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Hyperreligiosity: Identifying and Overcoming Patterns of Religious Dysfunction

R. S. Pearson

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The word Hyperreligiosity is related to "religiosity" which is the outward form of religion. People make a distinction between religiosity and spirituality, spirituality being the embodiment of virtue. Hyperreligiosity is when the outward forms and other aspects of religion become life disabling. There is a direct connection between hyperreligiosity and terrorism or destructive cults. 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 isolation from others because one thinks God is vengeful and punishing. Others who do not practice religion the same way are believed to be contaminating to the hyperreligious person, and this belief fights the drive to what are considered historic descriptions of authentic spirituality. The author states that Mother Teresa and Albert Schweitzer were not hyperreligious, as hyperreligiosity can be understood by how it is a personal problem, not the actual dedication to the various beliefs of religion. Hyperreligiosity does not produce anything of personal or social value and in fact is often dangerous and destructive. Psychologists developed the term hyperreligiosity yet there is no one agreed upon spelling of it. It can either be spelled as, "hyper-religiousity," "hyper-religiosity," "hyperreligiosity," or "hyperreligiousity," and each spelling is used by doctors, which can be found via doing a Google search. Psychiatrists see hyperreligiosity in someone having psychotic episodes or epileptic fits in which they experience God. Politicians see hyperreligiosity in the way terrorists use religion to justify murder and other criminal acts. The author's view of hyperreligiosity contains these definitions but also sees it as any religious activity or thinking pattern that obscures the virtues of a healthy spiritual practice. It is also related to a type of obsessive mental illness in which a person can not use their thinking faculties in the manner and extent in which they were educated towards using them. The author says mental illnesses are sometimes on a type of spectrum, in that, many of us at some time or in some way, have these problems in a greater or lesser form. Hyperreligiosity is no exception. Hyperreligiosity is easy to recognize when it is extreme and against social norms, but when it is hidden, the person having it can also be at a disadvantage. The author, R.S. Pearson, admits that he himself has had hyperreligious traits on and off for some of his adult life. "I had it starting in my teens. It took different forms, from a Christian version to one into Eastern philosophy and New Age thinking. And then it would even go back and forth between such ideas. Spirituality is very important to me so I wanted to experience what the various paths said I could," Pearson says. "To make sure I obtained the benefits of given to those who really seeked, I believed I had to do a lot of work."

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