

Reviving Erastianism? ‘Spiritual Abuse’, Religious Liberty and the Paradoxes of Post-Christendom¹

In recent years the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of England and other religious bodies have been subject to growing public scrutiny for the handling in their midst of child abuse particularly, but of other forms of abuse too.² In response to this, some have developed a terminology of ‘Spiritual Abuse’ (SA) to define forms of non-physical or non-sexual abuse that might somehow be deemed distinctive to religious people and groups. Although characteristically well-meant, this development of SA discourse has come to present significant challenges for civic theology, and for religious liberties in particular. Moreover, those challenges are both surprising and paradoxical; surprising because they risk exhuming an Erastian-style statutory prohibition of specifically theological convictions – a prohibition that might otherwise have been thought long-interred by secularisation – and paradoxical because they would require an otherwise self-consciously secularising state to dispense distinctively theological judgments that, precisely *because* of such secularisation, it is less equipped than ever *to* dispense. Indeed, while SA started out three decades ago as a definition of harmful practices requiring specifically ecclesial healing ministry or pastoral care – practices like ‘heavy shepherding’ and enforced tithing – I want to suggest that the term has grown especially problematic of late, not least as it has become subject to growing mission creep.

Erastianism itself is defined as ‘the ascendancy of the State over the Church in ecclesiastical matters’, or as the ‘doctrine that the civil state has final earthly authority over expression and practice of religious beliefs’.³ It is named after the mid-16th century Heidelberg Zwinglian Thomas Erastus (1524-1583), and yet in his seminal 1900 article on the subject J.N. Figgis famously asked ‘Was Erastus an Erastian?’ and argued that the relationship between the two was at best partial.⁴ More specifically, Figgis emphasised that as a magisterial Protestant opposed to the imposition of autonomous church discipline by Calvinist Presbyteries in the Palatinate, Erastus ‘was concerned solely with the question of the proper method and authority of enforcing ecclesiastical discipline in a State *which was uniform in its religion*’⁵ – that is to say, where the statutory authorities share the same theological convictions as a single State church, such that the two are distinguished not by doctrinal belief, but simply by the scope of their jurisdiction. A similar uniformity was assumed by Richard Hooker in his *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (1594) – the most foundational apologetic for the establishment of the Church of England. Indeed, Figgis insists that in his posthumously-published *Nullity of Church Censures*,⁶ Erastus was plainly ‘not concerned ... as to the coercive religious authority of a State which allowed more than one [form of religious expression]’. That scenario would pertain later, when Westminster Assembly divines like John Selden and Bulstrode Whitelocke were identified with Erastianism in 1643 for suggesting that the State should regulate a range of (albeit still Protestant) denominations, and when around the same time the great English philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) proposed State regulation of the Established Church of England by a parliament that might nonetheless comprise those of

¹ This paper adapts and develops material from the research and writing I did for the February 2018 report of the Theology Advisory Group of the Evangelical Alliance (TAG) entitled *Reviewing the Discourse of ‘Spiritual Abuse’: Logical Problems and Unintended Consequences*. I chair TAG and was lead drafter of this report, which is available at <https://www.eauk.org/current-affairs/media/press-releases/upload/Reviewing-the-Discourse-of-Spiritual-Abuse.pdf> Accessed 1/6/18

² *Protecting All God’s Children: The Policy for Safeguarding Children in the Church of England (4th Edition)*. London: Church House Publishing, 2010, 16. Available at: <http://www.lincoln.anglican.org/media/6142/protecting-all-gods-children.pdf> Accessed 24/1/18. Jo Renee Formicola, *Clerical Sexual Abuse: How the Crisis Changed US Catholic Church-State Relations* (Palgrave Studies in Religion, Politics, and Policy) New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016; Thomas Plante & Kathleen McChesney (eds) *Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church: A Decade of Crisis, 2002-2012* Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2011; Mary Gail Frawley-O’Dea *Perversion of Power: Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church* Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2007; <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/dec/15/royal-commission-final-report-australia-child-abuse> Accessed 28/1/18; Zahra Tizro, *Domestic Violence in Iran: Women, Marriage and Islam*. London: Routledge, 2011; http://www.hinduwebsite.com/hinduism/h_violence.asp Accessed 28/1/18.

³ F.L. Cross & E.A. Livingstone, ‘Erastianism’ in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, Oxford: OUP, 1997, 558; David Little, ‘Erastianism’ in Donald K. McKim (ed), *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith*. Louisville, Ky & Edinburgh: Westminster/John Knox & St Andrew’s Press, 1992, 122; Peter Toon, ‘Erastianism’, in J.D. Douglas (ed.), *New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, 35.

⁴ J.N. Figgis, ‘Erastus and Erastianism’, *JTS* 2 (1900), 66-78

⁵ Figgis, ‘Erastus’, 66. My emphasis.

⁶ Originally published in Latin in 1589 as *Explicatio Gravissimae Questionis*.

different denominational allegiances, or, indeed, of none.⁷ More particularly, as Figgis underlines, Erastus believed that the church should not excommunicate its own errant members, but that the magistracy should decide matters of ecclesial discipline and punishment *on behalf of* the church.

Today, of course, our British constitutional arrangements allow for a much greater plurality of religious expression – not just across and between different Christian churches, but across and between other faiths communities, too. In what Stuart Murray, Craig Carter and others term our ‘post-Christendom’ context, the Church of England might remain Established, but Establishment no longer implies a hegemony of one Christian, or indeed one religious, tradition.⁸ Nor would we realistically expect, as Hobbes did, that a religiously plural parliament could regulate the doctrine, liturgy and polity of the Established Church to anywhere near the extent that it did as recently as, say, 1928, when it rejected a revised version of the Anglican Prayer Book. And yet, SA today provides us with a case study of a surprisingly paradoxical mutation of Erastianism, if not of Erastus’ own civic theology. In that mutation, an increasingly and self-consciously secular and plural State is nonetheless being cast as a potential arbiter of theological propriety, and of theological disputes between one group of religious believers and another.

In a paper presented to the Royal College of Psychiatrists in April 2017, entitled ‘Spiritual Abuse – the Next Great Scandal for the Church’⁹, the senior lay Anglican Jayne Ozanne acknowledged that SA is not yet a legally-recognised category, but accumulated references to it in current Anglican, Methodist and United Reformed Church safeguarding literature,¹⁰ and linked these references to existing legislation on hate crime and hate speech.¹¹ The implication was that SA should be subject to the same punishment as these criminal offences, or that it should be circumscribed on a par with other existing forms of criminal abuse.¹² In the same paper Ozanne favourably cited work being done by the Churches’ Child Protection Advisory Service (CCPAS – since renamed Thirty-One Eight) to promote SA discourse, and endorsed its approach as a model of how to ‘deal with’ it. Since CCPAS/Thirty-One Eight has been the preferred safeguarding agency of several churches and Christian organisations, this rising profile of SA discourse needs to be examined carefully.¹³ In order to do this, it will be helpful to review how the concept SA has evolved historically to this point.

In 1991, Bethany House issued David Johnson and Jeff Van Vonderen’s *The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse*.¹⁴ In 1992, the similarly evangelical publisher Zondervan released Ronald Enroth’s *Churches That Abuse*.¹⁵ This was followed in 1993 by another title on the same theme from IVP America – Ken Blue’s *Healing Spiritual Abuse: How to Break Free from Bad Church Experience*.¹⁶ These and more recent texts using the phraseology of SA are undoubtedly motivated by genuine concern to support victims of the various baleful phenomena that phrase is taken to entail – namely domination or bullying of one person by another who is usually in a position of institutional authority over them, such that the victim manifests debilitating responses including shame, anxiety and depression.¹⁷

⁷ Hobbes, Thomas, *Leviathan* (ed. Richard Tuck), Cambridge: CUP, 1991 [1651], Ch. XLII ‘Of Power Ecclesiastical’, 338.

⁸ Stuart Murray Williams, *Post-Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange New World (2nd Edn)*. Eugene, Or.: Cascade, 2018; Craig Carter, *Rethinking Christ And Culture: A Post-Christendom Perspective*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009.

⁹ <http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/pdf/jayneozannespiritualabusetheNextGreatScandalForTheChurch.pdf> Accessed 15/11/17.

¹⁰ Ozanne cites references to SA in Church of England and Methodist Church of GB safeguarding literature, but concedes that it is *not* a term recognised or used by the Catholic Church or the Baptist Union of GB. Ozanne, ‘Spiritual Abuse’, 2-4.

¹¹ Ozanne, ‘Spiritual Abuse’, 6-8

¹² *Ibid.*, 6-9.

¹³ All the following current resources and pages from CCPAS’ website continue to promote the use of the term ‘Spiritual Abuse’: [http://files.ccpas.co.uk/documents/Help-SpiritualAbuse%20\(2015\).pdf](http://files.ccpas.co.uk/documents/Help-SpiritualAbuse%20(2015).pdf); <https://services.ccpas.co.uk/information/research>; <https://www.ccpas.co.uk/training>; <https://www.ccpas.co.uk/theology>; <https://www.ccpas.co.uk/review> All accessed 30/11/17.

Ozanne, ‘Spiritual Abuse’, 4. Ozanne’s PowerPoint presentation for her talk includes a final slide entitled ‘Dealing with Spiritual Abuse’, which depicts the CCPAS logo and commends CCPAS as the lead agency addressing SA.

<http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/pdf/Ozanne%20Jayne%20-%20Spiritual%20Abuse%20-%20April%202017.pdf> Accessed 30/11/17.

¹⁴ Grand Rapids: Bethany House, 1991.

¹⁵ Ronald Enroth, *Churches That Abuse*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992. Text also available at

<http://www.ccel.us/churches.toc.html> Accessed 27/11/17. See also Enroth’s follow-up volume from 1994, *Recovering from Churches that Abuse*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994. Available as a free e-book at http://www.agapecounselors.com/uploads/4/9/9/2/49921401/recovering_from_churches_that_abuse_-_ronald_m_enroth_web.pdf Accessed 28/1/18.

¹⁶ Downers Grove, Ill., 1993.

¹⁷ More recent books deploying the nomenclature of SA include Boyd D. Purcell, *Spiritual Terrorism: Spiritual Abuse from The Womb to The Tomb*. Bloomington, In., 2008; Yvonne Davis-Weir, *Spiritual Abuse: Learning and Overcoming Spiritual Abuse in the*

Legally, however, such phenomena would most often be identified as forms of Emotional or Psychological Abuse, and although the clearest delineation of this in UK law is that which defines Emotional Abuse as one form of *child* abuse alongside Sexual Abuse, Physical Abuse and Neglect, any prosecution of a crime which caused an *adult* victim to suffer Psychological Abuse would most likely be pursued with reference to the well-established offence of Common Assault. CCPAS in particular has additionally sought to present most or all of these phenomena as ‘religious’ forms of the more recently-codified category of abuse known as ‘Coercive and Controlling Behaviour’. Yet in statutory terms the language of Coercion and Control is focused on intimate domestic relationships and has not been read across to abuse that takes place distinctively in religious settings.¹⁸

Now it needs to be stressed here that Emotional or Psychological Abuse could be manifest in *all sorts* of settings – marital, commercial, medical, sporting, theatrical, party-political, in Hollywood or the media, as well as in so-called ‘spiritual’ contexts. From the sexual harassment scandals exposed by the ‘#MeToo’¹⁹, and ‘TimesUp’ movements²⁰, through recent accusations of bullying made against Speaker of the Commons John Bercow, to complaints upheld by British Cycling against its former Technical Director Shane Sutton for intimidating and denigrating female and Paralympic cyclists,²¹ testimonies to Psychological Abuse are gaining greater prominence. Yet there seems little appetite for re-categorising these diverse manifestations of Psychological Abuse specifically according to their context, with niche terms like ‘entertainment industry abuse’, ‘parliamentary abuse’ or ‘sporting abuse’ – precisely because such sub-categorisations might detract from the headline point that *all* such forms of abuse should be aligned to the extant statutory definition of Psychological Abuse, and if pursued legally, should meet the criminal threshold for prosecution according to that primary definition.

Despite all this, proponents of SA hold that there is something so distinctive about the ‘spiritual’ context in which Emotional and Psychological Abuse might occur, that it requires its own separate, headline definition. Thus, following the early work of Johnson, Van Vonderen, Enroth and Blue, Ozanne, CCPAS and others propose that for abuse to be deemed specifically ‘spiritual’ it must principally:

- a) be ‘justified’ by appeal to the divine,²² or to one or more sacred texts defined as having divine authority;²³
- b) be enacted by people associated in their role or function as religious,²⁴ and
- c) take place in settings identified in one way or another as religious.²⁵

Church and Home. Bloomington, In: WestBow, 2015; June Hunt, *Spiritual Abuse: Breaking Free from Religious Control (Hope for the Heart)*, 2015; F. Reimy Deiderich, *Broken Trust: A Practical Guide to Identify and Recover from Toxic Faith, Toxic Church, and Spiritual Abuse*. BISAC, 2017.

¹⁸ http://www.cps.gov.uk/legal/a_to_c/controlling_or_coercive_behaviour/ Accessed 28/11/17;

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/domestic-violence-and-abuse> Accessed 28/1/18; <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/coercive-or-controlling-behaviour-now-a-crime> Accessed 28/11/17. The extrapolation of this domestic abuse-specific legal category of ‘coercion and control’ to distinctively religious contexts is made by CCPAS, for instance, in their current guideline booklet *I Want to Understand Spiritual Abuse*. [http://files.ccpas.co.uk/documents/Help-SpiritualAbuse%20\(2015\).pdf](http://files.ccpas.co.uk/documents/Help-SpiritualAbuse%20(2015).pdf) Accessed 28/11/17.

¹⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/oct/20/women-worldwide-use-hashtag-metoo-against-sexual-harassment> Accessed 24/1/18; <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/05/opinion/golden-globes-metoo.html> Accessed 20/1/18.

²⁰ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/mps-sex-scandal-sleaze-spreadsheet-timeline-what-happened-explained-westminster-a8032531.html> Accessed 28/1/18; <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/dec/19/corbyn-horrified-by-sexual-harassment-claims-in-westminster> Accessed 28/1/18; <http://time.com/5033751/sexual-harassment-politicians-roy-moore-al-franken/> Accessed 28/1/18; <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/03/us/politics/why-sexual-harassment-persists-in-politics.html> Accessed 28/1/18; TUC/Everyday Sexism, *Still Just a Bit of Banter? Sexual Harassment in the Workplace in 2016*. Online at: <https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/SexualHarassmentreport2016.pdf> Accessed 27/1/18; <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/oct/16/facts-sexual-harassment-workplace-harvey-weinstein> Accessed 28/1/18; <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2016/aug/10/half-of-women-uk-have-been-sexually-harassed-at-work-tuc-study-everyday-sexism> Accessed 28/1/18.

²¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2016/oct/28/british-cycling-upholds-complaint-shane-sutton-jessica-varnish> Accessed 28/1/18.

²² Enroth, *Churches That Abuse*, 29.

²³ Johnson & Van Vonderen, *Spiritual Abuse*, 81-93.

²⁴ Blue, *Healing Spiritual Abuse*, 12-14; Johnson & Vonderen, *Spiritual Abuse*, 111-120.

²⁵ Enroth, *Churches That Abuse*, 15-34.

Theoretically, of course, SA could be taken to extend to *all* religious traditions. But in fact, virtually every popular and academic publication in English that uses this term is focused on Christianity. Most prominent among these is Lisa Oakley & Kathryn Kinmond's *Breaking the Silence on Spiritual Abuse* (2013).²⁶ Oakley herself is deployed as a consultant by Thirty-One Eight and has spoken at several of the SA-themed events it has run during the past two years or so.²⁷ She is also a member of the Psychology Department at Chester University. Her definition of SA builds on the preceding work cited above, as does her more particular delineation of SA as 'spiritual'. Moreover, the inclusion of 'coercion and control' language in her definition both echoes and informs the translation of that language from the legal codification of domestic abuse into religious contexts:

Spiritual abuse is coercion and control of one individual by another in a spiritual context. The target experiences spiritual abuse as a deeply emotional personal attack. This abuse may include: manipulation and exploitation, enforced accountability, censorship of decision making, requirements for secrecy and silence, pressure to conform, misuse of scripture or the pulpit to control behaviour, requirement of obedience to the abuser, the suggestion that the abuser has a 'divine' position, and isolation from others, especially those external to the abusive context.²⁸

At face value, this more formal definition seems commendable enough: after all, manipulation, domination and bullying offend not only modern secular morality; they are inimical to the gospel. In Matthew 23, Jesus sharply criticises religious leaders who unduly 'burden' others without supporting them (v.4); who 'shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces' (v.13), and who insist on petty legalistic observances while neglecting to show 'justice, mercy and faithfulness' (v.23). In Mark 10:42-43, he contrasts existing Gentile rulers, who 'lord' it over those in their charge, with faithful Christian ministers who act as 'servants' to those in their care. Paul, likewise, castigates religious 'empty talkers and deceivers' who 'upset whole families' and 'teach things they should not teach' (Titus 1:10-11).

Insofar as the burgeoning discourse of SA represents a sincere attempt to safeguard against the negative traits identified in these biblical texts, the *motives* for its use might be understandable. All the same, sincerity of intent cannot serve as the only test for ministry and mission. We must be mindful also of the *consequences* of what we say and do, whether intended or not. Indeed, particularly within our current socio-political climate, the need for critical wisdom with respect to the actual *use* and *effect* of SA discourse is crucial.

Such critical wisdom has become even more necessary of late, in the wake of the first Determination by a Church of England Bishop's Disciplinary Tribunal to cite SA as a specific aspect of misconduct warranting sanction under the Clergy Discipline Measure (2003). In this Determination from December 2017, the Revd Timothy Davis, Vicar of Christ Church, Abingdon, was found by Oxford Diocese's Tribunal to have exercised 'abuse of spiritual power and authority' over a teenage schoolboy whose family were members of his congregation.²⁹ Specifically, the Tribunal concurred with the boy's and his mother's joint complaint that Mr Davis had subjected the boy to mentoring of 'such intensity ... that he was in breach of safeguarding procedures both of the national Church but also of the parish and that this amounted to spiritual abuse'.³⁰

In one sense, the Determinations of a Bishop's Disciplinary Tribunal are internal to the Church of England,

²⁶ Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013.

²⁷ <http://services.ccpas.co.uk/information/media/press-releases/10-02-2017> Accessed 15/11/17.

[http://files.ccpas.co.uk/documents/Bio%20-%20Lisa%20Oakley%20\(July%202014\).pdf](http://files.ccpas.co.uk/documents/Bio%20-%20Lisa%20Oakley%20(July%202014).pdf) Accessed 15/11/17.

[http://files.ccpas.co.uk/documents/Help-SpiritualAbuse%20\(2015\).pdf](http://files.ccpas.co.uk/documents/Help-SpiritualAbuse%20(2015).pdf) Accessed 15/11/17;

<http://files.ccpas.co.uk/documents/SpiritualAbuseSummaryDocument.pdf> Accessed 29/1/18.

²⁸ Lisa Oakley & Kathryn Kinmond, *Breaking the Silence on Spiritual Abuse*, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013, 21. This definition is prominently quoted on p.3 of the lead CCPAS guidebook, *Help: I Want to Understand Spiritual Abuse*.

[http://files.ccpas.co.uk/documents/Help-SpiritualAbuse%20\(2015\).pdf](http://files.ccpas.co.uk/documents/Help-SpiritualAbuse%20(2015).pdf) Accessed 30/11/17.

²⁹ <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2018-01/TD%20Judgement%20final%2020181228.pdf> pp.1, 18. Accessed 5/1/18.

³⁰ <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2018-01/TD%20Judgement%20final%2020181228.pdf> pp.11-18. Accessed 5/1/18.

and as such may deploy ecclesiastically-specific concepts and punishments *additional to* the precepts of the law. Even so, the status of the Church of England as an established church, and the construal of Mr Davis' SA in relation to statutory safeguarding protocols, could be interpreted as lending proto-legal weight to the concept of SA. Specifically, it could be seen as providing ecclesiastical 'case law' which secular lawmakers might then cite, pursuant to placing a distinctive offence of 'Spiritual Abuse' on the statute book, or within associated secondary guidance, and prosecuting it as such.

Indeed, reviewing the outcome of the Davis case, Jayne Ozanne took the Oxford Tribunal's Determination as a cue for proposing that 'the government needs to recognise Spiritual Abuse as a formal category of harm – particularly with children – and add it to their current four-fold definition of abuse – physical, sexual, emotional abuse and neglect'.³¹ The Christian abuse survivors' charity Replenish similarly suggested that the current legal restriction of 'coercive and controlling' behaviour to intimate relationships in domestic contexts should be extrapolated to include ecclesial contexts also.³² Perhaps more predictably, Humanists UK have also begun campaigning for the extension of the same statute to cover SA. Yet one must ask in relation to these actual or potential construals of SA as a new legal proscription, '*How would the singling out of specifically spiritual/religious people and communities in this way for exclusive, additional prosecution over and above the existing secular framework not constitute religious discrimination?*' Surely, it would require police officers, the Crown Prosecution Service, barristers and judges of diverse faiths *and none* to make granular theological distinctions that they could hardly be qualified to make. It would also potentially single out Emotional and Psychological Abuse perpetrated in contexts deemed to be 'spiritual' or 'religious' as somehow worthy of special, or even additional, legal punishment as compared to other forms of Emotional or Psychological Abuse.

As we have seen, Erastianism will the state to punish specifically theological offences defined in accordance with specifically sacred texts, ministries or settings. It makes the State the arbiter of both secular *and* ecclesial penal discipline, and to all intents and purposes conflates the two.³³ This is effectively what certain proponents SA discourse are seeking. Yet they are doing so from apparently liberal-progressive motives which are curiously at odds with the theocratic, mono-religious context that Erastus himself envisaged as the only viable context in which his polity could work, and that are at odds *also* with the context of Established church dominance that is required for latter-day Hobbesian-style Erastianism. My proposal is that in the interests of religious liberties so hard-won from theocratic hegemony and state-church coercion in the later seventeenth century, this new, hybrid form of 'neo-Erastianism' should be resisted.

In 1689, one of the great pioneers of religious rights and freedoms, John Locke, wrote in his *Letter Concerning Toleration* that 'the Magistrate's Power extends not to the establishing of any Articles of Faith, or Forms of Worship by the force of ... Laws. For Laws are of no force at all without Penalties, and Penalties in this case are absolutely impertinent, because they are not proper to convince the mind'.³⁴ Locke's point is that in a society where different people and groups manifestly hold different religious beliefs, it should not be the job of the law to arbitrate between those beliefs, since to do so would be to suggest that the law should compel certain theological convictions or doctrines as correct for society as a whole, and punish other theological convictions or doctrines as incorrect for society as a whole. Such compulsion and punishment, for Locke, would fundamentally misrepresent the nature of religious belief, which, if authentic, should be freely chosen, and freely permitted.

As things stand, a religious leader who preaches race-hate or incites terrorist bombing in Britain today will rightly be prosecuted in law not for their theologically or 'spiritually' abusive views as such, or because they

³¹ Jayne Ozanne, 'Are You Suffering from Spiritual Abuse?' <https://viamedia.news/2018/01/08/are-you-suffering-from-spiritual-abuse/> Accessed 25/1/18.

³² Replenish, 'A Response to the Evangelical Alliance Theology Advisory Group Report'. <http://www.replenished.life/a-response-to-the-evangelical-alliance-theology-advisory-group-report> Accessed 14/2/18.

³³ A.M. Renwick, 'Erastianism', in Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1984, 361-362; J.N. Figgis, 'Erastus and Erastianism', *Journal of Theological Studies* 2 (1900): 66-101.

³⁴ John Locke, 'A Letter Concerning Toleration', in *Second Treatise of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration*. Oxford: OUP, 2016 [1689], 129.

are a specifically *religious* leader, but rather with regard to how their views issue in deeds that violate laws which must apply to all citizens, and not to religious believers alone. Again, the law in a secular democracy that cherishes religious freedom may be competent to try the *effects* of certain applications of certain theologies insofar as those same effects might be perpetrated by non-religious citizens as well. It is not competent, however, to try those theologies *qua* theologies, since to do so would be to require legal authorities to make specifically theological judgments that they cannot conceivably be competent to make. In his magisterial study *Free Speech: Ten Principles for a Connected World*, the Oxford political philosopher Timothy Garton Ash devotes a chapter to free speech and religion in which he exposes the various ‘bad, anachronistic, inconsistent, vacuous and counterproductive’ applications of laws intended to protect distinctively theological sensitivities in modern secular pluralist states, as well as to circumscribe the specifically theological convictions of particular faith groups within those states, rather than the more general, long-standing principle of religious freedom *per se*. Even then, as Garton Ash goes on to point out, New Labour’s 2006 legislation on ‘Incitement to Religious Hatred’ was amended to cover not just ‘religion’ but ‘any other belief system’ – so elusive is a clear definition of ‘religion’ or ‘spirituality’ when one moves as far away from theocracy or monocultural Establishment as today’s UK has moved from the contexts that Erastus and Hobbes assumed.³⁵

Precisely inasmuch as such ill-informed legal judgments of the ‘spiritual’, ‘religious’ or theological dimensions of abuse would institutionalise and compound religious discrimination, it is crucial to underline that such potential discrimination would apply just as much, if not more, to *other* faith traditions as to Christianity – and even, perhaps, to ‘belief systems’ like Marxism, that might bear certain anthropological traits of ‘religiosity’ without subscribing to theism, or theology as such. Thus, one must assume that SA perpetrated by ‘coercive and controlling’ application of the Qur’an, Guru Granth Sahib or Vedas by imams, Granthis or Hindu priests, by Orthodox Jewish or Sikh parents insisting on intra-religious marriages for their children, or by Islamic or Hindu family shame and honour codes, would be pursued as vigorously by safeguarding agencies and statutory authorities as instances of SA within Christianity. Yet the likelihood that this would stir up a highly toxic ‘culture war’ – one prone ironically to accusations of racism and ethnocentrism – ought to give serious pause for thought.³⁶ If such a bleak situation *is* allowed to develop, we shall surely have reanimated a *form* of Erastianism, but a strangely chimerical form whereby judges would purport to arbitrate between ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ spiritual beliefs and actions *qua* ‘spiritual’, not from a clearly-defined theological standpoint authorised by the state, but from a perspective that would not itself be specifically or even generically theological. In this scenario, such neo-Erastianism would not be so much paradoxical as incoherent. By association, the broader cogency and operativity of the term SA must be in serious doubt.

The tendency to separate out spiritually-related Emotional and Psychological Abuse as something requiring distinct legal sanction can also be critiqued on analogy with child sexual abuse. Granted, a judge might possibly *sentence* a paedophile church minister more severely than a non-religious paedophile who did not hold a professional duty of care to children. But the same additional severity in sentencing would apply to an atheist paediatric surgeon, child care worker or secular youth worker likewise convicted of child abuse. Again a ‘spiritual’ motivation, role or setting might be of concern to the specifically religious body from which the perpetrator has come, and that religious body might well take steps to condemn any attempt to justify or excuse such abuse theologically. But that should not be confused with the same religious body’s base-line responsibility to refer psychological and emotional abusers in its midst to the statutory authorities when their offences merit it, where they should be dealt with according to the non-theologically-specific precepts of the law.

Indeed, churches and other faith bodies might very well wish to apply *further* disciplinary measures over and above those applied by the law to emotional and psychological abusers in their midst (e.g. suspension or decommissioning from public ministry). To reiterate: of all communities the church should hold to the

³⁵ Timothy Garton Ash, *Free Speech: Ten Principles for a Connected World*. London: Atlantic, 2016, 270-271.

³⁶ Another very difficult problem for prosecution authorities (let alone a jury) to overcome in this scenario would be the role of Sharia courts and Jewish courts such as the Beth din. The definitions of SA cited here could mean that such quasi-legal systems might routinely be deemed guilty of SA, which would again risk deepening inter-cultural and inter-ethnic tensions.

highest ethical and pastoral standards where this and other forms of abuse are concerned. But as in other arenas of safeguarding and therapeutic care, diagnosis is key to more effective treatment, so cohesive diagnosis is key here, too. As it stands, the term SA might be equated to amorphous concepts like 'The Vapours', 'Shellshock' and 'Hysteria' that were common in psychology a century ago, but which have been superseded by more precise diagnoses like clinical depression, bipolar disorder, functional neurologic disorders, and post-traumatic stress disorder. As I have argued, reiterating default legal definitions of Emotional and Psychological Abuse would be the more lucid and more actionable diagnostic course for churches and other religious communities to take. Where appropriate, it *might* be helpful to identify the context in which such abuse has occurred as 'religious' or 'spiritual' – although as we have seen, precise definitions of these terms are notoriously elusive, and would be even more problematic for police, politicians and lawyers unschooled in theology or religious studies to define. In any case, there should be no suggestion that by appending such qualifiers to it, the abuse perpetrated should be subject to any distinctive *legal* sanction. Indeed, it is because the danger of such distinctive legal sanction for religious groups would be even greater if the discrete construct of SA continued to be oxygenated as described here, that its recent proliferation should be re-thought, reviewed, and reversed.

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