

How to Become a Church in the Spirituality of Life Milieus?

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From New Religious Movements to Spiritualities of Life

October 1967 the musical Hair first came into public view¹ as a herald of the era of new religious movements and the new age:

Harmony and understanding
Sympathy and trust abounding
No more falsehoods or derisions
Golden living dreams of visions
Mystic crystal revelation
And the mind's true liberation
Aquarius!
Aquarius!

Since then new Religious Movements, New Religions or Cults, as they were often called, have received a massive publicity.



New religions are not necessarily new; they may have a long history, but just be new in the sense of being adapted to a new cultural setting as when Hindu and Buddhist spiritual practices found their way to Western societies, a process starting with *the Theosophical movement* founded in 1875 and *the Parliament of the World's Religions* in Chicago 1893.

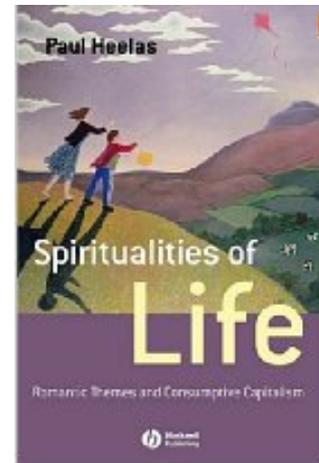


The new religious world of the 1970s and the 1980s were characterized among others by yoga-courses, Hindu gurus, zen-meditation, Scientology, The Unification Church, and The Family of Love (Children of God). Also alternative healing practices appeared in the old Christendom world, among others inspired from traditional Chinese medicine and other practices linked up with an energetic worldview. Many of the “old” new religions or cults have diminished in influence since the 1990s where “new” new religions began to appear with a less authoritarian character and a more fluid membership or affiliation. Sometimes the “new” religions, westernised Buddhism as well as neo-pagan groups, linked up with feminist and ecological spirituality, are part of the new spirituality milieu (cf. the following paragraph).

¹ <http://www.hairthemusical.com/>

Since the late 1970s a broader spiritual movement got the focus. This was not a new religion, but borrowed insights and practices from many religious and spiritual sources. Defining these new spiritualities is almost impossible, just as finding the right name for the phenomenon is difficult. In the 1980s and 1990s many people were satisfied naming it “New Age” or “Holistic Movement”.² New spiritualities have a holistic understanding of life; body, mind and spirit interact. In many parts of the neo-spiritual milieu holism tends to be monistic or non-dual, seeing the conditions of human life as illusory; one might speak of a *monistic* or *non-dual holism*. Yet New Spirituality adherents care for the planet and the ecological environment; there is a sense of responsibility for the healing of nature and the protection of all life; one might speak of a *planetary holism*. At the same time it is an *individual* or *personal holism* – being concerned with personal wholeness, wellness and well being, personal development, and the transformation of consciousness.³

These new spiritualities may have religious aspects in a way that suggest their characterization as New Age Religion, referring to the legacy from Western esotericism,⁴ but it is usually not thought of as bound up with a specific religion according to the self-understanding of both teachers, trendsetters, practitioners and consumers in the neo-spiritual milieu. New spiritualities comprises more than New Age, e.g. neo-pagan movements, which themselves are religiously ambiguous, and the non-religious spirituality in the culture of wellbeing and wellness. The non-religious spiritualities have recently also been called “Spiritualities of Life” because of their focus on practices which enhance life e.g. therapy, healing, wellness, and massage, seeing life as the spiritual ground of existence.⁵ Heelas defines “Spiritualities of life” thus:



The expression ‘spiritualities of life’ refers to all those ‘teachings’ and practices which locate spirituality within the depth of life. Spirituality is identified with life-itself, the agency which sustains life; spirituality is found within the depths of subjective-life, our most valued experiences of what it is to be alive.

As a contrast he suggests spiritualities which “operate from beyond whatever life in this world has to offer”. These are “spiritualities *for* life” and not “spiritualities *of* life”.⁶

It is the new spiritualities *sensu* “Spiritualities of Life” that seems to be the dominant feature of the neo-spiritual milieu. If a theoretical framework of meaning is sought, it is more likely to be found among teachers, writers and trendsetters who have a world view with affinities to the undogmatic approach of the spiritualities of life milieu rather than in traditional religions such as Christianity. In

² Cf. William Bloom (ed), *Holistic Revolution. The Essential New Age Reader*. Allen Lane / The Penguin Press, London 2000.

³ For further explanation on the terms *monistic* or *non-dual holism*, *personal* or *individual holism*, and *planetary holism*, cf. Madsen 2009a, pp 45-49.

⁴ Hanegraaff 1996

⁵ Cf. Paul Heelas, *Spiritualities of Life. New Age Romanticism and Consumptive Capitalism*. Blackwell Publishing, MA/Oxford 2008

⁶ *Ibid.* p.25.

Denmark Theosophy has had this role.⁷ Spiritualities of Life are however mostly concerned with practice and experience, with life itself rather than with philosophic or religious truths.

Most observers discussing the new spiritualities stress the individualized feature of spirituality focussing on experience and personal choice as if it was a narcissistic enterprise. Some observers even speak of consumerist religion/spirituality. Even though the individual way is stressed and the wellness trend has taken over spiritual language and even though the spiritual quest seems to take place in what resembles a market place, it is usually not only for personal gain or fun. The individual way is understood as a necessary part of the evolution of mankind and the Earth; spiritual growth happens in relation to other than self, in groups or in a client-practitioner setting.⁸ New Spiritualities are furthermore often connected with a concern for the unity of humankind, nature and the environment. This is sometimes expressed as being servants for the Earth and humankind, or experienced as being channels for a new age.

William Bloom expresses it this way:

Holistic people believe that it is normal for us to experience a deep sense of companionship with Earth and nature. Our physical bodies are essentially of the same matter and, whatever the particular history, we emerged together out of the same cosmic origin. In most people there is an instinctive understanding that nature is alive... But this mystic understanding is obviously worthless if our lifestyles remain selfish and harmful.⁹



Today phenomena, practices and thought-forms, which in the 1960-1970s were expressed in counter-cultural milieus and were seen as a culture criticism, are considered mainline¹⁰ and seem to be present everywhere, e.g. in magazines, in TV and Film, literature (fiction as well as non-fiction), the health sector, pedagogy and the wellness sector.¹¹ This development towards spiritualities of life follows general tendencies in Western culture and society which have been acknowledged by sociologists for at least three decades; these tendencies may be summarized under three headings, “the subjectification of reality”, “the intimization of society”, “and “the politicization of culture”.¹²

One may also talk of a secularised religion or spirituality rising out of folk religion or of the vague beliefs of common people. Ina Rosen has 2009 published the results of her focus group research on belief among common people in Copenhagen. Her findings do not differ much from the results of Per Salomonsen’s research on religion in Denmark, published 1971. In Salomonsen 80% said they were Christians, but only 25% considering themselves religious (in the “terminology” of common people: having a conscious confessional relation to the Church); 20 % of the “Christians”, though member of the national Lutheran Church, denied the existence of God. What has changed is that

⁷ Pedersen 2009, pp 106-108, 150.

⁸ Cf. the discussion in Heelas 2008, pp 132-136, and Madsen 2009a pp 46-48.

⁹ Bloom 2000, pp. 97-98. Cf. Madsen 2009a, pp. 48-49.

¹⁰ Bloom 2000, pp xii-xix.

¹¹ Kraft 2008, pp96-97.

¹² For further discussion of these tendencies and their influence on Christian spirituality / liturgy cf. Manion 1990.

folk religion adherents have less and less words for expressing their beliefs and that the belief bricollage today contains imagery from other sources than Christianity to a larger degree than in Salomonsen, and that the subjective turn of belief is more outspoken today. This indicates that it is more likely for today's common beliefs and folk religion to orientate itself towards spiritualities of life rather than Christianity in search for a language of self expression or a commitment to life.

Church: From Parish and Institution to Network

One of the obstacles of the church (from a new spiritualities point of view) meeting today's spirituality is its institutional character, not the least in a country like Denmark where the national Church is a part of the service institutions of the State. Even though many common people as shown by Ina Rosen use the church in terms of traditions and heritage,¹³ and even though many spiritual seekers have had meaningful meetings with Christians, have experienced healings from evangelists and have had good sessions with Christian counselors, the organized fellowship in parish churches and congregations and the participation in the ordinary church services does not seem relevant to their personal beliefs.¹⁴ The Church / Christianity is seen as a system or an institution with only little room for spiritual freedom, expression of experiences, and spiritual growth.¹⁵

The church has to be understood in other ways than an institution governed by law, if it should be felt relevant for today's believers and spiritual seekers. New forms of church and Christian fellowship are emerging in the last decade, i.e. fresh expressions of church,¹⁶ emerging church,¹⁷ or new monasticism.¹⁸ In a Lutheran context it is obvious to seek inspiration from the reformation ideal of church and congregation. Luther speaks of seven marks of the Church which all of them express the church as living out of the relationship to Jesus Christ

- 1) The Word of God
- 2) Baptism
- 3) The sacrament of the altar (the Lord's supper)
- 4) The office of the keys (confession and absolution)
- 5) Ministries
- 6) Prayer
- 7) The holy cross

In all marks of the Church the initiative of God calls forth faith with the aim of leading the believer to sanctification.¹⁹

¹³ Rosen 2009 pp 141-145.

¹⁴ A clear indication of this is the small number of people regularly attending church services in Denmark in spite of a 80% membership rate of the Danish population in the national Lutheran Church.

¹⁵ As evidenced by talks with spiritual seekers at alternative fairs, holistic fairs by myself and other Christians having our own booth.

¹⁶ <http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/>

¹⁷ <http://www.emergingchurch.info/>

¹⁸ <http://www.newmonasticism.org/>

¹⁹ Von den Konziliis und Kirchen, 1539, WA L,628-644.

But also on the horizontal level the church is understood in relational terms summed up in the idea of the common priesthood of believers, a fellowship gathered around the word of God and the right use of the sacraments.²⁰



Luther wanted to safeguard the freedom of each Christian to find a gracious God; thus the Church ideally should assemble in such a way as to provide freedom for the growth of faith as well as for “being a Christian and confessing the gospel with hand and mouth”.²¹

Luther’s ecclesiology however has a very polemic stance towards his

opponents, the enthusiasts (Schwärmer) and Roman Catholics, but following this polemic line of thought would only lead to the loss of rich spiritual insights and expressions of faith in the practices he criticizes, e.g. concerning liturgy and sacraments. But his dynamic understanding of the Church which makes room for every single Christian and his/her faith and sanctification inspires today’s Christians to find the courage to form Christian fellowships in the individualized spiritual milieu of Western society and culture, however still keeping the Word and the sacraments in focus, even if his thoughts, being conceived in a Christian monoculture, cannot answer all the questions which rise out of a multicultural and multireligious/spiritual reality.

Syncretism, Church and Spiritualities of Life

A major obstacle for many Christians to enter dialogue with new religions and new spiritualities is the syncretistic and eclectic character of the new spiritualities. The fear of syncretism is deep rooted among many Christians.²² And new religions and new spiritualities are criticized for their eclectic and syncretistic practices and world views:

Many have seen in the growth of various new religious movements a hopeful sign of deep spiritual hunger. ... Others ascribe this emergence of syncretistic religions to an outbreak of a new satanic wave which must be understood in light of the warnings of Jesus Christ that in the end there will arise many false prophets ...²³

This problem must be dealt with, since we cannot escape syncretism if we really want to contextualise the Gospel and want the Church to inculturate in any culture, and *in casu* the spiritual milieus of the post modern world.

²⁰ An den christlichen Adel deutsch Nation, 1520, WA VI,406ff. Cf. Confessio Augustana, article VII.

²¹ Deutsche Messe und Ordnung des Gottesdienstes, 1526. WA XIX,75.

²² Cf. The Lausanne Covenant of 1974, article 3: “We also reject as derogatory to Christ and the gospel every kind of syncretism and dialogue which implies that Christ speaks equally through all religions and ideologies.”

<http://www.lausanne.org/covenant>

²³ Lausanne 1980, Introduction.

I am using “syncretism” as a neutral and phenomenological description, designating the bringing together of elements, practices, ideas and language from different cultures and religions / spiritualities.²⁴ In relation to mission syncretism poses two questions: a) What is the role of syncretism in the religion or culture, *in casu* spiritualities of life, which meet the gospel, and b) how will the gospel unfold true to itself as well as culturally relevant *vis a vis* a syncretistic culture og milieu?²⁵ A religion is not accepted/received if it just negates the culture and religion of the society or milieu in which it is presented. On the other hand we need to ask, how far may we go in this process without losing the content, which we want to bring into these milieus?



It may be helpful to discern between two kinds of syncretism in order to find a way to encounter the questions raised in the preceding paragraph:

- a) Syncretism on the systemic plane. This happens if the limits of religious systems are crossed or cancelled in a way in which heterogeneous elements are combined freely in a new unified religion. Any religion, which claims an absolute and universal validity, rejects this form of syncretism, e.g. the Old Testament Jahve-faith confronting Canaanite religion.
- b) Syncretism on the plane of elements. This happens through a conscious or unconscious taking over of elements from another spiritual tradition in a way in which the elements are reinterpreted or fused together, that is transformation, new functions, identification of elements or seeing them as equivalent. How does this kind of syncretism influence the system? What is legitimate and what is illegitimate syncretism in this area?²⁶

But syncretism also has an individual dimension as the seeker attempts to keep his/her identity between two spiritualities or religions to reduce or eliminate tension or just to create meaning of whatever elements he/she finds in the social sphere²⁷; this we might call existential syncretism. Syncretism thus is a creative way of preserving one’s identity in a cultural situation full of alienation and doubt / insecurity: How do I find a meaningful life in between contradictory and overwhelming factors in culture?

²⁴ RGG defines syncretism thus. „Er bezeichnet einerseits den bewußten Zusammenschluß verschiedener Religionen bzw. einzelner Elemente in ihnen, andererseits das organische Zusammenwachsen von Religionen oder ihren Anschauungen und Praktiken zu einer Einheit. Es handelt sich bei diesem Phänomen um eine allgemeine religionsgeschichtliche Erscheinung mit verschiedenen Motiven.“ *Synkretismus* in Die Digitale Bibliothek Band 12: Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart, Directmedia Publishing GMBH, Berlin 2000, p. 31782 (= RGG Bd. 6, pp 563)

²⁵ *Synkretismus* in Die Digitale Bibliothek Band 12: Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart, Directmedia Publishing GMBH, Berlin 2000, p. 31793 (= RGG Bd. 6, pp 567ff)

²⁶ Ulrich Berner in Siller 1999, pp 130-144.

²⁷ Ina Rosen refers to the social sphere as the relatively unstructured and unspoken gap between the institutional sphere and the private sphere, where persons and their inner universes meet. In the social sphere meaning and belief emerge from input from other individuals and social actors, e.g. the media, institutions and religions. Rosen 2009, p. 132

Existential syncretism is what is found in the new spiritual milieu. In the New Age classic of M.



Ferguson, *The Aquarian Conspiracy*, this was not in the least obvious in what she described as the 2nd stage of the transformative process of consciousness, exploration.²⁸ One and the same seeker may go to the doctor or a medical specialist, use alternative medicine, receive some kind of alternative therapy, and ask for the healing prayer and laying on of hands in the Church. This indicates that the transformation process still goes on, the quest has not stopped, and the worldview is still in making - consisting of pieces of insights from as well a Christian, scientific, materialistic and

alternative/occult/New Age outlook. An existential syncretism is usually a syncretism on the plane of elements, but may also happen on the systemic plane, e.g. defining Christ as the office of the World Teacher, identifying him with Maitreya Buddha. In which way will an existential syncretism relativize the spiritual or religious symbols, practices and traditions involved? In which way is the meaning of the elements eventually changed when used in a new context?

Another way of looking at syncretism is as a kind of *bricolage* (from the French verb *bricoler* – the core meaning in French being, "fiddle, tinker" and, by extension, "make creative and resourceful use of whatever materials are to hand, regardless of their original purpose"). A synthesis is made out of old ideas and meanings and their supporting practices, stories and metaphors.²⁹

Belief *sensu* Ina Rosen seems to be a bricolage consisting of elements from Christendom and the social sphere (the media, work place, education, personal encounters etc.):

What this conveys is that the individual is in charge of choosing elements of religion from the public sphere to incorporate somehow or other in everyday life.

Nonetheless the individual is also part of a greater social sphere, where one is socialized with particular norms and values, as well as traditions and language. These elements are in dynamic, contextual interplay in his mind as well as in the



²⁸ Ferguson 1980, p. 92; all four stages of transformation cf. *ibid.* pp 89-97.

²⁹ Siller 1991, pp 6-7; cf. Ina-Maria Greverus in Siller 1991 pp 18-30.

many social contexts he moves in throughout life... . They use the church as a symbolic space to reproduce certain traditions, but all of this is bereft of religious meaning or beliefs. Beliefs in contrast are personal and do not often pertain to the church and are only seldom associated with expressive practices.

When we find that people believe individually, privately in personal ways, this is because belief has been withdrawn into the inner lives of individuals. They assemble their beliefs on the basis of life's experiences and actualize them contextually. Such beliefs therefore cannot mirror any system offered by denominations or other institutions, organization or groups found in the public sphere...³⁰

What is true concerning belief *sensu* Ina Rosen, is conspicuous in the more self-reflecting new spiritualities or spiritualities of life. It is important to stress that meaning in the case of a spiritual bricollage not is found in the elements themselves, but is found in the sense which the individual person makes of the elements of his/her bricollage as a the new composition. This suggests that what an observer sees as inconsistent and self-contradictory elements from diverse sources, is experienced as one coherent image by the "creator" of the bricollage. And what the observer sees as shopping in the spiritual consumer's market, the person him/herself experiences as evolving or emergent meaning making.

Christian Symbols, Spiritual Practices and World Views in a Syncretistic Setting

Faith *sensu* Rosen as well as new spiritualities / spiritualities of life take the form of bricollages of many different elements found in the social sphere. In the case of faith *sensu* Rosen the national Lutheran church is a reservoir for traditions and heritage,³¹ and even spiritualities of life *sensu* Heelas does not evolve isolated from Christendom, actually much of it is found in indeterminate zones, often "operating at the 'edges' of theistic Christianity... and at the same time drawing on the two sources of authority and significance..., perhaps 'selecting' the best of what the god within and the god without have to offer, to find some kind of experimental harmony".³² Popular culture dealing with life style, health and wellness and not in the least in the world of Fantasy (novels, TV and film) also mix Christian symbols and metaphors with other religious themes and imagery in such a way that many people, especially fans, "find meaning and identity through the myths created in the fantasy stories", fandoms being "expressions of popular culture that provide fans with overarching moral systems and thus, functionally, become living belief systems".³³ Also theosophy which have lend the new spirituality most of their thought forms contains many Christian elements, not the least the theosophy of A. A. Bailey (e.g. the importance of Christ) and the Danish movement of Martinus.³⁴

³⁰ Rosen 2009, pp. 161-162

³¹ Rosen 2009 pp 141-145.

³² Heelas 2008, p. 58.

³³ Istoft 2008

³⁴ The importance of Christ in the Hierarchy or the Great White Brotherhood in the works of A.A. Bailey is exemplified by a book title as "The Reappearance of the Christ", Lucis Trust, New York 1948 Martinus called his main

This presence of Christian elements, imagery, language, values, rites and tradition does not bestow on them the role of conveying the bricolage with its ultimate meaning. The Christian elements probably do not have the same significance and intent in the new spiritual milieu and in the beliefs of common people as among clergy and members of the core congregation. Furthermore it is difficult to Christians to present their faith to people whose spirituality is characterized as *ad hoc* beliefs and whose spiritual bricolage gets its meaning and significance from the individual persons themselves. Another difficulty in presenting the Christian gospel and the full package of Christian faith and practice is the inherent suspicion towards what is conceived of as fanatic, fundamentalist or sectarian religion.³⁵

Is it however possible for Christians being actively present in the neo-spiritual milieu to confine inculturation and the contextual sharing of the Gospel to a syncretism on the plane of elements, or will the bricolage-tendency reduce the influence of a Christian presence so that we end up with a syncretism on the systemic plane?



Syncretism may be an instrument of regaining a cultural relevance enriching one's own tradition by means of foreign elements or through a dialogue of cultures. Syncretism however is anyway the necessary outcome wherever we are engaged in true communication.³⁶ It is in this perspective we will understand contextualisation and inculturation. We cannot escape syncretism; it is in fact the condition *sine qua non* for being a fellowship of the disciples of Jesus in a given culture or spiritual milieu.

The gospel will not be understood if we do not manage to transmit the *kerugma* or if we at same time are not able to manage the syncretistic process without succumbing to it. The core of the Gospel and the basics of the church as a fellowship of Jesus' disciples gathering around the Word and the sacraments should be preserved unchanged, while words, actions, customs, liturgies, prayers, forms of worship communicate the gospel and the Christian core values relevantly to the given culture or milieu, recognizing that culture is the context in which people find their identity. Even though the process of inculturation involves affirmation as well as correction of elements in the given culture (critical contextualization), the different methods of inculturation nevertheless inevitably combines elements from different cultures.³⁷ Dynamic equivalence "consists of re-expressing components of worship with something in the local culture that has an equal meaning

work for "Det femte Testamente" – "The Fifth Testament", referring to his work as a fulfillment of the gospels and an unfolding of the insights of Christ..

³⁵ Rosen 2009, pp 150-155; Hanegraaff 1996, pp 324-330, 515-517, 520

³⁶ Siegfried Wiedenhofer in Siller 1991, pp 150-173.

³⁷ On Critical Contextualization, cf. Lausanne 2004, pp. 41-42.

and value”. Creative assimilation in yet another way is much more radical in adapting or “baptizing” elements from the new context.³⁸

This is nothing new. From her beginning the Church has been a trans-cultural movement; it is a central theme in the New Testament, not the least in the Acts and in the ministry of St. Paul. But inculturation has a double movement: The Church has to become a part of the given culture, but she also has to transform and sanctify it. If the latter movement does not succeed the Church would end up in a cultural captivity, by which she may be misused / abused for e.g. nationalistic purposes. If the Church avoids being an instrument for legitimizing power claims, she may engage as a partner in the creation of the self understanding of the given culture,³⁹ e.g. helping the neo-spiritual milieu to upkeep the understanding of service towards the Earth and humankind.

The Shape of the Church to Come

When the Church shall find its form *vis a vis* the neo-spiritual milieu and spiritualities of life, she has to acknowledge that most of her members does make their own belief bricolage out of elements which they find in the social sphere, among others from Christianity as heritage and tradition. This is happening in a more conscious way among the spiritualities of life practitioners, teachers and trendsetters. As long as the Church does not recognize this fact she will not be able to find ways to open the Christian elements in the individual belief bricolages to their core meanings. Furthermore the Church has to come out of her cultural ghetto or self chosen marginalization.⁴⁰

The contextual sharing of the gospel starts with the meeting of persons on an equal basis. This takes place in the social sphere. The Christian should meet the other person as/for who she/he is – not as a representative of any faith-system (e.g. folk religion, New Age, Buddhism / Buddhism light), and abstain from expressing a judgment on the individual belief-bricollage of others. The situation must also be taken into account: an accidental meeting, in the family or workplace, at a body-mind-spirit-fair or in a counseling session? The sharing should be on equal terms keeping a balance between listening and talking. The Christian should be able to appreciate what he/she and the other person share concerning imagery, traditions and values, even if common Christian elements may not have the same meaning or significance in the other person’s spiritual life. But sharing what these elements mean to the Christian in his/her life, he/she through the sharing will add to the Christian content of meaning in the shared elements of the other person’s belief-bricollage. The Church begins with friendship and relations.

This meeting of equal persons should be paradigmatic for the forms with which the Gospel is shared with common believers, spiritual seekers and spiritualities of life practitioners. The next step to become a Church or Christian fellowship in the neo-spiritual milieu is to identify common

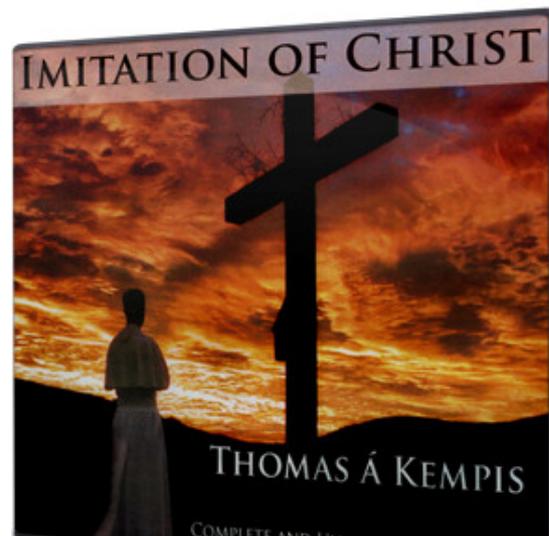
³⁸ WCC Commission on Faith and Order, *Towards Koinonia in Worship*, in News of Liturgy, Issue No. 239, November 1994, pp. 10-12. For examples cf. Madsen 2001 and Madsen 2008b

³⁹ Hummel 1994, pp. 176-157.

⁴⁰ Kraft 2008, pp. 89-90.

concerns, may be in a shared feeling that there are yet many people who do not share the same concerns and insights. Common rituals and traditions may arise out of shared concerns in a way that likens spontaneous rituals as putting flowers and lighting candles on the scene of an accident or crime. A sense of reciprocal responsibility may transform the shared concerns and insights into a group consciousness, a fellowship, a community, a civil society (like a NGO) or even a “congregation”. Even though Ina Rosen in her study of belief in today’s Copenhagen does not find that Community or Civil Society are adequate descriptions of religion in the Danish society,⁴¹ I find it reasonable to see such kind of emerging organizing as the possible outcome, when belief in the social sphere become more articulate and starts to find its form in the meeting of belief with belief.

In this process Christians need to qualify their own spirituality. Christians will have nothing to share with others if they do not have a conscious spiritual life themselves – individually and as fellowships or communities. This was what Luther intended with his seven marks of the Church. Every Christian has a story of belief shaped by the faith in God’s self-revelation in Christ, in the Word and the Sacraments. Christian spirituality lives out of a living relationship to God-in-Christ. And the Christian fellowship guards the dignity of each believer in his/her quest for God in a mutual support, care and encouragement.



Thus Christians have a positive task to communicate an understanding of Christian spirituality as spirituality inspired/worked by the Holy Spirit, leading to a Christ-shaped life as a member of the Body of Christ, which enhances the quality of life and furthers spiritual growth. In this spirituality the doctrines of the Church are seen as expressions of experienced life with God. A spirituality worked by the Spirit and founded in Christ would be able to engage in a learning relationship with other spiritualities, contextually sharing the Christians’ experiences of life with God with others without succumbing in syncretistic process. A Christian spirituality may offer a culture criticism without prejudices, being adequately “exotic” to catch the interest in the multi-spiritual world.

There may also be an apologetic dimension to Christian spirituality *vis a vis* spiritualities of life:

- Spirituality does not exclude believing in God,
- The Christian understanding of creation and its restoration in Christ is life enhancing, and
- A biblical understanding of human nature inspires a responsible relationship with nature and fellow humans, guards the dignity of every person and implies a true tolerance.

From the meeting persons in the neo-spiritual milieus or shared beliefs with other people in the social sphere arises the need to find new ways to understand the nature of Church and to live the

⁴¹ Rosen 2009, p. 131.

reality of Church. This will influence the traditional congregation and her spiritual life and it will create new forms of Church.

The first steps for the life of the traditional congregation has to do with a revitalization of spirituality, and not the least the liturgical life. The considerations of Marc Seale some twenty years ago are still helpful:

To overcome the cultural momentum towards religious individualism, we should need forms of worship which actually cultivated such awareness of the “liturgy of the world”.⁴²

This suggests a remedy for excessive individualism influencing Church life, but also a life affirming spirituality, which embraces all of life including poverty, suffering and death and the ecological crisis of the planet in order to take all of life into the history of God with humanity and the created world. The fixed and solemn form of the liturgy and the sacraments endows the liturgical gathering with an objectivity which opens it towards the expressions of life.

In homily, monologue will yield to dialogue as the Word of God establishes an agenda for the examination of social issues not only during, before and after the liturgy itself. Inspired by the Word, the congregation will become once again a “community of memory,” remembering especially the things that our culture forgets: the radical equality of all human beings before God and the centrality in the Christian economy of those – like women and children, the unemployed, the handicapped, the sick, the dying, and the unsuccessful – whom society relegates to its margins.”⁴³



The liturgy provides creative images of what it is to be a fellowship of Christ followers in today’s culture – in distinction to cultural trends and in service for the life of humans. On the one hand the rites and liturgical acts will define the fellowship as Christian, differentiating baptismal life from uncommitted life in the world and defining the fellowship as disciple life shaped by Word and sacraments. On the other hand, “within the community, awareness of and concern for the larger society will result in common prayer that is not afraid to be specific and does not hide its lacks of commitment behind pious generalities.”⁴⁴

The suggestions of Searle point to the necessary renewal of the spiritual life of the Christian congregation, but renewal is needed on other parts of congregational life. The dissertation of Ina Rosen showed that the focus group was a help to ordinary people to start a reflection on belief; this suggests that the focus group may be a model for a learning process for spiritual seekers in their first contact with church. Workshops would be another way to create a learning-by-doing introduction to Christian faith and life.

⁴² Searle 1990 p. 42.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Searle 1990, pp. 43-44.

The identification of common concerns with people in the neo-spiritual milieu, e.g. concerning ecology and climate, may inspire new spiritual practices in the congregation and new ways of local presence. An example of such spiritual practices might be creational liturgies celebrating the eight “Celtic” festivals, following the seasons of the year – thus sharing the joy of and caring for nature with neo-pagans, and at the same time creating a bridge from eco-spiritualities to the Church.⁴⁵ The growing number of congregations inviting to meditation services and night open churches are important bridge building activities.⁴⁶

But the Christian witness to the new spiritualities / spiritualities of life and the formation of Christian fellowship cannot stop with the internal renewal of the congregation. Christians need to be present in the Spiritualities of Life milieu. One of the best opportunities for building relationships



between Christians and spiritual seekers and new spiritualities practitioners is booth ministry at holistic festivals and fairs, e.g. Body Mind Spirit fairs.⁴⁷ Some guests and exhibitors visit the Christian booth over and over again, fair after fair to receive the prayers or blessings offered in the booth; to some it changes their image of God and self and (re)orientate their life towards Jesus Christ; some of the also repeatedly take part in the workshops, seminars or communion services held by the

Christian booth. This means that these guests and exhibitors should be met as disciples of Jesus and as members of the Body of Christ, The Word and the Sacraments are shared, the marks of the Church are manifest at the fair, and the Body of Christ is being build up as a network of relation between Christian booth ministers and guests and exhibitors. This is just as much Church as the congregation in the parish. At the same time the Christian booth is a prophetic sign, a kind of internal cultural critique within the new spiritualities milieu, pointing to the Christian experience of the God-Human relationship as an I-You relationship, thus experientially showing forth another understanding of God and the created world and human nature than the one implied by the monistic trait in much of the new spirituality worldview.

⁴⁵ Madsen 2009a, pp 51-53; cf. Madsen 2008b.

⁴⁶ Berg 2001; www.natkirken.dk

⁴⁷ Lausanne 2004, pp 54-51; cf.

http://www.inthelight.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1&Itemid=2

The renewal of Christianity vis a vis the belief bricollages of new spiritualities

I have dealt with the challenge to being a Church from the syncretistic nature of the new spiritualities. This raises questions like: Does a Christian presence in the new spiritual milieu result in a renewed Christianity – or will it mean the disappearance of the Gospel-core in a new religious synthesis? I have argued that the only chance of retaining the true meaning of the Christian foundational metaphors, imagery and spiritual practices in the neo-spiritual milieu is to be present and critically contextualize the gospel and inculturate the fellowship of Jesus' disciples in the milieu – not fearing what people will make out of it and trusting the Holy Spirit to make the Gospel alive. But the success of this presence presupposes an authentic Christian spirituality in the Church and in the life of her evangelists.

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