarily outrun ordinary constraints under charismatic insulation. After succession, when insulation weakens, cost recognition spreads. The institution responds by

intensifying extraction and shifting legitimacy into visible output—performative charity—while optimizing targeting toward people likely to become future contributors.

This response can keep the machine running temporarily. But it also increases burnout, resentment, and resistance. It lowers the exit threshold. It accelerates cascade dynamics.[3] In that sense, performative charity is not merely an “activity.” It becomes a post-charisma survival strategy—and, paradoxically, one of the accelerants of The Great Collapse.

A further indicator consistent with contraction-era adaptation is the apparent consolidation and “transfer-ready” structuring of member-funded properties under corporate vehicles associated with the leadership circle (see Appendix A).

8. Conclusion

MCGI’s Great Collapse is best understood as a socio-economic process triggered by the weakening of charismatic insulation and accelerated by output substitution.

Recruitment intake declines after 2021.[4] Official media attention conversion collapses despite retained subscriber-scale infrastructure, with early view velocity dropping to levels comparable to dissident/exiter media.[4] Founder continuity fractures through archive/platform discontinuities.[4] Overseas contraction markers appear alongside steep revenue drops in regulated filings.[4] Under these conditions, the institution shifts legitimacy from doctrine-centered persuasion to output-centered performance—lugaw drives, medical missions, and continuous “good works.” But output requires labor. So MCGI increasingly converts members into a distributed workforce and optimizes charity toward prospects who can be converted into future inflow.

So collapse is not simply “people losing faith.” It is an extraction-based system losing the authority that once made costs feel invisible—then compensating by intensifying labor and optimizing recruitment-performance—thereby pushing The Great Collapse forward.

Appendix A: Asset consolidation and property-transfer signals under The Great Collapse

This appendix extends the working paper’s core thesis by examining an additional class of evidence: changes in property governance and titling that appear consistent with an asset-protection posture under contraction. The main paper argues that charismatic insulation previously delayed ordinary cost recognition and enabled overextension. As that insulation weakens under succession and The Great Collapse becomes thinkable, organizations of this type face a predictable problem: how to preserve high-value assets when inflow, compliance, and legitimacy begin to fall. One organizational response—observed in many institutional contexts beyond religion—is to reposition assets into corporate forms that facilitate control, transferability, and insulation from membership-level claims.

A central case in the MCGI ecosystem is KDR Adventure Camp (KDRAC), described by exiters and internal movement narratives as a large-scale member-funded property whose function shifted over time. Accounts commonly describe it as initially tied to founder-era expectations of a large “Araw ng Kapighatian” gathering site, later repurposed into an adventure camp/theme-park style facility under the successor period. In corporate documents reviewed in our archive, KDRAC’s governance and ownership appear aligned with the leadership family’s corporate perimeter. Specifically, Post-MCGI Society’s copy of the relevant SEC General Information Sheet (GIS) indicates Arlene Razon’s board-level presence and reports a controlling share position (reported as 80% of issued shares in the GIS materials we reviewed).[A1] Whatever one’s interpretation of intent, concentrated share control has clear institutional implications: it centralizes decision power over disposition, leasing, monetization, and future transfers.

A related alignment appears in the corporate vehicle associated with the organization’s media and public operations. Publicly available filings for Breakthrough and Milestones Productions International (BMPI) list Daniel S. Razon as President.[A2] The analytic point is not the exact corporate title used in everyday speech, but the structural fact that a core institutional arm is housed in a corporate form capable of holding and moving assets under leadership control.

Beyond KDRAC, our archive includes documentation consistent with broader titling and transfer strategies affecting locale properties. These include reported guidance that lots acquired through member-driven fundraising projects (including those referenced by members as “Philippine Loop”) should be titled or structured in ways that simplify consolidation under centralized corporate naming—for ease of management and transferability.[A3] Our archive also contains reports and templates indicating that members donating lots were encouraged to execute transfers via Deeds of Sale rather than Deeds of Donation, even in contexts where the donor’s intent is presented as religious contribution rather than market transaction.[A3] We do not claim that a particular deed choice is automatically unlawful; legal form can have multiple motivations. The narrower claim is sociological and organizational: sale-form transfers and centralized titling practices increase portability and control of assets, which is precisely what institutions often seek when preparing for instability.

This matters for collapse dynamics because it strikes at the moral economy sustaining extraction. Under charismatic insulation, members tolerate ambiguity and trust the center. Under weakened charisma, the same ambiguity becomes suspicious—especially when it concerns real property funded by member sacrifice. If members come to believe that “church assets” have been positioned for easy retention or transfer within family-adjacent corporate structures, continued labor and giving become harder to legitimize. Even the perception of an elite “exit strategy” can accelerate cost recognition and withdrawal of cooperation, intensifying the very contraction the institution is attempting to hedge against.

Accordingly, this appendix does not rest on speculation about motives. It advances a defensible structural inference: the observed direction of property governance appears increasingly compatible with asset survivability under contraction. In an organization where members are repeatedly exhorted to sacrifice “for the church,” that compatibility is not a technical matter. It is an interpretive shock—and interpretive shocks around property and ownership are historically among the strongest triggers of accelerated exit and legitimacy collapse.

Notes

[1] Max Weber, *Economy and Society* (University of California Press, 1978), sections on charismatic authority, routinization, and succession vulnerability.

[2] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (International Publishers, 1971), on cultural hegemony and internalized discipline.

[3] Mark Granovetter, “Threshold Models of Collective Behavior,” *American Journal of Sociology* 83, no. 6 (1978): 1420–1443.

[4] Post-MCGI Society Research Archive (Exhibits on file with the authors; 2018–2026): monthly average baptismal intake series (2018–2025) including notes on reporting disputes; UNTV and MCGI Cares early-view logs (24-hour window standard) and comparative exiter livestream logs; documentation of AngDatingDaan.org deactivation and founder exposition deletions; Google Trends snapshot set comparing “Ang Dating Daan” versus “MCGI Cares”; documentation of closures/consolidation including Papua New Guinea and North America patterns; extracts and calculations from MCGI Australia filings (2023 vs 2024) and comparable UK/Canada revenue drops; internal instructions and video documentation regarding lugaw/feeding-drive targeting; recorded materials attributed to ministerial guidance on recipient selection; and documentation of profession-based labor tapping for medical missions, legal, accounting/office functions, and engineering/technical tasks.

[5] Albert O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), on exit as a rational response when voice is blocked and loyalty is costly.

[6] Associated Press (via PBS NewsHour), “New law in Japan takes aim at Unification Church’s coercive fundraising tactics,” December 10, 2022.

[7] Reuters, “Head of Japan’s Unification Church vows to fight loss of legal protections,” March 27, 2025.

[8] Associated Press, “Court in Japan orders the dissolution of the Unification Church,” March 25, 2025

[9] Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Worldwide Church of God,” on founder death and subsequent problems/reconfiguration.

[10] National Endowment for the Humanities, “Rajneeshpuram ... final collapse of the Oregon ranch in 1985,” overview feature.

[A1] Securities and Exchange Commission (Philippines), General Information Sheet (GIS), KDR Adventure Camp Corporation (year and filing date as shown on the document), indicating board/officer roles and share distribution; copy on file in the Post-MCGI Society Research Archive.

[A2] Securities and Exchange Commission (Philippines), General Information Sheet (GIS), Breakthrough and Milestones Productions International (BMPI) Inc. (filing year as indicated), listing Daniel S. Razon as President; copy on file in the Post-MCGI Society Research Archive.

[A3] Post-MCGI Society Research Archive: internal circulars/templates and local instructions regarding (i) centralized naming/titling practices for locale properties acquired through member fundraising projects (including references to “Philippine Loop”), and (ii) guidance on executing property transfers via Deed of Sale rather than Deed of Donation; copies on file in the Research Archive.