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Salvation or Abuse? : Case Studies of Spiritual Abuse in Japanese Religions

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Although sexual harassment by superiors in schools, offices, and molestation on streets and trains have been appearing in every morning paper in Japan, such news in religious institutions are rarely reported except for scandals by controversial new religions. In orthodox Christianity, sexual abuse has been a taboo. However, on April 25th, 2005 a pastor, 61 years of age, was arrested for allegedly raping seven junior high school girls and molesting other women in his church, “Seishin Tchuo Kyokai (Sacred Central Church).” On February 21st, 2006, he received a sentence of 20 years imprisonment.

This pastor studied theology with Pentecostal church in Korea and founded his independent church in 1986, then expanded his mission to include 22 branch churches, 57 vice pastors, and 1,300 believers. Since this incident, most of the embarrassed members have defected, yet a few branches still hold faith with him.

Japanese orthodox Christianity could not expand its missionary to the general public in Japan (less than 1 %) and suffered from aging of church members and budget deficits. On the other hand, Pentecostal church movement has been popular among young and middle aged Japanese. Excessive enforced missionary work, donations and devotion to a religious superior are controversial issue among Japanese Christians.

This paper studies sexual harassment by pastors as a typical case of spiritual abuse in cultic churches, which has been argued by several Christian activists criticizing “cults.” They insist that the cult controversy should not be limited in new religions, but rather be extended to the imbalanced relation between all charismatic leaders and true believers in all religions. By adding more cases, I will illustrate Japanese spiritual landscape, where people seek antidote of meaninglessness and salvation from competitive society, but replaced their hope by delusive convictions, and as a result, suffered a tragic ending.

Key Word: Spiritual Abuse, sexual harassment, Japanese Religions, Pentecostal church movement, cult

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