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## Religions of «New Age»: Religion Studies' analysis

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*The author analyzes the New Age movement as one type of new religious movements and as a specific quasi-religious subculture in the modern society.*

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Contemporary religious studies has accumulated enough research of new religious movements (NRM). Criteria of how specific movements should be classified as a NRM, typology issues have been studied. The very term “new religious movements” has been criticized multiple types (Balagushkin E.G., Kanterov I.Y., Egilskiy E.E., Matetskaya A.V., Samygin S.I et al.). Nevertheless, these problems did not mean this study has lost its significance. Nowadays, a researcher has to find a suitable definition which would reflect the most important characteristics of religious movements classified as new religious movements.

Another significant study is the research of modern NRM, its perspectives and future development in Russia. According to a well-known new religious movements specialist and professor Kanterov I. Y, PhD “the triumphant procession” of NRM in Russia has completed and its future is “unclear and unstable”. (Kanterov I.Y., 2013, p. 17). M. Y. Smirnov, PhD in Social Sciences, thinks that NRMs were organic to the

transient state of the Russian society between XX-XXI centuries. This “experience of religious rearrangement was useful, albeit not so relevant so it can be archived” (Smirnov M.Y., 2013, p.36). At the same time it demonstrates that interior and exterior resources of its existence are reserved. The interior resources mean that people who feel deprived or disappointed by the existent religious movements have the need to compensate for this. Exterior resources mean that they are very suitable to form an image of an enemy in a social mind, although they do not pose any threat to the society or traditional denominations. Other researchers have an opposite opinion. They suggest that non-traditional religiousness in Russia preserves the possibility for self-reproduction and that “Russia will come across the second edition if the institutionalization of non-traditional religious research in the near future” (Zherebyatyev M.A, 2013, p. 29). Many foreign and Russian specialists in religious studies and social sciences who analyze contemporary religious state think that its vital characteristic is not only the

appearance of NRMs but new individualized form of religiousness or spirituality as a unique experience of internal feelings (Barker E., 2008, p. 189; Stepanova E.A., 2011, p. 128). This characteristic is typical for those believers who consider themselves traditionalists. Sociologists who study religiousness give examples of those interviewed: "I'm Russian Orthodox but I feel closer to Buddhism", "I'm Russian Orthodox but I do not belong to the church". Individual internal convictions are more important than denominations. This type of religiousness is called "religious kaleidoscope", "scrap faith", "faith without belonging to a denomination".

The most outstanding example of new religiousness is the New Age movements, which is defined as amorphous spiritual phenomenon, alternative religiousness or new spirituality. In its narrow sense New Age movement is one of NRM kinds, religious communities that appeared in the XX century. In its broad sense New Age is a specific quasi-religious subculture of the modern society (Raevskiy A.N., 2012, pp. 16-17). In its ideological content New Age is presented by the diversity of topics, but in the vivid and amorphous set one can distinguish worldview opinions that define its religious content. When we distinguish these worldview characteristics in New Age we can firstly talk about this movement as a unity, secondly as an NRM type and finally separate New Age from other subcultures of the modern society. The ideas of the sacred in New Age have not been completely formed yet. Thus, in the movement called "Jingling cedars" or so-called "anastasians" gods act in the universe as "more or less concentrated energy clots in space" and influence the world on the energy level. At the same time, god is "unified conscience of all living creatures". God or superior creatures are impersonal, they are indifferent to prayer and it is impossible to worship them (Burdo M., Filatov S.B., 2006, pp. 296-297). In Radasteya faith gods

are called "Lords", "Superior Minds". The universe created by them is pierced by the "rays" coming from them as emanations that have their own mind and that influence each other rhythmically. (Burdo M., Filatov S.B., 2006, p. 285). The ideas of the sacred are more worked out in the Church of the Last Testament. Some researches classify this movement as New Age, while others to the group of neo-pagan type. The founder of the movement Sergey Torop (Vissarion) calls himself the "son of god", "the living word of the Heavenly Father" and considers his commune to be Christian. According to Vissarion's doctrine initially there is the Only One (Absolut) – the creator of the material world, "Superior Mind of the Universe". It exists in the sphere of fine fields and energies, torn away from the Only One. The energy which creates the material world is called the Spirit of Life. The universe is created based on the law of appropriateness or the karma law. Mother Earth, animated by the Spirit of Life is in fact an independent spiritual entity. Its members worship it and try to live in harmony with the nature. As a result of the spiritual progress "Heavenly Father" appeared. It is the creator of spiritual world, a person's soul; it emits Heavenly Spirit as a creative power (Burdo M., Filatov S.B., 2006, p. 262). Something similar in the interpretation of the sacred can be found in different quasi-religious groups aimed at healing practices, for instance, in the Reiki system. The syllable "Rei" means something superior and absolute which contains in itself everything spiritual and divine. It can also be translated with the words "emptiness" or "unimpeded flow" which makes it related to the concept of dao. Dao is empty but in its application it is inexhaustible. The syllable "ki" means life energy. In relation to a human "Rei" symbolizes the human spirit, its unity with god, immortal part of a person. The syllable "ki" means a person's power, energy and vitality. "Ki" comes apart after a person dies. The union of

“Rei” and “ki” is the harmony of a person’s all spheres. It is the union of body, soul and spirit and harmony with the surrounding world. It suggests self-realization and full life. (Lodkina S.R., 199, pp.14-15). In the divine world there is no confrontation between good and evil powers. According to anastasians the battles between gods and demons described in different religious mythologies is essentially “interior conflict of a person’s components”.

Thus, in ontological view New Agers are close to pantheism. They are characterized by the holistic view of the universe as an energetically interconnected unified system. Such interpretation of the divine does not require faith in God and the evidence of his existence. The whole Universe is God; his existence is a self-evident fact. God is understood by experience, with the immediate contact. The experience of contact (“channeling”) is one of the characteristic features of New Age. The idea of impersonal god allows the New Age followers to look all religions as different ways to divine truth and even gives a chance to combine these different ways.

Anthropological concepts of New Age followers can also be characterized as holistic. The divine and the human are united. “God is inside” and “I am God” are typical New Age phrases. Reiki masters think that “going to the Father means understanding the deepest inherent unity with the divine”. (Lodkina S.R., 1999, p. 17). Repentance is the “deepest state of mind, when we go beyond the limits of our egocentrism, dissolve all the barriers of the ego and self which separate us from god”. (Lodkina S.R., 1999, p. 17). The absence of dichotomy “sacred-profane” and “divine-human” define the soteriological notions of the possibility of salvation in this world, the chance of transformation, evolution growth of a human mind to the divine level. In some New Age movements the idea of reincarnation can be found. It is understood as a factor contributing

to the development of soul, and its improvement from one embodiment to another. Salvation is supposed to be a transition to new levels of physical existence. That is why there is interest not only to spiritual but also corporal practices, pursuit of healthy lifestyle, well-being, harmony of body and spirit, harmony with the nature etc. Eventually it should lead to the changed society in general, which is called “ascension”. The idea of “ascension” which means the change of society came to substitute New Age, New Era idea. So the European notions of evolution, progress and Eastern notions of interconnection between the corporal and the spiritual different spiritual and body practices have become intertwined so intricately in New Age. The ideas of human development, transition and ascension to renewed humanity eliminate the notion of judgment day. The idea of judgment day is rejected by New Agers as absurd. Soteriological notions that promise the salvation “right here right now” define quite pragmatic objectives: success in career, business, health, harmony in family life etc. Some groups are aimed at creating “family communes” (anastasians), some at healing and others at psychotherapy. They found ways of adapting to the modern society; some elements of this movement are included in mass culture by advertising some groceries, lifestyle, different diets, ways of raising children, various accessories, pyramids, crystals etc. That is why the interest to this movement will not disappear until the mass culture itself either disappears itself or is filled with new contents.

It is hardly possible to study organizational structure of New Age based on classical methodology of the opposition “sect-church”. It is more appropriate to apply the word “cult” to this notion. This notion was introduced by Becker G. where he distinguished charismatic, auditory and client cults (Egilskiy E.E., Matetskaya A.V., Samygin S.I., 2011, p.99).

In western religious studies the notion “cult environment”, introduced by Colin Campbell, is used. This environment of pluralistic society is favourable for constant reproduction of such kinds of cults. It is characterized by the interest to esoteric, mysticism, Oriental religious experiences etc. As a rule, in such cults there is no permanent membership; members go from one group to another freely or belong to different groups at the same time, which is thought as accumulation of experience of specific knowledge, spiritual experience and in general as an act of spiritual growth. Sometimes when describing the organizational structure of

New Age movement the model of net structure is used. New Age organizational forms are researched in “New Religious Movements” by Egilskiy E.E., Matetskaya A.V., Samygin S.I., and in PhD research by Raevskiy A.N. and other authors. In general with their diversity they represent an already formed “market of spiritual products”.

Thus, the researched New Age worldview concepts, taken individually, are not principally new for the history of religion. Taken in common complex they show the transformation way of religious conscience in NRMs in general and New Age specifically.

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**Религии «нового века»:  
религиоведческий анализ**

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*Автор анализирует движение Нью Эйдж как один из типов новых религиозных движений и как особую квазирелигиозную субкультуру современного общества.*

*Ключевые слова: религиоведение, история религии, новые религиозные движения, Нью Эйдж.*

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