

When Religion Hurts You: Healing from Religious Trauma and the Impact of High-Control Religion

Laura E. Anderson

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Written for those who have been trapped by fear-based high-control religions, the self-help book *When Religion Hurts You* points the way to freedom.

Laura E. Anderson survived long-term religious abuse herself. Here, she indicts patriarchal hierarchies, authoritarian leadership models, and fundamentalist beliefs and practices with causing personal harm. She reflects on “purity culture,” the denigration of the body, and isolation from those with different beliefs as well. Supporting its arguments with intense personal stories, her book talks about how members of such religions, kept in line by what looks like love, are subject to prohibitions on critical thinking enforced via blame, shame, shunning, and threats of excommunication and hell.

Revealing how people are drawn to fundamentalist religions as a coping mechanism, the book acknowledges that sameness can be comforting and that following the directives of authority figures—particularly white men—can feel familiar and easy. The effects of traumas caused by small events repeated over time, often found in instances of religious abuse, are addressed, with recommendations for learning to live in a healing body and handling inevitable triggers in a resourceful manner.

The book includes eye-opening examples of what abuse can look like in a religious context, widens the definition of abuse beyond physical or sexual maltreatment, and identifies red flags in teachings, practices, and relationships. There are moving personal examples as well: Anderson recalls instances of disrespect and belittling, fear- and isolation-inducing warnings not to speak about what was happening, and community-wide blacklisting that prevented her from moving outside of her religious community.

An exposé of the dangers of high-control religions that makes it easier to recognize and resist religious abuse, *When Religion Hurts You* is an affirming self-help book that supports healing from such pain.

KRISTINE MORRIS (November / December 2023)

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