

RELIGIOUS DEVIANCE AND SPIRITUAL ABUSE ISSUES: A CRITICAL REVIEW

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Abstract

This article highlights on abusive issues within religious deviant groups. It argues that abusive behavior is apparently driven by illegitimate purpose and means. The argument put forth is that practices of abuse may stem from the discursive construction of fanaticism/extremism that leads to spiritual harm and abuse to those who involved. In order to assess the relative value of these issues, a systematic review of literatures is employed as a research method. Therefore, both online databases and the references lists of articles were searched using predefined search-terms such as religious deviance, deviant group, cult, spiritual abuse, and discourse of fanaticism and extremism. A key finding of these issues is that fanaticism/extremism appears to be a consistent factor of abusiveness in religious deviant groups.

Keywords: religious deviance, spiritual abuse, discourse, fanaticism, extremism

Introduction

Over the last few decades there has been growing interest in the nature of the relationship between religion and religious deviance behavior. In general, the available literature has shown a concerted effort by researchers to primarily investigate if religion has anything to do with why people tend to be or not to be in a state of deviance.¹ This line of inquiry is helpful in offering explanations how religion and religiousness may keep individuals from engaging or disengaging in deviance behavior, and its possible effects. However, while it has traditionally been assumed that religion is an important factor in inhibiting various types of deviance, the empirical evidence is far from convincing when it comes to religious deviance issues associated with harmful religious movements, cults or sects.² In such movements, whether the groups are within a moderate or radical mainstream, religion is reported to be practiced for illegitimate purpose.

In many cases, the history of these movements show that they develop on the basis of high ideals of positive values. These values are expressed in a form of reaction to corrupted practices, preaching goodness and showing positive image of a doctrine.³ Therefore, it was subsequently accepted by general followers of faith. However, when the doctrine of the religion is misinterpreted or misused whether from a lack of proper knowledge or by devious intention, the doctrine devolves into exclusive operations which might harm all those involved or affected. Thus, it can be abusive or even destructive.

Spiritual abuse can take place in any religions or religious community. To give a few examples, in November 1978, nine hundred people in Guyana, South America drank a deadly drink at the behest of a religious cult figure, Jim Jones.⁴ In 1993, David Koresh led seventy-six souls to their death in Texas, and through Shoko Asahara's eccentric interpretations of Buddhism have made Aum Shinrikyo as the most destructive religious cult in Japan. Respectively, Islamic country such as Malaysia also has its own history with respect to this kind of group.

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¹ Byron, Johnson, R. & Sung Joon Jang (2012), "Crime and Religion: Assessing the Role of Faith Factor," in R. Rosenfeld et.al (Eds.), *Contemporary Issues in Criminological Theory and Research: The Role of Social Institutions*, Belmont: Wadsworth, Cengage learning, p. 117.

² Hampshire, Annette, P. & Beckford, James, A. (1983), "Religious Sects and the Concept of Deviance: The Mormons and the Moonies," *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 34, no. 2, pp. 208-229.

³ Gallagher, Eugene V. (2008), "Cults and New Religious Movements," *History of Religions*, Vol. 47, no.2/3, pp. 205-220.

⁴ Barker, Eileen (1986), "Religious Movements: Cult and Anti-Cult since Jonestown," *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 12, pp. 329-346.

To provide more clarification, the following section will present some background about religious deviant groups in Malaysia, particularly among the Malay Muslim people. Then, in order to understand the relationships between religious deviance and abusive act, this article will discuss the possible discourse that might shape religious deviance behavior and the implication of this discourse that leads to religious and spiritual harm. In doing so, a systematic review approach is employed to identify literatures which investigate the relative value of these issues. This approach involves a detailed and comprehensive search strategy with the aim of identifying, appraising and synthesizing relevant topics in this study.⁵ Thus, predefined keywords such as religious deviance, deviant group, deviant teaching, cult, sect, spiritual abuse, and discourse of fanaticism and extremism were used to narrow and formulate the prevalent content of this topic.

Religious Deviant Groups in Malaysia

Deviant groups claiming to be religious, Muslims or Islamic are not new in Malaysia, specifically among the Malay community. According to Ammar, religious doctrine and ideology which these groups uphold is believed to be stemmed from certain deviant teachings that have resided in Malaysia for more than 200 years.⁶ Most of these deviant teachings are based on *Sufism-tarekat heresy*, which are *taṣṣawwuf wujūdiyyah and bāṭiniyyah*.⁷ In relation to this group, the Department of Islamic Development of Malaysia (JAKIM) currently has listed 99 groups that have been confirmed deviant in this country. Among them are Aliran Pemikiran Liberal, Pertubuhan Kerabat Raja Sakti, Millah Ibrahim (also known as Millah Abraham), al-Arqam, Ayah Pin's teapot cult of Sky Kingdom, al-Ma'unah, Qadiani and Taslim. Compare to the statistic in 2009, there were only 56 deviant groups in the country, therefore, in less than 10 years the number had almost doubled.⁸

The impact of these groups on society and the influence of their activities have raised concerns among the public and the Islamic authorities. These concerns are related to the groups' religious discourse which usually do not conform to the Islamic faith and is claimed could mislead and jeopardize the beliefs of the Malaysian Muslims. For example, the claim that their leader is the Prophet who has been conferred revelation by God; belief that there is prophet after the Prophet Muḥammed; the acknowledgement of the future leader known as al-Mahdī; incarnation – the followers would enter the Paradise in the Hereafter in which a key to it is at the hand of the leader; the compensation of sins with money; and the submission of female for sexual purpose.⁹

However, a worrying trend among authorities are not only with their deviant discourse and activities but also the potential of developing the activities into violent acts such as terrorism and militancy. Investigations reveal that some of the groups had been preaching jihad (crusade) and *syahid* (martyrdom) to followers, influencing them to attack public places, claiming that they were God's army and even legitimizing the murder of fellow Muslims.¹⁰ As a result, the existence of these religious groups has caused a number of incidents in Malaysia, such as the arm heist of military weapons which killed two security officers on 2 July 2000, and a grenade attack on June 28, 2016 in Selangor.¹¹ The questions arise then: how do these groups gain such strong control over their followers; what forms of control are being used; and whether such control is emotionally and spiritually abusive? In order to respond to those questions, it is useful to first place emphasis on the link between the discourse which shapes certain religious deviance behavior, and how such behavior constructs consequences. In the context of this article, the performance of discourse such as fanaticism and/or extremism as well as its effects are discussed.

⁵ Uman, Lindsay. S. (2011), "Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses," *Journal of the Canadian Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, Vol. 20, no. 1, pp. 57-59.

⁶ Ammar Fadzil (2011), "Deviant Teachings in Malaysia and their Interpretation of the Qur'ān," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, Vol. 1, no. 20, pp. 183-194.

⁷ See Aisyarah Azhar (2016), "Deviant Tendencies in Tasawwuf: Factors that Leads to Deviant Teaching in the Tasawwuf and the Spread of Deviant Teaching in the Malay Community," retrieved on 29 May 2017, http://www.academia.edu/12507895/Deviant_Tendencies_in_Tasawwuf.

⁸ Salleh Buang, New Straits Time Online, "The Rise of Deviant Teachings," 7 April 2016, retrieved on 11 May 2017, <http://www.nst.com.my/news/2016/04/137802/rise-deviant-teachings>. See also Zahirah Mustafa (2013), *Fenomena Ajaran Sesat dan Peruntukan Undang-Undang di Malaysia*, Selangor: Universiti Teknologi MARA.

⁹ Ammar Fadzil (2011), "Deviant Teachings in Malaysia and their Interpretation of the Qur'ān," p. 186. See also Schwartz, Lita Linzer., & Kaslow, Florence, W. (2007), "Religious Cults, the Individual and the Family," *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, Vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 15-26.

¹⁰ Utusan Online, "Cari Jalan Singkat ke Syurga, Kononya Lakukan Jihad," 27 Mei 2017, retrieved on 28 May 2017, <https://www.utusan.com.my/berita/nasional/cari-jalan-singkat-ke-syurga-kononya-lakukan-jihad-1.486761>.

¹¹ Rozanna Latiff, "Grenade Attack on Malaysian Pub Wounds Eight, Police Rule Out Terrorism," Reuters Online website, 28 June 2016, retrieved on 11 May 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-malaysia-blast-idUSKCN0ZE094>. See also BBC News, "Malaysian Arms Raid Cult Charged," 8 August 2000, retrieved on 28 May 2017, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/870776.stm>.

Religion and Religious Fanaticism/Extremism Discourse

It is important to note that the word religion which derived from the Latin noun, *religio* – describes the relationship with God, and involves devotional and ritual observances. It contains a moral code governing the conduct of human affairs.¹² Religion is also described as an important belief system, where people in that group practice a set of theological beliefs, and therefore has a profound impact on most of all societies as it brings order in the lives of its adherents, gives hope and optimism.¹³

Thus far, many major religions of the world promote compassion, tolerance and moderation, and none of these religions encourage violence and violation of human sanctity. Nevertheless, they seem to share the same negative conviction – that sometimes religion can become horribly twisted and abusive. Religion might be abusive when there is manipulation of followers by those in power or influential, often involving money, sex, fear, children, and even violence.¹⁴ The misuse of religious ideas can prop up spiritually abusive systems, or other forms of abuse made possible by this group of people.

According to Johnson and VanVonderen, this act is exemplified in the actions of some religious adherents who perhaps had the desire to impose one's belief on others, not through dialogue, but through coercion with religious motive that it is for the eternal good of its followers.¹⁵ The obsession towards religious ideological position which displays very strict standards and little tolerance for contrary ideas or opinions is termed as fanaticism,¹⁶ and in other notion it is referred as extremism.¹⁷ Although authors have shared some similar and different definitions about both terms, there is a clear consensus in relation to the meaning that these terms constitute. That is, fanaticism and/or extremism is a complex phenomenon pertaining to the pursuit of something in an overwhelming enthusiasm and passionate way that goes beyond normality, or far removed from the ordinary. In this situation, fanatic and/or extremist act could disturb or disregard the accepted social norms and knowledge. Within religious context, those who are over-enthusiastic about their religious beliefs are mostly blinded to the views of others. In this position, they might feel that they are carrying out all activities for sacred purposes which in contrast, may against the society, and to an extent against what religion has prescribed.

From poststructuralist perspective of how discourse performs, fanatical discourse, extreme or obsessive religious stance, and its constitutive power plays an important role in positioning individuals into certain aggressive, or even abusive state. Taking Foucault's analysis of power/ knowledge concept, and the shaping effect of discourse, the above example shows that fanatic and extreme individuals may internalize religious knowledges and practices on which their belief is based and embedded.¹⁸ This process of internalization turns them into particular kind of people and shapes their relationships with others according to those terms. The production of such discourse has positioned them into a specific lifestyle and way of thinking that the subtle power embedded within the subjugated knowledge of fanaticism/extremism becoming invisible. Therefore, regardless of other meanings of religion – which are more common and moderate, from the lens of this group, these meanings are perhaps obscured.

The invisibility of such power is a simultaneous process of what Macleod and Durrheim call subjectivizing and objectivizing of people and individuals.¹⁹ Through this power, subjectivizing constitutes individualized subjectivities, and by objectivizing, it uses the operation of power to transform people into objects or docile bodies who uncritically perform the available unexamined discursive repertoire. In the context of this article, the discursive repertoire of fanaticism and extremism is governing the individuals to rationalize their act through religious and spiritual

¹² Omomia, Austin O. (2015), "Religious Fanaticism and "Boko Haram" Insurgency in Nigeria: Implications for National Security," *Journal of Advocacy, Research and Education*, Vol. 2, pp. 58-73.

¹³ Walsh, Fromm (2009), "Religion, Spirituality, and the Family: Multifaith Perspectives," in F. Walsh (Ed.), *Spiritual Resources in Family Therapy* (2nd. ed.), New York: Guilford Press, pp. 3-30.

¹⁴ Johnson, David & VanVonderen, Jeff, (2005), *The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse: Recognizing and Escaping Manipulation and False Spiritual Authority within the Church*, Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, p. 63.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Omomia, Austin O. (2015), "Religious Fanaticism and "Boko Haram" Insurgency in Nigeria: Implications for National Security," *Journal of Advocacy, Research and Education*, Vol. 2, pp. 58-73.

¹⁷ Berman, Eli & Iannaccone, Laurence, R. (2005), "Religious Extremism: The Good, the Bad, and the Deadly," NBER Working Paper Series, retrieved on 11 May 2017, <http://www.nber.org/papers/w11663>.

¹⁸ See Foucault, Michel (1991a), *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, London: Penguin Books.

¹⁹ Macleod, Catriona, & Durrheim, Kevin (2002), "Foucauldian Feminism: The Implications of Governmentality," *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, Vol. 32, no. 1, p. 50.

principles. Such principles might typically include the God-given authority of leaders and the spiritual consequences of submitting/not submitting to their authority. These rationalities are transmitted both explicitly and implicitly, producing submissive subjects and thereby a self-sustaining nexus of power and discourse.

Thus, when extremist and fanatic acts are produced, this act is just an interpretation of knowledge claims that according to Foucault is described as 'a regime of truth.'²⁰ Within this frame, knowledge or reality is seen as a grand narrative in which it is taken for granted as an absolute truth. Foucault explains:²¹

Truth is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society [and individual] has its regime of truth, that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.

In referring to this assumption, Gaventa depicts that the regimes of truth is reinforced and redefined constantly through the education system, the media, the flux of political and even the economic and religious ideologies. In this sense, the argument for truth is not for some absolute truth that can be discovered and accepted, but is an argument about the rules according to what is true and what is false, and the specific effects of power that are attached to them²².

Following what Foucault and Gaventa have argued, Gergen indicates:²³

The important point is that whenever people define reality – that death is real, or the body, the sun, and the chair on which they are sitting – they are speaking from a particular standpoint. In describing it [the reality] you will inevitably rely on some tradition of sense making. Each of these descriptions is legitimate in the traditions in which they were created.

Gergen is saying that because people perceive and conceptualize knowledge or reality within a particular culture or context, therefore, meanings are produced through these contexts. Meanings are constructed in a particular culture, and from a particular point of view. The way people understand what is accepted as true, is bound by relational, historical and communal domains. The point is not to abandon matters that people take as real and true, instead the idea is to offer a call for a reflexive stance towards the way people normally talk and think, towards what could be taken for granted, and might therefore have certain implications to their lives and others.

In the case of religious deviance and its relationship with the constitutive effects of fanaticism and/or extremism, harm and abuse can be caused or inflicted on oneself, or on others. Threat and anxiety also may be experienced when encountering extreme religious ideas that may seem disconnected from commonly held construct system. Therefore, when individuals or groups of people allow themselves to be manipulated whether in a sense of physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual, financial or intellectual they are subjected to be in control.

In this situation, often, the subject is not aware of the manipulation in which they are being abused – because at first, the abusive substance is usually balanced and legitimized with meeting some real or perceived need the people (the subject) may have.²⁴ For instance, people may be urged in their desire to get closer to God through a deepening religious and spiritual experience, and possibly because of the harsh life events, they need the time and space to heal through faith convictions. According to Orłowski, this belief enables them to experience God's grace in fresh and revitalizing ways, and thus, enables them to receive the comfort, wisdom and forgiveness that God might provide.²⁵ In what follows, the section will discuss how spiritual abuse occurs within religious deviance group, and how it can discursively constituted in people lives and their context.

²⁰ See Foucault, Michel (1980), *Power/Knowledge*, New York: Pantheon.

²¹ Rabinow, Paul (editor). (1991), *The Foucault Reader: An Introduction to Foucault's Thought*, New York: Pantheon Books, p. 72-73.

²² See Gaventa, John (2003), *Power after Lukes: An Overview of Theories of Power since Lukes and their Application to Development*, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies.

²³ Gergen, Kenneth (2009), *An Invitation to Social Construction* (2nd. ed.), London: Sage Publications, p. 4.

²⁴ Arterburn, Stephen & Felton, Jack (1991), *Toxic Faith: Understanding and Overcoming Religious Addiction*, Nashville: Oliver-Nelson, p. 32.

²⁵ Orłowski, Barbara, M. (2010), *Spiritual Abuse Recovery: Dynamic Research on Finding a Place of Wholeness*, USA: Wipf and Stock Publishers, p. 8.

Spiritual Abuse within Deviant Religious Group

The phrase spiritual abuse rarely appeared in literature until around twenty years ago.²⁶ There was some earlier material that explored the dynamics of unhealthy spirituality, but it failed to specifically name this as spiritual abuse.²⁷ According to Johnson and VanVonderen spiritual abuse has been described as the abuse of power in the context of religion with the core features of legalism, authoritarianism, spiritual intimidation, manipulation and excessive discipline.²⁸ Spiritual abuse also is described as spiritual bullying which is the maltreatment of a person in a spiritual context. As mentioned before, all abuse occurs when someone exerts power over another and uses that power to hurt them physically, spiritually or emotionally. In any religion, a religious doctrine or discourse can be considered abusive when the authoritative figures practice techniques of manipulation and thought reform (brainwashing). It is the misuse of a leadership position, or influence to further the self-interest of the person other than the individual in the group. It occurs out of a doctrinal position, or of legitimate personal needs of a leader that are being met by illegitimate means.²⁹ On this basis, Henke has listed five characteristics of an abusive system:³⁰

1. Authoritarian - the leader may claim authority and demand obedience by virtue of position. Followers may be told that God will bless their submission even if the leadership is wrong. It is not the followers place to judge or correct the leadership - God will see to that.
2. Image consciousness - because the truth about the abusive religious system would be quickly rejected if recognized, outsiders are shown only a positive image of the group.
3. Suppresses criticism - the system cannot allow questions, dissent, or open discussions about issues. The person who dissents becomes the problem rather than the issue that the person raised.
4. Perfectionism - failure is not an option because God demands holiness. Performance, or works, is necessary to achieve God's favor. In abusive [religious systems] all blessings come through performance of spiritual requirements.
5. Unbalanced - there is uniqueness to the abusive system that suggests a special status with God no one else has. Adherence to its distinctive is required for total acceptance into the group.

The process of spiritual abuse is subtle, thus explaining why many respectable, well thinking people are ensnared in this religious deviance. As leaders within religious deviance group actually believe they are representing God, they consider themselves to be beyond support or assessment of any kind. As a consequence, the religious systems they uphold become abusive and therefore, create an environment for the perpetration of spiritual abuse. Abusive leaders dominate those under their leadership, and then influence people through negative discourse, which inflicts wounds upon the person's psyche, causing the shaming of the person who can then be easily manipulated.³¹ In this situation, members of deviant religious group can be exploited psychologically. They might experience psychological distress of been excluded by family, grew disillusioned with the deviant religious life, rigid moral judgments of the unconverted outside world and converted to the ideals of the group, and in some cases to its powerful leader.³² They also might find themselves incapable of reverting to the former faith and belief although they truly wish to do so.

It is noteworthy to take into account that it is difficult to adequately describe the depth of feeling associated with religious or spiritual abuse. However, this situation may raise some possible questions for the members either at spiritual or personal level. In this instance, they may question about what they now believe and who they are. They may feel a sense of guilt, shame or confusion that they were part of an abusive system.³³ They also may wonder why they were not able to see the problems from the beginning. This can be disturbing to an individual particularly in raising issues of trust and making judgements about self and others, especially when the factors which make an experience abusive are often not evident for some time.

²⁶ Ward, David (2011), "The Lived Experience of Spiritual Abuse," *Mental Health, Religion and Culture*, Vol. 14, no. 9, pp. 899-915.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ See Johnson, David. & VanVonderen, Jeff (2005), *The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse: Recognizing and Escaping Spiritual Manipulation and False Spiritual Authority within the Church*, Minnesota: Bethany House Publisher.

²⁹ Saodah Abd. Rahman, "Ajaran Sesat Membentuk Pemahaman Radikal," Utusan Online website, 27 November 2013, retrieved on 26 May 2017, http://utusan.com.my/utusan/Rencana/20131127/re_07.

³⁰ Henke, David, "The Watchman Expositor: Spiritual Abuse Profile," *The Watchman Expositor*, retrieved on 22 May 2017, <http://www.watchman.org/profile/abusepro.htm>.

³¹ See Skedgell, Kristen (2008), *Losing the Way: A Memoir of Spiritual Longing, Manipulation, Abuse, and Escape*, California: Bay Tree Publishing.

³² Schwartz, Lita Linzer, & Kaslow, Florence, W. (2007), "Religious Cults, the Individual and the Family," *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, Vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 15-26.

³³ Burns, Graig (2012), *Exit from Soul-Abused: Redefining Extremist Cults*, USA: Trafford Publishing, p. 37.

In such phenomenon, individuals may grapple in giving meaning about their identification of spiritual self. It is the case that when spiritually abusive situation occurred, the sense of self begins with the internalized representations of the abuser's expectations as to how an individual must think and behave as a religious and spiritual being. When this happens, they may experience pain and spiritual struggle. Ellison and Lee point out that spiritual struggles can have multiple characteristic, such as doubts of spiritual concept, negative experience with religion as well as the people who engage with it, and questions about spiritual struggle validity.³⁴

The outcomes of spiritual struggles also vary amongst individuals. One of the outcomes of spiritual struggles leads to stronger, more mature spiritual identity, while the other outcome can lead to weaker spiritual identities. Therefore, according to Pargament, the trajectory and ultimate outcome of spiritual struggle depends heavily upon whether a person is able to come to a timely resolution. For this reason, struggles represent a "fork in the road" with one path leading to refinement of the self and faith, and the other leading to chronic struggle and disillusionment.³⁵ In this respect, Ano and Pargament depict that depends on individual's general self-orienting system which contains religious, personal and social elements, religious coping in regard to spiritually abusive experience might be distinct between each person.³⁶ One could perceive religion in a negative light which it is not helpful as a coping method, but one also could experience religion as a positive resource for his or her general well-being. At this state, it is comprehensible that religious coping are directly and functionally related to the situation at hand as well as the person involved.

For the former, the spiritually abused victims might not able to separate their sacred belief from religious deviance abusive experience, therefore the persons' spirituality becomes contaminated with such experience. In this way, the person may doubt their own spirituality and would avoid any engagement with organizations or individuals who are associated with spirituality or religion, hence dissociating their spirituality from any religious alterative. On the other hand, the latter offers more opportunity to contemplate their religious self when working with spiritual abuse issues. Within this position, religion is seen as a source for the person to speak about his or her difficult spiritual path in which the person had engaged in. Being abused in a spiritual context does not mean that the person cannot continue to involve in a faith life, but it is important to open up space for them to be listened, understood and trusted.

Religious conversation in this context should be a place where such individuals can feel at ease, safe and secure. Through this approach, spiritually abused victims can begin to trust, to construct meaning about their life experience and to find inner peace – as they reconnect to themselves; the sacred; and others. It is a space where they are supported to be aware of the potential of power abuse in religious deviance group, and learned to work consciously and constructively with these matters in order to avoid any further hurt and damage. This approach can be the first step for recovery process, and makes possible for the individual to empower their relationship with their spiritual self.

Conclusion

In conclusion, religious deviance movements or groups related to abusive practices is a complex phenomenon, to which exposure can have an array of negative effects on individuals. This can occur when religious discourse comes in conjunction with extreme understanding of how religion works and leads to the misuse of power and position by an authoritative or influential figure. One of the effects of such practices is the abuse of one's spirituality. In this case, often the spiritually abuse victims are not able to recognize when they are a subject of abuse, or how they have been influenced in ways that are controlling and involve manipulation of behavior and thought. Therefore, one's spiritual life might be experienced negatively. In this situation, the impact can be pervasive, affecting a person's emotional, developmental and interpersonal life. It involves a person's construction of reality, including the self and how they perceived others, as they were left with deep personal issues. Some of the examples of such issues were the inability to trust, to discern truth from error, and to eliminate a distorted perception of God. In few cases, the struggle also impaired the member's marital and family relationships. Thus, addressing religious and spiritual harm can be a challenge. A strong therapeutic alliance within the process is essential as healing only can be achieved when

³⁴ Ellison, Christopher. G., & Lee, Jinwoo (2010), "Spiritual Struggles and Psychological Distress: Is There a Dark Side of Religion?," *Social Indicators Research*, Vol. 98, pp. 501-517.

³⁵ Pargament, Kenneth, I. (2008), "Spiritual Struggles as a Fork in the Road to Growth or Decline," *Plain Views*, Vol. 4, no. 24. Retrieved May 29, 2017, http://www.plainviews.org/v4n24/lv_p.html.

³⁶ Ano, Gene, G. & Pargament, Kenneth, I. (2013), "Predictors of Spiritual Struggles: An Exploratory Study," *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, Vol. 16, no. 4, pp. 419-434.

fanatic and extremist discourse that governed the member's spiritual life is dismantled. By speaking about their experiences, fear, guilt and other strong emotions, members of religious deviant group may weaken this discourse and perhaps have the capability to engage themselves in a new position of relating and living based on the true grace of God.

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