

# Hyperreligiosity:

## Identifying and Overcoming Patterns of Religious Dysfunction

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### Introduction

I must state first of all that I am not a psychiatrist and this work falls under the realm of "anecdotal evidence." Anecdotal evidence is nonetheless known to be very important in medical science. In no way should a person who was diagnosed as hyperreligious by a psychiatrist or psychologist look at this work as being a substitute for adequate psychiatric or psychological help. I believe it is fitting that someone who was once diagnosed as hyperreligious should write a book on this subject rather than someone with no religious belief. A person who has no religious belief cannot understand the gray areas where the religious person makes certain important actions, which may be seen as sacrifices, for the benefit of their belief structure.

Hyperreligiosity is the ill-fitting grasp of the role of religion and God in one's life. It is the disability that can lead to killing in the name of God, or isolation from others in the name of religion. Hyperreligiosity happens most often when one thinks that they know the mind of God, and that one can know all the ways of God. The bible is one of the scriptures of the major world religions that clearly states this is impossible. There are psychological reasons why a person with hyperreligiosity needs to have the assurance that they know the complete mind of God. This book will explore some of them and some possible ways out of the dysfunctions of hyperreligiosity.

This is a very difficult work to write because religion often does great things for people that cannot be easily measured by society. There has been a duality occurring in some therapeutic communities of those who might be termed "hyperreligious" by some psychiatrists and therapists and those who have spent many years in therapy and do not fall under this judgment. Psychiatry often admits it can't cure people. The very nature of being a part of the community of a local church on a weekly basis, year after year, is a consistent social achievement beyond some people's reach. Socializing with the same group of people on a regular basis is often more than what some who resort to psychiatry alone can say they have done.

It is hard writing a book on hyperreligiosity when you yourself know that you have aspects of it. The worse thing for the hyperreligious is to feel that they are somehow causing another person to be less religious. Instead, in solving the problem of hyperreligiosity in a person, one opens that person up for true religion, or better, true spirituality. At times, in discussing one's hyperreligiosity, one may seem like one is trying to sound like a saint. But when one sees the problems associated with it, the listener begins to perceive that this is not the case. One begins to wonder how good of a life this is that we have chosen.

This book is in no way an attempt to help people become less religious or spirituality-centered in their thinking. In fact, it is the opposite, an attempt to empower spiritual people away from the disempowering ideas found along the spiritual path. The word "hyperreligious" seems like it might seem to mean "very religious" or "ultra spiritual" in the way that we picture the qualities of a superhero. Hyperreligiosity can happen when the outer form that true spirituality flows through becomes distorted to the extent that it becomes the sole focus. Instead of people being more loving, helpful to others, and filled with what they experience as God's nature to help them in their life, they become suspicious, isolated, and full of an untrue image of God that they can mold to their personal desires.

A type of hyperreligiosity can also happen when political groups use religious beliefs as a dividing line in the exercise of power, as a way to build sides so that other aims can be achieved. Hence political leaders in the past have called on the demon that is hyperreligiosity to awaken in the people so that war could be more easily approved. When hyperreligiosity does not exist in a person, there usually has to be very, very strong reasons to justify war to a human being, especially one that concerns oneself with religious thinking.

Hyperreligiosity produces painful results in the way other mental illnesses produce painful results. It is the mental illness that seems officially sanctioned by God to the person who has it. It can be difficult reading this subject matter if you have been afflicted by hyperreligiosity in any way. One may begin to feel anger, even negativity. Temporarily, this state can be a better place to be. It is taking the chance at maturing as an adult, instead being caught up in acting out the biblical admonition of being "like little children" to not just God in heaven, but to everyone, in every circumstance.

If there is a better understanding of hyperreligiosity, many of the problems of the world can be further solved. But for a religious person to even admit the term "hyperreligiosity" is a valid term, is itself difficult. People talk about the changes that need to take place as changes in the heart, but religious texts such as the bible, do not limit it in such a way. There needs to be a growth of wisdom, a growth of intellectual understanding of truth, for the world to change. Understanding that religious action is not always fruitful is a part of that knowledge and in fact much of the bible itself discusses this.

My disclaimer to this book is that if a person's religion brings them to a state of being that one becomes like a Mother Teresa or an Albert Schweitzer, and truly helps many other people, that is wonderful. I would never make an argument against that type of behavior, only encourage it. I believe it is such individuals that caused the evolution of humanity throughout time.

This work examines not so much how religion works miraculously in some people's lives, but instead focuses on when it works disastrously in others. I would be just as happy to write about religion's virtues because I strongly believe in religion and its ability to produce all the virtues. I noticed that there is not much written on this subject of religious mental illness by people who still uphold religious beliefs. I am in no way trying to make people "less religious" who have hyperreligiosity. Making Mother Teresa less religious probably would have also made her less helpful to the starving people of India. The aim is to find a way to free what religion actually is about and to know what is the form of mental illness and societal dysfunction that hides in a religious costume. The result will be freeing those with sincere religious desires to become more active in following the true spiritual life. There will be no limit to the time or money commitment such a life may have, but it will be free from the psychological shackles that this book describes.

The hyperreligious notion of God can be a frightening one. It is a God that holds good things from people, and who demands that people live for religion, instead having one's own life improved by religion. Some might think that their hyperreligiosity is justified by the biblical command to love God with all one's heart, all one's mind and all one's strength. This book explores dysfunctional faith, that is, why a person can't love God with all their heart or all their mind or all their strength. If a person really loves God with all their mind, they may begin to see that the reason why they are not like other people isn't necessarily because they are more spiritual, but may be because they were more abused by others and created defense mechanisms against this abuse.

Religious texts themselves have a balance written in them that helps prevent a person from developing hyperreligiosity. The gospels mention how Jesus taught us to not judge each other. Inherent in hyperreligiosity is the need of eliminating in others certain types of value and to only see certain values as existing in themselves. It is like the way the psychotic who may have come from a situation in which their value was threatened, creates a magical world by delusion of grandeur in which they now have great value to others. The hyperreligious has become threatened in their world and disempowered by people, and so they develop the need to devalue others and create value in themselves by their religious practice. But such can never be the basis of the spirituality God tells us He wants in the scriptures. Religion does teach us that God hears and answers our prayers, gives us strength, and the like. The hyperreligious get stuck in this mode of trying to live in this life of favor, and to do so they must judge others in their mind as unworthy, especially when they have been abused by others.

One can use this book as a part of one's spiritual arsenal when or if religion becomes a painful and hindering thing in one's life. It can be a note in one's song but not one's whole song.