Globalization: A Key Factor in Contemporary Religious Change

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Religious change is often closely related to structural and social change. In this paper, I will look at changes in contemporary religion in relation to the globalization process. Globally, one aspect of recent religious change is that fundamentalist religious movements are thriving, aiming at reviving tradition and making religion influential in contemporary society. While these movements can be conceived of as responses to globalization in the particularistic mode, in this paper I will explore the more vague religious expressions in Western culture, related to New Age and the spirituality discourse, as responses to globalization in the universalistic mode. I will analytically discuss six interlinked processes of contemporary religious change and their relation to globalization.

I will also discuss the concepts of New Age and spirituality, and argue that essentializing a New Age category no longer makes sense in a globalized society. Instead, I attempt a focus on the dichotomy of institutionalized religion on one hand, and uninstitutionalized or popular religion on the other hand.

The New Age concept and the spirituality discourse: different voices

The New Age subculture has been called "a major phenomenon in popular religion, with a considerable cultural and religious significance" (Hanegraaff 1996:1). However, in spite of much research and discussion, its nature and contents have remained vague. New Age has been categorized as "religion" (Hanegraaff 2005), "a religion" (Hammer 1997), "a movement" (Heelas 1996) or several movements (York 2005). Some scholars have likened New Age to a "smorgasbord" where everyone is free to compose his or her own plate (Frisk 1997). But what is presented on the "smorgasbord" in the first place – what is New Age and what is not – has remained problematic. Several authors claim, however, that there is a certain coherence of beliefs and structure, which legitimate the use of an essentializing label for these currents (Hammer 1996; Hanegraaff 1996:514). Others focus on one essential trait: e.g. healing (Frisk 1997; York 2005:29), self spirituality (Heelas 1996) or the literal significance of the concept of New Age, that a new age will be coming (Melton 1988:35-36). Still others question if New Age at all is a real and identifiable phenomenon, or just an artificial construction created by scholars or media (York 2005:17).

One of the most radical critics of the concept New Age, who also discusses concepts as "popular religion", "spirituality" and "alternative spirituality", is Steven Sutcliffe, who in his book from 2003 claims that the formulation of a New Age movement just essentializes a set of mixed and divergent social processes, and that New Age as a movement is a constructed etic category (Sutcliffe 2003: 5-6). Sutcliffe suggests to remove New Age from the field of "movement studies" and to re-conceive it as a harbinger of a shift in contemporary religion to small group practice and a discourse

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of spirituality (Sutcliffe 2003: 5-6). Sutcliffe sees New Age as a codeword for the heterogeneity of alternative[1] spirituality, best classified as a subtype of popular religion. Some typical concerns of religion in a popular mode are, according to Sutcliffe, grass roots activism, strategies for everyday living, ideals of spiritual autonomy and egalitarianism, and an ideology of direct, unmediated access to experiences (Sutcliffe 2003: 9). Sutcliffe argues that a popular, functional everyday spirituality increasingly displaces New Age, and is a product of its genealogy. "Spirituality" has, according to Sutcliffe, emerged as a hybrid discourse constructed from alternative and popular sources, and is associated with living experience and inner discourse, in contrast to religion which is associated with systems and dogma. Sutcliffe speaks about the emergent spiritual discourse as being *dissident,* striving at finding something other, more and better than institutionalized religion; being *lay,* having a domestic setting which undermines traditional boundaries between public and private space; being *populist,* recognizing the supremacy of the will of the people, and being *functional,* emphasizing short achievements of goals and the active creation of meaning in everyday life (Sutcliffe 2003:214-223).

The recent spirituality discourse has also been discussed by several other interpreters of contemporary popular religion. Paul Heelas, for example, claims that a spiritual revolution is gradually taking place, as religion gives way to spirituality (Heelas 2002:365). By "religion" Heelas means "obedience to a transcendent God and a tradition that mediates his authority", while he defines "spirituality" as "experience of the divine as immanent in life". Whilst the former is under threat, the latter is, according to Heelas, thriving, and is doing well both amongst those who are not involved with institutionalized religion, and within the field of traditional religion itself (Heelas 2002: 358). Heelas views New Age as a symptom of a wider, spiritual revolution, widespread in mainstream culture. New Age is, according to Heelas, just the most visible tip of an iceberg (Heelas 2002:361).

Linda Woodhead is arguing much along the same lines, claiming that a "turn to life" is one of the most significant trends in religion and spirituality, as well as in the wider culture, in the West since the Second World War. Woodhead characterizes the "turn to life" as having two poles: one personal, living out one's own life in all its fullness, "selfing", to do things "in my own way" – and one cosmic pole, turning to the life force, of which the small self is ultimately only an aspect. The turn to life also places more emphasis on nature and/or on human relationship. It is this-worldly and "holistic", and there is also an emphasis on a radical egalitarianism, a radical empowerment of each individual (2001: 111-113). Woodhead emphasizes, as Paul Heelas, that this "turn to life" is effective not only in alternative, post-Christian and counter-cultural movements, but it is also becoming widely influential in post-war Christianity in the West, especially in its more liberal wing, and in feminist theology as well. Punishment, hell, damnation, and demonology have almost dropped out of the picture, as has a strong stress on asceticism and self-mortification. Experience, egalitarianism, and this-worldly development continue to eclipse older emphases on sacrifice and denial in this life in preparation for a more real life to come (2001:113-117).

Woodhead discusses the "turn to life" as "the flight from deference", meaning a flight from submission to a higher authority, as well as a flight from deferral of personal gratification. The flight from deference is, according to Woodhead, not confined to the religious sphere: The World Values survey of 1990 indicates a decline in deference to many institutions which would formerly have commanded respect. A loss of confidence in governmental, party-political and religious institutions is evident (Woodhead 2001: 117-121).[2]

In their most recent book, Heelas and Woodhead are taking this theory one step further, discussing an on-going major cultural shift, meaning a turn away from "life lived in terms of external or ´objective´ roles, duties and obligations, and a turn towards life lived by reference to one´s own subjective experiences" (Heelas & Woodhead 2005:2). They find some support for this thesis, at least as tendencies (Heelas & Woodhead 2005).

Several other authors also discuss the spirituality discourse along much the same lines as Heelas and Woodhead. "Spirituality" is presented as being a more personal and individual concept than "religion" (King 2001: 5-9, Roof et al. 1995: 247-252, Barker 2004a; Hanegraaff 2005), more anthropological than theological (King 2001: 5-9, Barker 2004a), syncretistic and pluralistic (Roof et al. 1995: 247-252, Barker 2004a), anti-hierarchical (Roof et al. 1995: 247-252, Barker 2004a) and innerworldly (Barker 2004a).

Globalization and contemporary religious change

Although there are reasons to be critical of some of the above representations[3] - "a major cultural shift" may for example be far too strong an expression – there are, however, several indications that there are tendencies towards a change of focus in aspects of contemporary religion. In the words of Eileen Barker: "something important is going on, which students of religion ought to recognize" (Barker 2004a).

As to the changes, each author describes them a little differently, but there are a few characteristics that several of them bring up. In this paper, I will focus on six of these characteristics: *Eclecticism* and syncretism; emphasis on *personal experience* at the expense of ideology or dogma; uninstitutionalism or religiosity in the *private* mode; radical *egalitarianism* or recognizing each person as his/her own spiritual authority; *self-spirituality* or a shift from God to human being; and emphasis on *this-worldliness* rather than emphasizing life after death. Below I will, based on field observations and the above discussed authors, discuss these characteristics as six interlinked processes of change in the light of globalization theories, as I believe this is one of the most important explanations for these changes. Globalization is of course only one of the processes triggering this shift, but I think that as a major cause it has been quite neglected in the discussion so far.

Together with some of the above discussed authors, I reject the concept of New Age as an essentialized category, and focus instead on the whole field of non-official or popular religiosity[4] in contrast to the institutionalized[5] religions. The different

elements of popular religion are today, as a consequence of globalization, increasingly interrelated and mixed. It is questionable if it makes sense any more to distinguish or essentialize special categories like New Age. There certainly are some characteristics which historically belonged to the cultic milieu of New Age, but these characteristics are today so well spread and mixed with other elements in popular religion, that I would argue that, while it might have made sense in the 1970s and even in the 1990s to speak about "new religiosity" or even "New Age", it does not make sense today. Communication in the globalized world is increasingly dense, and because of the syncretism and ecumenism in uninstitutionalized popular religiosity in the post-Christian western culture, all elements are today mixed to a degree that it makes no sense to speak about "new religiosity"[6] as a separate category. At the most, one could speak of different tendencies in popular, uninstitutionalized religiosity.

Moreover, this syncretistic tendency is slowly making it more and more useless also to speak about different religions as essentialized categories, even if this process is much slower. The religious change discussed above relates to both institutionalized and uninstitutionalized religion, but more to the latter category, as there is an inherent resistance to change in institutionalized religion. I will discuss these processes further below.

Six interlinked processes of religious change related to globalization

From particular to eclectic

Several authors, for example Olav Hammer and Ursula King, note the eclecticism of the contemporary spirituality discourse/New Age. Many different religions are eclectically used as *resources* rather than identifying exclusively with one religious tradition as the only *source* (King 2001:5-9). Irving Hexham, professor of religious studies, and Karla Poewe, professor of anthropology, who discuss New Age in a globalized context, write that one of the main characteristics of New Age is that it consists of fragments of different cultures. New Age selectively combines aspects of many traditions to create a new culture, a process which is only possible under strongly globalized conditions (Hexham & Poewe 1997:41-43).

Today communication is worldwide and increasingly dense. People, cultures, societies, and civilizations that previously were more or less isolated from one another are now in regular contact (Beyer 1994:2). Structurally, the contemporary strongly globalized conditions explain the existence of elements from several cultures in one place. But to explain why this leads to eclecticism, we have to look at a special process of globalization, by the sociologists of religion Roland Robertson and Peter Beyer called *relativization*. By globalization particular societies are set in a wider system of societies, resulting in the relativization of both societies and individuals (Beyer 1994:26-27). All particular cultures are relativized, including the religions (Beyer 1994:9). Individuals form their religious identity in the knowledge that their religion is only one among several possibilities (Beyer 1994:30). This process, together with the radical empowerment of the individual discussed below, gives rise to the wild eclecticism we see today in popular culture. As elements of one

religious culture are as good as other elements of another religious culture, the individual could pick according to individual choice. However, this choosing is of course not completely at random: some religious cultures – like, for example, western esotericism, Indian religion, Chinese religion and Native American religion – are more represented in popular western religious culture than, for example, African or Arabic religions. Global currents are more inclined to flow in certain directions, depending on, for example, aspects of power, and on aspects of prevalent discourses like the Orientalism discourse (Frisk 2001). The eclecticism also gives rise to an extreme tolerance: if all religions are relative, they are all as true. Further, this characteristic undermines religions like Christianity, which claim to have a *particular* truth.

This eclecticism also in some sense makes the boundaries between different religions more vague. The difference between religions has, for the individual, become increasingly unimportant. In some contexts, elements from different religions are mixed, without awareness even that there is a mixture. This is so far evident especially with religions like Hinduism and Buddhism, which have some similarities and about which there is limited knowledge in the West (Frisk 2002).

From dogma to experience

It is characteristic in a globalized world that many different belief systems and ideologies coexist side by side. Many of them oppose each other, and it must be clear to the individual that not all of them could be true. For example, if you go to heaven after death, you cannot at the same time reincarnate. As a consequence, for the individual the plausibility of *all* belief systems is undermined. The solution, for the individual, is to change focus away from dogmas and belief systems and towards other aspects of religion. The ideological dimension looses importance, and, together with the radical empowerment of the individual discussed below, the subjective experience dimension stands out as the most important aspect of contemporary religion.

Another argument for the decrease of importance of the belief dimension in contemporary religion is that several recent large quantitative studies of religious beliefs show that there is a good deal of uncertainty in religious beliefs spreading in western society. The "don´t know"-answers, as well as "believe a little", and "maybe"-answers are well represented (Gustafsson 1997:35). I believe that this is also an expression of the change of emphasis from dogma to experience.

From collective to personal

In popular spirituality, there is also a new emphasis on the personal individual, as opposed to collective institutions. Religious establishments have, for the post-war generation, broken down or at least substantially weakened in influence (Roof et al 1995:244). As Linda Woodhead notes, the results of the World Values survey indicate a decline in deference to many institutions – governmental, party-political and religious. Woodhead argues that the social, political and economical

transformation from at least the 1970s all serve to empower more and more individuals to make decisions for themselves. Much of religion has thus moved from the public to the private sphere.

Peter Beyer argues that globalization structurally favours privatization of religion (although it also could provide fertile ground for the renewed public influence of religion). For religion to be publicly influential, it is required that religious leaders have control over a service that is indispensable in today's world, in the same way that health professionals, political leaders, scientific or business experts do. The structures of modern/global society greatly weaken most of the ways that religious leaders have accomplished this before. The central structural feature of modern and global society is, according to Beyer, differentiation on the basis of function. There is a difference between how a subsystem relates to the society as a whole – which Beyer calls "function" – and how it relates to other subsystems – "performance". In the context of the religious subsystem, "function" refers to "pure" religious communication, whereas "performance" occurs when religion is applied to problems generated in other systems (e.g. economy, politics). Beyer means that "performance" is a problem for religion today, because of its special nature of encompassing holism, which runs counter to the specialized and instrumental pattern of other dominant functional systems. The major applications dominated by religious experts in the past – for example higher education, or healing – have been taken over by experts of other functional domains (Beyer 1994:79-81) Therefore, Beyer argues that religion has a comparatively difficult time in gaining public influence, and is more visible in the private, personal sphere (1994:71-72).

Hierarchical to egalitarian

Steven Sutcliffe is one of the scholars emphasizing that contemporary spirituality is populist, meaning that it recognizes the supremacy of the will of the people, and that the authority to interpret is reclaimed by lay doers and thinkers.

This egalitarianism may also be connected to the prevalent globalization. Peter Beyer argues that a global society has no outsiders who can serve as the social representatives of evil, danger or chaos. The person who used to be the outsider is now a neighbour. According to Beyer, under globalized conditions there are two main responses for religion: the conservative option, which reasserts the reality of the devil (and persons/cultures who are seen as outsiders or evil) and the liberal option which dissolves the devil. Liberal religion seeks to address the problems engendered by the global system, but on the basis of the prevailing global values and not in opposition to them. Liberal religion thus correlates with the structural tendencies of a global society, and according to Beyer the liberal option might be seen as the trend of the future. Liberal religion is ecumenical and tolerant, and more or less agrees that there are comparable possibilities for enlightenment and salvation in different religions. The possibility of salvation, enlightenment or wisdom is for all, everyone is included. Liberal religion works for the fuller inclusion of all people in the benefits of the global community (Beyer 1994:87-104).

Tolerance and inclusion of all people go well together with egalitarianism and democratic values. Everyone's voice is today of the same dignity. Therefore, the reasons to listen to authorities diminish or even disappear. The individual is radically empowered, and knows as much as the priest about spiritual matters – not through studies or revelation, but through inner experience.

From theological to anthropological

In popular religiosity there is a radical emphasis on the human being. According to Ursula King, spirituality has moved away from the theological to the anthropological dimension. Salvation in popular religion is conceived of as more of an inner realization than related to an outer divinity (Frisk 2004). The individual has become radically empowered, a process connected to and interlinked with the processes of privatization and egalitarianism. Characteristic is that the spiritual potential of every human being is affirmed, and that spiritual growth is conceived of as closely related to the individual´s psychological development and maturation. Some scholars, like Paul Heelas, even mean that "self-sacralization" or "selfing" is today the very basic characteristic of contemporary popular spirituality.

The new emphasis on the human being also means that religion has become more secular, interlinked with the sixth and last process discussed below. Contemporary religion is manifesting itself in far more secular ways than before, of which the emphasis on human being, at the expense of supernatural beings, is but one aspect.

From after death to this-worldliness

According to Linda Woodhead, the "turn to life" is one of the most significant trends in religion and spirituality in the West since the second world war. The emphasis in religion is today on this world, not on the world to come. In popular spirituality, the divine is conceived of as immanent in both the individual and in this world. Aspects of this world, like nature or intimate relationships, are seen as sacred.[7] Together with the flight from deferral of personal gratification and the emphasis of the divine immanent in this world, Woodhead points out that also subjects like punishment, hell, damnation and demonology have almost dropped out of the picture, in popular spirituality as well as in institutionalized religion. According to Peter Beyer, globalization of society does not lead mainly to the death of God, but the death of the devil, because of the liberal tendency to be all-inclusive. Without forces of evil, the forces of order and good also become more difficult to identify, undermining or relativizing, for instance, moral codes (1994:72).

Alver et al point out that popular spirituality today expresses itself not only in contexts we are used to call religious, but also everywhere in secular culture. There are not any more sharp borders between the religious and the secular, between holy and prophane. The prophane is sacralized, and the sacred is prophanized. The sacred is no longer confined to church, or to life after this life, but is conceived of as immanent in the human individual in nature and in intimate relationships (1999:7-13).

Globalization – an outline to a further understanding

Globalization is a complex process, generating vastly variable impact across cultures. This paper has not considered the processes that Peter Beyer calls the particularistic religious responses to globalization, for example the Hindu nationalists, the Muslim fundamentalists or the Christian Right in United States. To problematize Beyer's classification, however, the particularistic responses to globalization do also in different ways absorb globally transmitted cultural values – most of them do, for example, use the media technology characteristic of globalization (Rajagopal 2001; Smith 2000).

There are also cultural responses which are core parts of the global economy and society, but at the same time are affirming cultural identities. Elaborating on this theme is Manuel Castells, who uses *information society* as a key notion for the contemporary global world. The information society is, according to Castells, based on knowledge generation and inform processing, and is organized in networks. Castells writes that the global trend for the informational economy is to connect to its network those who are valuable to it, but disconnect those who are valueless. This results in increasing social injustice in the form of income inequality, polarization, and poverty. Global networks of information and wealth often do not respect the values of historically rooted identities, and has generated a situation in which dominant values threaten other cultural identities. This creates instability and potentially fundamentalist reactions, questions the legitimacy of the development, and creates what Castells calls *resistance identities (*Castells & Himanen 2004:1-10).

The core of the theory of the network society is thus the tension between the rise of the network society and cultural identity. The global informational economy threatens cultural identities. Thus, nationalism and religious fundamentalism are basically increasing with the rise of the network society. Castells, however, questions if the information society always needs to be in conflict with different cultural identities (Castells & Himanen 2004: 127-128). Castells & Himanen exemplify with Finland, a country well integrated in the global informational economy, but at the same time affirming its culture, unique language and national identity (Castells & Himanen 2004: 4). In Finland there are no strong resistance identities, no ultra-nationalist movements, no significant religious fundamentalism. According to Castells & Himanen, this is because the Finnish model of the information society is built on the Finnish identity, and that both the information society and the welfare state are, each separately, deeply rooted in the Finnish identity. The information society has in Finland become a new survival project, a legitimizer of the national-state, and a new identity (Castells & Himanen 2004:128-135).

Still, Finland could have been a strong candidate for expressing resistance identities, as the Finnish identity historically has been suppressed for several hundred years, and there is a national experience of inferiority. However, the absence of resistance identities in Finland may be attributed to its short history as a country, and an orientation rather towards the future than towards the past (Castells & Himanen 2004:132-134).

Castells writes in another book that resistance identities resist – they do not communicate. They are built around sharply distinct principles, defining an "in" and an "out" (Castells 2004: 421). The social construction of identity always takes place in a context marked by power relationships, and resistance identity is generated by those actors who are in positions/conditions devalued and/or stigmatized by the logic of domination, thus building resistance and survival on the basis of principles different from or opposed to, those permeating the institutions of society (Castells 2004:7-8). For those social actors excluded from or resisting the individualization of identity attached to life in the global networks of power and wealth, cultural communes of religious, national, or territorial foundation seem to provide the main alternative for the construction of meaning. These cultural communes are characterized by three features: they appear as reactions to prevailing social trends, which are resisted on behalf of autonomous sources of meaning; they are defensive identities that function as refuge and solidarity, to protect against a hostile, outside world; and, they are culturally constituted, that is, organized around a specific set of values whose meaning and sharing are marked by specific codes of self-identification - the community of believers, the icons of nationalism, and the geography of locality. The constitution of these cultural communes works on raw materials from history, geography, language, and environment. They are constructed around reactions and projects historically and geographically determined (Castells 2004:68-69).

According to Castells, religious fundamentalism and cultural nationalism are defensive reactions: reactions against three fundamental threats: globalization, which dissolves the autonomy of institution, organization and communication systems where people live; reaction against networking and flexibility, which blur the boundaries of membership and involvement: and reaction against the crisis of the patriarchal family. When the world becomes too large to be controlled, social actors aim to shrink it back to their size and reach. When networks dissolve time and space, people anchor themselves in places, and recall their historic memory. When the patriarchal sustainment of personality breaks down, people affirm the transcendent value of family and community, as God's will. These defensive reaction become sources of meaning and identity by constructing new cultural codes out of historical materials (Castells 2004:69).

Castells also describes a third kind of identity – besides resistance identity and legitimizing identity, the last one being introduced by the dominant institutions of society to extend and rationalize their domination – which he calls project identity. A project identity is when social actors build a new identity that redefines their position in society and, by so doing, seek the transformation of the overall social structure. Identities that start as resistance may induce projects, and may also become dominant, thus becoming legitimizing identities (Castells 2004:7-8).

Also Ronald Inglehart writes about the knowledge society in contrast to the industralized society. Industrialization, says Inglehart, brings rationalization, secularization, and bureaucratization, but the rise of the knowledge society brings another set of changes that move in a new direction, placing increasing emphasis on

individual autonomy, self-expression, and free choice, and giving rise to a new type of society that is increasingly people-centered. Inglehart demonstrates with survey data from 81 societies containing 85% of the world´s population, collected from 1981 to 2001 (The World Values Survey), that the basic values and beliefs of the publics of advanced societies differ dramatically from those found in less-developed societies – and that these values are changing in a predictable direction as socioeconomic development takes place. Changing values, in turn, have important consequences for the way societies are governed, promoting gender equality, democratic freedom, and a good governance. In the post-industrial phase, there is a shift from survival values to self-expression values (or individualism), which brings increasing emancipation away from authority (Ingelhart & Welzel 2005:1-5).

Summarily, several components may underlie the specific developments of globalization regarding the religious change described in this article. What direction globalization takes seems to be related to economic and historical developments, and also to power relations. In this case, the parts of the world mostly touched by globalization in the way described above, have as a base a fast and stable socio-economic development, which according to Inglehart leads to individualistic values and effective democracy. It also concerns parts of the world with no close history of suppression or minority complexes, and a part of the world with more power (economically and otherwise) than other parts, and with not much glorified past. Parts of the world with the opposite characteristics – weak socio-economic development, no power, a glorious history – (as may parts of cultures with these characteristics) may be more open to particularistic responses to globalization.

Conclusion

Several observations indicate that there are silent changes happening in contemporary religiosity that need more attention from scholars of Religious Studies. The thesis discussed in this paper is that globalization is a key factor in this religious change. Essentially the contributions of globalization are connected to the inclusion of all and everything in a globalized world, and the consequential process of relativization. Reasons for such responses to globalization in the Western cultures may connect to issues of socio-economic developments, power and future-oriented identities, as responses to globalization may also manifest in radically other ways.

Essentialized categories of "religion" and different kinds of religion, whether New Age or Christianity, make less and less sense in the global world. All borders blur and elements migrate freely with individual choice as the only limit. Elements of the historical field of alternative religion more and more mix with other elements of religion in the popular mode, and has today developed into part of mainstream. With Linda Woodhead, I want to emphasize that the changes discussed in this paper is a change *in* religion, not *from* religion. Thus this paper is also a contribution to the secularization debate. As one of the key processes involved in the contemporary religious change is sacralization of the prophane, there is, however, a new difficulty for scholars of Religious Studies: difficulties to recognize and sort out which expressions are religious and which are not. And this, I expect, is our new challenge.

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Notes

[1] There has also been a scholarly discussion as to whether New Age should be considered "alternative" and "countercultural", or if it should be viewed as "mainstream". For example, James R. Lewis and J. Gordon Melton call New Age "an integral part of a new, truly pluralistic ´mainstream´" (Lewis & Melton 1992:ix), while Hanegraaff means that all New Age trends are intended as alternatives to currently dominant religious and cultural trends, and that there is a persistent pattern of New Age culture criticism, directed against what are perceived as the dominant values of western culture in general, and of modern western society in particular (Hanegraaff 1996: 515-516). Sutcliffe argues that "alternative" is problematic to use in connection with New Age, as some of its spiritual styles have fully entered popular culture and are diffused in advertizing, television, world wide web, paperbacks and magazines. Sutcliffe suggests the use of "alternative spirituality" for the extensive historical field from which New Age emerged, thereby suggesting that what was alternative yesterday is mainstream today (Sutcliffe 2003:5). A similar view is taken by Hanegraaff in a later paper, where he says that New Age has developed from a distinct counter-culture to a dimension of mainstream culture (2005:48).

[2] Woodhead traces these changes back to a combination of significant social, political and economic transformations from the 1970s or even earlier which typify "late industrial" society: unprecedented levels of affluence and post-secondary education, the growth of the service sector of the economy, and the information revolution. All these changes serve, according to Woodhead, to empower more and more individuals to make decisions for themselves, to shape their lives as they wish, and to extend the power of choice and consumption into more and more spheres of life (2001:117-121). In this paper, I focus on globalization as one of the key factors

of the contemporary religious change. Globalization is, however, only one factor triggering this change and other aspects of modernization must of course also be taken into account.

[3] I do not find the subjectivization thesis of Heelas & Woodhead convincing, especially as their representation is loaded with subjective judgements: for example the mode of life-as is represented as "conformity to external authority" (2005:4) or "neglect of the cultivation of their unique subjective-lives" (2005:), while the mode of subjective-life is presented as "authentic connection with the inner depths of one's unique life-in-relation" (2005:4) or "live in accordance with the deepest, sacred dimension of their own unique lives" (2005:7).

[4] The sociologist of religion Meredith McGuire defines "non-official religion" as a set of religious and quasi-religious beliefs and practices that is not accepted, recognized, or controlled by official religious groups. Whereas official religion is relatively organized and coherent, nonofficial religion is unorganized, inconsistent, heterogeneous, and changeable. Nonofficial religion is sometimes called "folk", "common" or "popular", because it is the religion of ordinary people rather than the product of religious specialists in a separate organizational framework. McGuire writes that popular religion is no single entity, and that its elements are diverse (McGuire 1992:104-105). In this article, I will use the concepts popular, non-official and uninstitutionalized religion as interchangeable concepts, not going into, for the moment, the different meanings different labels could have.

[5] There are, of course, different degrees of organization and institutionalization, which makes a spectrum from institutionalized to uninstitutionalized, rather than two separate categories. Although popular religion to a great part is expressed in the private mode, there are also institutional forms and social expressions. Every healer or channeller has her/his embryonal organization, and there is social transmission and interaction in sessions, courses and lectures. Other social arenas for popular religion are media, books and Internet.

[6] The label "new religious movements" could of course also be discussed, but I would argue that, in spite of many difficulties, it at least makes more sense to speak about new religious movements as a separate category, as "newness" in connection with religious organizations often relates to some special characteristics, like a living charismatic leader, deviating belief system, authoritarian structure, dichotomous world-view and tension to society (Barker 2004b).

[7] This tendency is interrelated also with other changes in our society, above all the material surplus, triggering a need for religious legitimation.