

New religious movements in Latvia

Straipsnyje apžvelgiami naujieji religiniai judėjimai Latvijoje, vertinant juos kaip istoriškai susiformavusias religinės išraiškos formas. Siekdama suvokti naujųjų Latvijos religinių judėjimų įvairovę, autorė skirsto juos į keturis tipus: 1) iš induizmo kilusius naujuosius religinius judėjimus, 2) gnostikus, 3) naujuosius krikščioniškus judėjimus, 4) naujuosius pagonis. Autorė remiasi J. Gordonu Meltonu tipologija: jis klasifikuoja naujuosius religinius judėjimus į skirtingas šeimas. Kiekvienos šeimos nariams būdingas bendras paveldas, ta pati doktrina ir gyvenimo būdas. Vienas pagrindinių šios tipologijos privalumų – atskirų grupių skirstymas pagal pagrindines religines tradicijas.

This paper gives a general picture of new religious movements in Latvia by examining them as a historical phenomenon because religious expression and formulation are imbedded in a historical context. In order to comprehend the variety of new religious groups, the author proposes to classify new religious movements that are present in Latvia in four types: 1) Hindu-related new religious movements, 2) Gnostic groups, 3) Post-Christian movements, 4) Neopagan groups. The author follows the typology of J. Gordon Melton who divided new religious movements into different families. Within each family, the members share a common heritage, doctrine and lifestyle. One of the main advantages of this typology is that it situates the individual groups in one of the main religious traditions.

Preface

Object of the research. The 20th century was a time of secular ideologies including capitalism, communism and national socialism, the 21st century seems to be a period in which religious thought is once again becoming more influential. The appearance and expansion of new religious movements in our days is a worldwide phenomenon. Recognizing this trend, researchers of religion are increasingly focusing attention on what are called *new religious movements*, in an attempt to create explanatory models describing how religions are created, spread, how they decline and eventually disappear.

Research questions. The new religious movements have now become a worldwide phenomenon, but it is nowhere as obvious as in the post-soviet Europe. In the last 20 years of their history the Eastern European countries have undergone a number of deep political, economic and cultural changes. A diverse spectrum of new religious groups of Asian, American and West European origins can be found throughout the former Soviet area. The first question is: How many new religious movements are in Latvia? This question is not as simple as it might at first appear. An important source of information bearing on the question of numbers of adherents to new religious groups would be national census data, but the situation is not so clear because only 21 religious denominations are included. Among them there are only 4 new religious movements: ISKCON, Neopagans (Dievturi),

Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons. A greater part of new religious movements are officially registered as, for example, cultural associations; therefore they do not appear in the national census data. The second question is: How can the new religious movements be classified?

Aim and tasks. The aim of this article is to give a general overview of the situation of the new religious movements in Latvia, without trying to evaluate religious message or social consequences of this phenomenon. In order to come to comprehension of the phenomenon we call formation processes of the contemporary religious groups, we will approach two tasks: 1) identify new religious movements present in Latvia; 2) to classify new religious groups in Latvia.

Methodology. The paper is based on the data collected over the three years period (2006–2008) in the EU Sixth Framework Programme research project "Society and Lifestyles: Towards Enhancing Social Harmonisation through Knowledge of Subcultural Communities". In order to identify new religious groups we did mapping based on information taken from the media. The analytical method is employed to trace the fundamental elements of diverse new religious groups.

Typology of New Religious Movements

In order to identify new religious movements in Latvia, we have collected 612 articles published in the media in two periods: from 1989 till 1991 and from 2001 till 2006. On the basis of the mapping of new religious movements, we can estimate from 50 to 70 such groups in Latvia. Moreover, we can assume that new religious movements will flourish in Latvia in the near future, playing approximately the same role, which they play elsewhere in the West Europe.

The most universal characteristic of new religious movements is their vast diversity. Some reject the secularism and materialism that infest the Western world. Many are opposed to institutional religions, seeking complete spiritual independence; individuals can now create their own completely idiosyncratic religion of a single member. Syncretism – the merging of different religious beliefs and practices into a new synthesis – is widespread among new religious movements. Many groups claim to have discovered lost ancient wisdom. This can range from the belief of having discovered the true nature of ancient Christianity to an attempt to revive the worship of pagan gods of antiquity in neo-pagan and occult movements. Many new religious movements are millenarian, forming communities in anticipation of imminent apocalypse. Others are utopian or communitarian, rejecting the evils of modern society in hopes of creating new ideal communities.

In an effort to understand the new religious movements better, it may be useful to attempt to classify them according to their various types. How can the new religious movements be classified? Let us consider various kinds of typologies that have been proposed by scientists. 1. Roy Wallis¹ is mostly known for his classification of new religious movements into three different categories: world-rejecting, world-affirming and world-accommodating. 2. American sociologists, Rodney Stark and William Bainbridge² take the degree of organization, or lack of it, as the principal criterion for their distinctions between

the various new religious groups. They classify new religious movements into three types: audience cults, client cults and cult movements. 3. In his typology, Dick Anthony³ focuses on differentiating new religions by whether they can be judged to be “authentic” or “in-authentic” paths to transcendence. 4. Frederick Bird⁴ takes another approach that centers on moral accountability. 5. J. Gordon Melton⁵ divided the new religious movements of the world into different family groups. Within each family, the member bodies share a common heritage, a doctrine, and lifestyle. One of the main advantages of this typology is that it is mainly descriptive and aims at situating the individual groups into one of the main religious traditions.

The new religious movements can be approached from different angles. The development of a new religious group is of special interest for a historian of religions because it can be studied by examining the development and consolidation of religious groupings. Historians of religion show the relationship between different religious groups and focus on new religious movements as the product of historical processes. In order to understand the causes of the rise of new religious groups, the attractive nature of their beliefs and practices, and the influence they might have on major religions, it is necessary to look at the formation of new religious movements in different historical periods. A consideration of religious movements throughout history might generate insights for a better understanding of why new religious movements come into being and how dominant religions react to their beliefs and practices. It might also provide guidelines for formulating more appropriate social and religious reactions to their persistent presence. Because the religious expression and conceptual formulation are imbedded in a historical context, these expressions and formulations become “historical documents”. The greatest claim to merit of the history of religions is precisely its effort to decipher in a “fact”, conditioned as it is by the historical moment and the socio-cultural environment of the epoch, the existential situation that made it possible.

There are the normal empirical difficulties in applying broad typologies to specific cases. However, we can distinguish four main currents of the new religious movements in Latvia: 1) Hindu-related new religious groups; 2) Gnostic movements; 3) Post-Christian movements; 4) Neopagan groups.

Hindu-Related New Religious Groups

In Latvia, non-Christian faiths and groups, apart from Jewish communities and Gnostic groups, had not been present until the begging of the 20th century. Other religions, for example, Buddhism⁶ came to Latvia during the first part of the 20th century. The religious landscape in Latvia was further expanded by the Hindu-related new religious movements which came during the second part of the 20th century: ISKCON, Chinmoy, Transcendental Meditation, Brahma Kumaris, Ramakrishna mission, Osho group, Sahaja Yoga, Sai Baba group and Integral yoga. In contemporary Latvia, the Hindu-related new religious movements have a wide range of gurus and of practice, some emphasizing yoga, some devotion and some meditation. What all Hindu-related groups have in common is their claim to universality which is based philosophically on the unity of religions.

The religious discourse cannot be separated from its cultural and social context. Therefore the appearance of Hindu-related new religious movements in Latvia could be regarded as a phenomenon of social and political protest. In the 70's much of the fear that the Latvians had after the II World War was lost. As a result many young people began to rebel against communist ideology. Many began to search for deeper meaning of life through Eastern philosophy. Such was milieu where the Hindu-related new religious movements found its followers in Latvia.

In India, guru is seen as a conduit for religious experience. Finding the true guru is often held to be a prerequisite for attaining liberation (*moksha* or *mukti*). In his "Encyclopedic Dictionary of Yoga", Georg Feuerstein stresses that the importation of yoga to the West has raised questions of the appropriateness of spiritual discipleship and the legitimacy of spiritual authority⁷. While in India the word *guru* is widely used with the general meaning of 'teacher', in Western usage, the meaning of *guru* has been extended to cover anyone who acquires followers, though not necessarily in an established school of philosophy or religion. Indeed, many of the successful 'guru' movements have developed into large international corporations, for example, Transcendental Meditation, Osho group, ISKCON etc.

It should be noted that in traditional Hindu teachings, guru, though considered as messenger to communicate the message (Word) of God to disciples, does not participate directly or indirectly in the power of grace, whereas in West guru pretends to participate in the power of grace. Evidently, the spiritual master in West interpretation (being a medium) has been magnified to the point that he had become an object of devotion, and without his grace a devotee cannot make even an approach to God. Guru in the West is the vital link, the essential mediator of God. A characteristic of those who join a new religious group led by a guru is that they first place their trust in that guru and then put their belief into message delivered by the guru.

The encounter with Hindu-related new religious movements is, indeed, a part of and a stage in the West's encounter with the Asian traditions. Often these Eastern traditions themselves undergo change as a result of their encounter with the West. The transformation of Hindu tradition of a guru role in religious life is an excellent example.

The most visible of the Hindu-related new religious movements in Latvia is the International Society for Krishna Consciousness or **ISKCON** which was founded by Pradhupada (1896–1977) in U.S.A. (1966) when the hippie movement was in its prime in America. The movement is particularly noted for its wearing distinctive robes and public chanting of mantra, as well as for its vegetarian lifestyle and active recruitment. This movement took root in Latvia in the late 1970's. The group enjoyed a period of rapid growth during the 1980s. With the registration of ISKCON Latvia in 1988 and especially with the incredible book distribution boom of the early 1990s, ISKCON ranks increased by enthusiastic newcomers, and the main ISKCON temple was opened in 1990 in Riga. While initially opposition to 'the new eastern religion' dominated, today public response to ISKCON is very positive, because of Food for Life programme (*žēlsirdības misija "Dzīvības ēdiens"*)⁸. Practically everyone in Riga now recognizes the krishnaites as the 'people who are caring for the needy'. The programme had expanded to approximately 500 hundred

meals served per day. It primarily caters for pensioners, invalids, large families and the unemployed.

The second largest of the guru movements is **Transcendental Meditation** (TM). It began as *The Spiritual Regeneration Movement*, instituted in 1958 by an Indian calling himself Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (1917–2008). The intention of this organization is to spiritually regenerate the whole world. In Latvia, the growth in the TM was rapid, especially in the 1990s when the counter culture made meditation and eastern spirituality more appealing in the eyes of general public. TM presents a specific problem in that its religious element is flatly denied by the TM organization. This means that a large number of people are being duped into something they are not aware of. TM maintains that its form of meditation makes disciples more active and efficient, and a number of semi-scientific experiments seemed to prove this.

Chinmoy (born in 1931) lived 20 years with Aurobindo in India, but left to become the messenger of yoga in the West, as expressed by the hundreds of books, the thousands of poems and songs, the enormous number of paintings and musical compositions which he has produced. Riga Sri Chinmoy Centre organizes meditation classes, organizes marathons and concerts. Chinmoy followers regularly participate in the World Harmony Run in which runners carry a burning torch through over 70 countries. In Latvia, the 'Self-Transcendence' half-marathon was organized on July 27, 2009. "The Oneness – Hear Tears and Smiles" programme was established in 1990 to provide humanitarian aid to many countries around the world. Since 1991 the programme has expanded to send humanitarian aid to a variety of countries. The programme is a practical opportunity to proclaim Chinmoy doctrine.

Guru **Sai Baba**, born in 1926, considers himself as one of the representatives in the succession of the *babas*, but most important he proclaims himself as the new incarnation of Sai Baba of Shirdi. Sai Baba is, more than any other guru, a miracle-man who, like a magician, performs the most remarkable prodigies, claiming that they are caused by his *siddhis*. Sai Baba produces out of his body a grey ash, called *vibhuti*, which is treasured by the believers as a means of healing and benediction.⁹ His movement has built schools, dispensaries and other establishments in many parts of India. Sai Baba's influence outside India is due not only to organizational efforts, but depends also on the deep faith placed in him by the many pilgrims who have been to his centers, and in each of them Sai Baba is worshipped, especially on Thursdays, his special day. The teaching of Sai Baba reached Latvia already in the middle of 1960's through a soviet poet Mirdza Ķempe who was introduced in Sai Baba teaching by an Indian in Moscow.¹⁰ Since that time ideas of this movement came in Latvia, especially among poets and artists. The teaching of Sai Baba became rather popular in Latvia through translations and even through original writings, for example, some ideas have become well known by the poems of Imants Ziedonis and the fairy-tales of Alise Eka. Today Sai Baba's movement is represented in Latvia by two groups (Riga, Liepaja). One of them is *Urantija* with 14 "certified" healers who are working in the centre of Riga.

The most popular guru in Latvia is **Osho** or **Bhagwan Rajneesh** (1931–1990). His ashram at Poona (India) attracts thousands of seekers from all over the world. Osho de-

veloped his own dynamic meditation, which was his trademark. Osho is now recognized as having major influence on contemporary New Age spirituality, particularly in his integration of Eastern meditation with Western psychotherapy and his holistic approach. In Latvia, Osho group is represented by the Centre of New Psychologies (Jauno Psiholoģiju centrs). His books are extremely popular among Latvian population. They are presented as a books in psychology.

Gnostic groups

In Latvia, the Gnostic current crested at the first part of the 20th century, making a strong impact on the cultural¹¹ and religious life of Latvians. Gnosticism is difficult to define because it comes in so many flavors and interpretations. Till the end of the 20th century, the term *Gnosticism* was applied to particular Christian sects. In other words, it was defined as a special Christian heresy in opposition to the early Christian Church. The Gnosticism flourished in the 2nd and 3rd centuries and was combated by Christian writers because of its heretical doctrine of creation and salvation.

In recent decades it has become clear that such definition of Gnosticism leads to historical simplifications. It is historically more accurate to see Gnosticism as representatives of a much broader movement “characterized by a strong emphasis on esoteric knowledge (gnosis) as the only means of salvation, which implied the return to one’s divine origin”¹². The Gnostic groups of the 2nd and 3rd centuries are integral part of this broader Gnostic movement and should not be isolated from it. Moreover, Gnosticism can be infused into any number of religions, including Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism and even Islam. It looks like here has always existed traditions of secret knowledge within various religious systems, i.e., Gnosticism comes through secret societies, which claim to carry on Gnostic traditions through various means. Gnostic ideas have long been present within many, if not most, new religious groups. Contemporary Gnostic groups are extremely interesting, because their doctrine is present at nearly every aspect of our society. In Latvia, the most important Gnostic movements are: AMORC, Spiritualism, Theosophy, Anthroposophy, Scientology and a variety of New Age groups.

The Gnostic group members believe and proclaim that salvation is possible only through revealed secret knowledge (Greek *gnosis* – ‘knowledge’). The Gnostics are those who *know* – who pursue mystical knowledge that they believe holds the key to eternal life through advancing beyond the physical and into the spiritual realm.

Gnostics, in general, believe in the dualism of flesh and spirit: the flesh is evil and something to be freed from, while the eternal spirit is good. Gnostics believe that the purpose of human existence is to return to the spiritual realm from whence all originated. Death, then, is seen as liberation of the spirit. Therefore, the Gnostic goal is to learn the secret knowledge that would allow the inner spirit to be released from the confines of the flesh, enabling it to rejoin God in the spirit realm. In other words, a Gnostic tries to free his or her divine spark from the confines of the material body by achieving an awareness of the divine mysteries, an awareness obtained by direct experience of the divine or by initiation into a secret, esoteric tradition of revelation.

Before we discuss contemporary Gnostic groups in Latvia, we need to acknowledge Gnosticism's association with the occult¹³, because the emphasis on secrecy is another important attribute of the Gnostic groups. The occult character of the Gnostic groups is revealed by the Gnostics' belief that they have secret knowledge about God, humanity and the universe of which the general population is unaware.

Finally, the Gnostic groups are of esoteric¹⁴ character. The members of these groups are "people who know", and their "knowledge" at once constitutes them a superior class of beings, whose present and future status is essentially different from that of those who, for whatever reason, "do not know". The properly esoteric attitude may be described as a restriction of a higher level of understanding to initiates. To sum up, the Gnostic groups propose the secret knowledge for selected category of people.

Ancient and Mystical Order Rosae Crucis (**AMORC**) was founded in 1915 by H. Spencer Lewis (1883–1939). Its objective is to teach a philosophy and practices that help a person to tap into ordinarily latent faculties to improve his or her abilities and lead a better life. In Latvia, AMORC was popularized by a former president Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga who before of her becoming a president announced to be a member of AMORC¹⁵.

Spiritualism or belief in the ability of the living to communicate with the dead through a medium traditionally dates from 1848 when sisters Fox spoke with the spirit of a murdered man in U.S.A. In the early 1850's it attracted the attention of Europeans. Early spiritualism consisted primarily of table turning and automatic writing, but finally it took two forms: the first was scientific spiritualism (Anglo-American "modern Spiritualism"), the second was mystical spiritualism (the French *spiritisme* of Allan Kardec). In the 20th century the scientific spiritualism got birth to so called Instrumental Transcommunication (ITC).

Latvian writer Konstantīns Raudive (1909–1974) who is well known for his parapsychological activities, believed that contact with people who have died has also been made via tape recorder. Experimenting on the so called electronic voice phenomenon became very popular in Europe in the 1960's and 1970's. Many individuals and groups collected voices over their home tape recorders. Eventually K. Raudive catalogued tens of thousands of voices. His results were published in his book "Unhörbares wird hörbar" (The Inaudible Becomes Audible) (1968), based on 72 000 voices he recorded. In this way K. Raudive became the one of the world's most renowned proponent of parapsychology. Although public clamour prompted him to continue with the hearing the voices, shortly before his death K. Raudive returned to literature. However his influence is international and enduring. During 1994 Instrumental Transcommunication (ITC) experimenters received paranormal telephone calls from K. Raudive who died in 1974. These calls were recorded and analyzed by voice experts. According to them, since his death Raudive is speaking from the other side of the veil.

Theosophy must be regarded as one of the most important new religious movements. The leader founder of Theosophy was Helena Blavatsky (1831–1891). She may be conceived as the archetype of the magus, with her remarkable birth and childhood, esoteric and mysterious personality, wide travels and supernormal powers.¹⁶ In 1874 H. Blavatsky came to the United States, and in 1875 the Theosophical Society was founded. After

H. Blavatsky's death in 1891 Theosophy underwent considerable fragmentation. J. Gordon Melton lists 43 Theosophical-related groups, many of which came into existence before the end of II World War.¹⁷

According to Robert Ellwood¹⁸, the Theosophical groups may be divided into two general branches. First, there are the "right wing" groups, which reject the theosophical orientalism. These bodies have a Western focus and hold that the love of India and its mysteries is inappropriate for a Western people. This branch includes Anthroposophy of Rudolf Steiner. Second, there exists what may be called the "left wing" Theosophical groups, based on new revelations received from the Masters. In this category there are Alice Bailey's groups, *I AM* movements and the Roerichs' groups. The source for all these developments was and still is H. Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine*.

Theosophy claims to be philosophy, religion and science. As a science, it claims to uncover hidden spiritual laws. As a religious group, Theosophy endeavors to be the ground of every religion. Consequently, Theosophy sees all religions as essentially the same, but separated from one another only by the dogmas and superstitions.

The evolution of a human being is one of Theosophy's central principles. Human beings represent a phase of the general evolutionary process that is constantly going on in the universe. Humanity is regarded as a spark of divine fire, an elementary spiritual substance belonging to the monadic world. The individual is a fragment of the group soul, demonstrating its ego in three ways: in the spiritual world as Spirit, as intuition in the intuitional world and in the mental world as intelligence. Moreover, individuals have not one body, but many, including an astral body. The astral body consists of matter with higher vibrations than the physical and emits various colors, visible to a clairvoyant. The astral body is the vehicle of feelings and desires through which an individual has consciousness on the astral plane during the sleep.

In Latvia, Theosophy is strongly represented by the Roerichs movement. Latvian Roerich Society is one of the first groups that was founded by the Roerichs in different countries in the world¹⁹. N. Roerich's ideas gained wider and wider recognition owing to the fact that he treated the notion of culture as *the cult of light* or, more precisely, as *worship of the creative fire*²⁰. In the period of time before World War II, the action of Roerich's followers in Latvia reached its highest peak in 1937 when the first conference of Roerich societies of the Baltic States took place in Riga making it obvious that Riga was the centre of Theosophy in the Baltic region. In 1940, society was closed down. With the downfall of the Soviet regime, Roerich's followers became more active and they resumed their legal status in October, 1988, when Latvian Roerich Society was renewed. In the first years of action, about a thousand new members joined the renewed organization²¹; however, rather soon the movement grew less and split up. Hence, today there are three Roerich's follower groups in Latvia: Latvian Roerich Society, Latvian Department of the International Centre of the Roerichs²², and Aivars Garda group or Latvian National Front. The splitting proceeded according to the geopolitical orientation. The spheres of action of these three groups differ as well. For Latvian Roerich Society, culture is the dominant way of group's communication with society. The action of Latvian Department of the International Centre of the Roerichs is focused on education²³, while Aivars Garda group or

Latvian National Front acts in politics²⁴. With the Baltic Conferences and editorial activities by Latvian theosophists, Latvia has regained its leading position in Baltics.

Scientology began when American science fiction writer L. Ron Hubbard (1911–1986) published a book “Dianetics, the Modern Science of Mental Health”. Dianetics therapy²⁵ claimed to be a “new science of the mind” with miraculous powers that could remove the causes of human unhappiness. L. Ron Hubbard announced that eternal spiritual beings (*thetans*) are trapped in human incarnations; that “auditing” could reveal previous incarnations in past lives and unlock the emotional blockages remaining from previous as well as present lives. In 1955 Hubbard founded the Church of Scientology, described by him as “an applied religious philosophy” incorporating the therapeutic goals of Dianetics, but also seeking to enable people to become “operating thetans”, free from the limitations of their human incarnations. In Latvia, since 2002 Scientology grows constantly by finding many “clients” who were willing to pay for being enrolled in its therapy and spiritual enhancement sessions. In 2008, Scientology distributed about 3000 books “The Way to Happiness”. The group affirms that every week about 30 interesents are coming, and the number of associated members reached 361 in 2008.

New Age is not a movement as it is usually intended by the term *new religious movement*, because it is spread across cultures, in phenomena as varied as music, films, seminars, workshops, retreats, therapies and many more activities and events. In Latvia, this movement is much diffused, and it has an informal character. Various para-religious groups incorporate New Age elements. Thus, the New Age is not a single, uniform movement, but rather a loose network of practitioners whose approach is “to think global, but act locally”. People who are part of the network do not necessarily know each other and rarely, if ever, meet.

Although New Age has become manifest only recently, its roots can be traced back to the 18th century. The vision of a new period in human history coming up was elaborated by Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772). His central theme, the “law of correspondences” between the physical and spiritual realms of this the world, has offered the philosophical foundation for the modern awareness of body-therapies as means of salvation. The New Age leaders claim to offer the key for finding the correspondences between all the elements of the universe, so that people may modulate the tone of their lives and be in absolute harmony with each other and with everything around them.

One of the central concerns of the *New Age* movement is the search for “wholeness”. In this way, against an increasing fragmentation of all field of science, New Age offers the new key concept of *wholeness*. Alternative therapies have gained enormously in popularity because they claim to look at the whole person and are about *healing* rather than *curing*. Holistic health, as it is known, concentrates on the important role the mind plays in physical healing. Holism pervades the *New Age* movement, from its concern with holistic health to its quest for unitive consciousness, and from ecological awareness to the idea of global “networking”.

In sociological terms, the modern New Age is elaborated as a response to the challenge of profound socio-cultural crisis. It demands not just an improvement of existing structures, but a radical, qualitative change of consciousness. An attempt to create a new consciousness

begins on the personal level with a process of gaining a new orientation. In these groups, common effort for a better world creates inner joy and spiritual satisfaction.

It is essential to bear in mind that people are involved with New Age in very different ways and on many levels. In most cases it is not really a question of “belonging” to a group or movement; nor is there much conscious awareness of the principles on which New Age is built. It seems that, for the most part, people are attracted to particular therapies or practices, without going into their background, and others are simply occasional consumers of products which are labeled New Age. People who use aromatherapy or listen to New Age music, for example, are usually interested in the effect they have on their health or well-being. It is only a minority who goes further into the subject and tries to understand its theoretical significance. This fits perfectly into the patterns of consumption in societies where amusement and leisure play such an important part. The movement has adapted well to the laws of the market, and it is partly because it is such an attractive economic proposition that *New Age* has become so widespread. *New Age* has been seen, in some cultures at least, as the label for a product created by the application of marketing principles to a religious phenomenon.²⁶ There is always going to be a way of profiting from people’s perceived spiritual needs.

Today in Latvia, anxiety about an apocalyptic future of economic instability, political uncertainty and climatic change plays a large part in causing people to look for an alternative, resolutely optimistic relationship to the cosmos. One of the most common elements in the New Age groups is fascination with extraordinary manifestations and, in particular, with paranormal entities. For this reason, Pokaini (near city of Dobele) is a place of pilgrimage for Latvians who are looking for “energy fields”.

Like many other things in contemporary economics, New Age is a global phenomenon held together and fed with information by the mass media, especially through the broadcasts by Lija Guļevska (“Siluets”) and Sundays program. There are also late-night interviews on TV, series on clairvoyants which claim to have found missing people.

Post-Christian Groups

It is certain that the new religious movements appear at definite moments of history. The outbreak of post-Christian groups was caused by definite socio-political and cultural situation. The greatest challenge to traditional Christianity and the central symbol of the new intellectual revolution was the new biology, proposed by Charles Darwin (1809–1882). The evolutionary ideas penetrated every realm of thought, and science tried to apply evolutionary theory to every research area. Consequently, this new understanding promoted the development of strong criticism of the Bible.

Within Christianity, a response to the new modern science and criticism was schisms, the creation of new groups from Christian Church. Many evangelicals chose to resist the new intellectual currents, even if it meant separating from the mainline denominations and establishing new religious groups. Examples of this case include the groups associated with the fundamentalist and pentecostal movements. Another response was theological liberalism. Many people rejected liberal theology, regarding it as a falsification of the historic

Christian faith. Thus schisms developed and new movements were formed, largely related to fundamentalism, but also within the Pentecostal movements. Finally, these movements generated some religious groups that went beyond the confines of Christianity.

With reference to Christianity we can distinguish new religious movements with Christian roots but with considerable doctrinal differences. For the post-Christian groups, **Bible is secondary** (usually it is substituted by a new sacred text, for example, “Book of Mormon” as in case of the Church of Jesus Christ of Later-day Saints or “The New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures” and particularly “The Watchtower” and “Awake” (Jehovah’s Witnesses), or the “Divine Principle” (Unification Church). For the post-Christian movements, **Christ is not the Saviour of the World**, for example, salvation is granted also through the person of Moon who claims to be the Lord of the Second Advent (Unification Church); Jesus is only “a god”, a lesser God than Jehovah God (Jehovah’s Witnesses); Jesus is the eldest son of all children of God the Father (Church of Jesus Christ of Later-day Saints); Vissarion claims to be a reincarnation of Jesus (the Church of the Last Testament). For the post-Christian groups, **the end of the world is at hand**, for example, the end of the world was expected in the year of 2000 (The Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments); it was expected also in 1914/1925/1975/ and finally “during our generation” (Jehovah’s Witnesses). The more recent case of the apocalyptic waitings: in 2008, in the Russian village of Nikolskoye²⁷ 29 members of the Pyotr Kuznetsov’s²⁸ group had taken up residence in a remote cave²⁹. In Latvia, there are several Post-Christian movements: Jehovah’s Witnesses, Church of Jesus Christ of Later-day Saints (mormons), Unification Church, Church of the Last Testament (vissarions), and Satanists.

The Church of the Latter-day Saints (mormons) is one of the most successful new religious movements in Latvia. It was founded by Joseph Smith (1805–1844) who claimed that he was led by the angel Moroni to discover the Golden Plates, which contained a written testimony to the spiritual history of early America. “The Book of Mormon” describes the lives of the “lost tribes of Israel” who migrated to America before the birth of Jesus. Similar views about the origin the American Indians are found in books of his contemporaries, too, for example, Ethan Smith (1762–1849) wrote about the origin of the American Indians in his book “A View of the Hebrews, or the Tribes of Israel in America” (1823).

In “The Book of Mormon”, J. Smith laid the basis of a powerful mythology that wove together many diverse myths into an integrated whole. In his later “revelations”, he elaborated these myths so that the developed mythology of mormonism not only explained the origin of American Indians but also spoke about life on other planets. An important element of mormon mythology that gives it a continuing appeal is its use of evolutionary ideas. Similar views about eternal progression and spiritual evolution are found in other 19th century new religious movements, for example, Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of Christian Science, also used evolution to unify her creed. Evolution was even more thoroughly adapted to religious needs by Helena Blavatsky who speaks of moral development and individual lives in terms of cosmic evolution. She suggests that the inner, spiritual growth of humankind constitutes the heart and dynamics of the whole evolutionary process. The evolutionary framework has also been popular in the 20th century New Age movement, as, for example, in the writings of Marilyn Ferguson. She speaks of evolution

as “the new paradigm” and expresses faith that humankind is entering a new evolutionary phase during which we will control our evolutionary destinies. Numerous other founders of new religious movements follow or repeat her example.

The first mormon missionary appeared in Latvia already in 1903³⁰, but for political reasons he left Latvia. Mormons returned in Latvia only in the early 1990's. In 1992, the first Latvian was baptized by the Church of the Latter-day Saints. Today the Church of the Latter-day Saints has about a thousand members in Latvia. There is a mormon temple under construction in Liepāja. The main activities: humanitarian aid, concerts for charity, English language courses (free of charge), lectures by experts in economics etc.

The Unification Church is one of the most controversial new religious movements to arrive on the contemporary Latvian religious scene. After having been excommunicated by the Presbyterian Church of Korea (1948), Moon established the Holy Association for the Unification of World Christianity (1954). This group is not registered in Latvia officially as a religious organization, therefore it carries out its activities through different non-governmental organizations: Women's Federation for World Peace, Family Federation for World Peace, a student organization CARP (Collegiate Association for the Research of Principles). Family Festivals and marches against drugs are held in Latvia, because this movement proclaims new alternative youth culture based on moral values, purity of love and a healthy lifestyle. The importance of moonies in Latvia is demonstrated by the visit of Moon in Latvia in 2005.

By far the most successful post-Christian movement in Latvia is the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, i.e., **Jehovah's Witnesses**, which have 39 congregations at present. The first representatives of the Jehovah's Witnesses arrived in Latvia in the early 1920's. The Latvian office of the *Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society* was established in 1926. During the years of soviet and nazi occupation Jehovah's witnesses were persecuted because they refused military service. With the formal dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 the door was open for the Jehovah's witnesses to reenter Latvian religious scene. At present there are more than 2000 members in Latvia. The message of the Jehovah's Witnesses is eschatological in their intonation, presenting an emotional critique of the existing order of things, opposing social injustice, war and the existing Christian churches. In 1996, Latvian society debated strongly in regard to rejection of blood transfusion which resulted in death of 17 years old group member.

Neo-Pagan groups

In Latvia, there are some people who call themselves *pagans*. They stress a connectedness to or lineage with older forms of paganism. This phenomenon is called *neopaganism*³¹ by academics to distinguish it from earlier forms of paganism, from which it differs in some significant ways. W. J. Hanegraaff has indicated: “As a general term, “neopaganism” covers all those modern movements which are, firstly, based on the conviction that what Christianity has traditionally denounced as idolatry and superstition actually represents/represented a profound and meaningful religious worldview and, secondly, that a religious practice based on this worldview can and should be revitalized in our modern world.”³²

The historical roots of neopaganism begin with the Romantic movement of the 18th century: the neopagan currents coincided with Romanticist interest in folklore and occultism. The 19th century saw a surge of interest in Germanic traditional religion with the Viking revival in Britain and Scandinavia. In Latvia, neo-pagan movement appeared with the rise of nationalism in the first part of the 20th century.

In Latvia the pagan traditions are being recalled by the group called Dievturi ('God holders'). The movement of Dievturi was founded in the 1920s by Ernests Brastiņš (1892–1942), who tried to revive Latvian traditional religion. E. Brastiņš's attempt to restore paganism was based on *dainas*, Latvian folk-songs imbued with traditional religiosity and symbols.

The researchers have identified two types of neopagan movements. First, a revivalist movement is understood to utilize history simply as a starting point for the development of religious practices. Thus, revivalist movements incorporate traditions and practices of other pagan religions since many indigenous practices are unrecoverable. Revivalist movements are typically labeled neo-pagan since they are adding something new to their historical understanding. Second, a reconstructionist movement places greater import on history and believes that ancient practices can be discovered and reconstructed by studying archaeology, epigraphs, historical records and folk traditions. Thus, Latvian neopagans can be considered a reconstructionist movement. They detest the term neopagan, finding it deeply insulting.

The 1980's was a very turbulent time in Latvia. Though interest in Latvian traditional religion can be found in various periods of the pre-soviet and soviet eras, neopaganism emerged in Soviet Latvia primarily in the aftermath of the *perestroika*, and have undergone their most dramatic growth since the early and mid-1990s. The collapse of the Soviet Union has provided fertile ground for an efflorescence of neopagan beliefs and practices.

"*Dievturi* in the present day Latvia have been divided into several groups (13) that expound diverse and sometimes even contradictory ideas. However, the majority of 'dievturi' groups are united in Latvian 'dievturi' league (LDL): in Riga (Auseklis, Rāmava, Burtnieki, Dainu Līga, Daugava congregations), in Valmiera (Beverīna congregation), in Dobeles region (Madara and Namejs congregations), Sigulda (Rūsiņš congregation), Gulbene region (Dižozoli congregation). There are the so-called independent 'dievturi' groups that have not joined Latvia 'dievturi' league (e.g., Viesturs congregation, Sidrabene congregation, congregation Austrā in Riga). 'Dievturi' groups exist also outside Latvia (the USA, Canada, UK, Germany, Australia) that unite Latvians in exile and constitute a specific discourse in Latvian 'dievturi' movement."³³

However the typical characteristic of Latvian neopaganism is individualism. The non-organizational character of the movement implies that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to get neopagans to follow anyone or anything, or even to get them to all go in one direction. In fact, their decentralization is point of almost sacerdotal pride. The dispersion of leadership loyalty and power makes neopagans highly resistant to a centralized or hierarchical structure and promotes religious individuality and eclecticism.

In Latvia, neopagan groups, there are some leaders whose charisma is famous, even outside neopagan circles. Many neopagans point to peoples who are at the centre of their groups' social structure: a wise man or woman. Each group has different figures who they

consider leader, and no one person dominates the entire movement. Therefore, there is no centralized organization that governs Latvian neopaganism. The emphasis is placed on the return to the simpler direct relationship between the individual and their divine. Therefore, in contemporary Latvia, neopaganism is a small and relatively unknown religious phenomenon, it is one of the fastest growing parareligious forms of the 21st century.

Moreover, today Latvian neopaganism is greatly influenced by the New Age, sharing many of its values, beliefs, assumptions and ethics. In fact, neopaganism is a hybrid of ancient mythology and contemporary New Age ideas and structure. G. Chrystides has noted that the New Age “has no formal institutional structure”³⁴. That is, there is no central authority or organized structural form. Communication and “organization” is by networking – loose, informal association and mutual sharing of ideas. It means the power of the New Age is in its ideas and results, not in a formal hierarchy that holds power and corrects deviance. In the same way, neopaganism has no central authority, no main headquarters and no single sacred text. It is held together by mutual recognition and self-identification, the barest minimum of common beliefs, practices and symbols, and by the ideals.

Conclusion

In conclusion it should be recognized that there is a broad array of different religions and new religious movements in Latvia, and that a deeper study of these movements is an urgent task for Latvian researchers. We could examine the relation of religious discourse to the public sphere, analyze postmodernism and its influence on religious trends, explore the postmodern critique of metaphysics and religion, study an intrinsic and structural relationship between religion and the media, debate concerning freedom, determinism and the relation between science and religion, take up the question of the relation between reason, faith and analogical language, approach to religious diversity and concern with the issue of religious pluralism. Moreover, historians of religions, psychologists of religion, philosophers of religion and sociologists of religion must undertake a more coordinated effort to research in three directions simultaneously: first, attempts at synthesis are needed, drawing together the disparate strands of research generated by studies of new religious movements; second, we need more and more detailed studies of specific groups and comparative studies of their activities; third, we need more work on the development of theoretical propositions about new religious movements based directly on the study of the contemporary religious groups. All these efforts will improve understanding of the real cultural significance.

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- ⁴ Bird F. *The Pursuit of Innocence: New Religious Movements and Moral Accountability* // *Sociological Analysis*. 1979. Nr. 40. P. 335–346.
- ⁵ Cf. *Gordon Melton J.* *The Encyclopedia of American Religions*. Wilmington: McGrath. 1978.
- ⁶ In 1908 in Riga was published a brochure “Buddha, a Prophet of Ancient Indians”. In 1920s Buddhism in Latvia was popularized by Kārlis Tennisons (1873–1962).
- ⁷ Cf. *Feuerstein G.* *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Yoga*. London: Unwin Paperbacks. 1990.
- ⁸ In 1993 Gopal Krsna Goswami visited Riga and represented krishnaites’ *Food for Life* as an international coordinator. He met with the mayor of Riga. The mayor was invited as an honoured guest to serve the meal, and the event was covered by local newspapers and television. With the mayor’s assistance, ISKCON Riga was granted a five year lease on the temple building and free rent until 1996.
- ⁹ *Ellwood R. S.* *Religious and Spiritual Groups in Modern America*. New York: Englewood Cliffs. 1973. P. 246.
- ¹⁰ *Krūmiņa-Ķonņkova S., Gills N.* Reliģisko minoritāšu ietekme uz jaunas daudzkultūru identitātes veidošanos // *Reliģiski-filozofiski raksti*. Rīga: LU FSI. 2005. 213. –231. lpp.
- ¹¹ Gnosticism has left a deep imprint on the Latvian culture. It has been the source of inspiration for modern writers, such as Rainis, Aspazija, A. Brigadere, R. Rudzītis etc. Even contemporary Latvian literature reflects Gnostic imprints, for example, works of L. Briedaka, M. Kosteņecka.
- ¹² *Broek Van Den R.* *Gnosticism* // *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism* / ed. W. J. Hanegraaff. 2006. Leiden: Brill. P. 404.
- ¹³ *Occultus* (Latin) – ‘secret’, ‘hidden’.
- ¹⁴ *Esoteric* derives from the Greek *esōterō*, comparative of *esō*, ‘within’.
- ¹⁵ *Viķe-Freiberga V.* Ceļš katram savs // *Neatkarīgā Čiņa*. 1994. 7. janv. 4. lpp.
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- ¹⁷ *Gordon Melton J.* *Encyclopedia of American Religions*. Vol. II. Wilmington: McGrath. 1978. P. 135–175.
- ¹⁸ Cf. *Ellwood R. S.* *Religious and Spiritual Groups in Modern America*. New York: Englewood Cliffs. 1973.
- ¹⁹ In 1920, the basis of this society were laid in Latvia by Vladimir Shibayev (1898–1975) who, after getting acquainted with the Roerichs in London, upon their initiative founded Master’s Lodge in Riga. The members of Latvian Roerich Society state that Nicholas Roerich and Helena Roerich belonged to the Master’s Lodge and paid the membership fee.
- ²⁰ *Roerich N.* *Realm of Light*. New York: Roerich Museum Press. 1931. P. 175; *Roerich N.* *Fiery Stronghold*. Boston: The Stratford Company. 1933. P. 47.
- ²¹ Interview. Respondent Nr. 9. National Art Museum. Riga. November 1. 2006.
- ²² The church of St. Peter, actually is the headquarters of the Latvian Department of the International Centre of the Roerichs, because the director of the museum of St. Peter’s church is the leader of the group. The ordinary meetings of this group are held on Wednesdays inside the church – in front of the statue of Jesus Christ (in their understanding, Mahatma or Teacher).
- ²³ Latvian Department of the International Centre of the Roerichs has managed to gain certain influence in Latvian education: the group successfully promotes Shalva Amonashvili’s humanitarian pedagogy, in which the Roerichs’ doctrine has found practical application in education. The concept of “indigo child” is used as a basis for the humanitarian pedagogy. This new pedagogy is introduced in schools, for example, in Liepas elementary school (Latvia), as well as in a number of other schools in the Eastern European countries, mainly, Russia. Seminars and conferences are held regularly to introduce the teachers in the humanitarian pedagogy. The main lecturer at these conferences and seminars is Shalva Amonashvili and the other leaders of the Latvian Department of the International Centre of the Roerichs. And finally the International Readings of the Humanitarian Pedagogy have to be mentioned (organized since 2002, held in Moscow). A year by year about 50 Latvian teachers participate at this conference helping to spread the ideas of theosophy in the Latvian educational system.

- ²⁴ Aivars Garda's political action may be characterized as radical right-wing. The group spreads its idejas in the paper "DDD" (De-occupation. Decolonization. De-bolshevization).
- ²⁵ L. Ron Hubbard taught that the mind processes information and experience as "engrams", which are stored in the "reactive mind". Many of these are painful and block free, rational and adaptive behavior. Dianetic therapy ("auditing") sought to discover, "restimulate" and release these traumatic experiences, giving progressive control to the rational ("analytical") component of the mind. This process was held to "clear" individuals of emotional blockages.
- ²⁶ Cf. *Bochinger Ch.* New Age und moderne Religion: Religionswissenschaftliche Untersuchungen. Gütersloh: Kaiser. 1994.
- ²⁷ Nikolskoye is located in the Penza region of Central Russia, about 60 miles from the town of Penza.
- ²⁸ The group leader Pyotr Kuznetsov is a divorced 43-year-old architect from Belarus. Kuznetsov travelled across Belarus and Russia, spreading his message of apocalyptic doom, before settling in the village of Nikolskoye.
- ²⁹ The cave is a two-mile walk from the tin-roofed prayer hall where sect members used to gather to sing songs. The leaders of the group secretly prepared the cave, bringing in supplies of gas and kerosene as well as half a tonne of honey and a lot of jam.
- ³⁰ Cf. Pēdējo dienu svēto Jēzus Kristus baznīca. <http://www.jezuskristusbaznica.lv/Baznica-Latvija.htm>. 2009 09 12.
- ³¹ *Neopaganism* is a general term for variety of new religious movements both organized and non-organized emerged as attempts to recreate traditional religions.
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Gauta: 2009 09 27

Parengta spaudai: 2009 10 14

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NAUJIEJI RELIGINIAI JUDĒJĪMAI LATVIJOJE

S a n t r a u k a

Tyrimo objekts. XX a. – tai pasaulietinių ideologijų (kapitalizmo, komunizmo ir nacionalizmo) amžius. XXI a., atrodo, yra laikotarpis, kai religinės idėjos vėl turi lemiamos įtakos. Naujųjų religinių judėjimų atsiradimas ir paplitimas yra pasaulinis fenomenas. Šias tendencijas pastebintys religijos tyrinėtojai vis daugiau dėmesio skiria *naujesiems religiniams judėjimams*. Tyrinėtojai mėgina paaiškinti, kaip atsiranda naujos religijos, kaip jos plinta, silpnėja ir galiausiai išnyksta.

Tyrimo klausimai. Naujieji religiniai judėjimai yra pasaulinis fenomenas, ypač akivaizdus posovietinėje Europoje. Pastaruosius 20 metų Rytų Europos šalyse vyko daugybė svarbių politinių, ekonominių ir kultūrinių pokyčių. Įvairiausi Azijos, Amerikos ir Vakarų Europos naujieji religiniai judėjimai paplito ir buvusios Tarybų Sąjungos teritorijoje. Pirmasis klausimas – kiek naujųjų religinių judėjimų yra Latvijoje? Atsakyti į jį nėra taip paprasta, kaip gali pasirodyti iš pirmo žvilgsnio. Svarbus informacijos šaltinis, galintis atskleisti naujųjų religinių judėjimų narių skaičių, galėtų būti gyventojų surašymo duomenys, bet reali situacija nėra tokia aiški, nes į apklausą įtraukta tik 21 religinė denominacija. Iš jų tik 4 naujieji religiniai judėjimai: ISKCON, naujieji pagonys, Jehovos liudytojai ir mormonai. Dauguma naujųjų religinių judėjimų oficialiai įregistruoti kaip, pavyzdžiui, kultūros asociacijos, todėl jų nėra gyventojų surašymo duomenų suvestinėse. Antrasis klausimas: kaip galima būtų klasifikuoti naujuosius religinius judėjimus?

Tikslas ir uždaviniai. Straipsnio tikslas – pateikti naujųjų religinių judėjimų Latvijoje apžvalgą, nesisientiant vertinti šio reiškinio religinės reikšmės ar socialinių pasekmių. Siekiant suprasti šiuolaikinių religinių judėjimų atsiradimo fenomeną, straipsnyje keliami du uždaviniai: 1) nustatyti naujųjų religinių judėjimų dabartinę situaciją Latvijoje; 2) suklasifikuoti naujuosius religinius judėjimus Latvijoje.

Metodologija. Straipsnyje naudojami trejų metų (2006–2008) duomenys, gauti per ES Šeštosios bendrosios programos projektą „Visuomenė ir gyvenimo stiliai: socialinės harmonijos link“. Siekiant išsiaiškinti naujuosius religinius judėjimus, remiantis žiniasklaidos informacija buvo sudarytas žemėlapis. Analitinis metodas padėjo nustatyti pagrindinius skirtingų naujųjų religinių judėjimų elementus.

Prieita prie išvados, kad egzistuoja daugybė skirtingų religijų ir religinių judėjimų Latvijoje. Nuodugnės jų studijos turėtų būti Latvijos tyrinėtojų užduotis. Galima būtų nustatyti religinio diskurso ir viešosios erdvės ryšius, išanalizuoti postmodernizmą ir jo įtaką religiniams judėjimams, išnagrinėti postmodernią metafizikos ir religijos kritiką, iširti vidinius ir struktūrinius religijos ir žiniasklaidos ryšius, svarstyti apie laisvę, determinizmą ir mokslo bei religijos ryšį, kelti klausimą apie priežasties, tikėjimo ir simbolinės kalbos ryšius, nagrinėti religijos įvairovę ir domėtis religijos pluralizmo idėja. Dar daugiau: religijos istorikai, religijos psichologai, religijos filosofai ir religijos sociologai turėtų bendrai dirbti trimis kryptimis tuo pat metu: pirma, būtina bendrai tyrinėti skirtingus naujųjų religinių judėjimų objektus; antra, reikia daugiau ir detalesnių studijų, analizuojančių specifines grupes, šių grupių veiklos lyginamųjų studijų; trečia, reikia labiau plėtoti naujųjų religinių judėjimų teorines studijas. Šios pastangos gali labai praturtinti kultūrinį paveldą.

PAGRINDINIAI ŽODŽIAI: naujieji religiniai judėjimai, induistiniai judėjimai, gnostiniai judėjimai, naujieji krikščioniški judėjimai, naujoji pagonybė.

KEY WORDS: new religious movements, Hindu-related movements, Gnostic movements, Post-Christian movements, Neo-paganism.

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