

THE SAGE Encyclopedia of the
SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION

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travel externally toward the illusion of the outer world until realizing that the path to God is internal toward pure consciousness.

Khaniqahi Sufism emerged in the 1950s under the leadership of Javad Nurbakhsh (d. 2008). The order has ties to the 14th century Nimatullahi order, attributed to Shah Nimatullah Wali (d. 1431) and based in Iran. The Nimatullahi had a penchant for transcending religious sectarianism and following the habit of its founder by advocating the Akbari principle of “unity of being” (*wahdat al-wujud*). As a modern expression of this, Khaniqahi Sufism draws on the full repertoire of the Iranian cultural heritage and the legacy of notable Sufi ecstasies and seekers of blame (*malamat*) to maintain that Sufism is the Islamic facade of Persian mystical antiquity and that it is squarely based on the principles of “chivalry” (*javanmardi*) and “etiquette” (*adab*), embodied by antinomian attitudes. Unlike the Chishti, who renovate Islam from within through Sufism, the Khaniqahi go further to undermine Sufism by Sufism, leaving very little to be said that could be described as Sufism—“whatever comes into words is not Sufism” (*aanche dar gofteh aayad dar tasawwuf neest*). Nurbakhsh treated Sufism as being synonymous with Truth, and, drawing on Attar’s metaphysic, he concluded that there is nothing that can be said that would capture the “Truth” (*haqq*); since nothing can be said, the way to be Sufi is to become nothing because “Sufism is to become and not something to hear about” (*darvishi shodanist na shaneedani*).

These case studies demonstrate the possibility of a mysticism as Sufism that is the other within Islam but even further as mysticism uncontained by Sufism without Islam.

Milad Milani

See also Modernization and Modernity; Mysticism; Neo-Sufism; Sufism

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NEW AGE MOVEMENT

The spiritual movement commonly referred to as *New Age* emerged in the context of the counterculture of the 1960s. It is vital for an understanding of religious change in the West since then, especially the shift from *religion* to *spirituality*. This entry discusses the movement’s countercultural roots, its worldview and cultural logic, and its implications for secularization theory.

The New Age movement constitutes a secularized offshoot of Western esotericism, which has been present in the West since the Renaissance. Its more recent historical roots are situated in the popular counterculture of the 1960s. Central to the latter’s outlook was a rejection of predefined social roles, of the institutions that defined these roles, and most generally, of a modern society that was understood as standing in the way of personal liberty, self-attainment, and personal authenticity. This critique made *The System* the central metaphor in articulations of discontents about modernity; it informed well-known countercultural slogans like “Turn on, tune in, drop out” and “Power to the imagination.”

This demonization of modernity quite logically sparked a sacralization of the personal inner world as the realm where genuine freedom could still be found. This turn within was exemplified

not only by the popularization of psychedelic drugs like LSD, peyote, and psilocybin (*magic mushrooms*) and of Asian religious traditions like Buddhism and Hinduism that foregrounded meditation but also by the emergence of the New Age movement. The movement draws its name from the hope and the expectation that a major transformation was imminent owing to the beginning of a new astrological era; specifically, that the Piscean Age (defined by *hierarchy and inequality*) was giving way to the Age of Aquarius (defined by *liberty and equality*).

Even though the *New Age* label itself has since lost traction, the worldview that defines it is more widespread in the West nowadays than it used to be in the 1960s and 1970s. This worldview has gradually permeated the cultural mainstream and has in the process lost much of its former critical and countercultural edge. It consists of a handful of logically interconnected tenets that assume, validate, and legitimate one another. Central to these is a notion of the sacred that differs strikingly from dualistic Christian understandings. For here, the sacred is not defined as a transcendent person-like agent-creator who resides in a realm of his own, but rather as a diffuse, nonpersonal life force, power, energy, or spirit that permeates the world and the entire cosmos (immanence). As such, this spirit is understood to connect *everything* (holism) and to be present within every single human being as well (self-spirituality). Because of this, it is held that the spiritual truth can be attained only by taking one's personal emotions, feelings, and intuitions seriously (listening to the voice within). The religious belief here in effect gives way to an epistemology that foregrounds personal experience (gnosis).

Because the spiritual truth can only be personally experienced, religious authorities, leaders, texts, institutions, and dogmas are understood as only leading away from it, and religious traditions are conceived as having buried it under layers of dogma, doctrine, and ritual. This applies especially to religions that foreground external authority the most, which is why non-Western religions like Hinduism and Buddhism are understood to be more legitimate than Christianity, especially in its conservative guises. Differences between religious traditions should hence not be taken seriously, because such would entail a foregrounding of human-made side issues. Similarities, however, are

vital, because all religious traditions are seen as stemming from the same source, as the spiritual doctrine of *perennialism* epitomizes (There are many paths, but there is just one truth). Provided that doctrinal and institutional side issues are bypassed and neglected, religious traditions are hence not rejected unequivocally. Rather than sticking to a single tradition, however, those concerned are encouraged to freely pursue their "personal spiritual paths" (*seekership*) by exploring different religious traditions and spiritual practices simultaneously and/or successively (bricolage).

Much of the research interest in the New Age movement is motivated by the legacy of secularization theory, especially its notions of religious decline and religious privatization. For although Christianity has clearly lost much terrain since the late 1960s, New Age spirituality has become more widespread in this same period. While this divergent development is currently accepted by most sociologists of religion, there is much controversy about its implications for the empirical adequacy of secularization theory. Highlighting the omnipresence of private practices of bricolage and the absence of clear ideological significance in the public realm, the received view holds that secularization theory basically confirms it. This interpretation has, however, been critiqued on two counts. Firstly, it misconstrues fragmentation and bricolage as *proving* the absence of a coherent and unifying spiritual worldview. It is after all precisely such a worldview that accounts for this characteristic fragmentation and bricolage by actively encouraging it. Fragmentation and bricolage do in effect not prove the absence, but rather the presence of a coherent and unifying spiritual worldview. Similarly, the assumption that public significance must necessarily be ideological significance can be critiqued for maneuvering the public significance of New Age spirituality out of sight. For it is clear and virtually uncontested that the latter plays major (indeed, increasing) therapeutic roles in the public realms of health care (complementary and alternative medicine), work, and organization (human resources management and business leadership).

Dick Houtman

See also Esotericism; Individualism and Individualization; Privatization of Religion; Secularization; Spirituality

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NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS

All religions were new at the time of their inauguration, but the term 'new religious movement' (NRM) came to be employed in the second half of the 20th century by scholars who were trying to escape the negative connotations associated with the terms 'sect' and 'cult' because they were being used in popular parlance, frequently with the addition of adjectives such as 'evil' or 'destructive'. The movements have tended to be of a controversial nature, and many of the countries in which they have tried to establish themselves have treated them not only with discrimination but also with persecution.

Although tens of thousands of NRMs have mushroomed throughout the world since the World War II, no more than a few hundred are likely to survive into a second generation with as many as 10,000 members. Obviously enough, all religions were new at the time of their origin; slightly less obviously, new religions have existed throughout the world and throughout history. This makes it almost impossible to generalise about NRMs, and the same is true of those religions that have become visible since the end of the World War II. It is, however, possible to argue that one might look for certain characteristics, such as those discussed in this entry, in religions that consist predominantly of a first-generation membership.

The Global Growth of New Religious Variations

Following World War II, there was what Horace McFarland called *The Rush Hour of the Gods* in his 1967 book about Japanese religions that had been repressed during, or had emerged since, the war. Around the same time, a large number of new religions, including what Harold Turner referred to as PRINERMS (Primal New Religious Movements), were emerging in sub-Saharan Africa.

Although some non-Christian NRMs such as the Baha'i from Iran and the Ahmadiyya Community were to be found in the West around the turn of the century (partly due to persecution in their countries of origin), the vast majority of new religions that had emerged in the West before the 20th century had been offshoots of the Christian tradition. Well-known examples include the Quakers, the Shakers, and various 19th-century sects, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the Mormons), and the Brethren.

NRMs with Christian roots, are for examples the Children of God, the Jesus Army, the Way International, and Catholic splinter groups are for examples the Apostles of Infinite Love and Santa Muerte. But although Christian innovations were still in the majority amongst late 20th-century movements, Eastern influences have become increasingly visible.

The popularisation of Eastern thought had received a significant promotion through channels such as Madame Blavatsky's Theosophy, and it was later facilitated by the 1965 U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Act. Jacob Needleman's 1970 book *New Religions* consisted of descriptions of religions of Eastern origin, some of which, such as Zen and Tibetan Buddhism, although new to the West, had existed elsewhere for centuries.

Amongst the better known NRMs that have migrated to the West since the 1950s are Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church from Korea, Soka Gakkai International from Japan, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, the Brahma Kumaris, the Rajneesh movement and Sai Baba from India, and Hizmet from Turkey. Other NRMs include the Local Churches of Witness Lee from China, Cao Dai from Vietnam, the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God and Santo Dame from Brazil, and the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star from Nigeria.