

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF PSEUDO-RELIGION: A Case Study of the Documentary Film In the Name of God - A Holy Betrayal

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Abstract

The documentary film "In the Name of God: The Holy Betrayal" records interviews with former followers of four sects in South Korea, namely Jesus Morning Star/Jeong Myeong-seok, Five Oceans, Baby Garden, and Manmin Central Church. Through a case study, five similarities were found among these sects, namely individual cult (worshiping their leaders), religious fraud (misuse of money), religious abuse (exploitation to sexual harassment), isolation and exclusivism, and extreme mysticism. These five similarities are covered by a fanaticism that makes followers not question or criticize teachings, even if they are contrary to the law. Through a literature review of the cases in this documentary, this research concludes that these five similarities are part of the sect's character. This analysis has significance for introducing Christian movements and tendencies for teachings to become pseudo-religions.

Keywords: Case study; Documentary; Pseudo-religion; God.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of pseudo-religion can be defined as a doctrine and movement of adherents based upon the primary teachings of a mainstream tradition. In this context, this research focuses on doctrines related to Christianity that have, over time, deviated from major canonical beliefs, often resulting in followers who demonstrate problematic and criminal behaviors. Investigating the doctrines and movements of pseudo-religions associated with Christianity can be approached by directly examining the sites of their adherent growth, studying and understanding their primary sources of doctrine, and conducting interviews with their followers.

In the Name of God: A Holy Betrayal is a documentary divided into episodes, releasing on the Netflix movie application on March 3, 2023. The film depicts the story of former members of a religious cult who suffered psychological and physical abuse by the sect's leaders. Through interviews with former members and experts, the film shows its

impact on individuals and society. The film, directed by Cho Seong Hyun, tells the story of 4 heretical sects in South Korea assembled in 8 episodes.

The first sect, the Jeong Myeong-seok sect (*JMS or Jesus Morning Star*) or Providence is narrated in the first 3 episodes, entitled God's Brides, Messiah on Red Notice, and Messiah with Electronic Anklets. Then, only in the next 1 episode, it tells about the second sect, namely *Five Oceans* with the title *God and 32 Dead Bodies*. The documentary continues on the third sect which will be told in 2 episodes, namely the Baby Garden cult with episodes entitled *On the Way to the Heaven* and *The Baby Garden of Death*. This documentary series ends with 2 episodes of the fourth cult story, namely the Manmin Central Church sect, with the title *The Man Who Became God of Manmin and God of Manmin Who Went to Prison*.

In the press conference, Hyun explained that one of the backgrounds for making the documentary that has been worked on for 2 years is so that Many people know and recognize incidents from this religion (sect), as well as to raise topics and social consciousness.¹ Hyung also mentioned a term to designate these sects: *pseudo-religion*.² According to Eileen Barker, a prominent sociologist of religion, "pseudo-religion" refers to religious or spiritual movements that are perceived as imitations or false by external observers because they do not conform to what is considered a mainstream religious norm or standard. It goes on to say:

Labeling a movement as a sect can imply that it is a dangerous *pseudo-religion* with vicious touches that may engage in financial crimes and political intrigue, practice unnatural sexual habits, abuse women and children, and use brainwashing techniques continuously and indisputably exploiting his followers.³

The sects described in this documentary are biased (*pseudo-religion*) from Christianity. This is because each of his teachings used the Bible as a reference, presented the concept of the Trinity or associated his doctrine with Jesus Christ. As *pseudo-religions*, these four sects fulfill the characteristics mentioned by Barker as sects. Broadly speaking,

¹ Jeong Han-byeol, ""내가족도피해자"... '나는 신이다' 조성현 PD의 고백 [종합]," Hankook Ilbo, March 10, 2023, <https://www.hankookilbo.com/News/Read/A2023031010220005096>.

² Sophie-Ha, "The producer of 'In the Name of God, A Holy Betrayal' says he's been carrying around a stun gun and baton for protection," Allkpop, March 11, 2023, <https://www.allkpop.com/article/2023/03/the-producer-of-in-the-name-of-god-a-holy-betrayal-says-hes-been-carrying-around-a-stun-gun-and-baton-for-protection>.

³ Eileen Barker, "The Not-So-New Religious Movements: Changes in 'the Cult Scene' over the Past Forty Years," Temenos-Nordic Journal of Comparative Religion 50, no. 2 (2014): 235-56, <https://journal.fi/temenos/article/view/48461/14189>

the documentary mentions the *JMS* sect committing sexual violence, the *Five Oceans* sect engaging in financial crime activities, *Baby Garden* engaging in exploitation and violence against children, and *Manmin Central Church* engaging in indoctrination (the recognition that its leader is the second Christ). The things mentioned, are not the only activities carried out by these sects, some sects also commit crimes of sexual and financial violence. By and large, all sects are indoctrinated and have the same theological color, that the sect leader calls himself and is recognized together as God or prophet.

Until this article was written, there are still pros and cons to this documentary. *JMS* followers had prevented the release of this documentary by raising objections. For them, presenting cases handled by courts in documentary series violates the "principle of presumption of innocence" and undermines religious freedom.⁴ Some of the sects mentioned in the documentary are still operating and have followers today.

The facts in this documentary, can be examined in case studies to understand how a religion – by its followers – produces biases, which are not only incompatible with the teachings of its major religion, but also commit crimes that threaten the welfare of society at large. This study was also conducted on the followers of the sect. In this case, it was the fanaticism of his followers that gave room for the development of the sect. The religious fanaticism mentioned here is understood as an irrational attitude towards religion that encourages its adherents to practice religion outside the bounds of common sense and, therefore, in the absence of order or ⁵ also called blind belief in an idea or doctrine is considered absolutely true, and that it is acceptable or even true to force others to share the idea. ⁶ As with blind faith, the fanatical actions of followers of sects are generally not followed by true knowledge of the religion.

Overall, this article highlights some of the similarities that exist within each sect, so that it is easy to recognize and prevent its development. Previous studies conducted a biblical study of Bible passages on heresy ⁷ and the theory of the threat of heresy in

⁴ Yonhap, "Religious group's request for court injunction to block release of Netflix documentary rejected," The Korea Times, March 2, 2023, https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/art/2023/03/398_346417.html.

⁵ N.S.S. Iwe, *Religious Fanaticism: Causes, Consequences and Remedies* (Calabar: Saesprint, 2000), 11.

⁶ Gwamna, Je'adayebe Dogara, *Religion and Politics in Nigeria* (Jos: ACTS, 2014), 64.

⁷ As Juanda & Zevania Venda conducted, "Facing the Heresy of the Ephesian Church Study According to 1 Timothy 4:6-16," Kerusso 1, No.1 (2019): 1-5 or Santy Sahartian, "Fortifying Church Youth from the Teachings of False Teachers Through Understanding 2 Peter 3:3," Journal of Theology Living News 3, No.2 (2021): 284-304.

Indonesia.⁸ This research provides practical studies related to heresy and its development so that it can complement research related to pseudo-religion, both in biblical, historical, social and practical studies.

The case studies answer questions about the characteristics of the growing sects discussed in this documentary. Regarding the characteristics found, a literature review was carried out to deepen the understanding of each of the things discussed. This study aims to increase the sensitivity of church members in recognizing teachings in the church, so as to anticipatory can prevent the emergence of biased religion. In addition, this study also aims to emphasize the position of Christianity in general towards biased religions narrated in documentaries that are widely discussed today.

The research method used is⁹ a case study, which points from a case experienced by former followers of sects both individually and in groups, which shows a social phenomenon. As qualitative research, this case study method aims to find the characteristics of the sect obtained from interviews in documentaries. The characteristics found can be used as a general theory for understanding biased Christian sects and also as a contribution to research into similar movements.¹⁰

The data collection procedure in this study was carried out by watching documentary films carefully and thoroughly. After that, the author can record and organize data relevant to the research topic. Data analysis is carried out by understanding the story or narrative conveyed, exploring the meaning contained in the story or interview, and relating it to concepts or theories related to the research topic. In this case, although the documentary has 4 major stories, a comprehensive analysis is carried out, so that a list of similarities between each sect is obtained to find its characteristics.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Sect 1: Jesus Morning Star/Jeong Myeong-seok (JMS)

In the 1980s South Korea faced a dark time, as it was ruled by a military dictatorship. In the university world, the student movement can be classified into 2 major

⁸ Morris Phillips Takaliuang, "The Threat of Heresy in Christian Circles: A Lesson for Indonesian Churches," *Missio Ecclesiae* 9, No.1 (2020), 163–84.

⁹ Sonny Eli Zaluchu, "Research Methods in Manuscripts of Religious Scientific Journals," *Journal of Living News Theology*3, no. 2 (March 2021): 249–66. <https://doi.org/10.38189/jtbh.v3i2.93>

¹⁰ Anif F. Chawa, Lutfi Amiruddin, and A. Imron Rozuli, "Case Study Approach in Sociological Qualitative Research," in *Qualitative Research Methodology - Sharing Experiences from the Field*, eds. Siti Kholifah and I Wayan Suyadnya, 1 ed. (Depok: Rajawali Pers, 2018), 191.

levels; The government's protest movement, and others focus on faith. In the midst of this situation, the teaching of the Bible by Jeong Myeong-seok (hereinafter referred to as JMS) sounded as a practical solution to the national problem. JMS is said to have read the Bible 2000 times, so many students are interested in listening to teachings that may have been confusing for them. The teachings of JMS flourish among the students of elite universities. The development of teachings is carried out through events that can be participated in such as football matches, cheerleading events and art festivals.

In this documentary, several voice recordings, reports, and direct interviews with victims of sexual violence conducted by JMS are presented. JMS conducts unlawful activities, such as sexual harassment of its female followers, which occur in meetings referred to as prayer meetings, meetings, or medical examinations. JMS also has a centralized location, where there are containers inhabited by young women who are victims of sexual violence. In addition, JMS often stayed for several nights and had meetings with young women while traveling to preach. In 1999, JMS was arrested on charges of kidnapping and stealing money from his former followers, but legal proceedings did not proceed. In addition, JMS also made overseas trips that he did nothing more than a fun activity in other countries, and allegedly harassed about 100 young women in Taiwan under the guise of wanting to carry out consultations.

When he wanted to renew his passport, JMS bribed the officer by giving expensive crystals. In this recording, it was found that there was an arrest warrant in the name of JMS. There JMS's passport was confiscated and he fled. In 2003, Interpol included JMS on its list Red Notice.¹¹

The former followers gathered and filed criminal lawsuits and civil courts for rape and kidnapping. After fleeing South Korea, he was arrested in Hong Kong in 2003, but later returned to escape and commit sexual violence abroad. In 2007, he was arrested in China and sentenced to 10 years in prison, but still received erotic photos from his female followers while in prison. In 2018, she was found guilty and sentenced to wearing an electric ankle bracelet for 7 years, but there are still reports of sexual assault. In 2022, JMS was rearrested after the victim held a press conference and is currently hiring a large

¹¹ A Red Notice is a request to law enforcement around the world to locate and temporarily arrest a person awaiting extradition, surrender, or similar legal action. A Red Notice is not an international arrest warrant. Interpol. "View and search public Red Notices for wanted persons." March 16, 2023. <https://www.interpol.int/en/How-we-work/Notices/View-Red-Notices>

law firm. An anti-JMS professor, Kim Do-hyeong, has written a book chronicling his struggle against JMS.

Sect 2: Five Oceans

Park Soon Ja is a businesswoman dubbed the "Holy Mother" for her hard work and sacrifices for the welfare of her followers. However, behind this positive impression, there is a dark story involving extortion practices, fraud, and physical violence. Park Soon Ja asked her members to lend funds with the promise of high interest rates, around 20-40%. The money was used for Park Soon Ja's personal benefit. When a member asked for a refund, Park Soon Ja refused and even asked her followers to borrow even more money from their families. Park Soon Ja also forced her followers to repentance and confession by means of physical torture performed in front of everyone. He claimed that he had received a revelation from God that the world was coming to an end and the Five Oceans were heaven on earth. He even called himself God and claimed to soon conquer the world.

As suspicions of Five Oceans' activities grew, on August 29, 1987, Lee Sam-jee, a policeman, discovered Park Soon Ja had been killed along with 31 of her followers in a factory attic in the Samin-Dong area. Five Oceans' total debt amounted to hundreds of billions of won, borrowed from about 200 creditors. The story of the Five Oceans serves as a lesson that nurturing the underprivileged is a noble duty, but it should not be done in a detrimental and unlawful manner. In addition, the claims made by Park Soon Ja as God and world leader must be watched out for and questioned.

Park Soon Ja, leader of the Five Oceans sect, stressed the importance of communal living where followers are expected to prioritize the needs of the group over their own individual desires. However, calls for additional funding put enormous pressure on followers to donate more money, which often exceeds their means. Park Soon Ja encourages her followers to borrow money from their families and trust them, which causes many followers to fall into debt. Although lending money is considered a noble task, the emphasis on this practice often causes financial hardship for followers who are unable to pay back their debts.

Sect 3: Baby Garden

The leader of this sect named Kim Ki-soon was a disciple of a priest surnamed Lee, who was controversial for dancing naked with his followers. The ritual of worship is to

wear thin pajamas and sing spiritual songs. Kim Ki-soon began to develop his teachings while pastor Lee was imprisoned. Kim Ki-soon said that Pastor Lee was like John the Baptist who paved the way for his own ministry, and named himself Agaya. In his teaching Kim Ki-soon said that all people must be like children, in order to be worthy in the Kingdom of Heaven; Even he called himself a three-year-old baby. The place of this sect gathering was referred to as the Garden of Babies after the previous Garden of Eden. All these things started in 1978.

The Baby Garden itself is referred to as heaven on earth created by Agaya, as a gathering place for all his followers as a family and brothers. He also mentioned that the apocalypse is coming soon, and only the Baby Garden family will be saved. The doctrine established by this sect is the Doctrine of Love. That God is love, and his followers believe that Kim Ki-soon is the Lord Jesus, the second Christ. In a prayer excerpt, it says:

*To Agaya, the King of Love
We give You glory and praise
Our King of Love
We dedicate our laughter, singing and dancing to You
We will be Your source of eternal happiness
O Agaya, you are so beautiful.*

A former follower of hers said that as long as they regard Kim Ki-soon as God, then they see everything she does as beautiful and see no faults. Including when they are asked to raise money that will be used to build a gathering location called the eternal kingdom. His followers sold their possessions and gave money to build this kingdom. Families who do not give money because of poverty have to work hard to provide money for development.

The first land was purchased on December 19, 1982, in Icheon. Development is entirely carried out by his own followers, both men and women work together. A former follower said that this sect was not an ordinary sect, because it successfully brainwashed its followers and made them work like cattle.

There are three things that must end when joining this sect, namely affection (obsession with the family: forbidden to love the family, no affection, must be prepared to commit cruel acts against their own family, children will call their mother as aunt), material goods (obsession with goods: no need to pursue education because they are already in God's kingdom and focus on working to meet the needs of the Baby Garden) and sexual desire (obsession with opponents type: dating and loving the opposite sex is

a sin). Kim Ki-soon is also said to restrict access to hospitals and rely on a traditional treatment called moxibustion.¹² For his followers who proved to be disobedient, they would be beaten and treated like servants with high working hours

Sect 4: Manmin Central Church

Manmin Central Church is a church led by Pastor Lee Jae-rock. This priest claimed to be a miracle worker who could heal believers just by touching the hem of his clothes, looking into his eyes and stepping on his reflection, or when they were placed on handkerchiefs. In his youth, he was a man of many illnesses and after intense prayer, he experienced healing. During these times, he claimed to hear God's voice saying, "I will be with you wherever you go." Manmin Church was founded in 1982 with Lee Jae-rock's recognition that he is God. This church began to receive attention during meetings to heal the sick. The source in this documentary mentioned that many people were successfully healed during these meetings. In 1991, Lee Jae-rock was dismissed from the Korean Church of Jesus Sungkyul and in 1999 was labeled a cult by the Korean Christian Council. It states, "a monstrous cult that practices extremist mysticism." One case of this sect was an act of destruction carried out to prevent news airing by MBC television station in 1999. The government said the move was a threat to national security and would arrest Pastor Lee Jae-rock if convicted of provocation. Losses are estimated at up to 2-3 billion for this destruction. In the lawsuit, MBC won the lawsuit. However, Lee Jae-rock announces that it was their side that won it.

There is an event that seems like a big day for this sect, the day of the Feast held every May 3. This event was done to welcome the presence of God who came to visit them. When he got God's visit, it was said that the Father would walk on Lee Jae-rok's right, and Jesus would walk on his left, they would walk together. In this event, they will prepare 3 magnificent chairs mentioned to represent the Holy Trinity, two of which are for the Father and Jesus, the other for Lee Jae-rock. Lee Jae-rock's existence here is mentioned as another Christ, who is equated with the Holy Spirit.

¹² Moxibustion is a way of stimulating acupuncture points using moxa, which is a cigar made from Ngai leaves (*Artemesia vulgaris*) by burning. The heat power from the moxa through acupressure points will be flowed through the surface of the skin, muscles and then to the points and meridians so that it will cause treatment, prevention and repair reactions and treatments. Muhamad N. Ikhsan, *Basic Science of Acupressure and Moxibustion* (Cimahi: Bhimaristan Press, 2019), 189.

In his teachings, it is mentioned that there are 5 levels of heaven. The first level is called Paradise Heaven (there is only pasture), the second level is the First Heaven (there are apartments), the third level is the Second Heaven (there are houses), the fourth level is the Third Heaven (there is a castle) and the last is the New Jerusalem (there is a palace). This can be obtained by a measure of faith, which has been prepared through recording on a piece of paper, such as "your faith is 30% in the second degree," or "your faith is 70% in the third degree." The amount of faith this will be determined by how much the congregation gives money offerings to the church. In his sermon on hell, Lee Jae-rock said, "if you don't pay tithes and offerings, God will curse you." Explained form of anathema it can be like a driving accident or also sick disease. The offerings consisted of thanksgiving offerings, building offerings, charitable offerings, special offerings, offerings during Bible study, harvest day offerings, Easter offerings, Christmas offerings and tithes. Even children are considered to need to pay tithing, on behalf of their parents.

In another teaching, he said that believers are unlikely to experience disease. Therefore, all sickness is because a person sins and deserves the death penalty. Visiting the hospital is a form of weakness of faith, so many parishioners are actually sick but only pray, until eventually they die. It is said that TB disease is contracted by many congregations in this church. One of the sect's activists claimed to have tuberculosis because of marriage, while he should only love Lee Jae-rock. Lee Jae-rock also forbids women and men from engaging in active communication, and men who have difficulty controlling their sexual desires are encouraged to castrate themselves. During the trial, it was said that he often denied all charges, until a recording circulated and recorded the voice of a woman who admitted that the activities she did with Lee Jae-rock were considered an honor, because he was not an ordinary human being and he was always right. For this act, Lee Jae-rock was sentenced to 16 years in prison. His followers are still waiting for his release.

Case Study: Characteristics of Pseudo-Religions

After looking at the interviews presented, the background of the establishment of a sect, what is its main doctrine, what criminal acts they commit and how it impacts socially, it is found that the uniqueness of each sect is found. This uniqueness lies in their area of understanding of Bible teaching. The JMS sect acknowledges the existence of its leader as Christ Himself, by recounting details of his birth as if prophesied by the Bible.

The Five Oceans sect, however, places more emphasis on the existence of its leader as a prophet or God who will bring about the end of human history. Unlike the previous two sects, the Baby Garden sect does not refer to its leader as Christ, but as God Himself, and refers to itself as love. Next is the Manmin Sect which talks a lot about its leader in his position in the Trinity. This uniqueness actually has something in common in terms of how they claim to be the last messenger, who fulfills all prophecies. Related to this, Leach also mentioned this which makes his fanatical followers always feel right.¹³

There are some similarities in all these sects. The following is an explanation of the characteristics found to be similar along with the general attitude and view of Christianity towards it.

Cult of the Individual: The Cult Leader is God

As pseudo-religious sects of Christianity, the leaders of these sects were generally born and developed within Christianity itself. In its development, some of these leaders are said to have had mystical experiences in their youth or early ministry. JMS and Lae Jee-rock began their ministry by presenting miracles that attracted the attention of many people. In addition, these leaders have charisma that is able to attract the attention of the crowd – such as Kim Ki-soon who replaced the previous church leader – or is well known for his generous nature – like Park Soon Ja. The leadership of these sects arose from unusual situations: miraculous signs, generous attitudes, eye-catching speech and a new festival atmosphere.¹⁴

In the midst of their followers' confessions, these leaders would either claim to have revelation from God, or were messengers of God, or even God Himself. On closer inspection, some movements basically carry the spirit of Christian mission that teaches the Bible and thus improves aspects of people's lives. However, the self-appointment of the leader as a divine figure, the arbitrariness of the leader undermines the core of the movement. With the power he has, he can do many things, even things that tend to violate mutually recognized norms and morals. This is what makes each sect totalitarian.¹⁵

¹³ William H. Leach, *Religious Fanaticism*, 243.

¹⁴ Jesus' teaching on heresy, "On the last day f many people shall cry out to Me: Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and performed many miracles in Your name also? At that time I will come clean to them and say: I never knew you! Depart from Me, you evildoers!" Matthew 7:15-23.

¹⁵ Relates to the concentration of power on a leader. Merriam-Webster, s.v. "Totalitarian," accessed March 22, 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/totalitarian>.

Barker cites this type of charismatic authoritative leadership as a common sign for pseudo-religious movements; he is not bound by rules or traditions, so is accountable to no one, except perhaps to God (though he may be God), and thus highly unpredictable and capable of dramatic change without warning.¹⁶

Other studies conducted on sects tend to have something in common with this. Tretyakov, in his research on manipulative and totalitarian leadership of sects, mentions that this leadership is the initial stage of brainwashing his followers. ¹⁷ It is further explained thus:

"... the manipulative criminals are highly skilled in calculating and hypocritical, possessing all the evidence of artistic talent; They deftly simulate joy and reasonable trust, imitate simplicity and sincerity in communication, envelop a person with a stream of love and verbal exaltation. With close emotional contact, recruiters form a very trusting relationship with a potential victim (such contact becomes two-way, and the interaction turns into pure manipulation). Thus, often the victim is not a passive puppet, to whom the psychological impact of the crime is directed. Subsequent informational intervention (which is quite painful and traumatic) is inevitable. Aggressive brainwashing (mental attacks) will continue until the victim reaches a state of complete prostration. In the life of a novice in the sect, the phase of blind obedience begins."¹⁸

The Bible's teaching of the divinity of Jesus is a central part of church growth. In this case, the congregation is encouraged to have the ability to think critically and have the courage to rebuke mistakes or potential misdirection that may occur. However, of course this can be done if the congregation has knowledge of the true word of God through expositional sermons.¹⁹

Paul took note of this, right after he had delivered the greeting in his letter to the Galatians 1:6-19. In this entire letter to the Galatians, Paul is telling them that they are responsible for judging the message conveyed to them by others.²⁰ Furthermore, in his letter to Timothy, Paul does not merely rebuke those who preach heresy, but those churches who listen only to what they want to hear (2 Timothy 4:3).

¹⁶ Barker, *The Not-So-New Religious Movement*, 241

¹⁷ Tretyakov investigated 17 criminal cases linked to *The Order of the Way, The Church of Scientology, St. Michael Monastery, Christian Mission Family, Church of Spiritual Enlightenment, Kondratiev sect*. Ivan Tretyakov, "Destructive nature of manipulative content, created by leaders of totalitarian pseudoreligious cults," E3S Web of Conferences: EMMFT-2020, No. 244 (2021): 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1051/e3sconf/202124411036>

¹⁸ Ibid., 6.

¹⁹ The three things Mark Dever notes as signs of a healthy Church begin with expositional preaching, then continue with biblical theology and the gospel. Mark Dever, *9 Signs of a Healthy Church* (Surabaya, Momentum Publishers: 2010).

²⁰ Mark Dever, *9 Church Signs*, 281.

As a Christian, proclaiming oneself as God or acknowledging others as God is intolerable. Whatever and however the signs that accompany a leader's presence and ministry, if he preaches himself and not Christ, all Christians are responsible for rejecting that teaching. The only thing that has the nature of inerrancy is the Word of God, leaders and those who deliver expositions of God's Word must be open and receptive to criticism, but in order.

Religious Fraud: Financial Fraud

In Christian teaching, the giving of offerings is an important part of religious teaching. Although Jesus has affirmed that offerings are never related to quantity and Paul mentions that there are other things that also include offerings, many churches use offerings for self-enrichment or for other purposes such as church building or mission travel. The four sects described in a documentary have also been implicated in misappropriation of money, including paying women after sexually assaulting, gambling, or building mansions.

In general, Tretyakov points out, whatever sects' theology – and their crimes – all sects raise money to enrich their leaders.²¹ In a study conducted in Indonesia, related to financial management and potential corruption in the church, it was said that this potential abuse occurred due to several factors, namely Agency Theory, triangle fraud theory and GONE theory.²² Agency theory is a theory about the tendency of company management (in this case the church) to perform subjectivity in money management, such as prioritizing colleagues or family in church building projects, manipulating the figures of money use knowingly and even not evaluating if there is a financial mismanagement when done by family or colleagues.

The issue that needs to be discussed here is not whether paying for the offering is necessary or not, but the management of the offering itself. Giving money has been the style of God's church community since the Old Testament (Proverbs 3:9; Mal 3:10), also taught by Jesus (Luke 6:38) and became more specific in the Apostles' teaching (1 Corinthians 16:1b-2; 2 Corinthians 9:7). There are theological explanations also in paying

²¹ Ivan Tretyakov, *Destructive nature of manipulative content*, 2.

²² Soepardi (2010) as quoted by Eka Adhi Wibowo & Heru Kristanto, "Corruption in Church Service: Analysis of Potential Irregularities and Internal Control," *Integrity* 3, no.2: 109.

money as an offering that show that offering is not necessarily about giving money, but is also part of a testimony of faith and growing understanding of the church community.

The management of church money must be done with good principles, as reported openly, have internal controls,²³ pay attention to the welfare of his congregation and have an impact on the wider community. Although there are many aspects that need to be considered about accountability of church financial management such as aspects of divinity of leaders and transparent financial reporting that are considered taboo, using church money for personal purposes, even used for gambling and facilitating sexual harassment clearly shows the lack of financial reporting carried out.

Religious Abuse: Exploitation to Sexual Abuse

Various studies have been conducted to examine the relationship of clergy leadership to sexual harassment or violence.²⁴ In general, this is considered to be related to the cult of the individual, so what the leader does will be considered right because he is God. Whether the case is sect-related or not, the independent commission focused on sexual violence in the Catholic Church called CIASE released a report estimating that as many as 216,000 children have been sexually abused by priests and other church members from 1950 to 2020.²⁵

This happens very clearly in the three sects; JMS, Baby Garden and Manmin Central Church. In the case of JMS, the women who became his followers were indoctrinated that their bodies belonged to God (i.e. themselves) so they had to hand them over to him. In the Baby Garden sect, this contradicts Kim Ki-soon's teaching that prohibits romantic relationships between men and women because all sexual desires are sins because there are sources who claim to have been abused by her. In the case of the Manmin Central Church sect, Lae Jee-rock used his image as God and invited others to visit him to his apartment secretly and suddenly. The site of the abuse was called the Garden of Eden, where everyone could freely wear no clothes and sexual activity took

²³ More about internal control is explained by Eka Adhi Wibowo & Heru Kristanto, *Corruption in Church Ministry*, 105-136.

²⁴ One example is Martinus Renda, et al, "Abuse of Priesthood Power in Cases of Sexual Abuse," *Studia Philosophica et Theologica* 22, No. 1 (2022): 114-37.

²⁵ Nindias Nur Khalika, "The Seriousness of the Catholic Church in Combating Sexual Abuse Continues to Be Tested," *Tirto*, October 24, 2021, <https://tirto.id/gkzb>

place there. Victims tend not to realize that they have been abused because those who do so are recognized as God or prophets.

Also highlighted in this section is the exploitation of its followers, namely the compulsion to work beyond reasonable working hours and the lack of quality of life characterized by inadequate housing, insufficient food and also limited access to health services. JMS reportedly hired his followers who were college students to sell during their holidays, and he bought cars with his earnings. Likewise, Kim Ki-soon forced her parents to sell late at night, but the living facilities provided to them were far from decent. Tretyakov said that victims of sects tend to face problems such as humiliation, fraud, blackmail, exploitation, spiritual slavery, total socio-psychological alienation, and persistent loss of mental health. Constantly-and these are just some of the problems that can happen to them.²⁶

In context, both exploitation and sexual harassment can occur due to social isolation. His people were withdrawn from the general public and lived together in a closed community (on this subject discussed in the next point). This is explained by Tobias and Lalich in the following list:

- Cults may use techniques such as hypnosis, mind control, and social isolation to manipulate and control their members;
- Sect leaders often have absolute power over their members and can force them to commit unethical or even unlawful acts;²⁷
- Sect members who want to leave can face threats and intimidation from leaders or fellow members.²⁸

The Bible's view of sexuality is holy and holy. God created sexuality before man fell into sin. Sex is God's gift in its recreational function for male and female relationships. Becher reformulated the form and effort in fighting for justice in human sexual morality through several fundamental things related to sexuality:

First, the Bible fundamentally favors sexuality. Second, men and women become partners so that there is no inequality between men and women regarding sexuality. Third, establish four basic principles in the relationship between men and women: the

²⁶ Ivan Tretyakov, Destructive nature of manipulative content, 1.

²⁷ Madeleine Landau Tobias & Janja Lalich, *Captive Hearts, Captive Minds: Freedom and Recovery from Cults and Abusive Relationships* (California, Hunter House: 1994), 8-10.

²⁸ Ibid, 113.

principle of equality, the principle of sexual distinction, the principle of encouragement to unite and the principle of sublimation.²⁹

Farley says the only foundation and moral standard for Christianity in illuminating sexuality is the Bible.³⁰ There, a standard that does not contradict the ideology of society in general, concerning the relational (not authoritative) relationship between one man and one woman. Contrary to this, it does not come from the Bible.

Isolation and Exclusivism

Sects such as JMS and Manmin Central Church have a lifestyle that is isolated from the surrounding community and tends to be closed. Even though Thus, they are not completely isolated and still have access to the wider community. This is due to the assumption that their community is the only true one and outside social exposure can bring a decrease in the quality of faith. Kim Ki-soon, the founder of Baby Park, built an isolated 'kingdom' with many intrigues asking his followers to keep secret. Navarro, however, wrote about this isolative attitude as part of the cult leader's dangerous personality. He said that one of the dangerous personality traits is when he takes away the freedom of his followers to leave, travel, organize their lives, isolate their followers literally, such as going to a remote place so as not to be observed.³¹

Christian vocation and ministry is holistic, internally influencing and building individuals and their communities, and externally impacting the world around them. Christians are asked to go and disciple as many people as possible in the context of integrity ranging from ideology, to quality of life, ecology, politics and society. The call of Christ does not invite people to gather and close themselves in exclusive communities, but rather to gather and be sent.

²⁹ Jeanne Becher, *Women, Religion and Sexuality* (Jakarta, BPK Gunung Mulia: 2011), 263.

³⁰ Margaret A Farley, *A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics* (London, Bloomsbury Publishing: 2008), 183.

³¹ Joe Navarro, *Dangerous Personalities* (New York, Rodale, 2014) as quoted in Reci Sydney Newsletter Vol. 88, October-November 2014. <https://stage.recisydney.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Radix-Nov-2014.pdf>

Extreme Mysticism

Mysticism is the belief that direct knowledge of God, spiritual truth, or ultimate reality can be attained through subjective experience (such as intuition or insight).³² In Christianity itself, mysticism can be understood as the purpose of a Christian's life to live like Christ and in the image he creates.³³ It contains personal spiritual experiences that are consistent with the truth of God's Word. So far, Christian mysticism in that context has not been a problem.

In discussing extreme mysticism within sects, we mean the prioritization of individualist spiritual experiences in order to establish a teaching, and even without study of the Bible – thus being called extreme.

Tretyakov mentions that mystical practices are something that cult leaders always do, in an effort to add to the image that affects their followers.³⁴ And sure enough, activities that included miracles of healing, festivals of faith performed against the backdrop of a magnificent stage, and so on, managed to attract many people to come and hear.

The analysis shows that the focus is not on the source of the miracle or whether it is true, but on the construction of the miracle in its manifestation. In Christian theology, miracles must be Christ-centered and bring about the understanding of the forgiveness of sins as the greatest miracle that saves man. Miracles are not meant to glorify individuals or groups, but must always be in line with the message of Christ.

Comparison of Christian Teachings and Attitudes

The sects discussed in the article have doctrinal differences from the Bible, ranging from the doctrine of God, His work, to the coming of Jesus in the new heaven and earth. Every Christian should test these teachings so as not to be swayed by false teachings. Jesus Himself warned of false prophets who wore sheep's clothes but were actually wild wolves (Matthew 7:15-16). He emphasized the importance of recognizing the signs of heresy and taught that He is the only way to salvation and eternal life (John

³² Merriam-Webster, s.v. "Mysticism," accessed March 23, 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mysticism>.

³³ Reginald H. Starr, "Christian Mysticism," *The Sewanee Review* 9, No.1 (1901), 30-40.

³⁴ Ivan Tretyakov, *Destructive nature of manipulative content*, 1.

14:6). Therefore, teaching that diminishes the existence of Jesus is certainly not in harmony with the Christian faith.

Relationally, in John 10:1-18, Jesus taught about the importance of having good spiritual leaders, such as shepherds who know their sheep and take good care of them. Against this heresy, Jesus' teaching can be understood thus: reduce, replace or distort Jesus' lordship as the only way of salvation (John 14:6); is among the congregation, but dangerous. Jesus emphasized that it was necessary to pay attention to the fruits of his ministry to recognize his doctrine (Matthew 7:15-16); have good relationships and are accepted in the context of morals and general norms, care for the welfare of their congregation and maintain their faith properly (John 10:1-18).

The apostle Paul in his epistles also advised the church about heresy. Paul's emphasis was on acknowledging Christ's primacy as Lord, and salvation received by grace. In his letters, he wrote a critique of the congregation that considered circumcision, food and prioritized the law for salvation.

Barker, in the perspective of the sociology of religion, suggests that the sect may engage in financial crimes and political intrigues, practice unnatural sexual habits, abuse women and children, and use continuous and indisputable brainwashing techniques to exploit its followers.³⁵ From the perspective of his followers, there was an attitude of fanaticism that led them to accept all the doctrines taught in the sect. Fanaticism itself is understood as an attitude that shows excessive enthusiasm and intense loyalty without being critical of some controversial issue (such as religion or politics).³⁶ It is this anti-critical attitude that deserves attention, because it is completely inconsistent with the Bible's teaching that asks its readers to test everything on the basis of the Bible itself.³⁷ Fanaticism is a blind form of belief.³⁸

Christianity is actually an integrative and holistic understanding of its approach to faith. Truth (or knowledge) is emphasized in the Bible. God's Word is the original truth (Psalm 119:160) revealed in the incarnation of Jesus Christ (14:6), which is contrasted

³⁵ Barker, *The Not-So-New Religious Movement*, 236

³⁶ Merriam-Webster, s.v. "Fanatic," accessed March 21, 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fanatic>

³⁷ Test everything and hold on to the good. (1 Thessalonians 5:21)

³⁸ William H. Leach, "Religious Fanaticism: Asset or Debit?," *The Biblical World* 53, no. 3 (1919): 240-44, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3136306>

with fairy tales or myths (1 Timothy 4:7). Salvation in Christianity itself is concerned with knowledge (John 17:3) and belief (John 3:16), and all recorded theories of faith touch reality at least the death and resurrection of Christ (Romans 10:9–10; 1 Corinthians 15:12–19). In a relational context, loving God also involves the integrative aspects of soul, heart, strength and mind (Luke 10:27) and knowing God's will involves renewing the mind (Romans 12:2). All of this confirms that the Christian faith is not merely accepted by closing one's eyes, but can be explained with a rational approach. Faith and reason are not contradictory but integral, not two unrelated parts or dualism.³⁹

In this documentary, former followers of sects become sources who reveal their experiences. They realized that as followers of the sect, they were unable to see clearly and did not take a personal and critical approach to the Bible. Fanaticism is understood as blind love and not questioning teachings. On the contrary, the life of a Christian should have a redemptive impact on society and the church should participate in bringing good impact to society. The Bible and its laws and purposes never contradict any law (Galatians 5:23). The Christian life is to have a redemptive impact in society, not an isolated and exclusive life. In the context of the community, the church is also an active part that has the task of participating and bringing good impact to society.

In the Gospels, of course, there are different and contradictory things with doctrines or ideologies in society. A diverse worldview and perhaps from there breeds a lot of action. However, the truth of the gospel is not an exclusive ideology that makes a believer close himself off from social circles. The Gospel in a global context shows the full light of God, and that light is in sparks outside the Gospel, for the whole universe was created by God in Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:15–16). Calvin often referred to it as the stage of God's glory.⁴⁰

This redemptive call clearly denounces all forms of fanaticism that bring individual Christians or churches closed to criticism and always feeling right. In fact, church history records many mistakes made by the church. The Israelites, as God's people in the Old Testament, are recorded as having done much evil before the Lord God (worship of Baal at the foot of Mount Sinai [Exodus 32:4], murmuring attitude toward God's providence [Numbers 11:4–23, 31–35] until many of them were killed by serpents

³⁹ Kalis Stevanus, "The Relationship of Reason and Faith in Apologetics and the Proclamation of the Gospel," *Dunamis: Journal of Theology and Christian Education* 6, No. 1 (2021): 93.

⁴⁰ John Calvin as quoted by Mark Denver, *9 Signs of the Church*, 28.

[Numbers 21:4-9], rebellions [Numbers 13-14, 16:41-50]). True Christianity understands ultimate sinfulness and the great concept of grace simultaneously. In living out the gospel that is God's truth, man needs to be aware of the sinfulness and potential evil that exist within him, which must be resisted daily in the power and power of the Holy Spirit. This should remind all believers that Christianity is actually the truth lived by justified guilty people. Understanding this will distance all Christian teaching from an attitude of justification and self-focused teaching.

CONCLUSION

The documentary "*In the Name of God: A Holy Betrayal*" is a story that covers the existence of four pseudo-religious sects of Christianity in South Korea. These sects emerged because they were reported by some of their former followers for offenses committed such as sexual harassment and violence, theft, exploitation, murder and fraud. Of the four sects, three are still in the legal process. The explicit testimonies and recordings shown in this documentary are convincing to support that transgressions and crimes have indeed been committed in the name of God. Case studies were conducted on this documentary, so that similarities were found in the four sects of JMS, Five Oceans, Baby Garden and Manmin Central Church. These similarities include the recognition that the leader is God (cult of the individual), religious fraud (money fraud), religious abuse (exploitation to sexual harassment), isolation and exclusivism and the occurrence of extreme mysticism. These are collectively associated with fanaticism among Christians, namely anti-criticism and lack of participation in researching Bible verses that are presented, resulting in brainwashing through indoctrination that not only contradicts the Bible, but also harms society.

This research is expected to provide a clear position of Christianity towards documentary films "*In the Name of God: A Holy Betrayal*" which is widely discussed. In addition, Christians need to have a good sensitivity, born of the spirit of studying the Bible and doing research on it, so that under the light of the word can understand the truth day by day. There are limitations in this study, given the breadth of terms used related to sects, and also the limited exposure of the socio-political context in which these sects develop. Further research can be done to see the correlation of Christianity with the development of sects, specifically in South Korea by taking into account the socio-political

context, to understand the reasons for the rampant development of pseudo-religious sects of Christianity in this region.

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