

Introduction

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The first volume, a companion to this one, focusses primarily on establishing that abuse exists across multiple religious traditions. Whereas spiritual abuse is best documented in Christian contexts, spiritual abuse is a presence also in non-Christian religious traditions – including Jewish, Hindu, Sikhi, Muslim, Buddhist, and others. Of course, it is impossible to generalise about any one of the five traditions explored in Volumes 1 and 2: each of Judaism, Hinduism, Sikhi(sm), Islam, and Christianity is far too internally variegated for this. Still, acknowledging the reality of the widespread existence of spiritual abuse across many religious traditions is a first step towards confronting, preventing, eliminating, and healing from it.

This volume confirms the wide and deep reach and the diversity of spiritual abuse but focusses primarily on forms of resistance and activism that have emerged within religious traditions. In other words, spiritual abuse is rampant, tenacious, as well as profound in the harm it causes,¹ yes – but it is far from uncontested and the chapters to follow attest to organisations and resources that actively and often very creatively and effectively resist spiritual abuse.

Moreover, this volume is a text of its time, a time where spiritual abuse is finally becoming confronted much more vocally and visibly – including in religious traditions other than Christianity (e.g. [Choudhury and Hammer, 2024](#)) and in settings other than Global North West ones ([Mbote et al., 2024](#)).² As such, this book joins and also represents a growing and worldwide movement of research-based scholar-activism.

I submit this volume at a time shortly after Justin Welby resigned as the Archbishop of Canterbury (on 12 November 2024). His resignation was prompted by the Makin Report, which criticised the Church of England's handling of and failure to investigate numerous allegations of abuse by John Smyth. The series of events leading up to Welby's resignation shows up yet again the need for ongoing resistance and for upstanding and not bystanding. It is becoming ever clearer that such is not only right but on the right side of history.

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2 Abuse in World Religions

Notes

- 1 In their chapter for Volume 1, Chowdhury and Hannan evocatively refer to the impact of spiritual abuse reaching “the core being of a person.” Similarly, Starr refers to acts of spiritual abuse as “scars of the soul.” Dehan and Levi, meanwhile, point out that spiritual abuse is not separate from, but adds additional force to, other forms of abuse, including physical, psychological, sexual and economic abuse.
- 2 Both volumes cited here are available open access and both have a clear activist purpose of confronting abuse in religious contexts head on – be this sexual abuse in minoritised Muslim communities (Choudhury and Hammer, 2024), or homophobia in East Africa – that is, predominantly Christian settings (Mbote et al., 2024).

Bibliography

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