
Religion, Spirituality, Worldviews, and Discourses: Revisiting the Term “Spirituality” as Opposed to “Religion”

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Abstract: In the last few decades, the usage of the term “spirituality” has plummeted in an unprecedented way and has significantly contributed to the question what “religion” is and is not. The notion that the word “spirituality” is an emic term, closely tied to the postmodern situation and specifically the New Age scene, is occasionally referred to by scholars, mainly by Steven Sutcliffe. However, the consequences of this remain largely unexplored. This article shows the term has been largely accepted by the scholarly community, with all its implicit emic baggage, and discusses various aporia and questionable results that emerge from its uncritical usage. Consequently, from the traditional perspective, the term should be treated as emic. At the same time, however, the term should be subject to rigorous discursive analysis to uncover all of its implications, contexts, and implicit relationships of power.

Keywords: religion; spirituality; theory of religion; religious studies; New Age

Abstrakt: V posledních pár desetiletích se začal v odborných kruzích stále více používat termín „spiritualita“ a způsob, jakým je uplatňován, výrazně přispěl k diskusi o tom, co je „náboženské“ a co ne. Je známo, že výraz „spiritualita“ je termínem emickým, který je úzce spojen s postmoderní situací a specificky s kontextem hnutí nového věku – stručné zmínky o tomto faktu se nacházejí především v textech Stevena Sutcliffea. Z širšího hlediska však tento problém dosud nahlédnut nebyl. Tento článek ukazuje, že termín „spiritualita“, ač rozsáhle přijatý odbornou veřejností, je používán nepřítliš reflektovaně a s celou svou implicitní emickou bagáží. To vede k mnohým aporiím a pochybným výsledkům, které s sebou takové nekritické přijímání přirozeně nese. Z tradiční perspektivy je proto třeba zacházet s tímto termínem jako s emickým. Zároveň je však vhodné podrobit jej pečlivé diskurzivní analýze a odhalit tak celý jeho kontext, všechny souvislosti i implicitní mocenské vztahy, které se s ním pojí.

Klíčová slova: náboženství; spiritualita; teorie náboženství; religionistické studie; New Age

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From “New Age” to “Spirituality”

In the 1990s, when Wouter Hanegraaf wrote his extremely influential book *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, the term “New Age” was already problematic in a way. After the initial period, during which it was at least partly used for self-identification by the movement itself, it slowly waned from emic use until it basically disappeared, remaining only as a vague and somewhat derogatory notion. By that time, however, the term had already been accepted and adopted by the scholarly community and it has been in use ever since. This created a strange gap, in which the emic self-identification stopped matching the etic term. The ensuing problems can be beautifully illustrated by the situation in the Czech Republic, where New Age *sensu lato* arrived in the 1990s, that is, long after the term ceased to be used in an emic context. At my department at Charles University, there is at least one student at the New Age introductory class every year, who discovers with a great deal of surprise that they in fact belong to the New Age – without them ever even knowing what the term actually means.

Even without regard to the specific context of countries from behind the former Iron Curtain, this situation is hardly sustainable. Naturally, there were various attempts to accept the term or dispose of it, either by re-defining the “New Age” or by inventing a completely new label. Hanegraaf chose the first option, distinguishing the “New Age *sensu stricto*” and the “New Age *sensu lato*”. The former variant described the original movement that used the term “New Age” as an emic self-denominator; the latter one referred to the growing phenomenon from the 1980s onward that already managed to enter the mainstream and dissolved into it. In this latter stage, the “New Agers” themselves largely abandoned the term “New Age”.¹

Contrary to Hanegraaf, other authors leaned towards discarding the term completely. Sociologically oriented scholars preferred to explore the form of the phenomenon and create a term that would emphasize its specific character. In this sense, “milieu” became quite popular, specifically among authors such as Colin Campbell (who created the term “cultic milieu”)² or William Sims Bainbridge, who adopted the term and at the same time coined the characterization of the New Age as a “loosely defined set of collective behavior”, partly belonging to audience and client cults, as opposed to cultic movements.³ While these terms tried to capture borderlessness,

¹ WOUTER HANEGRAAFF, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought*, Leiden: Brill 1996, p. 96–97; see also JÖRG STOLZ and JOËLLE SANCHEZ, “From New Age to Alternative Spirituality”, in MICHAELA MORAVČÍKOVÁ (ed.), *New Age*, Bratislava: Ústav pre vzťahy štátu a cirkvi 2005, p. 530–544; ROMAN SCHWEIDLENKA, “Die Geschichte des New Age”, in MICHAELA MORAVČÍKOVÁ (ed.), *New Age*, Bratislava: Ústav pre vzťahy štátu a cirkvi 2005, p. 517–523.

² COLIN CAMPBELL, “The Cult, the Cultic Milieu and Secularization”, in MICHAEL HILL (ed.), *A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain* 5, London: SCM Press 1972, p. 119–136.

³ WILLIAM SIMS BAINBRIDGE, “The New Age”, in WILLIAM SIMS BAINBRIDGE, *The Sociology of Religious Movements*, New York, London: Routledge 1997, p. 370; WILLIAM SIMS BAINBRIDGE, “New Age Policy”, in: MICHAELA MORAVČÍKOVÁ (ed.), *New Age*, Bratislava: Ústav pre vzťahy štátu a cirkvi 2005, p. 21–37.

spontaneous character and lack of central authority, they also helped to divert attention from the millennial connotations of the term “New Age”. Even Hanegraaff’s seminal work contains references to the waning of millennial ideas from the “New Age *sensu lato*”,⁴ later proved premature by the wave of end-of-the-world expectations (or hopes for global transformation of consciousness) linked to December 2012.⁵ Other types of terms emphasized a strong connection to the current of Western Esotericism⁶ or insisted on the vague popular (as opposed to elite) character of the New Age, identifying it as a contemporary example of “popular religion”.⁷ Finally, some even argued the lack of a common self-denominator indicated that we were in fact looking at a complex web of intertwined “elementary forms” (in the Durkheimian sense) and not at a homogeneous “religion”. According to those authors, we should abandon the attempts to find an adequate expression for it, since such attempts hardly help to clarify the matter and sometimes may obscure it even more.⁸

Meanwhile, the milieu itself increasingly adopted the term “spirituality” as opposed to “religion” and scholars quickly followed suit. The most important example of scholarly usage of the term “spirituality” for the “New Age” phenomenon is certainly Paul Heelas. Although he originally subscribed to the “milieu” trend, christening the phenomenon as “holistic milieu”, later he started to emphasize the term “spirituality” much more, coining the label “Spiritualities of the Self” and finally his famous “Spiritualities of Life”. Where the term “New Age” suggested millennial content and all the diverse sociological terms emphasized its vague informal and individualistic character, here the attention turns to the central importance of “life” or “self”. The main point is its inward and heterogeneous character implied by the term “spiritualities” used in plural.⁹

While the full term “Spiritualities of Life” was never largely adopted by the scholarly community, “spirituality” or “spiritualities” started to appear everywhere. Even Hanegraaff himself, who in 1996 preferred to label the New Age as “religion”,¹⁰ ap-

⁴ HANEGRAAFF, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, p. 96.

⁵ ZUZANA MARIE KOSTÍCOVÁ, 2012: *Mayský kalendář, transformace vědomí, dva světy a rovnováha*, Praha: Grada 2011, p. 55–127.

⁶ Apart from Hanegraaff, see p. e. ADAM POSSAMAI, *Religion and Popular Culture: A Hyper-Real Testament*, Brüssel: P.I.E. Peter Lang S. A. 2012, 108–111.

⁷ STEVEN SUTCLIFFE and MARION BOWMAN, “Introduction”, in STEVEN SUTCLIFFE and MARION BOWMAN (eds.), *Beyond New Age: Exploring Alternative Spirituality*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2000, p. 8.

⁸ STEVEN SUTCLIFFE, “New Age, World Religions and Elementary Forms”, in STEVEN SUTCLIFFE and INGILD SÆLID GILHUS (eds.), *New Age Spirituality: Rethinking Religion*, Abingdon, New York: Routledge 2013, p. 17–34.

⁹ PAUL HEELAS, *Religion and Spirituality in the Modern World: Spiritualities of Life: New Age Romanticism and Consumptive Capitalism*, [Oxford]: Willey-Blackwell 2009, esp. p. 26; PAUL HEELAS, “Challenging Secularization Theory: The Growth of ‘New Age’ Spiritualities of Life”, *The Hedgehog Revue* (1, 2006): p. 46–47.

¹⁰ HANEGRAAFF, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, p. 7.

peared to have shifted his allegiance towards the term “spirituality” a few years later, albeit considered as a specific type of “secular religion”.¹¹

At the same time, regardless of multiple attempts to discourage it, the term “New Age” remained in use. This led to the invention of a hybrid label, “New Age spirituality” or “New Age spiritualities”. Even those authors who prefer not to name the phenomenon at all (arguing there is no “phenomenon” in the first place) are forced to use it in order to make their field of research understandable to others. On this note, while Sutcliffe argues against the use of the term “New Age”, he does so in an article called “New Age, World Religions and Elementary Forms”, included in a book (edited both by Ingvild Gilhus and Sutcliffe himself) with the title of *New Age Spiritualities: Rethinking Religion*. One can only conclude that Sutcliffe was in no great hurry to abandon the term at all.¹²

A short history of “spirituality”

As for the term “spirituality”, it is in no way a new addition to scholarly debate. Originally connected to Christian theology, the term was historically used for a specific type of inner life, inherently (but not exclusively) connected to monastic orders and related to asceticism, mysticism, and other practices. The core of spirituality in this traditional sense was the monk’s or nun’s inner belief and their intimate and active connection with God. In this traditional sense, Christian theology distinguishes diverse “spiritualities” – Dominican, Carmelitan, Jesuit, etc., each connected to a specific type of monastic order. In more recent times, the concept has been somewhat widened to include every Christian’s inner spiritual life. For instance, *New Catholic Encyclopedia* characterizes spirituality as follows:

The spiritual life is the Christian life lived with some intensity. It is the serious response of man to the revelation of God’s love in Christ and consists in loving knowledge and service of God and one’s fellow men in the Mystical Body of Christ. Christian spirituality begins when God’s word is accepted in faith. It manifests itself in the expression and the development of the love of God in prayer and action. It is the subjective assimilation and living in charity of the objective, theological realities of revelation.¹³

This in many ways pre-defines the way the term “spirituality” as used in Psychology and Psychology of Religion. An eminent Czech psychologist of religion Pavel Říčan reflects the use of the term in his discipline: referring to Pargament, Emmons,

¹¹ WOUTER HANEGRAAFF, “New Age Religion and Secularization”, *Numen* 47 (2000): p. 300; WOUTER J. HANEGRAAFF, “New Age Spiritualities as Secular Religion: A Historian’s Perspective”, *Social Compass* 46 (2, 1999): p. 145–160.

¹² SUTCLIFFE, “New Age, World Religions and Elementary Forms”, p. 17–34.

¹³ *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., Detroit et al.: Thomson Gale, and Washington: The Catholic University of America 2003, p. 437.

Reich, Corveleyn, and Luten, he uses such terms as “a relationship to the sacred”, “relationship to the transcendence”, “pursuit of sense of life, of unity, connectedness”, “the search for the utmost human potential”, “the most important of human experiences” or “conviction of an existence of a higher, supra-human force”.¹⁴ Moreover, according to Říčan, the idea of “spirituality” carries a strong implicit emphasis on intense or (in Maslow’s words) “peak” experiences, both wonderful and scary (which of course alludes to Otto’s *mysterium tremendum and fascinans*).¹⁵ In a similar fashion, David Wulff identifies a strong sense of personal growth that the term “spirituality” implicitly contains. Again, he puts a strong emphasis on inner experience as opposed to social growth embedded in the pre-existent institution and its hierarchy.¹⁶

Naturally, an important question arises: What is the relationship between religion and spirituality? At the original theological level of understanding, spirituality becomes a special case of religion (in other words, the category “religion” would contain spirituality as one of its parts, perhaps even the core or the most ideal part). On the other hand, at the level of psychology of religion, spirituality would become a basic human need, on which every religion is ultimately built (in other words, “religion” would become a kind of particular and culturally limited expression of a wider anthropological constant called “spirituality”). This is also reflected in the writings of different authors – Říčan uses the example of Pargament (who considers “religion” to be a wider category) and Zinnbauer (for whom the wider and more basic category is the term “spirituality”).¹⁷ In Zinnbauer’s particular case, spirituality may even exist outside of religion, creating “non-religious spirituality”; in this case, “religion” is predominantly understood as organized, institutionalized and hierarchical, with a special emphasis on normative practices and teachings. In this sense, “non-religious spirituality” (understood again mainly as a profound religious experience or even “ecstasy”) may exist in this institutional frame or outside of it. A similar type of opinion can be found in the works of Ewert Cousins, who considers “spirituality” to be the core essence of every religion or its inner dimension, which consists of the experience of the ultimate reality.¹⁸

Contrary to the theological understanding of the term, this type of interpretation is already in a close relationship with the evolution the term has undergone in the New Age milieu. The word is increasingly used as self-definition by the participants of the phenomenon themselves – various authors quote self-identifications such as “I am a spiritual, not a religious person.”¹⁹ Again, the question how the labels of “religion” and “spirituality” are understood remains. Most importantly and contrarily to the scholarly use, in wider popular culture and the New Age milieu the concepts are

¹⁴ PAVEL ŘÍČAN, *Psychologie náboženství a spirituality* [Psychology of Religion and Spirituality], Praha: Portál 2007, p. 43–45.

¹⁵ ŘÍČAN, *Psychologie náboženství a spirituality*, p. 44.

¹⁶ DAVID M. WULFF, *Psychology of Religion: Classic and Contemporary*, 2nd ed., New York et al.: John Wiley and Sons 1997, p. 5–6.

¹⁷ ŘÍČAN, *Psychologie náboženství a spirituality*, p. 45.

¹⁸ ŘÍČAN, *Psychologie náboženství a spirituality*, p. 45.

¹⁹ HANEGRAAFF, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, p. 7.

cast in terms of good and bad, right and wrong. On one hand, “spirituality” retains its former theological heritage and psychological flavor: it becomes the deepest of human needs, a connection to higher forces of the universe, a language of one’s inner or higher self and the most important and purest part of every human being. Religion on the other hand is expressed mostly in terms of collectivity, authority, hierarchy, institution, and organization that typically create dogmatic teachings and force people to act according to their limiting norms by means of punishment, repression, torture or war. Religion means oppression or even slavery and repression of human-kind’s natural instincts; most importantly, religion tends to persecute true spirituality and limit or even forbid its natural expressions. “Spirituality” evokes radically different concepts: since every human being has slightly different emotional needs, desires, and goals, spirituality as such is highly individualistic, eclectic, and free, yet still connected to the utmost and deepest truths of this world. Where religion limits, spirituality gives wings. It is through spirituality that human beings can reach their highest potential, free themselves from everything that holds them back and thrive and flourish both in this world and beyond.

This is also an answer to psychologists’ concern of whether religion is a sub-category of spirituality or *vice versa*: according to the New Age, religion is something closely resembling a parasite on spirituality; a system which is misguided and outdated at best and wholly evil at worst. The stress on authority, centralism, and organizational character finds its best example in the Catholic Church which is often cited as the exemplary case of all the evils of religion incarnate, complete with blind dogmatism, a top-down approach to its members, pathological repression of natural needs (celibacy), and religious violence both towards believers (the Inquisition) and unbelievers (the Crusades).²⁰ At the same time, true spirituality with its “holistic” or “nondualistic”, experiential, and emotional character is sharply contrasted to traditional science. The latter is criticized for its extreme stress on rationality and both dualistic and essentially mechanistic interpretation of the world (stemming from the so-called “Cartesian-Newtonian paradigm”), which stripped life of its magic and is finally responsible for most of the evils of the world, such as the environmental crisis, poverty, and unsustainable lifestyle.²¹ Spirituality thus becomes an answer to problems created both by religion and science. It holds keys to mankind’s brighter future, which may even arrive in the form of a new golden age accessible through a global transformation of consciousness. As Stolz and Sanchez phrase it:

New Age ideology states that modern society is submitted to a dualism and a reductionism which lead to several very harmful separations: the separation of (wo)man and nature, of male and female, of matter and spirit, of (wo)man and god(dess), of body, mind and spirit. These dualistic and reductionist views are said to have very practical con-

²⁰ See p. e. HANEGRAAFF, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, p. 77, 91, 303.

²¹ HANEGRAAFF, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, p. 322–323.

sequences: pollution of the environment, illness of the body and mind, wars, religious dogmatism, authoritarianism, etc.

The *goal* of the New Age movement is to construct a view, monistic and holistic view to restore the (original) unity of (wo)man and nature, male and female, matter and spirit, etc. Its aim is to arrive at a society dominated by peace, harmony, health, and spirituality. Such a world will be a “New Age” or the “Age of Aquarius”.²²

Spirituality defined?

Naturally, these core ideas of the milieu are intimately known to every expert on the “New Age” at least since Wouter Hanegraaf’s masterpiece. Nevertheless and quite surprisingly, the term “spirituality” still tends to be seen as an etic term fully recommendable for scholarly discourse and its function as a common self-denominator and expression of identity of the members of the alternative milieu tends to be largely underestimated. This also means the New Age scholars usually accept the term at face value, with all its implicit emic baggage: in the most common case, the term is not even reflected as biased. The most notable exception is Steven Sutcliffe, who mentions the emic character of the term several times, albeit only *en passant* and while setting the New Age in the context of popular/vernacular religion.²³ However, he does not elaborate further to pinpoint all the necessary implications of this fact.

That does not mean some scholars do not try to define the term. For example, Norichika Horie devoted an entire article to a search for a satisfactory definition, reaching the following formulation:

Spirituality refers to both belief in what cannot usually be perceived but it can be felt internally, and practices to feel it with the whole mind and body, accompanied more or less by attitudes of individualism or privatism, anti-authoritarianism, and selective assimilation of religious cultural resources.²⁴

Horie then proceeds to create four “quadrants” of spirituality – spirituality in an established religion, spirituality in popular culture, spirituality of “foreign religion” and “systematic spirituality”. This fourth component is defined as “the global and non-religious type”:

It has an intellectual foundation in inter-disciplinary scholarship (humanistic psychology, transpersonal psychology, Jungian psychology, mindfulness based stress reduction, etc.),

²² STOLZ and SANCHEZ, “From New Age to Alternative Spirituality”, p. 531.

²³ SUTCLIFFE and BOWMAN, “Introduction”, p. 8.

²⁴ NORICHIKA HORIE, “Narrow New Age and Broad Spirituality”, in STEVEN SUTCLIFFE and INGVLID SAELID GILHUS (eds.), *New Age Spirituality: Rethinking Religion*, Abingdon, New York: Routledge 2014, p. 111.

alternative medicine (Andrew Weil, etc.), terminal care (Kübler-Ross, etc.) environmental thought (deep ecology), cognitive science, and religious studies (M. Eliade, H. Campbell, H. Smith, etc.). It is also supported by the expert systems of those disciplines. This systematic spirituality plays a role as a “systematic theology” for the whole spirituality. It is rooted in individualism, psychologism, vitalism and romantic evolutionism. Its characteristics are the theorization of the plurality, fluidity and multilayeredness of the human psyche, the experience of transcendence from within, self-affirmation and self-responsibility, and positive thinking. Systematic spirituality is that intellectual discourse outside established religion which is nevertheless sympathetic towards religion. On the other hand, the discourse belonging to religion can be evaluated as “spirituality” if it shares these characteristics.²⁵

Horie’s definition shows many clear signs of unconscious acceptance of the implicit emic context of the term. First, it shows the great stress on personal experience and “feeling” which has accompanied the term ever since its original Christian theological setting. Second, the “whole mind and body” character of spirituality is fully embedded in the “holistic” or “mind body spirit” context, which has been often defined as one of the core features of the New Age milieu.²⁶ And finally, the “individualism or privatism, anti-authoritarianism, and selective assimilation of religious cultural resources” recalls core features of “true spirituality” as understood by the New Age itself. As for “systematic spirituality”, the characteristics of the term perfectly match some important elite sources of the New Age *sensu lato* described by Wouter Hanegraaff in the discussion of scientific sources of the milieu.²⁷

True, it may be argued that Horie’s fairly recent attempt to define spirituality has not reached wider acceptance and is therefore hardly representative of the scholarly community at large. Consequently, in order to show how far the emic content of the New Age concept of “spirituality” has penetrated Religious Studies and related disciplines, I would like to turn my attention to the famous Chicago University’s *Encyclopedia of Religion*. Originally edited by Mircea Eliade in the 1980s, the massive multi-volume work saw its second edition in 2005, created under the supervision of

²⁵ HORIE, “Narrow New Age and Broad Spirituality”, p. 114.

²⁶ See, among others, HANEGRAAFF, *New Age Religion in Western Culture*, p. 119–120; STEVEN SUTCLIFFE, “‘Wandering Stars’: Seekers and Gurus in the Modern World”, in STEVEN SUTCLIFFE and MARION BOWMAN (eds.), *Beyond New Age: Exploring Alternative Spirituality*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2000, p. 19–20; PAUL HEELAS, “Challenging Secularization Theory”, p. 46–47; POSSAMAI, *Religion and Popular Culture*, p. 52. In Czech context, see p. e. DUŠAN LUŽNÝ, *Nová náboženská hnutí [New Religious Movements]*, Brno: Masarykova univerzita 1997, p. 91; ZDENĚK VOJTÍŠEK, *Netradiční náboženství u nás [Non-Traditional Religions in the Czech Republic]*, Praha: Dingir 1998, p. 40.

²⁷ HANEGRAAFF, *New Age Religion in Western Culture*, p. 62–76; see also KOCKU VON STUCKRAD, *The Scientification of Religion: An Historical Study of Discursive Change, 1800–2000*, Boston and Berlin: De Gruyter 2014, *passim*.

Lindsay Jones. Mary McDonald, the author of the entry “Spirituality”,²⁸ tries to sum up the meaning of the term as follows:

Spirituality is the concern of human beings with their appropriate relationship to the cosmos. How the cosmic whole is conceived and what is considered appropriate in interacting with it differ according to worldviews of individuals and communities. Spirituality is also constructed as an orientation toward the spiritual as distinguished from the exclusively material. [...] By the end of the twentieth century spirituality, long considered an integral part of religion, was increasingly regarded as a separate quest, with religion being distinguished from secular spiritualities. A predilection to speak of having spirituality rather than having religion indicated a change in worldview and a transition from exclusive religious traditions to inclusive, overlapping expressions of commitment to world and community.²⁹

McDonald then proceeds to distinguish three types of spirituality. First, the “classical spiritualities” are rooted in a specific worldview that helps the believers pursue their relationship with the cosmos and may be expressed in different ways depending on the culture the particular person belongs to. The second type are “contemporary spiritualities” characterized by a strong interest in the planet Earth and those that live on it. This type of spirituality is specifically influenced by the most frequent topics of civil activism, such as environmentalism, feminism, universal human rights, social justice, and other movements that fight for dignity and equality of diverse human groups and life forms. McDonald quotes Matthew Fox, who says the main motivation of this type of spirituality is “compassion” and a struggle to “survive” in a world threatened by an imminent disappearance of human groups, animal or plant species, or even of the entire planet.³⁰ McDonald dubbed this contemporary type of spirituality “a green spirituality”. Finally, the third type consists of those that consider themselves to be spiritual, while actively distancing themselves from “religion”. The New Age naturally belongs to this category. By the term “religion” McDonald explicitly means collective identity, shared past and specific teachings and disciplines that claim a normative status. Contrarily, McDonald defines “spirituality” as individual, eclectic and free in terms of choosing one’s own spiritual sources of inspiration.

Analyzing McDonald’s concept of spirituality, the first type mostly resembles the traditional Christian approach, albeit already stripped from its monastic context and cast as a general anthropological constant. This type also matches the concept of spirituality used in Psychology of Religion. In her definition, McDonald explicitly uses

²⁸ MARY McDONALD, “Spirituality”, in LINDSAY JONES (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2nd ed., Detroit et al.: Thomson Gale 2005, p. 8718–8721.

²⁹ McDONALD, “Spirituality”, p. 8718–8719.

³⁰ For more details see MATTHEW FOX, *Original Blessing: A Primer in Creation Spirituality*, Santa Fe: Bear & Co. 1983, p. 12–16, and Matthew Fox’s personal website: “Creation Spirituality: Reawakening Mysticism, Protecting Mother Earth” [online], *matthewfox.org*, accessed January 2018, available online at <http://www.matthewfox.org>.

the term “quest” to describe spirituality, especially in its “secular” context – naturally, New Age seekership, a lifelong path leading to personal fulfillment and transformation, immediately comes to mind.³¹ There is no need to stress the fact that in the last few years, seekership has become one of the most studied New Age phenomena. McDonald’s second type well matches those facets of the New Age strongly inspired by the environmental movement with its respect to the Earth; it also shows an unmistakable Buddhist flavor by the stress on “compassion”. Scientific and activist inspirations merge with the typical New Age eclecticism in much the same way as in some classic New Age writings, such as Rupert Sheldrake’s *Rebirth of Nature*.³² And, finally, the third type is explicitly connected with the New Age by McDonald herself.

Comparing Horie’s and McDonald’s attempts to define “spirituality” and create some kind of typology, we can identify roughly the same outline: a) both authors struggle to maintain both concepts of “spirituality” at the same time, distinguishing “traditional” or “classical” spiritualities from “new spiritualities”, which comprise both of secular or scientifically inspired spirituality (Horie’s “systematic spirituality”, McDonald’s “green spiritualities”) and of the New Age milieu itself (as understood by those authors). On the one hand, the apparent paradox of a spirituality that is at the same time deeply “religious” and violently “anti-religious” is dissolved by the implicit understanding of spirituality as a mystical experience, which is at the same time cast as an anthropological constant. Nevertheless, this idea arrives accompanied by New Age flavored terms such as “quest” or “compassion” and exists within the context of environmentalist millennialism, new science, transpersonal movement, and an all-pervasive emphasis on individualism and anti-authoritarianism. In this sense, the stress on deep personal experience ultimately loses the remaining traces of scholarly detachment and becomes suspiciously akin to a typical New Age bias towards the individual, eclectic, spontaneous, and experiential – and against the collective, institutionalized, and authoritatively prescribed.

In sum, this leaves us with markedly circular reasoning. The New Age self-defines as “spirituality” and therefore it cannot be “religion” – because “religion” is defined (again by the New Age itself) as the opposite of “spirituality” in the first place. Of course, in the emic context of politics of identity, this works beautifully. Nevertheless, the question how to deal with it in scholarly discourse remains.

Traditional approach: Religions, spiritualities, and worldviews

One possible way to approach the emic-etic question is to ask ourselves whether “religion” and “spirituality” are indeed two entirely different realms – in other words, whether the claim of “non-religious spirituality” can be proven. As for the question of “religion without spirituality” (which is rarely seriously raised outside of the most ex-

³¹ SUTCLIFFE, “Wandering Stars”, p. 17–36.

³² RUPERT SHELDRAKE, *Rebirth of Nature: The Greening of Science and God*, London: Century 1990, *passim*.

treme anti-religious type of New Age thought), we of course touch on an old problem here, which was widely discussed by such authorities as Rudolf Otto, William James or Mircea Eliade. For Otto, mystical experience and active relationship to the ultimate reality, culminating with the encounter with the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, is the core of all religion – to the extent that Otto insisted that those who did not have this experience should altogether refrain from writing about religion.³³ In pretty much the same way, James points out personal experience as the source of religion and researches “sick souls” as natural virtuosi of this kind of experience.³⁴ Mircea Eliade also speaks about relationship to the “sacred” as of the innermost characteristic of religion³⁵ – and in recent years, Ninian Smart included the experiential among his seven core dimensions of religion.³⁶ True, other theorists such as Durkheim or Weber put more emphasis on the social, institutional, and hierarchical, discussing religion as an incarnation of society and highlighting its collective functions, its relationship to authority and other topics closely related to the points of interest of Sociology of Religion.³⁷ Nevertheless, one approach does not invalidate the other – after all, social and institutional is, again, only one of Smart’s seven dimensions of religion. And if we still need more proof, it is noteworthy that the term “spirituality” itself was created by Christian, specifically Catholic theology. And, for the New Age, Catholicism is the prime example of “religion” as defined by those who claim to be “spiritual and not religious”.

Naturally, the universal presence of religious experience throughout all the different religions of the world is a long-standing matter of course, universally accepted by scholars of Religious Studies and related disciplines. But what about “spirituality without religion”? Does it really exist? Until recently, the seemingly universal scholarly answer was “yes, of course – it is the New Age and related popular spirituality”. Nevertheless, in a recent article by Ann Taves and Michael Kinsella³⁸, serious doubt is cast on this answer. Taves and Kinsella show how the organizational elements of the New Age are “hiding in plain sight” in the form of local spiritual centers, one-to-one client-teacher relationship inspired by psychotherapy and, I would add, even charismatic leaders that emerge from the milieu from time to time and form a following or a “school”, sometimes forming an outright New Religious Movement, sometimes

³³ RUDOLF OTTO, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational*, London: Oxford University Press 1936, *passim*.

³⁴ WILLIAM JAMES, *Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*, New Hyde Park: University Books 1963, *passim*.

³⁵ MIRCEA ELIADE, *Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, New York: Harcourt and Brace 1959, *passim*.

³⁶ NINIAN SMART, *Dimensions of the Sacred: An Anatomy of the World’s Beliefs*, Berkeley: University of California Press 1996, *passim*.

³⁷ MAX WEBER, *Sociology of Religion*, Boston: Beacon Press 1993, *passim*; EMILE DURKHEIM, *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, London: Allen and Unwin 1976, *passim*.

³⁸ ANN TAVES and MICHAEL KINSELLA, “Hiding in Plain Sight: The Organizational Forms of ‘Unorganized Religion’”, in STEVEN SUTCLIFFE and INGVLID SAELID GILHUS (eds.), *New Age Spirituality: Rethinking Religion*, Abingdon, New York: Routledge 2014, p. 84–98.

mostly remaining on a level Stark and Bainbridge³⁹ call a “client cult”.⁴⁰ True, at this moment the New Age has no central authority and is strongly opposed to it. On the other hand, organizational forms take time to develop and we sometimes seem to forget the milieu is only a few decades old. Why compare it to the enormous giant of the 21st century’s Catholic Church, which took two thousand years to develop to this stage? Why not use a more fitting comparison to the early Church that stood proudly in all of its local diversity, individual interpretations, and vivid spontaneity against the aging colossus of organized Roman priesthood?

To resort to Ninian Smart once again, we may clarify the matter somewhat by introducing the term “worldview”.⁴¹ Though McDonald herself tries to employ it in her entry, she insists on the concept of spirituality (in Horie’s words) as a “broad” phenomenon that penetrates each and every religion and is at the same time fully capable of existing outside of it. In other words, “spirituality” is something more basic and universal, as opposed to particularities of different worldviews. Nevertheless, under close inspection, this statement makes sense only in the context of the New Age concept of “religion” as an organized, hierarchical, and authoritative institution. On the other hand, seen from the traditional Otto-Eliadian perspective, it would be roughly equivalent to say “religious experience is fully possible outside of religion”. For these authors, this would naturally be an oxymoron.

In much the same way, Smart himself identifies an “experiential” dimension of religion, which in this psychological sense would be more or less the same as “spirituality” and equal to the way the term is used in Psychology of Religion. And if we simultaneously identify “religion” with (or, perhaps more fittingly, reduce it to) Smart’s social and perhaps even doctrinal dimension, we could finally conclude that, indeed, “religion” and “spirituality” may or may not co-exist in different worldviews. But is this not throwing the baby out with the bathwater? According to this definition, no “pure” religion or “spirituality” could ever exist. Moreover, in this sense, Horie’s and McDonald’s typologies of spirituality would make even less sense – since, as we saw, it has been proven that the New Age, the “non-religious spirituality” *par excellence*, is busily and “in plain sight” developing its own organizational forms.

Discursive approach to spirituality

Contrary to traditional phenomenological approach that seeks to capture the “true” nature of “religion” and “spirituality”, we may also resort to the discursive approach

³⁹ WILLIAM SIMS BAINBRIDGE, “The New Age”, p. 363–391.

⁴⁰ There are many examples of institutionalized New Age phenomena – some may even form a new religious movement centered around a spiritual teacher and/or charismatic leader. See for example DOUGLAS E. COWAN and DAVID G. BROMLEY, *Cults and New Religions: A Brief History*, Malden, Oxford: Willey Blackwell 2015, p. 59–77.

⁴¹ NINIAN SMART, *Worldviews: Crosscultural Explorations of Human Beliefs*, Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall 2000, *passim*.

developed by Michel Foucault and adapted for the use of Religious Studies by Hans Kippenberg, Kocku von Stuckrad, Teemu Taira, Titus Hjelm and others.⁴² Instead of asking “what religion/spirituality truly is”, we may focus on the discourse that employs those terms itself. Discourse, as defined by Foucault, is mainly a set of practices, rules and relationships of power closely related to particular institutions and binding every kind of human communication. Contrary to the essentialist phenomenological approach that emphasizes continuity, relatedness, and universality, focusing mostly on transcultural comparison, Foucault focuses on differences, discontinuity, gaps and changes. We may ask ourselves who is speaking, what is acceptable to say, under what conditions – and *vice versa*, what is deemed as unacceptable, outdated, even dangerous to say. What kind of discontinuity has enabled the current emergent use of the term “spirituality”? What are the core discursive changes that made it possible? What are the characteristics of the relevant discursive formation?

Again, this question is hardly new. In his last book, Kocku von Stuckrad traces the origins of the discourse of spirituality at least to the 19th century and relates it closely to vitalism. He points out the core importance of the 1960s, which saw the full development of the subsequent discursive formation. What is even more important, the mentions of “spirituality” are closely related to what von Stuckrad calls “the scientification of religion”, in other words, a perennial interaction between religious discourse and the discourses of the sciences (both social and natural, since a great part of the monograph deals with the historical interplay between Astrology and Astronomy). The book not only convincingly shows the historical instances of this discursive knot, but points out its essential inevitability.⁴³

The Foucauldian focus on discontinuities and changes shows a strong divide between old and new discursive formations. Originally, “spirituality” had belonged to the discourse of Christianity in the widest sense. Later on, with the advent of the secular sciences, the term was adopted as a denominator for some general phenomena identifiable worldwide. While the scholars succeeded in emancipating it from its Christian origins, they kept linking it inseparably to “religion” at large, either neutrally (even favorably, as in Eliade’s case) or in an atheist, derogatory way. Finally, the term has been cast as *sui generis*, independent of “religion” and sometimes even contradictory to it. The original Christian flavor of “spirituality” has largely disappeared, opening the way to an entirely different discursive formation, strongly linked to the New Age milieu. In this sense, we are not only witnessing a “scientification of religion”, but also a “religification of science”, the seeping of a new alternative spirituality into various academic disciplines. Throughout this article, we have seen how scholarly concepts of “religion” and “spirituality” as used in the Religious studies increasingly conform to the New Age discourse.

⁴² See esp. MICHEL FOUCAULT, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, London, New York: Routledge 1982, *passim*; VON STUCKRAD, *The Scientification of Religion*, see esp. p. 4–19.

⁴³ VON STUCKRAD, *The Scientification of Religion*, esp. p. 180.

Conclusion

To sum up, the term “spirituality” as used in the discipline today is essentially emic and closely related to the New Age milieu. The most important thing is that in their original New Age context, the terms spirituality/religion are judgmental, creating a duality of good and bad, progressive and outdated, liberating and limiting, true and false. Of course in its strictly psychological sense, the term remains useful for the scholarly community. On the other hand, attempts to distinguish “spirituality” from “religion” and to define them in the sense the terms are used in the emic New Age context inevitably lead to problems. I hope to have proved this sufficiently in the analysis of Horie’s and McDonald’s definitions. In the latter case, the problem is all the more pressing, since the emic usage disguised as etic is unproblematically displayed on the pages of a famous and extremely influential encyclopedia.

Speaking from a Smartian point of view (as Taves and Kinsella sufficiently demonstrated), the New Age is by no means a pure “spirituality” – as a matter of fact, quite to the contrary. Using Smart’s categories, not only does it refuse to limit itself to the experiential dimension, but it also has a nascent doctrine and philosophy (based on such core emic terms as “holism”, “energy”, “higher self” etc.); highly developed ethics (which, among others, contain the “compassion” and nonviolence identified by McDonald as a basic component of “green spiritualities”); it is undergoing a process of invention and establishment of different types of rituals (the most evident case being various kinds of cleansing, both bodily and spiritual); shows rudimentary seeds of institutions and/or social organization; and, last but not least, has a truly massive material and commercial dimension closely tied to postmodern capitalism. In this sense, New Age checks all the boxes and is therefore undoubtedly a full worldview.

This raises the following question: can some worldviews be “religions” and “non-religions” (or, in Waardenburg’s words, “implicit religions”), while others are “spiritualities”? We may possibly reach some kind of a truce here, defining “spirituality” as a specific post-modern type of worldview that has all the dimensions of religion, some even extensively so, but refuses to identify itself as one and labels itself “spirituality” instead. However, funnily enough, this category would only contain one specimen – the New Age itself. So, if we go to such lengths in order to respect the New Age’s emic self-identification, shouldn’t we respect other religions in exactly the same manner? True, we may for example be inclined, as Balagangadhara requires, to create a category of “tradition” that would encompass what we formerly labeled as “the religions of India”.⁴⁴ But it would for example also mean creating a serious etic category of “the one and only true religion” for Christianity. I, for one, would argue against this approach and opt instead for relegating the New Age version of the term “spirituality” (as opposed to “religion”) firmly and finally to emic realm (right next to

⁴⁴ S. N. BALAGANGADHARA, *“The Heathen in His Blindness”: Asia, the West, and the Dynamic of Religion*, Leiden, New York: Brill 1994, see esp. p. 41–51, 60, 108.

“the one and only true religion”). The only etic level of the term would then be the psychological usage, roughly equivalent to “religious experience”.

All this etic/emic confusion is further cleared by a discursive approach to the problem. Here we clearly see not only the various self-identifications of different religions, but also the inherent relationships of power implicitly or explicitly contained in them. When Balagangadhara seeks to re-define Indian religions as *traditio*, he clearly intends to distinguish them from Christianity (*religio*).⁴⁵ And *vice versa*, when Christianity defines itself against “paganism” or “heresy”, it does so in order to establish itself as the one and only true approach to the Divine. Finally, in much the same way, the New Age refutes the category of “religion” in favor of “spirituality”, distancing itself from traditional organized religions, especially Catholicism. And it is even more interesting that the New Age discourse, originally limited to the alternative religious scene and popular culture, is now apparently busily penetrating elite scholarly discourses, including contemporary Religious Studies. Not only that this process is still largely uninvestigated, but many of the scholars themselves remain oblivious to it.

I do not intend to finish this article with any kind of heated warning against this new “religification of science”. After all, Religious Studies are neither isolated from the rest of culture nor exempt from discursive practices. The powerful rise of the New Age in the Western mainstream culture becomes increasingly obvious and its ever stronger influence on the Academia is probably inevitable. As von Stuckrad shows, the interplay between science and religion has been part of the history of Western sciences from its dawn up to now. On the other hand, Religious Studies apparently need a better understanding of “spirituality” not only as a phenomenon, but especially as a discourse. This way we may still complement the discipline’s traditional Christian origins and its modern, strictly secular core with new alternative perspectives – but without drowning in them.

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⁴⁵ BALAGANGADHARA, “*The Heathen in His Blindness*”, see esp. p. 139–140, and *passim*.

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